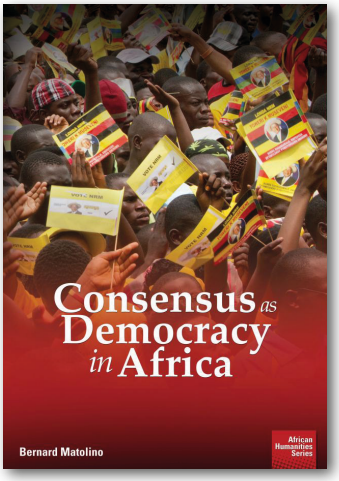
Consensus as democracy in Africa

by

Bernard Matolino



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Dedication

To my loving wife, Phocenah

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CONSENSUS AS DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

BERNARD MATOLINO

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Contents

Acknowledgements ix

Preface xv

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 Democracy by consensus 10

Introduction 10
Carew on transformative politics 11
Wamala on traditional consensus 17
Wiredu on traditional consensus 34
The contexts of democratic challenges 40
Conclusion 49

Chapter 2 Conceptualising consensus 50

Introduction 50
The issues 53
Consensus as superior to majoritarianism 54
Conclusion 87

Chapter 3 Democracy and consensus 89

Introduction 89
What democracy is not 91
What democracy is 96s
Is consensus truly democratic? 107
Conclusion 130

Chapter 4 Political parties in consensus **132**

Introduction 132
Problems with political parties 133
Consensus as a non-party polity 137
Is a non-party a one-party? 157
Conclusion 166

Chapter 5 African aspirations, democracy and African democracy **168**

Introduction 168
Africa 169
Socio-politico-cultural reality 176
Purpose of democracy 180
African aspirations and democracy 189
Beyond consensus and majoritarianism 192
Conclusion 201

Conclusion **203**

Bibliography **207**

Index **216**

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Preface

Majoritarian democracy, chiefly identified by its visceral and adversarial competition for power, with clear and almost irreconcilable divisions between and amongst competing parties, has generally failed to register a positive effect on the African continent, its opponents argue. Further, they point that majoritarianism has led to political disaffection of the losers and has caused enduring divisions between and amongst different political parties. Theoretically, majoritarianism has been accused of being an inferior form of democracy when compared to democracy by consensus. The latter, its supporters argue, is not only directly traceable to Africa's past and traditions but tends to satisfy a maximal or more meaningful definition of democracy.

In the pages that follow, I present the nature of consensus as democratic practice in some traditional societies and combine that with the support offered on behalf of a consensual polity. I then consider objections to both the traditional setting and practice of consensus and the theoretical pitfalls that assail its proponents.

The reason motivating me to undertake this project is the perilous failure of the African polity to fully democratise. This failure is measurable by the polity's inability to satisfy the notion of representation. If representation is the major defining point of democratisation, as Kwasi Wiredu holds, then it is clear that Africa has not done well in this respect. If there is a version of democracy that either promises or shows itself to be capable of bringing representation to full effect, then it should follow that such a version is preferable.

Yet the issue is not as easy as it might appear. There are other considerations that come into play such as whether consensus, as outlined by its supporters, is theoretically suitable for multi-ethnic African nations, whether consensus is different from a one-party polity, and whether consensus satisfies other crucial requirements of democracy. While consensus, at first appears attractive, once pressure is put on its democratic status, its story loses its initial potency. If my arguments here against consensus as democracy are as strong as I believe, then the possibility of consensus as an alternative to majoritarianism is greatly compromised. Hence, it follows, that African political theorists or philosophers need to continue thinking about what a usable democratic framework might be for the African continent.

To my mind, a usable democratic framework would be one that avoids the problems seen in both consensus and majoritarianism, as well as in the socialist flirtations the continent has gone through. But beyond avoiding problems associated with these three theories, I think that whatever framework we end up coming with, it

must be one that is responsive to the needs of the people of this continent. We could think of those needs in terms of basic everyday stuff such as a dignified existence free of hunger, unemployment, and disease. But we could also think of such a framework deliberately aiming to fulfil political imperatives such as freedom of the individual, equal and fair treatment before the law and freedom from being victimised by the state. I seek to interrogate whether consensus can live up to these expectations as part of its democratic lexicon.

Introduction

Political philosophy broadly understood as philosophical theory of governance touches on a number of themes such as why have governments at all, what makes given regimes of governance legitimate, how legitimacy starts and ends, what type of governance is most desirable, fair and just, the nature of human agency as subjects of governance, and how laws are formulated to regulate individuated interests. We may add to this last consideration an account of what individuated interests are and how they relate to other competing interests. We could extend the discussion further, depending on what our account of the nature of individuated interests is, to argue for restrictive or more liberal forms of governments. We could say certain institutions and certain practices are permissible by virtue of what we take individuated human interests to be. This consideration can then be extended to determine what we take individual rights to be, the appropriate relationship between the state and its subjects – in as far as the reciprocity of rights and duties is concerned.

There have been divergent discussions by Western philosophers on political theory, starting with Plato's polemics against democracy and ranging from Niccolo Machiavelli's realpolitik and Thomas Hobbes' grandiose design of the control of the sovereign to John Locke's liberalism which was admirably expanded by John Rawls in the last century. Even a cursory analysis of the discussants and the topics they address, shows that there is a wide divergence of the topics that can be discussed in political philosophy. Just as there are various channels to approach and discuss issues under the rubric of political philosophy, there are also equally various reasons why these discussions take the trajectory and emphasis they do. The particular direction that each discussant takes may be informed by certain theoretical commitments or ideals, or by a desire to see the establishment of a more just society, an accountable state, or a fair distribution of social goods.

Political philosophy, just like any other branch of philosophy, as a reflection of the human condition, speaks directly to what realities, aspirations or problematic questions of human nature and existence are taken to be. From this, it can be argued that each philosopher addresses each topic in direct proportion to how she conceives of it as warranting special attention. This special attention could be motivated by a variety of reasons. These reasons could emanate from either within or without the philosopher. In the case of the former, they could be born out of concerns of visionary thinkers who may be pursuing a certain type of social framework that might maximise high qualitative experiences of life among citizens. In the latter case, they could be

informed by a rejection of existing social and political structures that either serve to devalue experiences of life or oppress and restrict the citizens. Both the attention and the manner of proceeding from these reasons seek to find one thing, at least under the present formulation. They seek to find a just and fair polity or system of governance that best captures the notion of representativity, commonly expressed as 'the will of the people.' The successful expression of the will of the people legitimises both the polity and the given regime. A failure to capture the expression of the will of the people delegitimises both the polity and the existing regime.

The foregoing points to a particular direction of theorising. This form of theorising is one that is intent on answering certain questions or addressing particular issues in the political world. However, it is important to be clear about what a political theory either seeks to do or actually does when it seeks to address political questions. In answering the question what is thought a political theory should do, David Archard offers the following response: 'I do not mean by this the question of whether a theory should be about justice, the state, the class struggle, or whatever. I mean what is a theory taken to be doing when it answers a self-chosen question such as "What is justice?"' (2003, 277). He claims there are four broad kinds of responses to this question. 'The first is that a theory should be built upon FOUNDATIONS…that are universally recognised and evident truths: its procedure of argumentation and reasoning should similarly be unexceptionable and acceptable to any rational person. It is likely that these foundations will comprise some understanding of the individual human being' (Archard 2003, 277). He cites John Rawls' *A theory of Justice* and Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* as political theories of the foundational kind. However, Archard argues, these exemplars and approach either have to be universalisable – therefore becoming empty of substantive content, or recognisable – thus becoming 'partial and controversial'. Correctly, he points out that a common criticism against Rawls is that 'his contracting individuals are not those of any time and place, but historically and culturally located agents – Western, liberal men' (Archard 2003, 277). He suggests that one way of avoiding this problem is to localise theory in one's own culture and history. However, there are three problems to this localisation which are relativism, the impossibility of outsiders judging another society's values, and conservatism – a reference to the idea that a society's meanings are essentially defined by its practices. Implicitly, he identifies the second possible response to the question of what a theory should be, to lie in the particular. He identifies Rawls' *Political Liberalism* as representing a shift from the universal to the particular. The particular that is implicit in Rawls' thought is taken to be the idea that existent institutions do not only approximate to given ideals but actually aspire to those ideals. He identifies the third approach as critique – which is exemplified in Marx's exposure of the actual workings of the capitalist system. Yet as Archard states, the aim of political

philosophy can be seen in a different but equal function: 'Analogously the task of political philosophy may be to reveal what our shared meanings do not and cannot say about our political world. The function of critique is to display these gaps and thus the distance between actuality and the moral pretensions generated by that actuality' (Archard 2003, 278). The fourth and final approach, according to Archard, is against rationalist ambitions that any theory proposes for itself. He states that this method is against the idea that any political theories must have a stated outcome or purpose.

> Instead it sees the tasks of political theory as more modest and restricted. It is the articulation of the commonly acknowledged rules of conduct which inform our actual practices. It salutes the historical achievements of modern liberalism, not least the emergence of 'individuality' and 'civility': that is, law and civic order. Yet it refuses to see these eminently practical achievements as conforming to universal, objective principles that may be laid bare. Political theorising should be faithful to the knowledge already presupposed in our practice: it should 'pursue the intimations' of established traditions. (Archard 2003, 278–279)

I find Archard's discussion enlightening in our own understanding of what a political theory should do. As I have suggested above, the very idea of dabbling in political philosophy does not always appear to be innocent theoretical work but a process that is informed by other operative reasons and intentions of the theorist. However, as Archard argues, the issue is really not simply about the development of a theory that is detached from lived-out realities. Some of the approaches actively steer clear of detached and universal political theories in favour of particular and relative theories. My tentative guess is that there are good arguments for these disparate approaches. The divide, for example, between communitarians and liberals on issues such as the notion of the individual, the individual's interests, and the subsequent social and political structures that have to be created, is legendary.

While I do not seek to pursue the discussion of these differences, I still find the very existence of these differences to be useful in the way I intend to formulate my current consideration. An unavoidable question at this stage would refer to which of these possible methods of dealing with the proposed purpose of political philosophy, is most useful to improving the human condition. We have two extremes operating at opposite ends. One view would see political theory and perhaps the human condition, as best served by analysis that is removed from actual and historical affairs of real men, women and children. This kind of analysis would aim to achieve the best possible conditions under which humans can exist. It may seek to articulate both the conditions and the values that inform the preference of certain institutions over others. At the other end, one could tend towards a theory that seeks to perch itself in

the existing conditions, experiences, and articulable institutions and values of living societies. This could be aimed at either expressing the underlying values of social institutions or providing support for those social institutions.

While I have claimed that there are good reasons for choosing either of these extremes, I suggest that the choice of a particular option can either be well-informed or ill-informed. The crucial determinant of whether the choice is good or poor is to be found, I think, in what we want to achieve with the particular discussion we are having. Do we aim to 'discover' certain things that are applicable to humans? Do we seek to develop certain institutions that will be of given service to the wellbeing of humanity? Do we seek to restore order? Do we seek to improve what we currently have? If we are dealing with an unknown but desirable state of affairs, then we could go with completely de-localised and universalistic theories, or highly abstract theories. If we are dealing with what we know and what is immediately available to us, we would opt for paying attention to our past or current practices.

My own view is that while there is value in talking about the local and particular, in either past or current practices, we should be alert to the danger of such a method as persuasively suggested by Archard above. The real danger of this approach lies in that the values and institutions we either seek to defend, revive, understand or resuscitate, are self-contained. They leave no possibility of being subjected to any evaluative judgement other than their own internal frameworks. This is a significant problem since systems tend to be self-serving and conservative. This means that when there are problems within the system, it has no point of reference in rectifying those problems besides its internal lights. But the internal lights of systems that have become conservative are hardly progressive lights as they increasingly become recalcitrantly dim. Self-contained systems easily self-contaminate, and that is a real danger to progress and change. This is not to suggest that externally generated or non-particularised systems are any better. On the contrary, their lack of context speaks to nothing. If the system is Rawlsian liberalism that has undertones of personhood, objected to by communitarians such as Alasdair McIntyre and Michael Sandel, as an unencumbered emotivist self, the whole edifice becomes problematic for two primary reasons. First, no such dis-interested individual actually exists, and second, whatever political system that is a result of considering such dis-interested individuals is farcical.

What is probably left, on Archard's account, is the method that valorises critique. The initial attraction of this method, though grounded in Marxism, is its quest to show the gap that exists between political systems and our understanding of their operations. I am inclined to think that this is the proper task of any philosophical activity. I do not seek to suggest that philosophy must champion the introduction of proletariat revolutions or seek to promote ideologies. What I take critique to

represent is the idea that philosophy essentially asks difficult questions, interrogates the guaranteed and daily stuff, proposes unusual opinions – in a word – analyses. Though there is dispute as to what this analysis has come to be (Eze 2001, 206–208), there is no denying that the principal role of philosophy in any society is to provide analysis. This analysis includes political analysis. This philosophical analysis is what makes political philosophy to be what it is – a theoretical exposé of the political (Eze 2008a, 77–78; Bongmba 2008, 98–99). I am therefore persuaded that this method of approaching political philosophy is most viable. Its viability lies in its acceptance of the basic role of a philosophical task. A philosophical endeavour is one that provides philosophical analysis. It is the method I shall seek to follow and apply in my discussion. Naturally, I will avoid any dogmatic and ideological slant. Instead, I will emphasise critique of accepted positions, exposure of unstated assumptions, and demonstrate the gaps that exist between what are ordinarily accepted tenets of certain truths and other factors that may be at work behind these truths. I particularly wish to follow a path that does not play sycophant to institutions that are either steeped in tradition or theories that aspire to revive certain traditional outlooks as bases of progress. While it is important to develop a sense of the particular and what that particular serves in political theories, I suggest that it is also equally important to engage the particular from a critical standpoint. This critical view does not necessarily have to be external or universal. It can be carried out by those disillusioned by the particular and those not so passionate about the particular. I must confess I have become somewhat disillusioned and far from passionate about the subject matter of this book. In the beginning, I embraced consensus with gay abandon but have now largely discarded that uncritical and celebratory embrace. My reasons for jumping ship are good, old philosophy. The more I have read on consensus and the more I have thought about it, the more I have become dissatisfied with it. But more of this philosophical dissatisfaction later.

In the African context, political philosophy has been largely informed by the historical forces that have shaped African reality. African people, both on the continent and in the diaspora, have suffered a great deal of discrimination, oppression and exclusion. These factors were not accidental but deliberately meted out on the African people by so-called civilised nations and missions (Táíwò 2009; 2010). The dignity, cultural practices, social and political institutions as well as the worth of African people was severely violated by the colonial assault. While it could be all good and well to point out that it brings Africa and its peoples little benefit to insist on re-telling the brutalities associated with slavery, colonialism and apartheid, there is some good in tracing what the effects of this painful reality have been on the development of African political theory. The political theorisation that has unfolded on the continent has tried to find some healing to the collective atrocities done on

African people by a number of means. Firstly, political theorisation has endeavoured to trace the inherent dignity that is associated or resident in traditional African practices, beliefs and institutions. Secondly, African theorists have attempted to show the naturalness of these practices, beliefs and institutions to Africans. Thirdly, in some instances, some theorists have attempted to make a strong case for the superiority of the African polity over its Western counterpart.

The theoretical method that is adopted is one that seeks to affirm the workability of the traditional modes as well as find how they could be applicable to modern African conditions (Egbunu 2013, 138–139). The political analysis takes a turn that attempts to resuscitate, restore and apply what was traditional practice to the current realities of being in Africa, being African and being a political subject in an authentically African polity. This method is quite particular with no pretensions to any universality or a desire to be universal. It seeks to speak of, and speak to the African condition. This, I suggest, is close to the fourth method suggested by Archard above. This method, according to Archard, sees the task of political theory as quite modest. Political theory does not have to come with grandiose outlines but simply seeks to outline rules of conduct, that are widely acknowledged, that inform people's practices. 'Political theorising should be faithful to the knowledge already presupposed in our practice: it should "pursue the intimations" of established traditions' (Archard 2003, 279). Albert Kasanda appears to support this idea when he argues that: 'As a reflection on the polis, African political theory is concerned with people's everyday life, everyday experience of alliances and collective actions. This reality constitutes its roots and nourishing sap' (Kasanda 2015, 30).

This is the most fundamental understanding that shapes the dominant approach to political theory in African philosophy. There is a search for what common practice is and how established traditions can be made definite and accessible to everyone. There is a further search for the justification of the practice and tradition itself. This is how theory is understood and is extended. It is not a grandiose theoretical design of aspirations that have never been experienced or are unknown. The theoretical outline is limited to the defence of the plausibility of the suggested animation of the old mode of existence and polity. As Thaddeus Metz writes: 'Traditional practices among many indigenous African peoples have often inspired ideas about how to allocate political power in contemporary states' (Metz 2015, 3). The good reason for this approach is claimed to be the authenticity of the systems in African reality as well as the accessibility of these systems to all who live in this place, particularly indigenes.

In my view, there are two most developed and equally dominant strands of political philosophy on the continent. The first and oldest arises during the apex of celebrating or preparing for independence from destructive colonial episodes. Dominantly known as African socialism, this method sought to emphasise and celebrate the fact

of being African as well as affirm the dignity of the African mode of being. With its emphasis on distinct communitarian characteristics, socialism sought to prove its natural context as African and it sought to prove itself as a correct interpretation of political theory and practice in this local context. It sought to give guidance to what institutions and structures were appropriate to the local condition and to restore, in most cases, the egalitarian feature of traditional society. The second and latter-day strand is consensual democracy or democracy by consensus or simply consensus. With its emphasis on the ability of Africans to overcome individual differences in favour of shared or common interpretations of the best way to act or proceed, its advocates have largely sought to show how this arrangement was countenanced in the past as well as how its revival is in the interests of the present polity. This strand is articulated as a local alternative to Western hegemony of majoritarian democracy. Further, it is seen as a cure to the ills that are associated with Western majoritarian democracy. Indeed, some of its adherents hold that some, if not most, of the political malaise afflicting the African continent has direct genesis in alien Western majoritarianism.

These two approaches have one crucial factor in common. They both claim to articulate the authentic, specific, lived out experiences and realities of being African. They both claim to have the resources and the ability to represent those experiences. Interestingly, though, which is a crucial factor of their fundamental difference, they do not come to the same conclusions about the nature of the polity that is either characteristic of Africa or one that Africa should pursue. Hence, we could say their major similarity is that they are steeped in the common method of being not so ambitious by simply remaining faithful to knowledge that is already there as evidenced by our practices, and, most importantly, by pursuing our traditions to give word to what our systems should be.

Although African socialism has largely disappeared both from the radars of practice and theory, and its defendants have either repented or been condemned to some form of silence, either by natural causes or lack of conviction, I find it interesting that it once punted itself as a correct interpretation of the basic mode of being African. Considering the differences that exist between socialism and consensus, it becomes necessary to attempt an analysis of which of these two claims is a correct interpretation of our traditions. But that is not going to be my focus. My major focus is to evaluate the theoretical viability of consensual democracy, democracy by consensus or consensus in the construction of a modern polity that is authentically African as well as modern.

There should never be reason to experience a sense of contrition when engaging in the search for authentic modes of being African. Africa is all too real, its problems all too real, its aspirations, insights or lack thereof – all too real as well (Ukwamedua 2011). As a global player, Africa has remained on the margins of almost everything.

The greatest marginalisation has been acutely felt on the economic and political front (Oke 2006, 337). The former has generally been characterised by underperformance while the latter is famed for its chaotic state.

In this book I trace the origins of the theory of, if not advocacy for the practice of, democracy by consensus. At the outset, I should make it plain that this book is not essentially about Kwasi Wiredu, though he will feature quite large. Wiredu is not only a pioneering and original thinker in modern and professional African philosophy, but he is a formidable and persuasive philosopher. His standing among African thinkers is redoubtable. To date, through his advocacy of democracy by consensus, he has been the best advocate of what Eze has termed a return to the source. His account is clear and compelling. However, I have found some aspects of Wiredu's advocacy quite lacking in capacity to command the intended effect. Put differently I have found some important aspects of Wiredu's advocacy for consensus simply not convincing if not completely unsuccessful. While I subscribe to the need to find African modes of thought and examine them to the best of our abilities, I am more loyal to critique than to mounting defences of bygones. This is not to mean that there is no lesson to be drawn from eras past, but my own philosophical commitment is one that seeks to understand how suggested polities and their frameworks of reference can either be made to stand up to scrutiny or collapse under intense examination. As stated above, my position has moved from admiration and acceptance of the project of democracy by consensus to complete doubt. My disillusionment and subsequent critique is not informed by a desire to replace consensual democracy with an alternative system. Neither is it informed by admiration for foreign systems or grandiose universal views on the nature of perfect social and political institutions. On the contrary, the critique I formulate here seeks to push the advocate of consensual democracy to restate her position or re-affirm its strength in the light of the criticisms I make here. My dissatisfaction with consensual democracy is simply philosophical; if there are answers to my dissatisfaction, I expect them to be philosophical. If I fail in expressing my dissatisfaction, I will take it to be the case that my project is a philosophical failure.

My position is not dogmatic. As I write this, I genuinely wish I had come to accept consensual democracy as it is presented by African philosophers. I wish I could have added whatever I can to developing its postulate or to strengthening its claims. However, I could not find it in me to be convinced by the postulations associated with this polity. Sad as I am in realising that I am investing a fair amount of energy in writing a critical book, my only redemption and restoration of goodwill comes from the hope that advocates of consensus will either show my position to be woefully mistaken or will be able to up their own position to adequately account for the downside articulated herein. It is not my intention to be a spoiler where there is promise, especially on the African continent.

Finally, I wish to make it clear that this book and every view expressed herein must in no way be construed as either an expression of sympathy or a defence of majoritarian democracy, liberalism or other cognate forms of political practice or theory. I neither see it as my business nor the intention of this book either to defend liberal democracy or to embark on a comparative exercise between consensual and majoritarian democracy (Ágh 2001; Lijphart 1999). What actually brings majoritarian democracy into this book, or what actually causes me to mention it at all is that the supporters of consensual democracy have voluntarily juxtaposed the two systems in the process of condemning the former while praising the latter. That is as far as majoritarian or liberal democracy goes and features in this project.

This book is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, I sketch out the arguments made in favour of democracy by consensus. In the second chapter, I outline the philosophical or conceptual grounds of consensus as articulated by its supporters. In the third chapter, I set up broad requirements of democracy and seek to investigate whether consensus satisfies those requirements. In the fourth chapter, I attempt an evaluation of whether the non-party-polity of consensus stands and whether the subscripts that Wiredu (2001) assigns to different senses of party are sustainable. Further, I seek to show that the idea of non-party is perilously close to the socialist one party. In the fifth chapter, I chart a way of understanding and articulating democracy which is characterised by a search for some fundamental human needs. I suggest that a democratic system succeeds if it is able to respond to human needs; hence the working definition of democracy has to be one that prioritises such responsiveness.

1

Democracy by consensus

Introduction

The most common starting point for the advocacy of consensual democracy, is advanced in protest of the failures of majoritarian democracy on the continent, and in favour of consensus as a viable alternative that is capable of curing the ills manifested by majoritarian democratic practice (Wiredu 1997). By majoritarian democracy, we refer to the practice of periodically choosing representatives at various levels of governance, abiding by some electoral practice such as open competition for power between different political parties, and the very belief that whichever party that wins the majority of votes is entitled to rule. The first, and probably most major, complaint against majoritarianism is that it fails to capture adequately the maximal interpretation of what democracy is. The second complaint is that the majority is given carte blanche to act as they see fit, resulting in the tyranny of the majority over the minority. The downside of this perceived shortcoming is that the minority, who are the opposition, will merely oppose for the sake of opposing. The third, and least formidable complaint, to my mind at least, is the grievance that majoritarian democracy is alien to traditional political practice and theory on the continent.

Overall, majoritarianism is seen as an author of destructive tendencies such as the promotion of division in society on party political lines. In the West, in the United States of America (USA) particularly, the fight for votes has become brutal, leaving many a competitor with more than a bruised ego. In Africa, the turn towards majoritarianism has been quite deadly in some cases; not only are political parties organised along all forms and manner of partisanship (which contain no merit), but people have been killed in the name or defence of this or that party. Accompanying this is the additional ill of party loyalty for its own sake. The party demands that its members be loyal to its doctrines and this in turn suppresses the logical processes that should accompany political processes.

After these complaints have been presented in detail, a case is then made in support of consensual democracy by trying to show its advantages over majoritarianism

(Udebunu 2015). The insistence of consensus on an exhaustive dialogical method in decision-making is said to be effective in curtailing the ills of adversarial polities. These ills range in form and nature from an unproductive political system that valorises opposition for its own sake, a political system that thrives on an emphasis on the differences among competing political parties at the cost of reason and ostracism of the losers. But most importantly, consensus is taken as a homegrown form of democracy that was natural to many African societies (Bradley 2011, 456; Bradley 2005; Chemhuru 2010). The naturalness of consensus as a political system proceeds from the axiomatic nature of consensus in all adult relations (Wiredu 1997). This natural manner of being, on the continent, accompanied with the superiority of consensus to majoritarianism makes consensus preferable. Hence consensus is seen as having a natural home on this continent. The analysis here takes two forms. The first type of analysis seeks to show how consensus worked in traditional societies and how some remnants of those traditional societies could be used as informants of the current order. The second type of analysis goes beyond this retracing of traditional footsteps by attempting to mount a theoretical exposé of the said advantages that accompany this type of polity. Whatever analysis is adopted in support of consensual democracy, it is quite clear that admiration and faith in it is not in short supply. In some instances, such admiration is not even mitigated by a consideration of the possible pitfalls that may accompany consensus.

Carew on transformative polities

I suggest that a profitable point to start my discussion is by taking a little detour from these crucial issues and refer to George Carew's insightful view on Africa's standing in global affairs. Carew captures the major complaints that some scholars, and perhaps other ordinary observers, have against not only the sins of colonialism, but the current global political and economic order. On the international scene, the injustices of the past are perpetuated today by how the global order is deliberately skewed against Africans. In global politics, the Western world has become the major or dominant player by arrogating to itself the right and privilege to exclusively exercise decision-making powers at the exclusion of Africans and other third world players. On the economic front, the monetary bodies have openly advocated and suggested, and in some cases forcibly implemented economic principles and policies that have directly undermined the vibrancy and survival of host nations (Wamba dia Wamba 1993, 105). George Carew's most ingenious analysis is his link between the breakdown of democracy in third world countries and the economic policies foisted on these host nations. For Carew, the economic regime of structural adjustment programmes effectively undermines structures of democracy.

Carew argues that the most dominant economic system in the world is capitalism. He defines an economic system as a particular ordering of human behaviour and relationships to meet the material needs of society. He defines a capitalist system as a free market that emphasises that there should be no social or political pressures on how rules of supply and demand work. Carew states the issues as follows:

> From the foregoing perspective, it is argued that a free-market setting offers the best chance for democratic reforms and economic development. However, in practice global capitalism actually undermines democratic reforms and sustainability, because in its working out it limits the state's ability to be democratically accountable. The situation is particularly critical in states that exist at the margins of the capitalist global system. Since such states have been rendered obsolete by economic globalism, can they really be expected to carry the burden of democratising their respective polities? (2004, 460)

For this reason, Carew seeks to find an alternative to this system. In his view, this alternative system would be able to deal effectively with the trap that capitalism has created but is unable to overcome. His analysis focuses on Africa for two reasons: firstly, Africa represents a good example of those societies that bear failed policies that were designed by supporters of economic globalism. Secondly, Africa has to look at how to, get out of its domestic problems as well as how these problems are connected to global politics and economics. Carew argues that what actually is in crisis is global capitalist democracy that is always in tension with domestic democracy. He suggests that the only way out of this problem is through finding a suitable replacement — deliberative democracy. He states that the real problem is that African states are on the margins of economic globalism and are dependent states, yet they are expected to provide leadership. But, in his view, dependent states cannot be expected to provide leadership, as this is a contradiction. He argues that these dependent states have not been empowered, but rather have been made obsolete by virtue of policies that bypass the state, forcing citizens to adhere to programmes that developed states would not try to impose on their people. Thus, the fixed marginal positions that African states occupy do not allow them to democratise. In his view, this is made particularly so by the economic regimes prescribed for dependent states. These economic regimes do not create the necessary conditions for the development of democracy; hence, his advocacy for deliberative democracy. He notes that although there are different strands of deliberative democracy, they are all tied together by a common thread of

> …the ideals of rational legislation, participatory politics, and civic governance. The ideal of rational deliberation is a crucial part of the meaning of deliberative democracy. It means that free and reasoned agreement among equals is necessary for democratic decision-making. The emphasis here on the connection between dialogue and political decision-making is not to be treated lightly. (2004, 462)

He offers three reasons why dialogue is important for deliberative democracy: it promotes a common understanding and shared sense of purpose; it works to clarify issues and to expand social knowledge; and it safeguards values of freedom and equality guaranteeing social equity in the political system. The second ideal to be protected, by the process of dialogue, is that no voice will be silenced in deliberative democracy. The third ideal is the promotion of civic governance which is said to be grounded in principles of equality and freedom. 'This is the background context that is so indispensable to the creation of civic awareness in the polity. In short, the moralisation of social relations is the crucial innovative quality that deliberative dialogue brings to bear on democratic decision-making' (2004, 463). Carew admits that deliberative democracy, as a recent innovation has some problems, but contends it has some curative advantages over pure liberal democratic proceduralism which does not guarantee democratic outcomes that can be described as just. Further, he sees the deliberative method as a supplement to liberal democratic proceduralism. In answer to the question of how deliberative democracy is to be accomplished, he suggests that for democratic outcomes to be guaranteed, the starting point must be with civic society rather than the state. For him, the nature of global capitalism is unable to bring about democracy; hence, it must be circumvented. He states that the civil society has the tools to challenge global capitalism. He identifies this approach as transformative politics. This, for him, effectively amounts to a process whereby institutions of global capitalism are replaced with democratic institutions. This, in turn, will lead to the development of democratic transitions and their sustainability in Africa (2004, 463). I find his particular understanding of transformative politics rather revealing when he writes:

> But what is transformative politics and how is it different, if at all, from deliberative politics? Deliberative politics, as I have argued, emphasises dialogue and mutual consideration and respect as the base on which citizens can come to an understanding about the public good. Thus the practice of this form of politics would presuppose that transformation in a way has occurred in such attitudes as are envisaged by, say, liberal egoists, who hold that politics is only about self-interest and the market. But how exactly might such a transformation occur? What crucial move or moves could lead to the moralisation of social relations? Theorising this overlap is clearly the concern of transformative theory. This requires a full-length essay by itself and ought not to detain us here. However, that which is certainly worth noting here is how a focus on the transformative process within deliberative politics might lead us to innovative institutional designs that can embody deliberative principles. (2004, 463)

There are three crucial points advanced by Carew here. Firstly, Carew seems to suggest that transformative politics is a type of deliberative politics. With deliberative politics

starting off with an emphasis on dialogue, mutual consideration and respect for purposes of developing a notion of public good, transformative politics assumes that such principles have already obtained. Put in another way, transformative politics takes it to be the case that political agents/participants adhere to or operate by/under these principles. The second point is that there is a need to explain the actual transformative politics in terms of a particular moral account of prevailing social relations. Or certain social relations should prevail for transformative politics to be realised. For Carew, there should be a clear overlap between a transformative polity and the social relations that enable it to thrive. The third point is that Carew desists from theorising about this said overlap. Although he states that such theorisation would require an essay on its own, he does not even give a vague indication of what such theorisation may actually point to. In an endnote, he only indicates references to discussions on societies transforming from non-democratic to democratic societies. I find this silence rather worrying. What is clear is that there should be a carefully nuanced relationship between social structures and the transformative polity. Without an indication of what these social relations are, it remains an unhinged proposal.

Regarding his first point, it suffices to note that as a type of deliberative democracy, transformative politics may take a slightly different form from deliberative democracy, though it may retain a certain familial resemblance to deliberative democracy. As for the second point, the same consideration for the third point equally applies. Until Carew explains what these social relations are — we are not sure what the actual determining factors of the success of the polity are going to be. At this stage, it could be justified to claim that there is some obfuscation on Carew's part about the exact nature of social relations in transformative politics. But this need not worry us, since there is many an exponent of what this type of social relation is. Returning to Carew's main thesis, he argues that the biggest problem with the postcolonial state is that it was expected to embrace the market economy. However, this unravelled because it was not like the metropolitan state since the former was fragmented along ethnic lines. 'As a result of this colonial presumption, democratic theorists focused exclusively on internal issues that were deemed to have produced the crisis in good governance. The role of external factors in this crisis consequently was underestimated and in some cases misrepresented' (2004, 464). He then states his aim as seeking to correct this imbalance by demonstrating how these external factors have contributed the democratic crisis in Africa.

The most illustrative cause is to be found in how debt-ridden African states have become precarious. African states, Carew argues, were rehabilitated after the collapse of communism by international monetary bodies through linking democratic reform to a market economy. This was specifically carried out through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). These programmes, for Carew, created problems in the economy

such as increases in interest rates that resulted in bankruptcy in domestic business. This led to unemployment as domestic industries were thrown into disarray. 'The economic programs created grave instabilities that led to coups or military takeovers, despite the intended strengthening of democratic institutions. Political unrest created by massive layoffs in the private and public sectors was too high a price to pay for democracy' (2004, 465). The precise problem created for democracy, in Carew's view, was that stringent economic reform was not complementary to democratic reform but in conflict with it. SAPs then, had an opposite effect to what they were intended to achieve: they ended up undermining the state instead of strengthening it. This leads Carew to suggest that it is urgent to rethink the position of the African state in global affairs *vis* a *vis* the dominant capitalist model. He sees the main problem as the unequal interstate relations that undermine the sovereignty of lesser powers. The United Nations has not helped matters either, as it has marginalised weaker states and rendered them voiceless. Hence, he states the following as his solution:

> The crucial factor here is the democratisation of the decision-making process at all levels, including the global. In this way, limitations on state sovereignty should make the state not vulnerable but responsible. A responsible use of the state's autonomy to protect the interests not of a few but of all its citizens is what a deliberative global democracy will guarantee. This analysis, despite its endorsement of limited sovereignty, empowers each state and the global community to face the political and moral challenges of our time. (2004, 467)

What is of interest in Carew's analysis is his assessment of how the global forces of liberal democracy and the capitalist economy translate into real problems for the domestication of democracy on the African continent. The fault lines of the failure of African states to democratise do not so much lie within but can be traced to the unfair and imposed economic practices of international bodies. As a result, these systems tend to undermine the possibilities of states to operate as sovereign and promote authentic democracy. Hence for him, what needs to be done is to rid these weakened and dependent states of foreign and imposed systems in favour of an alternative that is deliberative democracy. What is even of greater significance in Carew's analysis is his argument for, if not belief in, the efficacy of deliberative democracy on the global stage. He suggests that not only is the deliberative model suitable for the African state, with its problems to democratise, but he also ingeniously views it as curative in its attempts at equalising interstate relations.

While it is very much open to debate whether Carew's analysis is complete or not, what is quite clear is that Carew would not be sympathetic to a position that seeks to suggest that there was either something inherently wrong with the African herself or the African state that make both somewhat unfit or incompetent for democratic practice. The African, in Carew's account, is rather a victim of

unequal global relations and she finds her state's democratic endeavour under threat. Whether we can see this as laying all or most of the blame of Africa's failure to democratise at someone else's doorstep, what remains true is that Carew has picked up on some serious issues. To my mind, the most recalcitrant issues that he has picked on have to do with the expectation that Africa should have been able to follow the model of democratic practice as found in its former colonial metropolis as well as its continued and sustained state of dependency which makes it an unequal player in global politics and economics. However, my current project is not so much interested in the unequal relations that Africa finds herself enmeshed in, but in the continent's own interpretation of what democracy is, how external forces have derailed the continent from attaining this democracy and how it seeks to restore that democratic principle, and, most importantly, what the model of that democratic principle would be. Here, Carew's submission is instructive. He argues that Africa has to accept democracy, but not of the type that is consistent with capitalism and domination but one that is deliberative. Branding it as transformative politics, he envisions it as not only limited to the African state but as extended to interstate relations as well. As I mentioned above, Carew is correct in pointing out that there are crucial social relations that would make his type of deliberative democracy cum transformative politics successful. However, his silence on the types of these social relations is quite an omission, especially if we consider that he takes his suggestion as a commendable proposal that should characterise all interstate relations. As tempting as considerations on interstate relations may be, I will exercise restraint and keep to my actual concern: the nature of domestic democracy in the African state.

I part with Carew with a word on his importance in this debate. He has succeeded in showing that the global polity does not favour the African state. He has also shown that the global polity is tied to an economic dispensation that does not favour the growth of a democratic polity on the continent. But most importantly he has shown that the capitalist economic order is closely tied to liberal democracy. I find this demonstration interesting, and will seek to develop it later on. If liberal democracy is tied to global capitalism, as Carew shows, what are deliberative democracy, transformative politics and consensual democracy tied to, economically? This part of discussion has been somewhat neglected in the euphoric embrace of an alternative democratic system. Yet the criticism of democracy as understood and practised in the West implies a commitment to an economic component — this African democratic alternative is silent in that respect. Yet, I suggest, this respect is equally worthy of investigation.

The democratic alternative on the continent starts not with a theoretical exposé or practical protest as envisaged by Carew above. It starts with what I consider to be a simple and true story that is so well told by two African philosophers, Edward

Wamala and Kwasi Wiredu. For there was such a time when neither protest nor opposition were necessary features of a democratic regime. It was a time in the pristine 'then.' Their stories are not only attempts at good old historical accounts; they are also accounts that seek to make a philosophical point. While the historical part has merit and is interesting for a range of imaginable purposes, it is the philosophical bit to which we must pay attention. Their articulations are neither peculiar nor limited. I just find their presentations well detailed and informative; hence, I consider them at length below.

Wamala on traditional consensus

Wamala's consideration proceeds from the traditional socio-politico organisation of Ganda society, part of present-day Uganda. He starts off by asking if it is possible to talk of democracy in traditional African societies which were clearly monarchical, did not have parliaments, did not have any checks and balances, political parties or periodic elections to elect representatives (2004, 35). He seeks to show that the very ideas that are taken to be crucial to democracy were operative both implicitly and explicitly in traditional Ganda society.

In Wamala's view, the first factor that played a crucial role in ensuring that a democratic dispensation existed was demography. The small number of people who lived in traditional set-ups under a king enabled the creation of a political environment where all free adults were able to participate effectively in the political processes of their lives. He draws a parallel between the Ganda system and the Greek polis. However, the crucial difference is that monarchy had literally disappeared from the political stage in the latter and, where it remained, it enjoyed only a ceremonial status, whereas in the former the monarchical system was deeply involved in the political life of its people. But before the monarchical system had fully developed there was a different system. Here is Wamala's description:

> Ganda society was constituted by independent patrilineal totemic clans, each one headed by an *Omutaka* and sub-divided into a descending series of segments, starting at the top with the major lineages (*Masiga*), the minor lineages (*Mituba*), and going down through the minimal lineages (*Nyiriri*), to the sub-minimal lineages (*Olugya*) and finally to the household (*enda*). *Omutaka*, as the head of clan, presided over a cultural hierarchy in which the different descending segments were headed by *Bataka* (clan leaders) of descending social ranks. (2004, 436)

The monarchical structure emerged when more powerful *Bataka* outwitted the others to become *Sabataka*. As Wamala puts it,

> In his newly acquired role, *Sabataka* (also called *Kabaka*) was head of all

> patrilineal totemic clans brought together as a single unit. As head of all clan leaders, *Sabataka* (*Kabaka*) was *primus inter pares*, an equal among equals, an arrangement which (as we shortly show) crucially influenced the political ethos of the times. (2004, 436)

The *Kabaka* also served as a religious leader/authority of the tribe. The religious practices, according to Wamala, centred around the gods (*Bakatonda*), ancestors (*emizimu*) and spirits (*emisambwa*). Wamala points out that whereas individuals invoked these beings for purposes of solving their own personal problems, the *Kabaka* invoked them for the state — either to win wars or avert disasters.

However, there was a tense relationship between the *Sabataka* and the *Bataka* as the former sought to increase his powers at the expense of the latter. This led to what Wamala characterises as an avoidance relationship which resulted in the creation of democratic conditions. With the availability of open land, it was possible for a single chief to withdraw from the kingdom, creating a legitimisation crisis and a problem of power for the *Sabataka*.

> This is clear from the fact that the very existence of his office depended on the recognition of the *Bataka*. There would be no *Sabataka* without individual *Bataka*. In the actual or threatened withdrawal of their support and recognition was the implicit reminder that 'government is best which governs least.' As a rule, the further implication that government is best when it governs with the consent of all concerned was not lost on the *Sabataka*. (2004, 436).

Further, Wamala argues that the avoidance relationship also brought into focus the principle of subsidiarity which he claims is found in Aristotle. This principle holds that 'higher units had legitimate authority, but only to promote the well-being of the lower units, aiding them to realise their good and their potential' (2004, 437). Higher authority could not usurp the power of lower authority, and the king, individually, could also not usurp lower authority as it was held that no one was above the law. The avoidance relationship also compelled the *Sabataka* and the *Bataka* to endear themselves to the people. In the case of a stand-off, the *Mutaka* needed the support of the people to pull off his withdrawal. The *Sabataka*, on the other hand, needed the support of other *Bataka* for his continued rule.

On the issue of what constituted the basis of consensus in traditional Ganda society Wamala writes:

> But seeking consensus in traditional Ganda society seems to have been more than simply a political expedient to avoid legitimation crises; it seems to have been at the heart of social and political organisation and the ethos of the people of Buganda. The dedication to consensus seems to have been rooted in the firm epistemological belief that knowledge is ultimately dialogical or social, and in the collective responsibility of all for the welfare of the community. (2004, 437)

Wamala states that Western thinkers such as Jurgen Habermas who, in the modern era, advocate the social or dialogical nature of knowledge are restating an old truth known to Ganda society. He argues that the link that exists between the dialogical nature of knowledge and consensus is based on the belief that nobody has a monopoly on knowledge. Issues had to be looked at from various viewpoints and debated until a resolution was reached. He disputes the imputation of epistemological authoritarianism to elders in traditional African societies. He states that had there been such authoritarianism, then consensus would not have been emphasised. He then cites two proverbs that show that even technical experts in Ganda society were not exempt from the epistemic aid of others. He emphasises that the dialogical conception of knowledge would not have been possible without the idea of collective social responsibility. All members of society were supposed to contribute and work alongside each other. He identifies this recognition and arrangement as social capital.

> At the heart of social capital is the nature of traditional kinship relationships, where everybody in the tribe was a relative. In the immediate family, a brother to one's father was a father. Similarly, a sister to one's mother was a mother. At the larger tribal level, because of the cultural tradition never to marry into one's patrilineal clan, any family found itself related to several other clans, as sons in that family married into those clans, and likewise the daughters married into clans other than those they were born in. What emerges, consequently, is a very strong sense of the 'social' as opposed to the 'individual' or the 'personal' or even the 'private.' Such a frame of mind was doubtless conducive to a consensual approach to governance. (2004, 438)

There is a purpose to this quote. Above, I indicated that Carew does not spell out in detail what the interpersonal relations and social structures have to be for deliberative/transformative politics to obtain. Although I found his silence both disappointing and quite a big missing link, I did suggest that there were other thinkers who could fill that gap. Wamala is certainly one of them. He articulates what Carew either could not or would not, or simply did not. Wamala identifies whatever enables consensus to work as social capital. He next describes the nature of this social capital and then proceeds to describe its nature. This social capital is of a form that is distinctly communitarian. Not only is it communitarian but we also have to remember that Wamala's starting point in favour of consensus was premised on the demographic factor. Small communities enabled free citizens to participate effectively in all political decision-making processes and be part of all political structures so that over-reliance on representatives was significantly reduced. But why should the quote above matter so much? There is a reason I pay so much attention to what I consider a crucial admission on the part of Wamala on behalf of the polity under consideration. This admission really amounts to that this polity worked well within a rustic framework

that was massively reliant on recognition based on blood or betrothal lines. Naturally, it becomes quite necessary to inquire into the efficacy of this polity if the conditions that are supposed to guarantee its success are absent. But more of this later, much later. At this stage what really matters is to notice that Wamala thinks that the type of social capital that would make consensus work is the traditional kinship system in which everyone is related to everyone else, either by blood or betrothal. A quick critical observation is in order here. The point to be raised here has to do with the fact that we know traditional societies to be very communitarian in constitutive outlook.

From this communitarian nature, explicit demands are imposed on individuals about the duties they have to the collective whole. In fact, the determination of the individual's success as a person is couched in the successful discharge of these duties. If it is the case that the natural environment of the discharge of these duties is the community, and as Wamala shows above, that very community is one of close affinity, a crucial question must arise from these very considerations. The question that arises is: Does a communitarian system based on kin relations make it very easy for participants to recognise each other and therefore easily acquiesce to communitarian demands and duties imposed on them? The real difficulty has to do with how communities secure consensus. By what formulae or standards does consensus become acceptable to ordinary participants in any community? If it is the case that kin relations enable the communal sense to be highly developed among participants in a given community — leading naturally to the attainment of consensus — what then happens in societies that are not founded on such kin relations? The duty to be both communitarian and an adherent of consensus, in Wamala's account, lacks any universal appeal. On the contrary, it is plainly parochial as it secures the success of consensus in the strength of community that is rooted in family relations. In the absence of such a kin system (which is secured by blood and betrothal) there are no grounds for the success of consensus. My critical intervention may seem misplaced or hasty, but let us consider this for a moment. What really makes relatives behave the way they do — in this case with care and consideration for other relatives' interests (particularly in the African framework)? The reason for the occasion of a sense of obligation, under this scheme, is that an individual feels obligated towards this and that person by virtue of being related. An agent has a special reason to take care of her relatives simply because they are her relatives. It is almost taboo if not self-defeating for one to fail to recognise the duties she has towards her relatives. These relatives are essentially taken to be a crucial part of an individual's identity. For it is from the family that one is born into, raised, develops an identity from, and is dependent on for a whole host of issues which truly relate to the completeness of the individual's life. It would therefore be extreme folly for the individual not to act in ways that seek to foster both the community and promote the search for consensus. It is important

to note what Kwasi Wiredu states in relation to the importance of consensus in interpersonal relations. He writes:

> But for now, let us note an important fact about the role of consensus in African life. It is that reliance on consensus is not a peculiarly political phenomenon. Where consensus characterises political decision making in Africa, it is manifestation of an immanent approach to social interaction. Generally, in interpersonal relations among adults, consensus as a basis of joint action was taken as axiomatic. This is not to say it was always attained. Nowhere was African society a realm of unbroken harmony. On the contrary, conflicts (including mortal ones) among lineages and ethnic groups and within them were not infrequent. The remarkable thing, however, is that if and when a resolution of the issues, was negotiated, the point of it was seen in the attainment of reconciliation rather than mere abstention from further recriminations or collisions. It is important to note that disputes can be settled without the achievement of reconciliation. (Wiredu 1997, 303–304)

It then follows from these considerations that if we extend Wamala's notion of the desirability of consensus in the way I have done in terms of relationality, and we add Wiredu's view above, what we have is a system that clearly recognises and prioritises the importance of consensus in the way that related people interact. Wiredu's view is pertinent to demonstrating a crucial issue. The central demonstration is that consensus was not peculiarly or fundamentally a political phenomenon. He states so in a very direct way. He actually claims that where consensus is seen as characteristic of how decisions are made, politically, it would have directly proceeded from what he describes as an 'immanent approach to social interaction'. This can only mean that there is no independent basis on which the notion of consensus can be appealed to or justified. Actually, its origins are already secured in the very inherent fabric of how people interact with each other, socially. In that interaction, at least among adults, who inevitably become political participants, their own interpersonal relations are deeply couched in, if not determined and regulated by, seeing consensus as axiomatic in taking decisions. Wiredu's position is then crucial in demonstrating that what all people knew as desirable, at least because it was the governing principle of their interrelations, was the attainment of consensus. Its manifestation in the political realm was, therefore, nothing but a continuation with what was already known, desired and practised by everyone through their interpersonal relations. Although Wiredu is quick to point out there were mortal differences along lineage lines, that is not the crucial point under consideration. The crucial point has nothing to do with interstate relations and what polities would have determined such relations but everything to do with the construction and justification of the intrastate polity. Equally important, is Wiredu's further claim that the attainment of consensus was seen, effectively, as a suspension of further recrimination. He even suggests that it is possible to settle

disputes without attaining reconciliation. This, in my view, can only mean that the only mode of dispute resolution that is capable of attaining reconciliation is consensus. I do not wish to labour this point any further at this stage, save to emphasise that what enables consensus to work in both Wiredu and Wamala's accounts is the close affinity that exists between the given members of these consensual polities. It is only natural that when in dispute with relatives, one seeks to attain reconciliation with them and suspend any further recrimination. It is also only all too natural that one seeks to act in ways that are approved by one's relatives. This approach ensures that the individual is not permanently alienated from the fraternal benefits of belonging to the kin network. More importantly, such an approach ensures that the family and the ties that bind it together are ever strengthened.

Another principle which aided the operation of consensus was 'the custom of "paying homage to a chief's court", known as *Okukiika*. By this custom, anybody could, on his personal initiative, visit the court of a chief or even of the king to apprise himself of the latest developments in the community' (Wamala 2004, 439). According to Wamala, this custom achieved two things: firstly, it allowed ordinary citizens to express their loyalty to the state and, secondly, it offered them the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the goings on in the community. The first function, Wamala argues, was important for people whose expression of loyalty was essential to the king. The second was important for ordinary people, as they could ask questions about the state. This was seen as ensuring that the people got to participate directly in the political process.

He notes that a common criticism made against consensus by some scholars of traditional African societies is that it is seen as having posited unanimity that did not exist in tribal communities. This criticism, according to Wamala, deliberately ignores deadly conflict that existed in these societies while idealising the past. In response to this criticism, Wamala states the matter as follows:

> This criticism misses a very important point, namely, that consensus presupposes dissensus, and talking until people agreed points to the existence of opposed views which needed to be reconciled. The idea of political opposition was, therefore, not alien to traditional Ganda society, only it was not the formal and ossified opposition instituted for the sake of an adversarial form of political pluralism. Definitely there was political opposition. If that were not the case, it would have been superfluous to talk of reaching consensus. At times, indeed, that was never reached, and in such circumstances, certain courses of action were taken. We have already referred, for example, to kings whose subjects turned against them and sometimes forced them into exile. These were, however, the exceptions that proved the rule. (2004 439)

I think Wamala is correct in dispensing with the criticism levelled against

consensus in the way he does. Indeed, such criticism is not strong or it deliberately seeks to set up a straw man. It is crucial to note that Wamala is correct in suggesting that a consensual polity presupposes dissensus. This is in keeping with all other polities that bear a resemblance to consensus. However, where I find Wamala's response rather interesting is his decision to present the consensual polity as not seeking to ossify opposition for the sake of adversarial politics. What we should note at this very point is the conviction that this support of consensus sees the other polity to be: unnecessarily adversarial since it is rooted in oppositional and party lines. This simply means that there are no other discernible virtues, in the eyes of the consensual democrat, of the other democrat. But is this really the whole story? Wamala admits that oppositional politics may have its virtues in a different set-up, the set-up of individualism. But by the very same standard that consensus is seen as suitable for these conditions, a necessary question becomes what happens when the very conditions that are supposed to secure consensus have disappeared or have been undermined in many facets? What then makes consensus attractive is not that consensus has some natural virtue or has some naturally imbued characteristics. Actually, consensus is merely either faithful to certain social conditions or is birthed by certain conditions that are seen as local and natural. This equally applies to the complaint against majoritarianism. The legitimate complaint that consensus has is that majoritarianism should not impose itself on local conditions that are dissonant with conditions from where majoritarianism originates. But I suggest that by the same measure consensus must not insist on its relevance if its original conditions have largely disappeared. Both polities are rendered (ir)relevant by the same measure.

The next consideration for Wamala revolves around the nature and role of the monarchical structure in the realisation of consensus. He notes that the monarchy was not of an absolute sort but operated in a limited manner. The ruler ruled through the council which was constituted by different heads of clans. Other levels of governance were attended to by sub-heads, heads and chiefs. In Buganda, all debates aimed to attain consensus which was seen as central to the operation of democracy. The power of the monarchy was, according to Wamala, of a limited kind in the respect that after the council had reached consensus, the monarchy could not oppose the adopted position. 'It is true that the monarch had a semi-divine status, being thought of as a link between the ancestors and the living. But he was made to understand, as already indicated, that he was not welcome to be autocratic' (2004, 440). Additionally, in the event that he had something to say, he would only say it through one of his advisers. Yet another feature, for Wamala, that distinguishes this form of democracy from other forms of democracy is that there was no veto power. 'The idea of a veto is defined as the constitutional right of a president to reject a decision of the legislature under certain conditions. Such an idea contradicts the idea of consensus and is alien to

traditional Buganda concepts of legitimate governance' (2004, 440). What this points to, is the absence of a sectional exercise of power or individualised forms of power. What is abundantly gestured towards is the understanding as well as the exercise of power that is as broad as possible. Such understanding and exercise of power is not found in party polities; hence Wamala, fittingly, concludes by articulating the evils of the party system.

The first weakness of the political party system is that its call to 'democratise' is externally generated and lacks sensitivity to the local conditions. Wamala states that political parties make lots of promises that ultimately contribute to destroying individual political agency. Party members are no longer real people but merely card-carrying members.

> With the massive help of the party machine, party members will try to win the people's votes by appealing to their basest instincts and sentiments. Driven to a frenzy, the electorate, in turn, is not so discriminative. Finally, those who are elected are representatives, not really of the people but of the party, which has become a power in itself. (2004, 440)

Elected party members violate the principle of delegated representation by having loyalty not to the people (who elected them) but to the party. The same problem is also equally applicable to opposition members, who in retaining loyalty to their own party begin to miss an opportunity for realising consensus. A further problem that develops from this are the Machiavellian tactics that are employed to get into power. All ethical considerations, which were the hallmarks of traditional consensus making, are dropped. Although power is retained at the level of personal rule in both the modern majoritarian framework and the traditional consensual framework, there is a crucial difference between the nature of holding power in these systems. The difference lies in that in the traditional consensual practice the ruler knew all the position holders which is not the case with the modern power holder. This moves Wamala to condemn the party system as inappropriate:

> The cultural inappropriateness of the party system is, indeed, deep. In the cultural milieu of the Ganda, in which individualism was almost unknown, the idea of institutionalising disagreement was alien. A way was always sought to reach a meeting point. In the contrary tendency of the multiparty system a deadly complication has ensued in Africa. Because the ethnic groups are apt to feel a mutual solidarity that makes them see themselves as one, multiparty politics becomes tribalised. The consequences to life and limb of the resulting struggles are there for all to see. (2004, 440)

This leads him to conclude that multiparty politics is better suited for those societies that are individualistic but ill-suited for communalistic societies:

> The challenge then is: how can societies, in which consensus was, traditionally, the preferred method of political decision-making, institutionalise democracy in the modern world? A creative answer to this kind of question can save contemporary Africa the headache otherwise caused when ideas are adopted without adequate consideration. (2004, 440).

I find the foregoing worth of engagement. Starting with the very last quote above, it is clear that Wamala thinks that there is a need to develop a political system for present-day societies that reflects or continues with an antecedent polity. For him, to democratise means to develop a system for contemporary Africa that avoids problems occasioned by the party system. Thus, societies that were home to consensus, have to develop a system that naturally avoids the problems brought by the alien and imposed system of majority parties. The first problem with the idea expressed in the quote above is Wamala's apparent line of thought that seems to assume readily that reviving a system past will both cure the present ills and restore order to the satisfaction of many, if not all, so that our political stability will become guaranteed. Further, Wamala seems to assume that all the problems that have seen the disintegration, betrayal and undermining of the current democratic polity can either be largely traced to or explained in terms of the alien nature and subsequent failure of majoritarian/party democracy. He crucially ignores the existence of other factors such as irresponsible behaviour on the part of power holders, the deliberate manipulation of state institutions and all levers of power to serve the narrow interests of an even narrower clique, the abrogation of constitutional dispensations, military coups inspired by nothing but sheer power mongering, woeful ineptitude at all levels of governance, bizarre corruption and all other associated ills. While I do not seek to deny that a hasty implementation of majoritarian party politics, as an end in itself, can be faced with numerous problems, I find it imprecise to suggest that all problems are owed to this very hasty implementation of party politics.

There is a truth that politics on the continent has tended to be organised along ethnic lines. But that is not the entire story. Although the organisation of political parties on ethnic lines has caused disaffection for minority ethnicities (who have had no chance of assuming power) there are other problems that have been visited upon all ethnic groups by politicians. I have in mind dictatorial regimes, one-party polities and notoriously unpopular — even illegitimate — regimes. If this situation on the continent, which is exacerbated by multiparty politics, is to be alleviated in any meaningful manner, it is incumbent upon Wamala and other thinkers of his ilk to do one thing: they must provide a frank analysis of what the combination of problems is that has brought Africa to where it is. It is also incumbent upon these thinkers to provide as honest an assessment as possible of what the proper causes of these problems could be. They would find, even with a cursory assessment of Africa's

problems, that it is incomplete to owe all the problems in the present-day polity to the antagonism that is sown by multiparty practices. One consideration that is worth entertaining, to temper Wamala's position, is the possibility that multiparty democracy has never been given a real opportunity to fail on the continent. In some cases, what has actually happened is that the core processes and requirements for a meaningful multiparty polity have either been usurped, abrogated or bypassed by powerful cliques that have an interest in maintaining certain facades, either as failures of multiparty democracy or as full but inadequate practices thereof. Wamala almost admits as much when he notes the prevalence of Machiavellian tactics in efforts to retain power or exclude others from participating in that power. These Machiavellian tactics have been extended to work in all sorts of ways that undermine institutions that are supposed to support a genuine and meaningful multiparty system. I suggest that it could be the case that what Africa has only experienced, to date, about multiparty democracy is only the dark side of vote buying, manipulation of party members, deadly fights along party and ethnic lines and other party-level ills.

Yet an even more intriguing aspect of Wamala's thinking is another form of ready acceptance. Wamala appears to accept readily that there is indeed a polity that is suitable for community societies without so much as spelling out what these community societies really are. Besides his description of the traditional Ganda society, which is organised along ethnic lines, he proffers no other account of a community society. Does it follow then, from his silence, that the Ganda exemplar is an adequate articulation of what community societies are? Proceeding directly from his silence, we are left to wonder if there is any other community besides the filial type. For, in the filial community, it is quite easy to see how the interpersonal relations readily translate to consensus in the polity. But what of other community societies that are not strictly governed along understandings of consensus as axiomatic in all adult relations? Is it possible to have other community societies besides of the type(s) described by Wiredu and Wamala, whose members' interpersonal interaction naturally extends to political practice? I think this is an intractable problem for both Wamala and Wiredu. Besides reference to the nature of social interactions, what else can serve as a justifier for the retention of consensus at the political level, especially in diverse societies where the leader (who has now replaced the king) does not know all the co-leaders at the various levels of state bureaucracy? These are considerations that Wamala treats as non-existent or regards as facile. Yet, ignoring them will, I think, only lead to an inadequate reading of the problem and the development of an equally inadequate solution.

Notwithstanding these considerations, Joe Teffo, weighs in to offer his support for consensus from a South African perspective. What is interesting, in the case of Teffo, is his careful attempt to juxtapose the traditional polity's resilience alongside

its modern counterpart. He notes that the 1996 South African Constitution has made provision for traditional leadership to exist alongside other institutions of governance. That was not always the case, as successive colonial authorities sought to destroy these indigenous institutions. 'That they did not quite succeed demonstrates the historical embeddedness and cultural vitality of those institutions' (Teffo 2004, 443). The real question that follows from this, for Teffo, becomes whether the traditional system is democratic or not. He notes that although there are various definitions of democracy, he favours one that puts emphasis on the participation of those who will be affected by the decisions. He rejects attempted Western hegemony in the definition of democracy. He notes that certain non-Western systems do work. This leads him to urge that concentration should not be on the definition of democracy but the system itself. He argues that since there are varieties of cultures in the world, there must also be different democracies. This leads him to conclude 'that there is a suitable tradition of democracy in indigenous African culture. It is, therefore, incumbent upon Africans to retrieve and preserve what is both logically sound and empirically justified from the African tradition and to try to perpetuate it' (Teffo 2004, 444–445).

Teffo's position is interesting for its undisguised advocacy of consensus by openly citing the need for Africans to develop a system that seeks to retrieve and preserve a polity that is not only sound but essentially based on and justified by the African tradition. Teffo is quick to point out that he is not advocating a return to the good old days, and although he concedes that there are certain aspects of traditional life that must be discarded as they are no longer consonant with modern life, he still maintains that: 'At the heart of this argument is the view that African tradition should remain, for Africans, the source of innovative reconstruction' (2004, 445). While Teffo is careful not to advocate a blind return to traditional systems, he holds that such systems are not only a guide but a suitable mode of democracy for Africans. A very close analysis reveals that on one hand there is an acknowledgement of the existence of the need to be wary of embracing antiquated traditionalism, yet on the other hand there is, equally, an acknowledged need to return to these traditional systems as they represent African modes of democratisation. While this cannot be read as a contradiction, I suggest that it raises a very special problem that Teffo either does not notice or does not address. It raises the problem of delineating, with precision, which parts of the system are so antiquated to have outlived their usefulness and which parts of the system are still useful and have to be retrieved. Further, it is incumbent upon Teffo to show what the retrieval process would be like and how those particular parts, that would have been retrieved, would be made to resonate with the encroachments of modernity. I have in mind, one particular aspect that Teffo has to look at with much more attentive rigour. This has to do with how a major part of

society has particularly transformed to be organised on lines that do not reflect the traditional parts of social capital or social unification enabled by close filial relations. Dead, for a good percentage of the African populace, are social arrangements such as close relatedness or close connectedness with royalty, etc; other realities and pressing issues have taken over. Yet Teffo seeks to offer either a selective or most basic defence of the founding notions of his traditional system. In reference to the principles of consensus as democracy, he states: 'To come now to the indigenous system, we note that its centrepiece is the institution of kingship' (2004, 445). He holds that a chief is not elected but born and, if there is any form of election the choice, for the electorate, is severely limited since the candidates must come from the royal family. He claims that a complaint that can be made against this system is that it is undemocratic since it does not have an elective feature. He responds to this accusation by pointing out that such criticism is short-sighted since it fails to note that the British monarchy, for example, is not elected, but its status is not in any way in opposition to democracy. So, he holds, it is quite possible, even for the present generation, for both political and symbolic power to be retained without any electoral procedures.

He then advances three considerations that are to serve as pointers to the democratic nature of consensus. Firstly, he states 'that African social organisation is undergirded by the principle of solidarity. It is characterised by humane people centredness. Precisely because of this principle, adversarial politics, the hallmark of Western-style multiparty system of democracy, is rather foreign to African political culture' (2004, 445). I find this submission quite problematic. The first problem is its lack of clarity. Taking the point Teffo makes above about the need to retrieve the working aspects of antecedent systems to democratise modern Africa, it is quite unclear whether this point is an act of retrieval or is merely a description of the past. I suspect that it is the latter, but the problem here has to do with how Teffo fuses descriptive past state of affairs with future aspirations without creating a sufficient and necessary link between the two. This is not a misreading of Teffo or an uncharitable interpretation on my part. Immediately above the cited part, he states that the British monarchical system though not retaining any electoral features is not dissonant with democracy. But what he overlooks is a crucial rider: the British system is both ancient and modern, or it has managed to transform itself from its ancient practice(s) to its modern reality. But as he draws its non-elective feature to be equivalent to some non-elective feature of traditional African monarchy, an unlikely but subtle jump has happened. He is effectively comparing a live and massively regulated, constitutional, system within one nation to some unknown or remote system in Africa's past. That the electorate does not choose a king/queen in Britain does not spell the end of adversarial democracy; neither is it an affirmation of consensual democracy. Actually, it is an affirmation of a different democratic system.

Secondly, Teffo fails to show what is problematic about the multiparty system of democracy in Africa besides pointing out that Africa was characterised by principles of solidarity. In this respect, his analysis is truncated, as it does not fully scrutinise other factors that could have contributed to making multiparty democracy a failure on the continent. I insist that the problems attendant to multiparty and adversarial politics in Africa cannot be wholly attributed to the very nature of this polity being multiparty and consequently adversarial. Routinely, supporters of consensus, hold that dissensus and at times bloody disagreement existed in traditional African societies. That admission shows that multiparty democracy did not foster anything exceptionally new in advocating acceleration of difference. What the real problem is, from the consensus sympathiser, is not difference caused by multiparty but some other problem which could have been accelerated by multiparty politics. That problem could be mixing different ethnic groups in one state whence we witness a clash of political parties along ethnic lines. At the risk of repeating myself, the real problem for Teffo, is not so much adversarial politics but some other problem(s) that come with the birth of the new African state. Teffo, and his friends, would keep their analysis of the problem besieging this state as adversarial political systems. Yet the notion of adversarial engagement, robust expression of difference and notions of substantive differences between political players were extant in traditional polities.

To this, Teffo may respond by pointing out that robust differences exist in all societies; it is only that their mode of expression has taken a new devastating turn in multiparty democracies of Africa. He may even concede that the real problem is the creation of the artificial state with a myriad of ethnicities that fracture along those very political lines. This move does not help Teffo that much. The reason for this lies in the fact that this concession takes us back to the problem of the lack of the cosmopolitan quality of traditional society. Its implied insistence on recognising political agency as only possible within intra-cultural subjects is problematic. How does it propose to treat instances of the other who does not belong to this commune-cultural infrastructure with all its attendant toppings such as being represented by someone from one's group, being personally able to go to the chief to pay homage and, most importantly, sharing in the same cultural capital that makes consensus axiomatic in all adult relationships?

His second consideration is that kingship as a democratic system tended to promote equal participation of all citizens, although this was at times, limited to circumcised male citizens. Since this appears to be discriminatory, he rehabilitates it by stating that: 'It is, however, more important to understand that the problem has to do not with the essential character of the traditional political system, but, rather, with some specific contingent beliefs. With the withering away of the beliefs, the practice is easily seen to be unsupported' (Teffo 2004, 446). He suggests that this move will

show how some traditional systems need to be revised without necessarily throwing away everything with which they are associated. Once again, Teffo is lacking in detail as to what could be thrown out and what should be retained. He can be regarded as hoping that an adjustment to traditional systems in the light of modernity will automatically throw light on what has to be thrown out and what has to be retained. But, as I have suggested above, the case is not that simple. What is needed is an explicit account of what aspect of tradition is relevant, how it is relevant and ways in which it can be made to continue in the present.

Third, and crucially, according to Teffo, 'consensus-seeking is the hallmark of traditional political decision-making in many African communities' (2004, 446). A system that gives priority to consensus, according to Teffo, is more democratic in a far much deeper sense than one that only prioritises the majority running away with decisions. Hence he writes:

> In African communities under discussion, kingship is an integral part of a communalistic social order. The special importance of kingship is seen in the fact that the institution symbolises, inspires, and facilitates the unity and continuity of the community's culture and traditions. The system involving the kingship institution might be called a communocracy, insofar as it is a type of governance based on general community involvement and participation. Communocracy, then, might be said to be a form of democracy characteristic of many traditional African societies. One might mention in this connection the Zulu of South Africa, the Bugandas of Uganda, and the Akans of Ghana. (2004, 446)

There are two operative ideas here: firstly the inspirational, symbolic and facilitative powers of the monarchical institution in the continuity and unity of the culture and traditions of the community; and, secondly, the consequent development of communocracy that enables the participation of everyone in matters of governance. The import of this is easily found in the clear and categorical confinement of this system to ethnic identity. This ethnic identity enables people to share in the values that are finally expressed in terms of communocracy. The definition of communocracy is reliant on securing the traditional setting of clan identity and all that comes with it.

Teffo states that an equally significant feature of this democratic system was that the king did not make decisions on his own but that decisions were taken by a leadership unit, in the form of the council, as a direct result of deliberation by members of the ruling council. 'Both in theory and practice the chief only pronounces the decision of the council. Decisions are never perceived as his, but as of all members of the council' (2004, 447). A king who interfered with the decisions of the council would risk losing his throne. He holds that the African monarchy, like its British counterpart, was merely a symbol of power who did not actually exercise that power.

However, the difference between the two is that the former would actually get to sit in council meetings.

In as far as these councils may be considered as democratic, Teffo emphasises that they were so by virtue of the cultures in which they operated. As far as representation was concerned, councils were constituted by lineage heads who were chosen on grounds of seniority, popularity, wisdom and vitality. These heads and representatives remained in their positions as long as they retained these qualities. Further,

> [t]o this is to be added the important fact … that the councils worked by consensus. This means that they literally engaged in deliberation until a consensus was reached. This is what makes the system cooperative rather than adversarial. It also certainly strengthens its democratic standing. (2004, 447)

Teffo, then hastens to add that in South Africa, today, traditional rulers are more relevant to any constitutional dispensation than in any of the kingdoms of the Western world. The reason is that the traditional leadership is in touch with the people residing in the rural areas. By virtue of this connection, the traditional leadership controls social relationships, and it governs the kinship behaviour, customary rites and marital contracts as well as overseeing affairs of the living and the dead. He then holds that since the party system cannot work as a panacea in Africa, it follows that there is a role for traditional leaders.

There is some truth in what Teffo claims, a lot of truth actually. Not only specific regions in South Africa, but large parts of Africa remain quite traditionalistic and responsive to traditional dicta, including authority and accompanying systems of governance. However, what Teffo fails to note are two crucial facts also equally attendant to this reality. The first is that traditional authority does not derive its power from the justification of its own institutions, practices and intentions. It is dependent on the national and modern legislation that chooses to give it powers that are seriously limited in all sorts of ways. In fact, the powers that are given to traditional authorities by modern authorities, which are in power thanks to adversarial politics, are so designed to serve the interests of the nation-state. Though they are meant to empower the traditional authority to regulate the spheres of life of his/her community, they actually are based on modern pieces of legislation that are commonly referred to as 'acts'. The situation is particularly glaring in South Africa where the government has launched a commission to decide who is royalty and who is not. The second point that Teffo so quietly ignores are the difficulties attendant to the consequent tension between tradition and modernity, particularly institutions that compete to regulate people's lives. In South Africa, for example, though the traditional authorities are recognised, they are not completely empowered to deal with matters in the sense that Teffo envisages. There is a real tension between how tradition and modernity

exist alongside each other and how they are meant to complement each other is not always clear. Tradition and its leaders may feel that the modern laws encroach in their space and the modern aspect of today's state may be impatient, embarrassed or feel compelled to encourage the traditional to play catch up with the rest of the country. Or even worse, but most likely, elected politicians may only tolerate traditional leaders for their usefulness in attracting votes. In Teffo's South Africa, the inherent tension between elected power and traditional leaders, is no more dramatically depicted as in the burning debate that occurred between civil society and those in support of traditional leadership's powers. These powers were seen by certain sections of the society as quite offensive if not altogether backward looking. What then needs to be pointed to Teffo is that glossing over issues of the actual tensions that exist between traditional structures and modern structures distorts both the matter at hand and the real context of today's traditional structures.

Teffo's concluding remarks are quite radical and I wish to quote him in full. He, without restraint, advocates the return of the consensual polity when he writes:

> Let us now recall some questions raised earlier on. Is the multiparty political system, which is an integral element of the Western democratic culture, the panacea for Africa's political problems? Should African modes of social thought and organisation be replaced wholesale with Western political philosophy and practice? If the answer is in the negative, as it should be, then there is a role for traditional leaders to play even in contemporary society. (2004, 448)

Wistfully, he adds:

> There is also the need to abstain from the undue *absolutisation* of the multiparty system. Rather, in their contemporary political culture, Africans should seek to reincarnate, among other things, the values of solidarity and consensus. Such an effort would give content and impetus to the African Renaissance Movement that is under way in South Africa. (2004, 448)

Teffo's remarks are worrying for their lack of in-depth analysis and their blind advocacy of a return to a system that he really views as a cure to all of Africa's political ills. While it is true that there are problems that are associated with the multiparty political system, it does not follow that the overthrow of multiparty politics and its replacement with consensus will directly lead to the end of whatever problems that multiparty politics has brought. It is quite clear that the major advantage that is cited in favour of consensus over multiparty politics is that the former gives substance to representation in ways that the latter cannot secure. If indeed it is the case that the most distinct advantage that consensus has over multiparty democracy is that it animates the notion of representation by giving full effect to the wishes of the people through their representatives, then there are some issues that Teffo has to address.

Some of these issues have to do with whether the political problems in Africa are directly attributable to issues of representation. But most importantly, Teffo has to show how consensus will be able to cure some problems that have nothing to do with representation. Just as much as he raises doubt about the Western multiparty system being unable to serve as a panacea to African political problems, by the same measure, we can raise doubt about the efficacy of consensus. Until deliberate detail is spelt out as to what it is, that is so compellingly wholesome in the application and use of consensus, to enable it to solve all of Africa's problems, that doubt remains.

Teffo's major complaint really lies in protesting against replacing African modes of thought and organisation with Western political philosophy and practice. It is fair enough that he complains this way, but he seems to overlook a crucial factor: what he either ignores or downplays has to do with how this is no longer just a political problem that can be sorted out through replacement of one polity with another. In fact, conditions of modernity, including other accompanying values with a more global outlook, have increasingly become the very fabric of social thought, organisation and practice for large parts of Africa. A good number of Africans, and I mean not a negligible minority, immerse themselves in matters of global outlook and are worried about other states of democracies in other parts of the world. These Africans have become cosmopolitan and effectively view the political progress of all humanity as necessarily of the same nature simply because we occupy this place, the planet earth, which is our global village. It is old news that what happens in one part of the world, including political events, may have an effect in other distant parts of the world. In South Africa, for example, a sporting event such as the soccer world cup finals of 2010 did much more in painting a positive picture of Africa's organisational capabilities than Teffo's fervent demand for the return of the continent to the consensual system. It remains unclear to me what refraining 'from undue absolutisation of the multiparty system' really means. The word 'undue' has many meanings, among them being unjustified, excessive, unwarranted, gratuitous, and so on. Absolutisation means making something absolute, implying that there is no other system to exist alongside the dominant one. This can only then mean that there is unjustified domination of the multiparty system that must be removed from the continent. Nothing can be more disingenuous. Africa has had ample opportunity to choose its own political path, and many parts of it have done so without showing any signs of having been compelled to take the Western majority party system. These chosen and self-inflicted paths have been not so glorious in their range from murderous dictatorships to kleptocracies. It remains to be established how the multiparty system is responsible for every conceivable and experienced political ill and how consensus would remedy these ills. While the problem of representation is real and can be dealt with in some respect through consensus, it is not entirely true

to imagine that all political problems besetting the continent have to do with the presence of multiparty democracy. Teffo has to do more to show the completeness of his advocacy as properly lying in analysis as opposed to advocacy.

Wiredu on traditional consensus

Wiredu traces the roots of consensus to traditional society where he finds that 'there is considerable evidence that decision by consensus was often the order of the day in African deliberations, and on principle' (1997, 303). A significant part that ensured the attainment of consensus was reconciliation which Wiredu holds as a form of consensus. This reconciliation took a form of 'restoration of goodwill through a reappraisal of the significance of the initial bones of contention' (1997, 304). For Wiredu, consensus does not involve complete identity of moral or cognitive position. What is important is that all parties are able to feel that their viewpoints have been taken into account in the proposed future action. In this instance, he holds, consensus does not suggest total agreement.

Wiredu points that there were two considerable varieties of polities with traditional African political systems, with one being centralised and the other not so centralised. However, anarchist societies operated with the same order as centralised ones. Wiredu does not attempt to understand the generality of the organisation of all traditional African societies. On the contrary, he traces the foundations of consensus through the Ashanti system. 'The lineage is the basic political unit among the Ashantis. Because they are a matrilineal group, this unit consist of all people in a town or village having a common female ancestor, which, as a rule, is quite a considerable body of persons' (ibid 305). Every such unit has a head who is a member of the council and such leadership is based on seniority and non-senility. In this case, then, election of the representative becomes routine. 'But where these qualities do not seem to converge in one person, election may entail prolonged and painstaking consultations and discussions aimed at consensus. There is never an act of formal voting. Indeed, there is no longstanding word for voting in the language of the Ashantis. The expression which is currently used for that process (*abato*) is an obvious modern coinage for a modern cultural import, or shall we say, imposition' (1997, 305). Hence, for Wiredu, consensus is first felt at this stage of the election of the lineage head. This head remained in office for life, unless moral or physical degeneration set in. It was, then, the duty of the lineage head to hold consultations with all adult members of the lineage regarding municipal matters. In turn, the council of lineage heads was presided over by the chief, a position which was hereditary. The actual choice of the chief was proposed by the queen mother 'and approved by the council and endorsed by the populace through an organisation called, in literal translation,

'the young people's association' in order to become final' (1997, 306). The word of the chief was not law but consensus of the council and any chief who imposed his will on the council risked being deposed. Citing William Abraham, Wiredu argues that the chief's office was more sacred than political. This derived from the fact that the chief was a link between the living population and the ancestors. Like Teffo, Wiredu states: 'In so far as it was political, it bore substantial analogies to the status of a constitutional monarch' (1997, 306). This monarch executed ceremonial duties but was unlike its Western constitutional counterpart in that the monarch sat on the council 'and in being in a position to exercise legitimate influence on its deliberations by virtue, not of any supposed divine inspiration, but rather of whatever intrinsic persuasiveness his ideas may have had' (1997, 306).

Representation, in this system, was found at all levels. Paramount chiefs presided over their councils which also sent representatives to the national council. At all these levels decisions were by consensus.

> Now, this adherence to the principle of consensus was a premeditated option. It was based on the belief that *ultimately* the interests of all members of society are the same, although their immediate perceptions of those interests may be different. This thought is given expression in the art motif depicting a crocodile with one stomach and two heads locked in a struggle over food. If they could but see that the food was, in any case, destined for the same stomach, the irrationality of the conflict would be manifest to them. But is there a chance of it? The Ashanti answer is 'Yes, human beings have the ability eventually to cut through their differences to the rock bottom identity of interests.' And, on this view, the means to that objective is simply rational discussion. Of the capabilities of this means the Ashantis are explicit. 'There is,' they say, 'no problem of human relations that cannot be resolved by human dialogue.' Dialogue, of course, presupposes not just two parties (at least), but also two conflicting positions… (1997, 306–307)

In another place, while making a case for oral heritage Wiredu invokes the same art motif and emphasises the same point when he writes:

> My own favourite among the art motifs I have found in Akan culture is that depicting a crocodile with one stomach but two heads locked up in a fight over food. I think this symbol captures both the most fundamental problem of ethics and its solution. The problem is that although we all *as individuals* have our own legitimate interests (symbolized by the two separate heads), excessive fixation upon those heads could lead us to lose sight of the fact that, *ultimately*, we all share the same interests, namely, our common well being (symbolized by the common stomach) That loss of perspective is the root of conflict, and its restoration should facilitate that agreement on the *sharing* of assets which recognizes the interests of all parties concerned. (Wiredu 2009, 10)

It is clear that Wiredu is resolutely committed to the idea that individual differences can be ultimately expressed or captured by a common denominator as represented by the stomach of the crocodile.

Wiredu also cites a saying that states that it is not one head that holds council, which shows that no single voice had a privilege to be heard over others. Another saying attests to the notion that it is better to have two heads (working together) than one which, according to Wiredu, signifies how the Ashanti (and Akans in general) prize rational discussion as leading to consensus and how qualities of elegant and persuasive discourse were requirements of making it into council. The pursuit of consensus, for Wiredu, was meant to go beyond securing majority, as majority was not seen as good enough by the Ashantis. Aiming for majority rule would have deprived the minority of the right to representation in the decision in question. Wiredu argues that there are two concepts of representation, namely: 1) representation of given constituency in council, and 2) representation of the will of the represented in making decisions in council. He identifies the first as formal and the second as substantive representation:

> On the Ashanti view, substantive representation is a matter of a fundamental human right. Each human being has the right to be represented not only in council, but also in counsel in any matter relevant to his or her interests or those of their groups. This is why consensus is so important. (Wiredu 1997, 307)

A practical reason for this position is that formal representation without substance will induce disaffection. Effectively, for Wiredu, if there is a minority that is not substantively represented, disaffection is likely to be institutionalised. Consensus stems the possibility of this disaffection becoming institutionalised in the form of adversarial politics. Hence, he calls consensus an antidote to majoritarian adversarial politics. Further, Wiredu holds that the Ashanti always thought consensus could always be achieved, at least in principle.

In response to the question of what the bearing of all this could be on democracy, he notes that current forms of democracy are systems based on the majority principle, with the situation that whichever party wins the majority of seats or gets the most votes has governmental power. Parties, in this scheme, are of people with similar tendencies and aspirations, with the aim of gaining power to implement their policies. He claims that a party-based system is majoritarian democracy while the Ashanti system should be understood as a consensual democracy. The latter is characterised by government by consent and it is consensual because that consent was negotiated, while the former is based on consent without consensus. The Ashanti system was not a party system in the majoritarian sense which seeks to gain power at the exclusion

of others. 'But in a broad lexical sense there were parties. The lineages were parties to the project of good government' (Wiredu 1997, 308). Most importantly he holds: 'For all concerned, the system was set up for participation in power, not its appropriation, and the underlying philosophy was one of cooperation, not confrontation' (1997, 308). However, he dismisses one-party supporters' reliance on co-operation when he writes:

The illusory analogy was this. In a one-party system there is no conflict of parties. No party loses because the *party* wins. The comparison is faulty for the following reason. In the traditional set-up, no party lost because all the parties were natural partners in power or, more strictly, because there were no parties. In the one-party situation, the reason why no party loses is because murdered parties do not compete. (1997, 308)

He holds that although the disappearance of the one-party state is not to be lamented, the good point it illustrates is that the party system shows that there is no connection between democracy and the party system. 'An associated insight was that indigenous African systems of politics, at least in some well-known instances, offered examples of democracy without a multiparty mechanism' (1997, 308).

For Wiredu, while some military and civilian dictators have fallen by the wayside as a result of democratisation, others, in response to the pressures to democratise, have devised tricks to survive multiparty democracy. As to what democratisation has brought to the continent, Wiredu points out the complexity of such an assessment when he notes:

> There is no denying, of course, that some gains in freedom have occurred to the African populations. But how substantial have these been, and to what extent have these developments built on the strength of the indigenous institutions of politics in Africa? It is hard to be convinced that this question has yet attracted enough attention. (1997, 309)

In refreshing frankness, Wiredu notes that the neglect of this question may have to do with its difficulty. In particular, conditions of traditional political life are less complicated than present conditions. Further, to his credit, he notes:

> The kinship networks that provided the mainstay of the consensual politics of traditional times are simply incapable of serving the same purpose in modern Africa. This is especially so in the urban areas, where industrialisation, albeit paltry in many parts of Africa, has created conditions, such as sharp socioeconomic cleavages, which carry all or many of the ingredients of ideological politics. In these circumstances it may well seem a trifle too utopian to envisage the possibility of a non-party approach to politics. (1997, 309)

Additionally, consensus may appear to exaggerate harmony in traditional life where there is evidence of both internal and external conflict. Importantly, he admits,

'more seriously, … the ethnic orientation of the various groups, by their own inward fixations, has tended to generate conflict in their external relations' (1997, 309). He states that if that is the case, then it can be said that consensus cannot be a basis for African politics which has always had ethnic divisions. He notes that it could be argued that the more pluralistic system of multiparty is a practical approach *sans* the tyranny of the majority. He notes that though both objections can be accepted (with no qualification in the first and a qualification in the second): 'But the conclusions in favour of the multiparty system in both cases are non sequiturs' (1997, 309). He dissects the objection as follows:

> As regards the premises, it is true that any suggestion that the kinship basis of traditional politics could be a model for contemporary African politics can be dismissed as an anachronistic nostalgia. But, in the matter of conflict among the ethnic groups, it should be noted that African history furnishes examples not only of conflict, but also of cooperation among them. Still, the history of interethnic conflict and the problem of its contemporary reverberations ought not to be minimised. Interestingly, exactly this is one of the reasons why the idea of a consensual non-party system ought to be taken especially seriously in Africa. (1997, 310)

Wiredu holds that one of the causes of conflict in Africa is that certain minority groups find themselves out of power, causing frustrations and disaffections which lead to disruptions in those very polities. He then urges the reader to imagine a polity not of parties but of consensus of representatives. Governments would comprise coalitions, not of parties but of citizens. Political associations could be formed but, in council of state, such associations would not play an important role. Two outcomes could be expected: 1) political associations would be an outlet to channel desired political pluralism without majoritarian party proclivities; 2) members would concentrate on the merits of proposals as opposed to pursuing ulterior motives. Since participants would not be fixated on accumulating power — consensus and compromise would all be too real. As consensus secures the substantive right of representation, it ensures that the minority is not triumphed over but prevailed upon,

> …it prevails upon them to accept the proposal in question, not just to live with it, which the latter is the basic plight of minorities under majoritarian democracy. In a consensus system, the voluntary acquiescence of the minority with respect to a given issue would normally be necessary for the adoption of a decision. In the rare case of an intractable division, a majority vote might be used to break the impasse. But the success of the system must be judged by the rarity of such predicaments in the workings of the decision-making bodies of the state. (Wiredu 1997, 311)

Essentially, what should be noted here is that Wiredu concedes that there will be

moments when voting becomes necessary within a consensual dispensation. But what is important is to note that voting was not an inevitable feature of consensus, it was a rare necessity. On the contrary, the essential feature of consensual democracy was the idea of prevailing upon the minority so that they will not go away with an acute sense of disaffection. Hence thinkers such as Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani (2014, 346), who believe that they are making significant criticism against Wiredu when they point that consensus and voting are co-existent, must temper their criticism with the recognition that Wiredu does not completely rule out the act of voting. On the contrary he appreciates that voting is necessary to break an unusual impasse, which by the nature of communal living and politics, is to be actively avoided.

Wiredu ends by re-emphasising the advantageous aspect of consensus which is its ability to not cause disenfranchisement among the minority. For that reason, he urges, its theoretical details should be pursued by African philosophers and political scientists. This call has been taken up in various forms by thinkers such as Ajume H. Wingo (2004) who seeks to fuse consensus to liberal democracy as well as Kibujjo Kalumba who seeks to expand Wiredu's position into a new form of a 'constrained system of multiparty majority democracy designed to empower minority ethnic groups' (2015, 116). Helen Lauer (2011a, 2012), on one hand, is engaged in both interpretive work on, and defence of, Wiredu's position. Kwame Gyekye (1992), on the other hand, has given ample historical support of Wiredu's analysis of the Akan consensual democratic theory and practice though he warns against some contemporary problems that come with consensus.

Eze (1997), while acknowledging the importance of Wiredu's project of the return to the source and its strong disassociation with one-party polities, expresses some serious reservations about the philosophical and practical viability of consensus in modern day Africa. Eze's objections can be summarised as follows: 1) The source of the legitimation of the king's authority is not clear since the Akan king is both a religious and political leader. What this means is that in traditional societies, the king could have easily appealed to his religious authority to prevail upon his subjects while maintaining an appearance of being rational. 2) There is serious doubt that at the rock-bottom there is an identity of interests. Eze argues that there is no way of knowing that such a rock-bottom could ever possibly exist and if it could ever be in the interests of common humanity as opposed to serving rulers and those who seek to exploit others. 3) He rejects the idea that democracy must be seen as consensus. On the contrary, he argues that the *raison d'etre* of democracy is to manage ever individuated desires, not reconciliation in consensus. He claims that consensus can only be a moment of democracy and not its essence. Elsewhere (Matolino 2009), I have attempted a response to Eze's objections. There I sought to argue that his first and third objection do not succeed, while the second objection deserves attention.

The contexts of democratic challenges

The foregoing presentation is limited to what has been raised in literature as support for consensus and a partial critique of majoritarianism. What I have not considered is the historical context from which these debates may probably be said to emerge and what may be responsible for the way they have emerged. In this section, I briefly consider the tension that arises from the majoritarian democratic version that was transferred onto the continent. Formerly colonised African countries started achieving their independence in the 1950s and were almost immediately burdened with the task of democratising. Almost at that time, the Western world was going through an economic upswing that was taken to be a direct product of Western democratic gains (Streeck 2011). But as Wolfgang Streeck argues, what was being established in Western Europe and North America, in that period after the Second World War, was democratic capitalism. Streeck argues that for the next two decades this combination functioned so extremely well that our notions of modern capitalism are attached to that period, despite the decline that followed thereafter. For Streeck, we should treat the two decades after the war as exceptional rather than what we should consider to be normal of democratic capitalism. The biggest problem with this relationship is that the two components are not mutually supportive but are rather at odds with each other. For Streeck, this uncomfortable coalition dates back to the 19th century where the political right suspected that the rule of the poor majority would eventually get rid of private property and free markets. The working class and the political left, on the other hand, suspected that capitalists would align themselves with reactionary forces to get rid of democracy and thereby avoid being ruled by a majority that is dedicated to social and economic redistribution. Streeck further argues that it was widely believed that in order for capitalism and democracy to be compatible, it was necessary that strict democratic controls over capitalism be in place. However, since then, what has bothered mainstream economists is how opportunistic politicians will prevail on economically illiterate electorates to interfere with functioning markets under the guise of seeking to attain goals of social justice and full employment. In detail, he characterises the tension between democracy and capitalism as follows:

> There are various ways to conceptualize the underlying causes of the friction between capitalism and democracy. For present purposes, I will characterize democratic capitalism as a political economy ruled by two conflicting principles, or regimes of resource allocation: one operating according to marginal productivity, or what is revealed as merit by a 'free play of market forces', and the other based on social need or entitlement, as certified by the collective choices of democratic politics. Under democratic capitalism, governments are theoretically required to honour both principles simultaneously, although

> substantively the two almost never align. In practice they may for a time neglect one in favour of the other, until they are punished by the consequences: governments that fail to attend to democratic claims for protection and redistribution risk losing their majority, while those that disregard the claims for compensation from the owners of productive resources, as expressed in the language of marginal productivity, cause economic dysfunctions that will become increasingly unsustainable and thereby also undermine political support. (Streeck 2011, 7–8)

There should be a lot of sympathy for this sort of analysis, particularly if it is to be presented as a part of demonstrating the unsuitability of Western-originating democracy for the African context. Not only is that case strong, but what this sort of analysis also shows is how the inherent contradiction between democracy and capitalism perils the possibility of democracy wherever it is combined with capitalism. The case against this combination, on the continent, is made even starker by the manner in which Carew, above, depicts Africa as operating on the fringes of the global capitalist order. If the situation is not so good in the democratic and capitalist capitals of the world, it can only be worse in African countries. What makes democracy unattractive in this instance is its inability to be a system that restricts itself to governance and governance alone, or proverbially, stand its ground against intrusions that are sponsored by other facets of the social order. As Streeck argues, the balance between pursuing the demands of the free market economy and the demands of democracy are mutually exclusive that those in power are forced to opt for one over the other. In the event that they opt to sacrifice democracy, they are then forced to give full expression to the demands of social redistribution that the whole population would be, probably justifiably, demanding. Such social redistribution, in my estimation, would crucially have to involve some form of interfering with the perceived free operation of the hand behind the free market economy. The result is that the progress and function of the capitalist-oriented market is stymied and the economic vibrancy either collapses or is severely restricted. On the other hand, if the government chooses to prioritise and protect the freedom of the capitalist market, they would have to abandon their principles and obligations towards social redistribution. Once they abandon those principles and obligations, what will result is a large-scale disaffection with the economic system that favours and protects the gains of the rich. Once the latter obtains, the legitimacy of the ruling regime is so severely compromised that it may lead, I would say, to instabilities of all sorts including civil unrest, armed uprisings, or the formation of highly aggressive and confrontational opposition parties.

I think what we should make out of this is the near impossibility of simultaneously satisfying the two crucial requirements of democratic capitalism. It is from this failure

that there has to be a compromise made between the two components, democracy and capitalism, that the real trouble starts. A satisfaction of one requirement at the expense of the other is going to cost the regime's legitimacy in the very sphere that has been neglected. As this neglect creates a crisis of legitimacy, it is not to be taken as an insignificant failure but one whose implications are far reaching. If, for example, the regime chooses to satisfy redistribution in fulfilment of the legitimate demands of the democratic process as given by the electorate, those efforts will backfire and compromise that legitimacy. By adopting policies that favour the demands and needs of the masses at the expense of either fiduciary discipline or playing to the rules of the free market, then the vibrancy of the economy may be compromised and unable to cater for the very basic economic needs that the regime had hoped to satisfy. If, on the other hand, the regime chooses to go with the dictates of the free market economy, this choice, it must be said, will always exclude the majority and cater for the needs and satisfaction of the minority, propertied class.

The real problem, one might argue as Streeck has indicated, is that capitalism, by its nature, tends to follow a certain trajectory of growth which is essentially non-inclusive. The non-inclusive character of capitalism is to be found in its ordinary operation which seeks to be in keeping with the dictates of the free market. Those free market principles are not as free as they appear, since they tend to favour a particular outcome which has nothing to do with prioritising redistribution. This leads to the emergence of a rich elite and the vicissitudes of the market reduce the rest of the population to an insecure existence which ultimately shrinks to discomforting levels of material dispossession.

If this is the choice that Africa is presented with, then it can be argued, its democratic project is doomed to collapse. The collapse is directly owed to the futility that is contained in the prescribed and forced combination that must obtain between capitalism and democratic expectations and practices. Hence, it can be argued that to speak of democratic capitalism is not to speak of any democracy at all but it is a reference to two systems that have been forced to cohabit and whose cohabitation will lead to an explosion. The point here has everything to do with how the complications of democratic capitalism bring themselves to bear wherever that system operates. As the system forces choices that are exclusive and ultimately lead to the undermining of the legitimacy of the neglected sphere, the credentials of democratic capitalism are questionable both as an instance of democracy and as an equitable social redistributive system.

In addition to these considerations, as Giovanni Arrighi (2002) argues, the factors that have retarded the economic performance of African states, to the extent of turning that performance into a crisis, have very little to do with Africa's own inefficiencies. On the contrary, those factors are of a global nature, specifically the

> …crisis that overtook world capitalism in the 1970s, and in the response of the hegemonic power, the United States, to it. The global crisis of the 1970s was simultaneously a crisis of profitability and a crisis of legitimacy. The crisis of profitability was due primarily to the worldwide intensification of competitive pressures on business enterprises in general, and industrial firms in particular, that ensued from the great expansion of world trade and production of the 1950s and 1960s. To some extent, the crisis of legitimacy emanated from the crisis of profitability. Policies and ideologies that had played an essential role in launching and sustaining the worldwide expansion of trade and in the 1950s and 1960s — so called Keynesianism, broadly understood — became counterproductive, socially as well as economically, once the expansion intensified competition for increasingly scarce resources, human and natural. But the crisis of legitimacy was also due to the increasing social and economic costs of US reliance on coercion to contain the Communist challenge in the Third World (Arrighi 2002, 18–19).

I suggest that we should read Arrighi as offering support to Streeck's view that the capitalist crisis can be traced to the 1970s and has become intricately linked to the crisis of legitimacy. In very much the same manner as Streeck, Arrighi argues that Africa has become implicated in this crisis not out of its own making but because of global forces attached to capitalism no longer functioning as they had. Further, very much like Carew above, Arrighi notes that there was a shift in the rules of engagement between the West and African states, which was to the disadvantage of African states. Hence, he writes:

> The development-friendly regime of the preceding thirty years was officially liquidated and Third World countries were invited to play by the rules of an altogether different game — that is, to open up their national economies to the cold winds of intensifying world-market competition, and to rival each other and First World countries in creating within their jurisdictions the greatest possible freedom of movement and action for capitalist enterprise. Especially in Africa, this new strategy of 'structural adjustment' was presented as the antidote to an increasingly discredited statist model, prevalent in the preceding thirty years. In practice, the cure often turned out to be worse than the disease. (Arrighi 2002, 23)

I think the foregoing is self-evident and needs no further explanation. However, what can be added is that there are factors of a global nature that are beyond the control of Africans that militate against the effectiveness of democracy taking hold on the continent. Such factors, in particular, spring from the economic front, whose effectiveness as a (capitalist) system is on the wane, and from the problem of so closely aligning democracy to such a troublesome system. Since both systems have been imposed on Africa and they are not deliberately thought out to benefit Africans, they then do not have a possibility of working out to benefit Africans.

Worse, the democratic capitalist system that has been imposed on the continent, via its global networks and influence, is one that does not show itself to aid the project of democratisation in Africa. This state of affairs on its own and the accompanying analyses as presented by Carew, Streeck and Arrighi (and any other analysis that is sympathetic to this view), might justifiably lead to the belief that the capitalist democratic system on the continent ought to be jettisoned and replaced by a more homegrown variant. A variant that will show itself to be sensitive to the historical factors not only of the imposition of a foreign system, but also of the internal contradictions that limit the possibility of success of the capitalist democratic model. What could possibly follow, straight from the analysis, is the conviction or argument that systems such as consensus stand a better chance of attaining the democratic requirements of representation and redistribution. Or, as was the case with supporters of African socialism, democracy could be interpreted in line with the socialist agenda inspired by the communalist ethos of traditional African societies.

While I think it is futile to try and argue against the analysis above, I think it equally futile to try and use that analysis in a way that seeks to ignore or downplay other factors that have stymied the process and prospects of democratisation on the continent. While the call for a homegrown version of democratisation appears to have some appeal, that appeal must be tempered with some equally homegrown facts that have compromised processes and prospects of democratising. The analyses by Carew, Streeck and Arrighi are correct in pointing out the inadequacies of democratic capitalism and how it negatively affects Africa's chances of both democratising and economic development. Both these effects have a direct bearing on the ordinary populace's experience of life, politically and economically. Hence, I suggest that it makes sense, from this analysis, to call for the development of a homegrown polity that will allow democracy to prosper and ultimately be able to meet the economic needs of the continent's population.

However, the issue is not as simple as this analysis might appear to make out. There is indeed a school of thought that is aware of the externally generated effects on the continent's democratic and economic standing. Nevertheless, that school of thought is not willing to lay all the blame on external factors. On the contrary, it suggests that internally generated factors are mainly responsible for the station that Africa is in. One of the most lucid proponents of this line of thought is George B.N. Ayittey whose work has continuously and consistently sought to demonstrate that Africa's failing, both democratically and economically, is of its own making or, more precisely, of its political leaders' making. Ayittey argues that there are two ways of approaching an understanding of what has been the cause of Africa's democratic and economic failure. He characterises one way as internalist and the other as externalist. I would hold that obviously externalists would be those who belong to Carew, Streeck

and Arrighi's thinking. But, internalists, according to Ayittey, hold that even though it is the case that colonialism and Western imperialism did not leave Africa in good stead, Africa's deterioration is due more to internal than external factors (Ayittey 1998, 44). These internal factors that have contributed to Africa's collapse, according to Ayittey, are 'misguided leadership, systemic corruption, capital flight, economic mismanagement, senseless civil wars, political tyranny, flagrant violations of human rights, and military vandalism' (1998, 44). As to the real commitments of internalists, he adds, immediately:

> Internalists argue that the attribution of Africa's crises solely to external forces is intellectually deficient for several reasons. First, pragmatism and scientific scholarship demand, at the very least, an unerring scrutiny of *all* causative factors, both external and internal. Common sense dictates looking both ways before crossing a street, or risk being hit by a truck. Africa is in bandages because its leaders looked only one way — at the external. (1998, 44)

Additionally, he holds that external factors are beyond the control and influence of most African countries. He is of the view that even if it were possible for African countries to have influence over those external factors, it would take them decades to change that external environment. Moreover, he adds, the attempt at changing that environment would be very protracted, as the basic organisation and functioning of the economic structure has not changed for the last 50 years (at the time of his writing). But, most importantly, Ayittey believes that 'internal factors are mostly man-made or artificial and are therefore more amenable to change or correction than the external factors. No matter how much colonialism is abhorred, that artefact of history cannot be undone or rewritten; it must be seen as a given' (1998, 44–45).

It would be understandable if one was tempted to dismiss Ayittey's views as unusual or as some form of Afro-pessimism, but such a dismissal would be uncharitable in the extreme. For a start, such a dismissal, I think, would operate only by succeeding in ignoring that Ayittey openly acknowledges the role that external factors have played in limiting the returns of democracy and economic success on the continent. Secondly, I also think, such a view would have to seriously downplay Ayittey's insightful distinction between two separate factors that operate to undermine Africa's efforts at democratising: the internal and external. While I would agree with the proposition that it could be the case that external factors may give rise to the internal factors taking the shape they do, I would suggest that we should take Ayittey's position seriously regarding the control that we have towards these internal factors. It is not controversial or an exaggeration on Ayittey's part to point out that not only are external factors hard to manipulate but also that colonialism, as an artefact of history, is a given. I am of the view that we could, and actually should, do more with what is within our control and what is not a historical given. I would

like to think that even die-hard supporters of the externalist view are willing to admit that there is a lot that could have been done differently by Africans themselves to better their situation, or to influence their situation in a way totally different from how they went about it. Our democratic and economic failure, as Ayittey demands, must be explained in inclusive terms as opposed to insisting on seeing it only from a certain prism — an externally driven failure. If we allow ourselves to interpret history in such a fashion, I am afraid, we might find ourselves fulfilling Hegel's notorious claims that Africans are incapable of determining their history.

Although it could be fair to say that Ayittey's work does not seem to take the task of a factual and accurate combination of external and internal analysis to explain the African predicament seriously, I do not think that it is prudent to dismiss Ayittey's concerns as an uncritical acceptance of the influence of internal factors. I think that emphasising the significance of the internal factors points to what can be quickly changed to the benefit of Africans. Ayittey's continuous complaint is against incompetent rule, maladministration, petrifying levels of corruption, grand and petty theft — all combined to bankrupt nations. He is most unforgiving about misdirected civil wars, deteriorating public facilities, dictatorships, oppression, un-free press and the judiciary; all of which are hallmarks of failed African states. It can only be the extreme externalist who tries to shoo these issues away from Africans' responsibility. But yet Ayittey is careful to point out precisely who is responsible for this state of affairs. He thinks this is due to bad leadership, and that bad leadership is not carried out by Africans, but by African leaders. Hence he thinks that the correct target of criticism for bad leadership should not be Africans but African leaders (1998, 13). He argues that criticising African leaders, even by non-Africans, should not be seen as hatred of Africans but as a correct diagnosis of who is behind the problem. 'Most African leaders are despots and failures. But leadership failure is not synonymous with failure of Africans as a people. And criticizing African leaders does not mean one hates black people' (1998, 13).

If Ayittey is correct in his assessment, then we must understand him to mean one thing: we should not lay all blame on external factors. Even though external factors have played a role in confining Africa to where it is, if we are to get out of that confined space, we need to account for what our own internally generated problems have been and how we can, without anyone's pity or aid, terminate them. Further, if we want to take responsibility for our own destination, or if our complaints against external factors are to carry the moral weight we think necessary, we must not be implicated in entrenching our own distress by bad behaviour as has been largely exhibited by African leaders. Instead of only seeing this as pessimistic views on what Africans are capable of, as Ayittey claims, it is more constructive to view it as a correct diagnosis of the impact of internally generated hindrances.

As to who his fellow travellers are in this position, Ayittey writes:

> In the internalist school of thought may be found Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, Kwesi Armah, the author of *The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born*, the present author, and the silent peasant majority. When soldiers seized power in Africa, they almost always cited corruption, economic mismanagement, and high cost of living as justification. And the average person on the streets does not blame colonialism and American imperialism for his hardships. (1998, 45)

What this points to, in my view, is not so much a matter of safety in numbers, but the importance of recognising how Africa is caught up in a mixture of historical truths of both a global and of a local nature. The internalist truth is that there are serious problems that have been created by either the decisions of those in power or their behaviour. This, in some instances, led to military interventions that, according to Ayittey, sometimes turned into military vandalism. However, what cannot be discounted is the compelling justification of the reasons behind those military interventions. They were carried out not because ordinary people in cities and peasants in the countryside were upset about the effect of external imperialist conduct that had contributed to the death of democracy and the reduction in material resources reaching the populace. On the contrary, it was the internal factors that made the military interventions justifiable; it was the internal factors that made thinkers such as Soyinka, Amah and Ayittey converge with peasants to complain about how things were turning out at the hands of their own kith and kin (political leaders). The stifling of both democracy and economic success at the hands of African leaders is deserving of correct diagnosis and treatment, as its effect is more debilitating than the externally induced paralysis. The reason for this view is that the internally originating paralysis is more potent than the external, as it is a self-inflicted limitation.

If both accounts are true, I suggest, they deserve to be taken seriously in attempting to work out how they have affected the current status of the African continent. While I certainly have my own sympathies for the need to attend to the internalist account with more vigour and determination, I do not think that it is within the ambit of my present project to consider any debates in favour of either account. My sole reason for having sympathies with the internalist account is rooted in my belief that we could do a lot more to hold our leaders to account by creating institutions that will not allow then to do as they please, or at least that will curtail (quite severely) their ability to do as they please. I believe, very much like Ayittey, that our leaders could have done much better, that our institutions could have been strengthened to a point where they served everyone (as opposed to being undermined till they served no one). And I, ultimately, believe that we have the potential to turn our fortunes around and play a very significant and meaningful role in directing exactly where we want to go or get to. While we might not end up there, in terms of our democratic and

economic achievement, we might actually end up very close to what we think is fair for all citizens on the continent.

It is this belief that has partially led to my embarking on this journey of interrogating the plausibility of consensus as a mode of delivery that will take us to where we want to go. Consensus promises to be a counter to both the failings of African political leaders and the failings of externally generated systems. It promises to restore the continent to its rightful place where its mode of governance is internally generated and is ultimately meant to be of service to the peoples of Africa. Its supporters promise to obtain from its intellectual defence and possible implementation the sort of justice consistent with a maximal and viable interpretation of democracy as well as communalist-oriented resource redistribution that is based on, as Wiredu (1997) states, an identity of interests. These initial promises are hard to ignore and, if plausible, are deserving of everyone's support and defence. However, there are certain issues that show themselves in the course of the articulation of what consensus amounts to or what its details are, that are deserving of further interrogation. Some of those issues, at least to me, have occasioned worries that cannot be lightly dismissed. Even though supporters of consensus may want to argue that what they are presenting, in the historical context of democracy on the continent, is the most solid epoch and account of how to find internally generated corrective accounts and measures to our plight, I would urge caution. My urging of caution is premised on the fact of the multiple and very complex levels at which the fact and history of Africa exists and has been exposed to. Even our attempts to contextualise historically our current state of democracy and the economy will be met by a number of competing attempts at explaining our current reality. It is appropriate to quote E. C. Eze who shows the nature of the complexity when he writes:

> With migration and instability as chronic elements in modern history of African, African/a philosophy must find ways to make sense, and speak of, the multiplicities and the pluralisms of these historical 'African' experiences.
>
> 'The African experience,' however, has never really been a monolith, on the continent or abroad. From Amo to Nkrumah to Du Bois; from Equiano to Locke to Senghor; continental and Diaspora modern Africans found a 'language' — largely based upon their awareness of a collective entanglement with the history of the modern West, their objectification and 'thingification' by this West, and so have also always individually and collectively struggled in multi-faceted and pluralistic ways against the oppressive tendencies within European capitalist cultures, and the illegitimate colonial structures that crush African initiatives on the continent. (Eze 1998, 219)

I find it necessary to emphasise two points contained in Eze's quote. First, the effect of the colonial encounter has been deep and we are all engaged in ways of

combating its effects that have kept us subjugated and far from realising our cherished goals and objectives. We are perpetually engaged in the struggle against what Eze calls 'thingification'. But that struggle, which is my second emphasis, is multifaceted in keeping with the interpretations we have of our historical reality. In that multifaceted interpretation, we have all developed different tactics and strategies to combat what we think is ultimately the project of being thingified by the capitalist dominance of the West. Both internalist and externalist accounts of confronting that thingification, in my view, are attempts at restoring our humanity. My attempts, in the chapters that follow, is to think through these attempts at making ourselves human, at finding ourselves through the important outlines of what it may mean to be fully democratised, or where such an attempt may fall short.

Conclusion

It suffices to note that there is a lively debate between those who support consensus led by Wiredu, and those who critique its viability, as initiated by Eze. Then there are others who wish to extend consensus as initially defined by Wiredu to make it co-exist with other forms of polities such as deliberation (Ani), liberal democracy (Wingo), and federalism (Kalumba). What I have sought to do here is present the notion of consensus as understood from the perspective of traditional practice and its proposed viability. While there could be objections about whether consensus was viewed in exactly the same manner as presented here, in traditional societies, such an objection can be easily sidestepped by pointing out that there is enough ethnographic study to at least minimally support the claims of consensus. Alternatively, we could look for the conceptual underpinnings of consensus to ensure we deal with its conceptual viability without getting bogged down in debates of verification. This is the route I seek to pursue hence in the next chapter I attempt to outline the conceptual underpinnings of consensus. However, I must emphasise that the notion of consensus that I seek to pursue here is free of mixtures borrowed from other traditions. My task is to present consensus as a theoretical possibility in the African context. Though there is value in borrowing freely and mixing African consensus with other polities, there is more to be yielded in advancing a specific theory that is purely African; at least for the benefit of the growth of African political theorisation.

2

Conceptualising consensus

Introduction

Some scholars express reservation about the viability of consensus, as a continuation of the traditional polity, in modern day Africa. They argue that while it is all well and good to find a path that takes us back to the source, it could be the case that this mode of polity is dated. The complaint is specifically that life, as lived ordinarily in traditional societies, with conditions that enabled consensus having all but disappeared, it is not possible to draw applicable lessons to today's Africa. This is largely owed to large-scale industrialisation and urbanisation which do not retain characteristics of traditional communitarian societies which valorised consensus. Ani (2014a) makes much of this point. Eze (1997), on the other hand, suggests that a possible critique of Wiredu (1997) would be two-pronged. Either we could question the veracity of Wiredu's project or we could deny it its claimed democratic credentials, and subsequently find a new name for it (Eze 1997, 321). It is important to note that Wiredu is fully aware of this problem. He concedes that it can be argued, and legitimately so, that conditions that were responsible for securing consensus in traditional African polities have largely disappeared. But that recognition does not dissuade him from seeing need to theorise further on the possibilities and viability of consensus (Wiredu 1997, 309).

Although such concerns are legitimate shots of critique targeting consensus, I wish to suggest that this criticism misses two significant aspects of the debate around consensus. The first aspect is that Wiredu, the greatest advocate of consensus, is aware of the possibility of the strength of this criticism and concedes that it is legitimate. However, he insists that there should be appropriate attempts at developing a mode of consensus that is responsive to the prevailing conditions by seeking to give a more meaningful interpretation of democracy. Wiredu (1980, 1–5) shows little patience with insistence on reviving traditional modes of thought for their own sake or just because they are African. Quite correctly, he cautions those tempted to do so to come to terms with the fact that such epochs are long behind us. The second aspect

is that this type of criticism is not the strongest. Besides the concession that there is merit in this criticism, a far-reaching question has to do with whether this criticism is able to topple the theoretical plausibility of consensus in toto. It is my view that it does not topple consensus. But maybe it should not aim to do so. Maybe the criticism does actually achieve a lot by merely pointing out that consensus is so traditional that it cannot be countenanced as having any relevance in the here and now. I remain unconvinced that this objection, however its purpose is stated, is strong enough to be entertained at length. What needs to be done, to dispense with this critique, is to argue that the project of consensus must not be understood as a return to the source that sought to revive traditional structures to make them workable in the present. It suffices to point out that consensus should be understood as a form of democracy that can be defended without necessarily relying on its traditional rootedness. As a theory, a theory of democracy, it is possible to articulate the basic assumptions of consensus and what would make it preferable without resorting to essentialising how it worked in traditional societies. When Wiredu (1997) points out the framework within which consensus worked among the Ashanti, he does so to show that Africans will not be impressed by the accusation/statement/claim that their entire existence is not consonant with principles of democracy. This claim is made in the process of forcibly imposing Western majoritarian democracy on Africans (interestingly by their former colonisers who showed no urgency to effect that democracy during their rule as colonial masters). It is in this light that Wiredu not only states that Africans are very much at home with democratic principles and practices, but also seeks to show that their traditional version of democracy was much more meaningful than its majoritarian counterpart. It, therefore, is wrong to read Wiredu as attempting an unadulterated return to an era long gone. It is not even an attempt to find unqualified inspiration from traditional models. Those traditional models must only be understood as pointers to future possibilities as opposed to being seen as blueprints.

I suggest, then, that what we need to understand the supporters of consensus as seeking to achieve is advancing arguments in support of consensus based on its conceptual appeal. This, like all good old philosophy, does not involve telling stories about a glorious golden past, but crucially involves conceptual appraisal (Graness 2000). I take the main aim of supporters of consensus to be motivated by the need to develop a theory of democracy that is not only sound and defensible but also workable. It is in the attempt to pursue these goals that the objection mentioned above arises. If it is the case that we are truly interested in pursuing a theoretical model of consensus, should we also worry about its workability? The conceptual belongs to the world of ideas and its strength will be determined by rules that govern how any conceptual analysis fares. In other words, it must stand the rigours of logical

scrutiny. Workability, on the other hand, refers to practical measurements of what can be, or what has been tried and tested. Intrinsically, it refers to the world of practical affairs, what can be observed, experienced or seen. In this sense then, the objection would insist, it is important that we have something to say about what worked in the past ever being able to work in the present and future.

I do not think that this line of thought, in pursuit of the objection, is promising. The very nature of political philosophy forces us to reflect on, at times, practical affairs that real people engage in everyday existence. However, such an analysis neglects to notice that conceptual analysis does not always seek to secure a practical outcome. Sometimes a concept seeks to speak to other dimensions of our existence such as our political ideals or definitions of democracy, fairness, just polities, etc. This analysis is quite possible without necessarily resorting to constructing practical societies that reflect the animation of these ideals. For instance, on populist democracy, Robert A. Dahl writes; '…the theory of populistic democracy is not an empirical system. It consists only of logical relations among ethical postulates. It tells us nothing about the real world. From it we can predict no behaviour whatsoever' (Dahl 1970, 51). The point is that it is possible to reflect on either the practical or the conceptual without necessarily having recourse to both. If someone chooses not to have recourse to the other, that does not necessarily impoverish her current consideration. For example, we could reflect on whether a state is just by looking at the specific behaviour of the state. We could find that the state is being unjust because of certain things it does to its citizens or ignores to do for its citizens. We could do so by not relying on a thick or detailed concept of what justice is but by simply relying on our intuitions of what actions actually constitute injustice. Conversely, we could set up conditions that we argue to be constitutive of the notion of justice without referring to any particular just state. If this scheme, I am suggesting here, is plausible, then it is possible to talk of consensual democracy without worrying about its possibility in modern day Africa. It is possible to see arguments made in favour of democracy for their merit or lack thereof from a purely rational eye, as opposed to a practical eye or a mixture of both. I therefore seek to pursue such a rational approach to investigating consensual democracy. By rational investigation I refer to nothing more than philosophical analysis.

With a little bit of liberty, and, hopefully, permission from pioneering advocates of consensus, I seek to reformulate the discussion to focus on the conceptual merits of consensus. The discussion I propose here will seek to define what democracy is and what makes consensus attractive over a specific rival — majoritarian democracy. This rivalry is born out of many reasons. However, for my purposes, I limit of its birth to two crucial reasons: firstly, the fact that both types of democracy seek to be dominant ideologies and, secondly, that each type claims to be a truer rendition of democracy

than the other. What we must keep in mind is that both these forms of democracy seek to retain control and jurisdiction over continental political theories and affairs. Africans have been encouraged to adopt the methods of majoritarianism both in thought and deed as these present not only democratic ideals but stand a far better chance of securing human flourishing than any other political theory. Consensus, on the other hand, sees majoritarianism as an inadequate and unsuitable mode of democracy for African states because of the inherent dynamics that characterise these states. The interesting contest is what form of democracy stands a chance of securing those conditions that are not only favourable to human flourishing but enable humanity to experience a maximal effect of democracy on their lives. This debate will yield much more through conceptual analysis, of stated strengths and weaknesses, of these two competing forms of democracy. While there are other variants of democracy these two have become major competitors on the continent via a mixture of history as well as intellectual rivalry as so well-articulated by Carew above.

This chapter, then, seeks to look at three crucial issues that pertain to the stated conceptual viability of consensual democracy. I also seek to present objections that are raised against these issues. I then evaluate whether these objections pose any significant harm to consensual democracy. While I concede that they may appear to offer sufficient reason to abandon consensus, these objections, as currently stated, do no significant harm to the concept of consensus. I then conclude by suggesting what the real problem with consensus could possibly be.

The issues

The three issues that are taken to be at the core of not only the attraction but also the plausibility of democracy are as follows: 1) consensus, by definition, is a superior version of democracy than majoritarianism; 2) the methods and procedures of consensus achieve more than those of majoritarianism; and 3) consensus as a polity avoids party politics which has been an author of innumerable problems. In this chapter, I concentrate on the first two conceptual issues and only highlight the third in sketchy detail, as it is a subject of the fourth chapter. My motivation for this approach is that invariably, the defenders of consensus as well as its adversaries always return to these issues either to advance the desirability of consensus or, with the latter camp, to demonstrate its shortcomings. Additionally, these matters neatly avoid raising objections of the sort that I claim unhelpful such as the possibility of the transferability of traditional to modern modes. One can discuss the viability of consensus on the merits proposed here without worrying about whether this is practice of this or that traditional and ethnic group on the continent. Most importantly, these three aspects

capture the very essence of democracy by consensus as well as why its supporters think it should be adopted. Any additional information or factors tacked onto these three issues is mere scaffolding. In fact, some of those additions only serve to distract us from seeing the actual defining blocks of consensus. For example, particularisation of consensus to a given ethnic groups only serves to reduce it to a tribal oddity that does not command appeal or seriousness in a cosmopolitan society. If these three core issues are removed from any discussion on consensus, then the discussion will not only be truncated but will become either so skeletal or significantly distorted that a true image of consensus cannot be truly reflected.

My point does not seek to deny the importance or relevance of the practical critiques to the applicability of consensus to the modern polity as extended from its traditional antecedent. That critique has value but only if directed at rejecting dogmatic calls for a blind return to tradition for the sake of a return to tradition. The practical critique is also useful when directed against arguments for consensus that obfuscate issues between theory and practice. This obfuscation can happen at the level where support for consensus fuses traditional practice and theory as if they were both equal justifiers for the concept of consensus. By this I refer to a situation where an argument in favour of consensus slides freely between specific traditional practice and societies and some theoretical support for it. While this slide between these categories may be seen as serving the function of providing practical instances to the viability of a theory, the downside is that this move introduces significant confusion in that objections targeting the practical aspect may compromise the force of the conceptual. The compromise happens when, as a result of the force of the practical objection, it is said to be evident that consensus is not a viable option. My position is that this would be an unfortunate conclusion because it does not represent the best argument against consensus. What we need to develop is a much stronger argument that seeks to show the theoretical shortcomings of consensus without getting distracted by its practical applicability. My reason for rejecting the prioritisation of the practical objection is that practical affairs are not governed by the same rules of evaluation as theoretical affairs. Theories, by their nature, are given to constant revision and recasting by virtue of powers of argument, correction and reconsideration. There is greater room to manoeuvre with theoretical postulates. If a version of consensus is weighed down by practical considerations, it may just as well not go very far in its intended theoretical goals.

Consensus as superior to majoritarianism

The most fundamental and biggest attraction of consensus in comparison to majoritarianism is that it is seen as a superior form of democracy. But where exactly

does this superiority lie? The argument runs like this: any form of democracy must satisfy two crucial requirements in order to be not only a legitimate form but also to be a more accurate interpretation of democracy than other competing interpretations. The requirements are that it must be representative and leaders must be accountable. With the first requirement, it is held that a democratic dispensation must be able to satisfy the criterion of true representation. All democratic systems make claim that they are a representative form of governance. However, not all democratic systems follow the same format in attempting to satisfy this crucial requirement. While democracy must be understood, in the Lincoln terms, as governance of the people, by the people, for the people, which effectively suggests that people must always be able to freely participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, this is not always possible. Such direct and popular participation is only possible in societies that are conceived as sufficiently small, thereby allowing free and not so cumbersome an involvement of all citizens. In significantly large societies such direct participation becomes cumbersome and hence preference is given to the idea that government of the people for the people and by the people can be done by proxy. This proxy, which takes the form of representation, must see to it that the people are effectively represented in all decision-making forums.

The immediate concern that follows from this is to consider how this idea of representation can be given a maximal interpretation. If it is agreed that representation is the best way of giving meaning to the idea of people actually exercising power, what is the best form of representation that would capture this popular exercise of power? Further, it can be claimed that any system that does not take the requirement of people being represented or participating in processes that decide on affairs that affect them is not democratic. How then do we ensure that we give an effective interpretation and maximal meaning of representation?

The first move is to identify what the inherent weaknesses of majoritarianism are vis-à-vis the notion of representation. In as far as I can work it out, there are three problems that can be said to be attendant to majoritarian representation. The first is the formula of working out that representation, the second is the expected loyalty of representatives, and the third, and probably most important, is the interpretation of representation.

Regarding the first issue, the manner in which representation is worked out is seen as problematic in one important respect: by the very nature of majoritarian democracy, anyone who wishes to be a public representative has to fight off other interested players. Those players interested in becoming public representatives present their credentials, beliefs, policies and programmes to a qualifying electorate. The electorate then decides, by a process of voting, who their preferred candidate for representation is. However, things are not always easy, and neither are they always

smooth. The pressing problem for this type of proceeding is that there is an open competition for votes. This open competition for votes makes this type of polity adversarial since lines of campaign are organised on strict contradictoriness. These strict contradictions are informed by the preferences that each camp has against one and all. These ideological differences can easily be fuelled into a deadly fight for power which expresses itself in the loss of life and limb. Wiredu (1997) notes how an adversarial polity is quite vicious, even in most developed democracies such as the United States of America. He notes how the notion of negative campaigning has not only become entrenched but almost an acceptable way of scouring for votes. Not only is this an unpleasant way of seeking power but it also institutionalises rivalry to a point of irreconcilability between political players. Significantly, this approach either introduces or promotes unscrupulous tendencies in the search for votes. When the moral bar is lowered, less than ideal practices such as exchanging cash for votes, disregard for truth, dehumanising one's political opponents, among many possibilities, become the currency of political interaction. It is not very difficult to see how toxic such an environment can become which may lead to either paralysis or a polity that is characterised by perpetual tension among key players. In most cases, the individual candidates are members of a particular political party, and since they belong to that party, they tend to exhibit party loyalties at the expense of other important considerations.

For Wiredu (1997; 2001) party loyalty brings its own set of problems. The first problem is that loyalty is to either party leadership or party ideology. This makes party members stop seeing the merit of arguments, positions or policies that are at odds with their party beliefs. Faithfulness to party ideology becomes the most important political requirement and determinant of how an individual is seen as an important political player. Once the issue of elections has been solved and the representatives have been elected, they are sure to carry their lines of mortal difference, party loyalty, and possibly other unscrupulous tendencies incited and supported by this polity, to the decision-making body. The winners, at the polls, will understand themselves to have a mandate to rule as they see fit to the exclusion of those who would have lost at the polls. The losers are confined to the role of opposition. With the roles predetermined, the opposition will either do all in their powers to frustrate the rulers by opposing for the sake of opposing or they will soon feel disaffected by this process. Disaffection normally arises in situations where the losers are sure to continue in that role with every electoral outcome. This may be due to either their constituency being small or because party politics has been organised along ethnic lines in a place where one ethnic group dominates, numerically. The rulers on the other hand, feel that since it is their right to rule, they either do not have to listen to what the opposition has to say or actually begin to see the opposition, in its entrenched oppositional

attitude, as a hindrance to the task of governing. With the opposition having no legitimate means to ensure that they are taken seriously, they may just as well resort to illegal means of ensuring that their unhappiness is noticed. Or more sadly, this could be the only outlet that they have. This may result in the taking up of arms which is both destructive and unnecessary. On the less dramatic side, Wiredu (1997) states that those voted into power, may develop the tendency of taking note of which constituencies did not support them in the last electoral process. They may then just make it a point to simply skip these constituencies when it comes to developmental provisions. This again may lead to disaffection with very undesirable consequences.

Yet at another level, the process of voting is seen as the decisive and preferable way of determining political outcomes. It is the process that is relied on to select representatives and it is the process that is used to settle disputes. The merit of issues such as debates, accommodating different opinions and seeking to take different opinions into consideration is sacrificed in favour of what the majority votes for. While this is a convenient and easy way of making decisions and settling disputes, supporters of consensus may claim that there is a major disadvantage to it. The disadvantage is that voting is an insufficient way of decision-making. It is insufficient in that it not only promotes the disaffection of the minority but it also excludes the possibility of investigating all pertinent matters in as thorough a manner as possible. Once a dispute is declared, or once difference arises, it is routinely taken that the best way to deal with that difference is to put it to the vote. This bars the possibility of talking that difference through which may lead adversaries to possibly converting from their erstwhile position. Voting then, the complaint can go, is a very poor way of solving conflicts since it neglects to give ample consideration to the possibility that there are other richer ways of solving conflicts that may involve a better apprehension of what the source of that conflict is and how it can be solved without entrenching difference. Even the election process itself is to be seen as a poor way of finding representatives, since it implores the political players to insist on difference and play it to the maximum. Even though effort may be made to understand both the source and the nature of the difference, little effort is made to reconcile those elements that comprise the difference. On the contrary, the more an individual aspirant representative is seen to be able to insist on that difference, the more she is viewed as a loyal party-political player. This process, then, does not have any means of ruling out the possibility of less than savoury characters seeking to run for public office, gaining that public office on majority votes and dedicating their public service to disgracing thoroughly that public office, in keeping with their unsavoury habits. And, equally terrible, is the fact that the process is unable to control the deficiencies of the reconciliatory skills of representatives. If anything, it just promotes them to an institutionalised mode of carrying out political decision-making.

The final complaint is that majoritarianism leads to an impoverished form of representation (Wiredu 1997, 2001). By the very nature of how decision-making structures are conceived, they are only able to satisfy the requirement of formal representation while neglecting to fulfil the requirement of substantive representation. Formal representation, Wiredu (1997) claims, refers to the idea that elected representatives simply fill the required quota of representation. However, these representatives may not always be able to speak on behalf of the people that they are supposed to represent. They may not always be able to see to it that the desires of the people that they have been chosen to represent are carried out. What these representatives are more loyal to is the position of their respective party as opposed to what the electorate or ordinary people think, feel or desire in a particular matter. Consensus, significantly, is able to secure both the formal and substantive element of representation. This is particularly so because with consensus the representatives are mandated to act on behalf of the people and not on behalf of any political party (Wiredu 1997). Having no particular party loyalty, the representative is able to articulate fully what her constituency desires without fear of retribution from her party, just in case her position is at odds with party ideology.

Opponents of consensus may have quite a bit to offer in opposition to the above. Since majoritarianism is said to be impoverished by the voting process, opponents of consensus could argue that there is no public political process that can ever be successful without relying on voting. They could be taking a cue from Ani, who in discussing aggregative democracy writes:

> In discussing aggregative democracy, I refer to the institutionalisation of *voting* as a basic standard for decision-making, instead of its usual function of being a last resort in cases of intractability or failure of consensus. This is because the most ideal form of group decision is usually a unanimous one. Wiredu has asserted that there was no word for voting in some traditional African societies, and that it seems to be a Western import. (1996, 184)

> However, I argue that voting is a basic human solution to resolving intractability, and intractability exists everywhere. The very idea of voting cannot have been imported. What could have been a Western import is the *standardisation* of voting as a tool for decision-making, often without deliberation, which usually leads to a mere aggregation of pre- or un-deliberated preferences. (Ani 2013, 208)

However, there are two problems with this objection. The first, which is a little detail, has to do with the contradiction contained in Ani's position. He starts off by noting that voting must be seen as a basic standard for decision-making instead of it being seen as a last resort for ending intractability or rescuing the situation when consensus

fails, but ends off by rattling a claim that voting is a solution to intractability and intractability exists everywhere. It suffices to state that in this case Ani can't, proverbially, have his cake and eat it too. The second, and real issue, becomes whether it is the case that it is not possible to have political decision-making processes that ultimately have to rely on voting.

In an attempt to answer these questions, it is important to emphasise that the objective of a consensual polity was never to aim at valorising and justifying voting as a credible procedure of proceeding. What this means is that there was considered to be a superior way of arriving at decisions other than voting. Indeed, voting happened in consensus, but only as a last resort. With majoritarianism, voting is the starting point of the whole polity. Ani (2013; 2014b) agrees with this position when he notes that the standardisation of voting is the problem especially if it goes without deliberation. I suggest that the absence of deliberation is more synonymous with some polities than others. In this case it would hardly be an exaggeration to argue that majoritarianism is more inclined to voting than consensus. As stated above, majoritarianism's whole edifice is built on voting. Its lifeblood is the vote. The vote is the most important individual endowment and the system is geared towards ensuring that the vote is not only protected but that whatever the vote says goes. Meanwhile, consensus prioritises coming to an agreement that is commonly owned by the players in the decision-making process. The alleged problem with consensus is said to be that it is a thorough-going mode, a radical form, one that requires totality of conformity from all participants — if the very ideal of consensus is to be realised (Eze 2008). The problem, it is argued, is that such thorough-going consensus is rare. In fact, not only is it rare; it is quite impossible to attain. Ani (2014a) leads this charge quite eloquently. He traces the source of his charge in Wiredu's claims that consensus requires a total conformity of views. Ani cites a number of instances where Wiredu is explicit in his defence of the ideal of consensus as absolute unanimity. However, the same Wiredu (1997) also holds that consensus is characterised by winning people over through conversion from their former positions. Wiredu also believes that the existence of dissenting opinion is noted through what he terms a residue of difference. If there is provision for a residue of difference, it can only mean that Wiredu is fully aware of the possibility of unanimity being unattainable. But, most importantly, Wiredu notes that in traditional societies, differences existed that could even lead to death. Some of these differences could not even be resolved through consensus.

It would appear that a viable objection is that Wiredu's position is inconsistent. If he holds that consensus is total agreement on the decision on how to act, on one hand and, on the other, holds that there is room to accommodate minority difference in the final decision, then his position becomes inconsistent. On the face of it, this charge of inconsistency seems more plausible than Ani's claim that Wiredu is committed to

a thoroughgoing mode of consensus. The problem with Ani is that he ignores other things that Wiredu says about the nature of consensus. So, does Wiredu really hold an inconsistent thesis of the nature of consensus outcome. I suggest he does not. The defining mode of consensus is not to be found in the nature of the outcome. Rather, the most important mode of consensus is how deliberation is carried out to arrive at that consensus. There are crucial differences between working for consensus and aiming at a particular version of consensus. Wiredu appears to be logically committed to the former. This is to be found in his view of the participants being free to articulate what they wish, holding discussions without fear of any camp, including the so-called majority and the power of the king. What in fact holds sway are the powers of dialogical logical persuasiveness (Mouffe 1999, 747–748).

Ani (2014b) rejects these supporting factors. He doubts that dialogue between different parties can be so neutral that the power of logic will prevail. He holds that studies of how group dynamics lead to decision-making show that there are always dominant people in any given group whose opinions are likely to be taken more seriously than others. Using the example of American juries, he argues that more educated jurors speak more and their opinions are more likely to be believed. Further, which is more damning for consensus, Ani strives to show that people are never really converted from their positions, but rather participate in decision-making processes in accord with previously formulated beliefs or convictions.

I do not think that Ani proves his first charge. He just thinks that logical persuasiveness is not possible. He follows Eze (1997) who doubts that the religious factor never played any role in influencing subjects to accept both the position of the king as well as the persuasive power of his views. My claim is that in any set-up where logic reigns supreme, participants require no additional scaffolding to discern what is rational from what is not (see Heysse 2006, 271–272). This is what philosophers do, after all. Philosophical positions, no matter how dogmatic the philosophers are about their positions, are given to rational exchanges. When a philosopher has been shown to be committed to an indefensible position, she tries to adjust her position in the light of the evidence. Even though she is not entirely convinced by the other position, and even though she refuses to be converted to the other position, she has a responsibility to deal with the force of the adversary's position and whatever powers it entails. The point is, different philosophers see the merit of their positions as well as the merit of opposing views, in most cases anyway. This is how philosophy is transacted. It is not impossible to imagine this form of transacting being extended to decision-making forums. It is good that Wiredu spells out that these forums are not characterised by a search for consensus in belief but action only. A consensus in action, only, is easier to attain than one that seeks consensus in ideology. Although Ani thinks that deciding on action is always informed by ideology, his study is not

sufficiently exhaustive to show that all action is ideology based. Most importantly, Ani fails to show that practical political decision-making processes are always steeped in ideology. Ani needs to marshal evidence that is more relevantly connected to the decisions under consideration as opposed to any group dynamic.

A friendlier reading of Wiredu, then, would be one that recognises that rational discussion is possible and where differences emerge, those differences are fully accounted for. When these differences are accounted for and dealt with openly, then disaffection is unlikely to arise. Voting can only be resorted to when an impasse occurs, and it must be seen as a necessary evil as opposed to being seen as the hallmark of decision-making.

In rejecting Wiredu's position, which is the epitome of this interpretation of consensus, Eze (1997) argues that consensual democracy does not represent the essence of democracy. He argues that consensus can only be seen as one moment of democracy. Democracy's *raison d'etre*, Eze argues, is the management of differences which are synonymous with human existence. What we know about the nature of humanity, according to Eze, is that it is essentially characterised by difference, and it is in pursuit of these differences that people may clash. Hence the purpose of democracy is the successful management of these differences.

If this objection stands, then it can be extended to claim that there is no real superiority due to consensus when compared to majoritarian democracy. I wish to be fair with this point. The objection to consensus, in the light of Eze, can be restated as follows: 'Democracy has many moments. Since consensus is just one of them, it is not plausible to suggest that there is something special about the moment represented by consensus. If anything, all these moments carry equal weight.' This must be understood as a restatement of Eze's objection. My reason for restating this objection in this manner is that I am not convinced by Eze's claim that genuine, democracy is one that majorly occupies itself with the business of successfully managing differences. Both Eze and Wiredu's definitions are just equal moments of the democratic process and they are also equal to many other processes of democracy that seek to guarantee freedoms of the governed.

For our present purposes, the question becomes, from the foregoing, does consensus do any better than any other version of democracy? The response will largely depend on what criteria the question thinks important in determining the real job of democracy. It is clear that Wiredu and Eze place priority on two different aspects of democracy. However, that is not all there is to democracy. There are many aspects to democracy that need to be considered. But let us look at the two aspects suggested by Wiredu and Eze before moving on to my reformulated statement. Wiredu's reason for his formulation is rooted in his belief that the right to substantive representation is the most important feature of democracy. But closely related to this

substantive representation is the idea that each and every voice has a right to be heard and represented since all voices are equal. Substantive representation, then, is the coming together of all those voices that are represented. In that process of coming together, they are expected to reach consensus. And this reaching of consensus is both an expression of substantive representation and taking all voices into account in the final decision. Eze, however, sees differences as an inevitable feature of human nature. For Eze, whether humans reach consensus or not is unimportant. What is important is that differences are managed successfully. This management may lead to consensus or it may lead to a different outcome. I may add that perhaps there is no known outcome with Eze's process.

I think the issue is clear. There are two alternatives; either both positions are partial in interpreting democracy or they have chosen to emphasise different facets of democracy. With the first alternative it can be said that both fail to capture the real meaning of democracy. With the second either both are a draw or we have to find a way of adjudicating between the two. My restated objection goes with the first alternative. My position and the alternative it goes with serves only one reason; it shows that issues are hard to deliberate on. Instead of being intransigent as Eze and Wiredu's positions would lead us to conclude, we need richer and broader references that can secure a comprehensive definition of democracy. Whatever that richer framework is, it must be able to reconcile the issue of differing interests and how they are successfully managed as well as how representation is satisfied with how each represented voice is guaranteed to have a fair right to being treated as a voice that matters. While the friend of consensus may be quick to wish to dismiss Eze by pointing that Wiredu is alert to the existence of difference in his insistence that the starting point for consensus has always been dissensus, that insistence alone, does not secure the best interpretation for consensus. Could it be the case that representation is all that there is to democracy and Eze has committed an injustice in ignoring the issue of representation?

Eze's worry must be understood as not only an expression of reservations he has about consensus as a democratic system, but reservations that he has about how consensus is reached and what anchors it. In traditional Akan society, Eze doubts that it was logical persuasiveness that secured consensus. He thinks the scaffolding of the chief's role as a chief priest played a big role in persuading people to accept or see logic. By so doing, he rejects the idea that logical persuasion alone played a role in enabling people to reach a decision.

This worry misses the point. Although Wiredu relies on the particularisation of the Akan and their peculiar modes of scaffolding the realisation of their democracy, it is not impossible to imagine a consensual system that does not have to rely on the prowess of the chief cum priest to be effectively logically persuasive. As Carew

(2004) argues, a polity can be based on rational dialogue when it is aimed at being a transformative polity. This transformative polity is a form of deliberative democracy and he notes that the key components of deliberative democracy are

> …the ideals of rational legislation, participatory politics, and civic governance. The ideal of rational deliberation is a crucial part of the meaning of deliberative democracy. It means that free and reasoned agreement among equals is necessary for democratic decision-making. The emphasis here on the connection between dialogue and political decision-making is not to be treated lightly. (Carew 2004, 462)

Since this is the case, consensus ceases to be a mere moment of democracy. It becomes a democratic dispensation that is specified by its ideals and what the intended outcomes of those ideals are. Carew cites three crucial aspects that rational dialogue achieves: 1) it promotes a common understanding and shared sense of purpose, works to clarify issues and to expand social knowledge, and it safeguards values of freedom and equality guaranteeing social equity in the political system; 2) no voice will be silenced in deliberative democracy; 3) civic governance which is said to be grounded in principles of equality and freedom, will be guaranteed (2004, 462). If all these are the aims of deliberative democracy, and consensus is just but one type, then the scaffolding lies elsewhere besides religious forces.

Where the actual scaffolding really lies has to do with factors that directly aid that no voice be silenced when deliberations are underway. Eze is hesitant in acceding to such discussions being purely rational. I understand Eze's worry to be mainly targeted at the traditional Akan system. But what if we were to remove such considerations from limits of the traditional Akan? What is the likely outcome of such analysis? Would consensus, generally, still fall prey to the same objections as the Akan mode of consensus? I do not think that will be the case. For example, Ani (2014a) argues that the claim that there is a purely rational deliberation is actually an extension of immanence. By immanence he refers to the idea that there is something distinctly inherent about Africans that drives them towards consensus, or that makes them agreeable to consensus. He rejects such immanence as distinctly African but prefers to understand it as a general human quality. He argues that such views of particularising immanence to Africans have tended to buttress racist attitudes such as the reification of white supremacy. Ani's objection is based on his reading of Wiredu (1997) who holds that consensus was immanent in Africans. However, though Wiredu has passages that attest to that position, that is not a reflection of his entire position. On the contrary, Wiredu never uses the word 'immanent' to describe consensus. What he uses is the word 'axiomatic' to describe how consensus was characteristic of all adult relationships and how it extended itself to political decision-making. I suggest that there is a great difference between the meanings of these words. While immanence

refers to something that is inherent, axiomatic refers to that which is self-evident. Anything that is self-evident is not something that is inherently imbued in a people's DNA. It is something that could have been so well-practised or of absolute necessity that a people cannot do without. It is for this reason that we cannot take Ani's (2014a) charge seriously, that immanence is part of the consensual make-up.

But let us return to the question of the possibility of a pure rational deliberation without fixing it on either Ani's immanence or Eze's (1997) religious scaffoldings. Ani, for example rejects both Eze's insistence on the importance of non-religious factors in securing consensus and my alleged advocacy for pure rational deliberation. He thinks that these two extremes are not reliable for capturing the right conditions under which deliberation can take place successfully. To correct these extremes, he suggests a reliance on Aristotle's division of persuasion into three components, namely; character (ethos), emotions or experience (pathos) and word/logic (logos). Ani claims that modern societies have replaced religious credibility and authority with professional credibility and authority. He cites the example of American jurors where those with higher jobs and education speak more and are perceived to be more accurate than those with lower education and jobs. While Eze and I are said to lean too heavily on either extremes of aids to deliberation, Ani charges that Wiredu leans too much on both. To correct Wiredu in particular, following Aristotle, Ani holds: '…under normal circumstances and when unchecked, humans ascribe credibility to an idea or information based on (I) reason, (II) emotion or attitude, (III) perceived social trustworthiness' (2014a, 35). For Ani this is how we weigh information, with each component of the stated three influencing us to treat information as credible or not. It is hard, for me, to see what Ani's contribution to the debate really is. I am not convinced that Ani's position is either a critique of Eze or Wiredu. Eze rejects rational deliberation while Wiredu prioritises the role of rational inquiry. Interestingly, elsewhere Ani (2014b) advocates the role of what he calls a dispassionate inquirer who plays the devil's advocate. He reckons that such a role player will lead to a more meaningful deliberative outcome.

Ani's greatest weakness is that whatever he has to say about a desirable deliberative outcome is already sufficiently taken care of in Wiredu's outline of consensus. One and three, in Ani's quote above, are sufficiently provided for by Wiredu when he states that the process of consensus involves not voting but selecting a person who is reputed for her wisdom. It is at that very initial stage that consensus comes into being. Wiredu takes the case further by stating that the selected individual would be an embodiment of virtues such as honesty and other characteristics that make up moral integrity. Ani has effectively added nothing new with his introduction of the three components in his quote above. Since requirement one is what Wiredu is arguing for, with a combination of some version of three, what Ani is left with

is insistence on requirement two — emotion. Whatever Ani chooses to do with emotion is his own choice but in this case it will not have a redeeming effect on purely rational discourse. This is simply because in this debate either one accepts that deliberation can be attained without reliance on emotion or it is impossible to attain without reliance on emotion. Worse for Ani, Wiredu is able to acknowledge the presence of emotions in deliberation but all he has to do is argue that the presence of such emotion can be worked into seeing reason or into accepting reason. It is of course quite possible, on Wiredu's account, to note emotions as part and parcel of the source of conflict, e.g. what some people may think so dear to them that they do not want to see alternatives. It becomes the work of reason to align those emotions in ways that either make them see how they could align to other emotions or how manifestly irrational they could be.

To answer our question, then, without the scaffolding and restraints of traditional society, it is quite possible to have a purely rational consensual deliberative process. Such a process is anchored in the very foundation of the importance of hearing each voice equally, according each voice the same weight in decision-making processes, as well as seeking to attain an outcome that reflects the importance of not only the values of consensus but its very processes. The core value of consensus is to seek the maximal integration of all voices in the final decision and the process prizes open and honest deliberation that is regulated by the force and power of reason.

The actual point that Wiredu, and by extension, consensus seek to make is to show that the question of representation is a very important factor in the interpretation of democracy. If we want to successfully interpret democracy, we must start by looking at the single factor that directly addresses the spirit and purpose of democracy. Democracy, as a theory of governance, seeks to speak to how the governed are represented in decisions that affect them. Consensus, the story may go, seeks to capture moments in which the governed are meaningfully represented and turn those moments into the core business of governance, the routine of governance, the everyday of governance. Governing and governments are meaningless exercises if they are unable to animate the ideals of representation that take seriously the voices and desires of the people. Seriously, in this instance, refers to giving effect to the actual opinions, preferences, arguments, wishes, needs, and aspirations of the ordinary people without necessarily resorting to the formalistic process of voting to discern what the majority may prefer. The real issue here has to do with how best, decisions are seen as not only captured but pursued. Is the most correct way to capture decisional moments voting or is there another method that is more fundamental than voting? There could be two competing issues about the interpretation of democracy; either emphasis should be on securing the right to vote or securing the right to representation. While an artificial analysis may suggest that

these two issues cannot be separated, Wiredu has done well to point out that the right to vote can be made a mockery by clever manipulations which invariably lead to undermining meaningful satisfaction of requirements of democracy.

It appears as though in Eze's (1997)insistence on the successful interpretation of democracy, he aligns with the preference of reaching an interpretation that favours going with the majority by virtue of suggesting that there has to be a successful management of already ever existing differences. While Wiredu does appreciate that there could be a need for voting to break an impasse, he thinks that a better interpretation of democracy is one that secures the right to representation in a meaningful manner. There is one crucial thing to note, if we return to Eze's original objection: he does not deny the importance of the right to representation. He merely seeks to show that what this right is in service of, consensus, is what is troublesome. That may turn out to be not so much of an omission of a little detail on Eze's part. The real question to Eze would be: why does your version of democracy undermine the right to representation or give it short shrift? There are very good reasons why Wiredu insists on the maximal notion of representation. The reasons can be stated as follows: the histories of failed post-independent African 'democracies' especially in representation, the unbecoming tendencies of skewed majorities in favour of dominant ethnic groups as well as accompanying favouritism, and failure to take into account what the people truly desire/want/expect/demand from their rulers. That Eze does not see this as a real question is troubling for his account, as it makes its own interpretation of democracy far lacking in an important detail. In our various conceptions of democracy, we tend to understand democracy as exercising power on behalf of the people and for the people. This goal can only be attained via a broader articulation of how power is exercised on behalf of the people, and that is essentially a question of representation.

A more potent objection, I think, to Wiredu's depiction of the superiority of consensus as lying in its ability to combine formal and substantive representation could be formulated along lines that seek to demonstrate that there is a bigger frame of reference that Wiredu is working with over and above notions of representation. The idea could be that Wiredu has already incorporated into his definition of democracy two senses that are distinct. Such senses could be seen as being carried over into the idea of representation, where consensus is naturally taken as superior to majoritarianism. It could be the case, the argument goes, that Wiredu actually has in mind a distinction between what may be termed formal democracy and substantive democracy. Although he uses these notions to capture the idea of representation, could it be the case that representation is commensurate with a specific form of democracy? If the answer is yes, then it would be easy to see the connection between majoritarianism's definition as formal to its notion of representation, and

consensus' definition as substantive to its notion of representation as well. Such a link, it may be argued, is seen in the way that Wiredu attempts to bring democracy down to its barest minimal requirement of being all about securing a certain form of representation over the other and assigning values to that representation. That value, in turn, is what is taken as a determinant or measure of any theory's true democratic standing. In this case this is what secures consensus' superiority over majoritarianism.

If this link stands, as I suggest here, then it can be objected that Wiredu's move has created opposites where they do not necessarily exist. For example, the idea of substantive representation being consistent with one form of democracy and subsequently being opposite the formal version, does not present a fair let alone accurate picture of majoritarian democracy. This unfair picture relies on the exclusive usage that Wiredu has chosen between formal and substantive representation. Such exclusionary depiction of what we may call the essences of the two types of democracy, which Wiredu compares, could actually be unfounded. The biggest problem for Wiredu is that in the history of democracy, no-one has ever aimed to attain formal representation as an end in itself. No one has ever defended such a version of democracy as preferable and no-one has ever found this form of representation to be sufficient for democracy. While it is true that this is a feature of majoritarian democracy, it can't be said that this is how majoritarianism understands itself and seeks to portray its aims and goals. While Wiredu is careful to argue that consensus combines both elements of formal and substantive representation, there is nothing that denies majoritarianism of aiming at the same end or actually achieving it.

What is important is how we think about conditions that may enable these requirements to obtain or fail to obtain. For example, the most important factors that are responsible for the success of a democratic regime may not lie in the definition of democracy and how representation is to be understood within that definition. If, for example, a poor country that practises consensus, with all the decisional processes allowing the ordinary people maximal participation, as envisaged under substantive democracy, suffers one significant handicap, that substantive aspect would be rendered meaningless. The handicap can come in the form of multinationals, or global powers, or some other political factor beyond the control of the system and its participants, deliberately undermining the decisions and agreements of the consensual scheme. In this instance, democracy is rendered meaningless and the substantive aspect is also reduced to a formal exercise. In this instance also, or any other variety of instances like it, the substantive aspect of democracy is nothing more than just a process whose outcome is neither pursued nor protected. What it means is that democracy's substantive part is open to being undermined and what

is needed is a little more than just a definition of terms. This is particularly so if this version of democracy is to serve as any form of inspiration in the modern African polity. This polity is influenced by a variety of factors that may undermine attempts at giving effect to the substantive requirement.

At the conceptual level, there is nothing really stopping majoritarianism from being understood along lines of substantive representation. Such an understanding may have to incorporate a number of features that take the people's will seriously. This may range from extended town-hall gatherings to devolution of power to allow the smallest unit to exercise total control over its affairs. Such a move does not threaten the coherence of majoritarian democracy, but it may serve to bolster the effectiveness of democracy. This substantive element does not stand in contrast to the basic requirements of majoritarianism and, if added to such a regime, will not cause a contradiction in terms.

The second form of consensus's claimed superiority to majoritarianism could be stated as accountability. At the heart of this claim is the understanding that truly democratic leadership must be accountable. Leadership that is not accountable is predatory, as it soon turns to devour the very people that it is supposed to serve. What could be the conceptual underpinning of such a polity to be understood as more accountable than a majoritarian dispensation? I wish to draw from the traditional depiction of such a consensual polity, the very sort of basis that can be seen as fulfilling the requirements of accountability.

I wish to start off by explaining the kind of accountability that we are seeking to pursue. This accountability has to do, primarily, not only with the requirement that leadership is responsive to the needs of the people and is able to fully incorporate the wishes of the people into its final decisions, but also ensures that structures take this requirement seriously. In basic words, the idea seeks to capture how the ordinary person's views are taken into account when decisions are being taken (Omoyefa 2010, 113). In the traditional mode, the ordinary person's view was sure to be heard and fully accounted for through her representative. But in modern majoritarian dispensations, the individual is lost in the aggregate of the majority of voices. A due incision has to be directed at two crucial factors that drive democracy. The first is that the voice of the people is heard, and the second is an interpretation of who the people are — or more precisely what the term people really refers to.

Hearing the voice of the people means different things to different interest groups. The first thing that must be admitted is that there is no single voice of the people, so to speak. Succinctly, there is no institution, real voice, or person who can claim to speak as the voice of the people. When we say the voice of the people has been heard, we are actually referring to an approximation of a number of processes that seeks to distil varied opinions and preferences into as narrow as possible a range

that will enable some form of coalescence of the greatest number of voices into a particular opinion. This process may involve either offering a restricted range of choices for the multitudes to choose from, or it can involve finding a way of collating different opinions into manageable positions. I suggest that the former process goes with majoritarianism and the latter goes with consensus. Though they have differing approaches, both seek to find a way of securing that voice of the people. Even though this is the ultimate aim of both approaches, we should not read into this aim that there is an actual voice of the people or the actual wishes of the people. What is real is that there is a manner of working the individualised and different voices into a certain chunk that is taken to be representative of the voice of the people. The outcome of such a process is then taken as an indisputable demonstration of the people's voice, wishes, desires or preferences. However, both approaches do not seriously protect the voice of the individual. They seek to find common grounds amongst individuals. With majoritarianism that is attained by offering as narrow a range of choices as possible, to ensure that the greater population chooses from that narrow range, and a majority is worked out. The assumption, probably, is that all individual choices can be reduced to any one of the given alternatives. With consensus, that is attained through a channelling of the various voices into one agreed plan of action.

The fact, then, is whether or not either of these approaches really captures what the voice of the people is. I suggest that both actually do, but artificially. Both approaches do concede that there will always be a violation of the individual's desire in favour of either a majoritarian outcome or in favour of a consensual position. While consensus aims at reaching agreements on choices that were not previously known, majoritarianism aims at securing agreements over pre-arranged choices. This effectively means that the individual has to either end up sacrificing her views to secure an agreement or revise them to find a place within a pre-determined fit, respectively.

If my foregoing assessment is correct, then what we have is a kind of a search of an aggregation of what a multitude of voices can be taken to be saying. Interestingly, both systems start off with recognition of the importance of the individual voice but equally end up with a search for an amalgamation of voices. The value of this process, to my mind, is to achieve a sense of direction as to what most of the people prefer. After all, this is what governance is about, working out the preference of the people and giving effect to those preferences. But this is precisely where things get sticky. Since both processes seek to aggregate voices, what is the importance of that aggregation? I am not persuaded that there is any value except realpolitik. Since it is not possible to give each and every individual their desired outcome, and since there are no conditions to guarantee the satisfaction of each individual's desires, there has

to be a practical way of roughly working out a general sense that is amenable to the people.

Consensus' claim to being superior to majoritarianism in the respect of accountability comes in the form of ensuring that the process of aggregation eschews merely number-crunching to work out where the majority stands. On the contrary, the consensual dispensation seeks to work out where the people stand, but most importantly, it seeks to find ways of engaging the reasons, through open debate, why each individual or association of individuals have chosen that stand. Voters, in majoritarian dispensations, for example, do not have to demonstrate the reasons for their choices on the ballot box. They just have to make the choice and whether such a choice is ill-informed or not, is immaterial to the legitimacy of the final outcome. With consensus, however, the final outcome is never legitimised by the mere collation of numbers but by what considerations have gone into the final outcome.

How does this consideration have a bearing on accountability? In answer to this question, we could start with Ademola Kazeem Fayemi's argument for what he calls an eclectic theory of democracy. He rejects an understanding of African democracy that seeks to dismiss liberal democracy. He argues that a contemporary understanding of democracy in Africa must be a mixture of both traditional and contemporary socio-cultural and ontological realities. However, he argues that there is need for modifying that eclecticism to embrace both the liberal and traditional communitarian reality of contemporary African societies. On the understanding of democracy, he argues that a sustained misconception has been to understand democracy as a form of government. He argues that a distinction must be introduced between understanding 'democracy as a form of government and democracy as a social principle' (2009, 121). He chides Abraham Lincoln's popular definition of democracy as failing to capture anything specific about the political or economic structure of a democratic society. Hence, he writes:

> …democracy, adequately understood, is a theory that sets some basic [socio political] principles according to which a good government, whatever its form, must be run. Such principles include those of justice, freedom, equity, accountability, rule of law and liberty. These social principles are universal criteria for distinguishing between good and bad governments. In other words, there are features of democracy that are not culturally specific, and whose abrogation inevitably produces tyranny. To give a few examples, accountable government, the citizens' right to decide, speak and organise are essential to free political expression. (Fayemi 2009, 121)

I wish to extend Fayemi's point by combining the idea of the citizens' right to decide, speak and organise as actual moments of free political expression. Accountable government, then, would seek to protect free political expression. What this is

supposed to mean is that when there are many opinions and when these opinions are divergent and probably in conflict, the citizens should be allowed to freely decide, speak, and organise themselves as they see fit. All the government has to do is ensure that there is room for the realisation of these freedoms.

We could return to my initial point, in this section, that any type of democracy seeks to give due consideration to the voice of the people. If giving due concern to the voice of the people involves being accountable, consensus has to show that it is able to give a better form of accountability than majoritarian democracy. It has to show, in terms of Fayemi's definition, that it does not allow the abrogation of certain features of democracy that will lead to tyranny. But, of course, majoritarianism does not seek to promote tyranny so consensus has to show that its interpretation of accountability is either furthest from tyranny or is closer to fully giving the people due consideration for their voice.

Consensus can indeed show that it is closer to giving people due consideration for their voices by demonstrating that all its socio-political principles and institutions are geared towards ensuring that the voices of the people are heard, in their multi-dimensional manifestations. Principles give rise to institutions. And principles of a certain sort give rise to specific institutions. The institutions that exist under a consensual dispensation are of such a nature that they really value the people's input in its argued and substantive form. While there are specific bodies that are tasked with decision-making, there are two principles that will be at play to ensure that the voice of the people is given effect. The first is the principle of subsidiarity, and here we take inspiration from Wamala's (2004) articulation, above, of the Ganda system. The second is the principle of wide consultation and involvement of people in decisions that directly affect them. With the first principle, higher authority that is designed to exercise power and make decisions on behalf of the people, will never usurp that authority to undermine the interests of lower authority or to extend the privileges of the higher authority. Power is understood to be truly exercised on behalf of the people. The people, in this sense, are understood as those who are not present in decision-making bodies but whose interests are well known by the decision-makers. The people refers to the chain that starts from the smallest recognised political unit right up to those carrying out deliberation in decision-making bodies.

The smallest possible political units are not consulted in a facile manner, but the institutions ensure that what each of the smallest units truly desires is retained with each higher ring of power. This can take many forms but a simple characterisation of this would be a case where the higher authority either does not take a decision which is at variance with the smaller unit's wishes or takes a decision that sufficiently demonstrates the smaller unit's wishes. In tandem with the first principle, the second principle would particularly insist that if there was ever to be a decision made, at

the higher level of authority, which either directly affected or had a bearing on the wellbeing, existence or concerns of the smaller unit, the requirement for making such a decision vis-à-vis that unit's position would be stringent. The stringent requirement would be that any decision made by the higher authority directly affecting any given smaller unit would have to be supported by the concerned smaller unit. This form of a veto by the smaller unit, on the higher authority, would ensure that the smaller unit is sufficiently protected and its real interests are reflected in the final decision. The veto is not of a form that announces a stalemate and ends there, but is of a sort that forces parties to seek each other out and identify and resolve the source and reason of difference. Once this has occurred, then the decision will be jointly owned by the smaller unit and the higher authority.

A possible problem with this account, it may be argued, would arise in the event that two or more of these small units of power are in conflict with each other and genuinely cannot find a moment of reconciliation, to borrow Wiredu's (1997) term. What if, the argument may be extended, the differences between these small units may never be solved amongst them but require to be referred to a higher authority. Would the higher authority be able to find a solution to these problems without alienating one or more of these squabbling smaller units? Indeed, tenets of justice, in adjudication, make it inevitable that where parties differ, at least one of them will be deemed to be in error and denied having its way. This is either at odds with consensus or is at least a demonstration that consensus can't be had.

I do not think that this is the case. If we go with Wiredu's understanding of consensus as not representative of total unanimity, then it can still be argued that some consensus will always be had. In fact, Wiredu's counsel that consensus is the virtue to be aimed at, must be the guiding principle of all institutions and principles. Deliberation, for example, as a principle of justice, will not so much aim at working out who is wrong or right than it would seek to aim at securing common ground. While this does not mean that there will never be apportionment of blame, the process and idea is that apportionment of blame will not be the end of the process. Rather, what is important is that the mode of proceeding is a search to go beyond the apportionment of blame, as well as apportionment of rightfulness, mainly through a numbers process.

If we accept Fayemi's (2009) understanding of the democratic process as not merely a form of government but as social principles, then, we could reformulate this into a new understanding that says democracy is about social principles that aid in determining how society is governed. The reason Fayemi's point is instructive is that it goes beyond merely outlining what should be or what can be a form of governing society. Rather, it seeks to find how society is not only organised, politically, but how its basic principles seek to organise its politics. There is a crucial difference between

the two. For example, merely articulating how a society is organised politically, or how it should be organised if it were to be a democracy, fails to capture the important aspects about how people relate, how they have formed institutions that govern them and how they understand their own interpersonal relations as well as how those relations are governed by various institutions. Fayemi's argument may be extended to claim that a definition of democracy that is far removed from the real circumstances of the people may just as well be a phantom with eye-catching features. What a democracy has to fulfil first, are the conditions that that are socially relevant for its success. What I mean by this is that a democracy cannot be a concept or practice that is far removed from the context in which it operates. The claim I make is that there is no universal characterisation of democracy that will work in all contexts where political subjects operate. Democracy is essentially about securing the interests of this woman, that man, and this child. And all these individuals operate in a given context with particular interests. But most importantly, these interests are not formed anyhow; they are formed in response to the environment that this very given individual operates in. This environment, I suggest, is more important than the so-called universal ideals/standards of democracy.

Returning to the question of accountability, it suffices to state that accountability in the manner conceived by consensus, ensures that the people are given sufficient room to express their wishes. This is achieved by the principles of subsidiarity as well as the principle of consulting and taking decisions that reflect the wishes of those to be affected by those very decisions. The question, however, can be whether this is accountability in the strict sense. Is leadership that takes into account what the people desire representative of the whole gamut of accountability? Should accountable leadership not be widened to include other factors such as successful management of the fiscus, providing other forms of leadership other than incorporating people's wishes in the final decision, providing people with infrastructure that enables them to lead fruitful and rewarding lives, and protecting the citizenry from external aggression? Other aligned considerations may also be suggested as constitutive of accountability.

I suggest that these considerations are not illegitimate, and neither are they not properly constitutive of requirements of accountability. However, all these requirements are subservient to the core principle of accountability as I envisage here. If the twin requirements of subsidiarity and reflection of the people's wishes in the final decision-making process are satisfied, then other requirements of accountability will be satisfied. Claude Ake, for example, writes: 'The principles of democracy include widespread participation, consent of the governed, and public accountability of those in power' (1991, 34). Thus, Ake sees requirements of democracy to be participation of the people, securing consent of the governed and accountability of leadership. One

can be tempted to interpret his position to suggest that these three requirements are distinct or operate in agreement to secure a democratic dispensation. My argument has been that accountability encompasses these other two principles. And I wish to show that shortly, but first let's look at what Ake, in referring to traditional African societies and the existence of democracy in those societies, writes:

> Traditional African political systems were infused with democratic values. They were invariably patrimonial, and consciousness was communal; everything was everybody's business, engendering a strong emphasis on participation. Standards of accountability were even stricter than in Western societies. Chiefs were answerable not only for their own actions but for natural catastrophes such as famine, epidemics, floods, and drought. In the event of such disasters, chiefs could be required to go into exile or 'asked to die'. (1991, 34)

I suggest that this quote provides support for my argument that accountability is openness, mass participation and taking into account the desires of those to be affected by the decision. Although Ake's reference is to practices in traditional societies, a few insights can be drawn from his position that can prove instructive for consensus. The first insight has to do with how we formulate democratic values. In support of the case I sought to make above, Ake clearly sees democratic principles and values as deeply embedded in other values of society. For Ake, democratic values were to be found within the social structures they operated. Put differently, democracy and its values were not an external imposition but something that proceeded from the very life of the society or community that this democracy was supposed to govern. The greater point is that democracy could never be externally imposed but always had to originate from the structures that it sought to govern. Those structures were informants of what a democracy is and what a democratic dispensation will look like. In the case of Ake, democratic values were steeped in the communal values of patrimony, shared consciousness, shared economy and shared life, which was the business of the community. The telling line is that everything was everybody's business. What this means is that there was no class of elites that existed to lord it over the people or make decisions that the people were not happy with or have minimal regard for the people's real concerns.

If everything was truly shared in this form of communocracy, we can only imagine that the sole occasion on which accountability could be violated was if the chief failed to take seriously all aspects that feed into accountability. If the chief showed himself unable to give due regard to the people's voice or allow them to participate in decision-making processes, then he would be held ultimately responsible for what had gone wrong. Indeed, it was the case that the Akans held that there were no bad chiefs only bad councillors. What this signifies is the idea of a shared responsibility, a shared responsibility, as Wiredu correctly argues, that is not only felt at the political

level but at every level of social existence. This existence is not any sort of existence but a corporate existence. The social structures and social existence impress upon everyone to be accountable to their fellow human beings. In the political sphere, if the chief has satisfied all requirements of accountability, there would be no reason for him to be exiled unless of course it was shown to be the case that he had personally infringed on some requirement that is significant in the execution of his duties. If the chief were to become immoral, corrupt or strong-headed, and if this could be traced to some disaster in the communal life, then he would be asked 'to die.'

The second insight, from Ake's quote, is that extant social structures lead to the promotion of popular and mass participation in all political processes. We can extend this notion of popular participation to claim that no one was left out of the decision-making processes, thus eliminating feelings of disenfranchisement or alienation from the political process. In this sense, all decisions could be said to be shared by everyone and even though the decision does not go in favour of a particular individual or group, that individual or group will never have the distinct feeling of not having been part of that decision. With this type of popular participation and decision-making, participants can come to know that this process of decision-making does not have permanent victors or permanent losers (Wiredu 1997).

The third and final insight is how open and fair this sort of system is. It encourages open engagement between social and political players. In open discussion, interests and disagreements are laid bare. Political associations and preferences are known to all. But the most important aspect is that the framework within which these discussions happen do not promote skulduggery. As already stated, this system does not also promote adversity for the sake of it (Wiredu 1997). Rather, the open discussions happen in an environment of co-operation, an environment that seeks to promote the idea that political actors must find each other and co-operate with each other. What is absolutely vital here is to note that co-operation is not necessarily a feature of democracy but a feature of social arrangements. These social arrangements then develop into a certain form of democracy that seeks to give full effect to the values of social co-operation and openness, and consequently this is what accountability is.

I now return to the question of accountability without reliance on the traditional model. Is it possible to have conceptual articulations of consensus as superior to majoritarianism vis-à-vis accountability? My suggestion is that if we follow the model of accountability that I have sought to construct here, consensus may have a superior edge over majoritarianism. The issues that we must keep at the back of our minds in making this judgement are the triad facts of understanding democracy as a social principle, the principle of subsidiarity, and openness that seeks to include the wishes of the governed in the decisions that affect them. A consensual system is much more capable of animating and keeping these principles alive than a majoritarian system.

Whichever way the former is conceived as a democracy, its structures are of a nature that is animated by these principles. Whatever democracy does, it does not impose its own principles but seeks to animate these already available principles of social co-operation. If that is the understanding we have, the question of whether social co-operation is democracy or not cannot arise. Under this scheme what comes first is not so much a definition of democracy but how accountable a democratic dispensation is. If accountability is everything and its moment is openness and inclusion, then we have a way of judging which form of democracy lives to this requirement in a more significant way.

I shall embark on this judgement via two routes: the first is a positive statement of how a consensual dispensation may live up to this requirement of accountability, and the second is to demonstrate how majoritarian democracy fails to live up to the expectations of accountability.

Under any consensual dispensation, leadership is made accountable by institutions that are designed to ensure that the leaders, at all levels, do not only encounter the voice of the people, but that whatever the leaders articulate is what people have decided. Differences are dealt with at the level they arise before they reach points where they are politicised into irreconcilable positions. When decisions are made and articulated, no one will be at sea and lost as to what the source or motive of the decision is. In such a set-up everyone may be able to recognise either the source of the decision or their own reflected preferences in that decision. In this manner of proceeding, the leader is accountable by virtue of implementing what the shared agreement is. The decision-making bodies are never far removed from the interests of the people as a result of the very nature of communocratic principles that always make it possible that people fully participate in the community's life including its political sphere. Accountability, then, involves leadership staying faithful to the course of shared decisions (between the people and leaders). Another aspect of accountability, in this scheme, is when leaders report to the people what the outcome of the implementation of the agreed course of action is. The system obligates leaders to communicate what the final decision and outcome is. If the people do not recognise their own inputs or preferences in that decision, then at that moment, they will challenge the decision. In effect the people will be charging the leadership with a dereliction of duty since the primary duty of any leader is to articulate what the consensual position is.

An opponent of my formulation may point out that the notion of accountability I give is hardly satisfying. The criticism may be that my account of accountability readily assumes that it is easy to reach decisions that are owned by everyone, or it is easy to align decisions in ways that are solved into agreeable schemes. Alternatively, the case may be that I have oversimplified the nature of real conflict in real communities in favour of a romanticised arrival at agreed decisions.

A response to these worries may be found in Ani's work on deliberative democracy. He is convinced that the discussion of traditional consensus should have been identified as deliberative democracy. In his view, this identification would have avoided a lot of controversy around the workability of consensus (Ani 2013, 207). In arguing for deliberation and citing a number of scholars, Ani holds that

> …deliberation will not work if certain attitudes are not possessed by the participants. In other words, deliberation requires certain attitudes and dispositions such as public spiritedness, equal respect, accommodation and equal participation…Actors should be able to justify their positions with reasons, refer to public interest, respect the position of other actors and be willing to yield to the force of better argument…They should observe reciprocity and publicity… (Ani 2013, 212)

In pointing out the need for open-mindedness in this form of polity and the possible benefits of open-mindedness he goes on to write:

> In an open-minded environment, we would, thus, expect to reap the benefits of, not just more inclusive value (or inclusivity), but arrive at decisions of better epistemic value. The opposite possibility-a scenario in which participants come to deliberation with minds closed by predeliberative cleavages and decisions-will not, in my estimation, amount to deliberation. (Ani 2013, 212)

While I do not share Ani's enthusiasm to identify African consensus as deliberative democracy, with my own preference being to draw lessons from deliberation, I find his position instructive. My primary reason is that deliberative democracy is a fully-grown form of democratic theory that is developed by scholars from a specific set of social and political circumstances that are radically different from African socio-political experiences. Instead of finding easy cop-outs by tying consensus to deliberative democracy, thereby safely eliminating some tough questions about the theoretical and practical possibility of consensus, I think consensus must be allowed to stand or collapse on its own merits or lack thereof. What is instructive about Ani's position is that consensus and deliberative democracy are similar in that they set certain requirements as absolutely essential to the success of decision-making by interlocution. This engagement occurs under frameworks which prize values that Ani points to.

What this points to is that discussions that happen under consensus, like those occurring under similar systems, do not oversimplify the nature of the problems or differences between the various political actors. What actually happens is that these discussions occur in frameworks that enable people to converse truly and eventually adjust their positions. Ani is insightful when he comments thus on deliberation:

> We might not imagine that deliberation will always result in opinion

> transformation. However, this, I think, is when we consider deliberation as a single-conversion event that immediately transforms people's opinions. Opinion transformations are often delayed since individuals are not often very good at promptly admitting the weaknesses of their opinions and publicly accepting change. (Ani 2013, 212)

He shows the dual aspects of deliberation when he states that: 'Some scholars have proposed consensus as a goal for deliberation. However, let me clarify that not every deliberation aims at common agreement. Some deliberative engagements are meant to produce more information to help participants in reaching their respective decisions and conclusions' (Ani 2013, 213). Ani's two ideas are quite helpful in answering the objection raised above. If we take his idea that the process of deliberation or consensus is not a once-off affair where people are expected to emerge with new ideas or to have traded in their positions, but an on-going process that may involve several rounds of slowly winning opponents over, then the alleged difficulties associated with consensus will lose their force. These difficulties completely vanish when we take into account Ani's suggestion that deliberation does not always seek to aim at common agreement, but, at times, aims at bringing more information to light that may help individuals make decisions.

Although Ani relies on Western scholars who have theorised on deliberative democracy, the same point can easily be secured if we go to Wiredu's assessment of consensus. Wiredu (1997) argues consensus is about the appraisal of the initial bones of contention so that there can be restoration of goodwill. This claim really amounts to Ani's two claims that consensual processes are not always about opinion transformation or about reaching a particular outcome. Rather, consensus has to be seen as a process that aims at reaching a better understanding of the other political player's position. I wish to emphasise that the social circumstances in which consensus occurs go a long way in securing the envisaged political outcome. The social framework, at the risk of being repetitive, is one that is co-operative and not adversarial. Since the social framework is one of co-operation, it makes the possibility of different political players with different opinions genuinely to seek each other out and probably be more patient with each other's position as they seek not to vanquish 'opponents' but find grounds for co-operation. It is understandable that someone who is either used to an adversarial system or who believes in the virtue of opposition politics will not come to see or believe the possibility of political co-operation, secured by persuasion, between different political players. However, that hardened attitude is not testimony to the weaknesses of consensus or its impossibility; it is just testament to the intransigence of the believer in oppositional politics.

I now wish to point out how majoritarianism can be said to fail at the task of accountability. The main aim of majoritarian polities is to work out who is more

popular by virtue of numerical superiority. Once that superiority is established, the winner of the majority votes is tasked with ruling. That rule is legitimised by the process of the vote. The outcome of the vote is the ultimate decider of who has legitimacy to rule as they please, within constraints, it is hoped. This is the first failure of accountability imbued in majoritarianism. The rulers are given carte blanche not only to develop policies but even to alienate whomsoever they wish to alienate, in their exercise of power. Strictly, the rulers are not obligated to take into account the desires of those who voted them into office or of any other political player for that matter. If the leaders decide to change course and depart from the electoral promises they made, the electorate cannot do anything but sit out the leadership's term of office. Decisions become a preserve of the ruling clique that can become elitist. Such a clique may see itself as either entitled to pursue its line of decision-making or as having a privileged understanding of issues that is quite superior to the ordinary people. Since there are no channels to elicit people's views on most decisions and since there is no attempt at reaching decisions that are epistemically superior, elitism is likely to creep in. But this elitism represents an inferior decisional moment since it is decision-making that is based on the twin belief that not like-minded political players must be excluded and the ordinary people's wishes count for little. The decisions themselves are not thoroughly interrogated and they lack the benefit of as wide an input as possible. There is a point to the belief that knowledge is social, and even experts can benefit from the view of lay people (Wamala 2004).

A decision that is made from a majoritarian view is surely poorer for its lack of benefit from interrogation, being tested, getting subjected to doubt, and possibly being improved by counter-proposals. A yet more serious problem with a majoritarian polity is the social framework in which it operates. The polity, following the social framework, assumes that human relations are essentially antagonistic. As Eze (1997) argues, the real task of democracy is not attainment of consensus but successful management of already existing individuated differences. This management of existing differences may appear to be a neutral and desirable process as it favours no single approach but seeks to adjudicate fairly over several competing ends. However, a closer look at this sort of framework reveals that such a system is not accountable. What it does, in seeking to adjudicate fairly over differences, is possibly to gloss over issues that may be deserving of further attention or investigation. The glossing over occurs in the process of seeking to ensure that differences are merely managed as opposed to being thoroughly interrogated, allowing them to be exposed to the light of reason and letting their weaknesses or strengths be known by all.

In this system, the underlying belief of interpersonal relationships is conceived to be adversarial as opposed to being co-operative. This is supported by the ready assumption that the meaning of democracy is successful management of differences.

While there could be some truth to this assumption, there is considerable reason to believe that such a system automatically deprives itself of benefits proceeding from a spirit of community. As Ani has shown, the greatest benefit of interrogated or deliberated decisions is that they have a superior epistemic value. Adversarial systems, for all their other stated benefits, lack this benefit. Additionally, majoritarianism and its adversarial politics leads to positions of either perpetual exclusion or perpetual disenfranchisement. Those who, for whatever reason, are in the minority will forever feel alienated by both the process and the outcome of majoritarian adversarial politics. Importantly, in as far as accountability is concerned; the elected representatives do not have to account to their respective constituency in any meaningful manner. As Wiredu correctly points out, in this system, the most important aspect to be satisfied is formal representation. Once that is satisfied, the elected representative may choose to exercise her duty and loyalties of representation in any manner she sees fit. She has no responsibility to ensure that the final outcome sufficiently reflects the actual desires of her constituency or a negotiated consideration of varied positions.

This manner of proceeding effectively undermines the process of having the representative account to the people how their wishes were either withered away or how they turned out in the form they have. From this state of affairs, we can see how it is easy to slide to other serious form unaccountability. It may start off with the people's wishes not being taken into consideration, all the way to actively violating the wishes of the people. This manner of allowing leadership to work out what it sees fit as decisional moments that have an effect on everyone, though not always dangerous, might begin to open frontiers of very dangerous processes that may defy all forms and manner of accountability. While majoritarian polities may claim to have systems that ensure that power is not abused and forces power to be accountable, such systems only retain procedural checks on exercise of power. Such checks are incapable of making any serious impact on the quality of the decisions that are made, their representativity and inclusivity. The weakness is borne of the assumption of majoritarian polities and the type of social formation they are based in. These societies allow procedure to be more important than real content or substantive merit of conduct. As long as conduct satisfies some laid procedure it cannot be faulted even when it patently lacks epistemic value.

The third and final claimed form of superiority that consensus has over majoritarianism is that consensus abjures party politics. My consideration here is limited to the evils of the party system. I will return to the issue of the conceptual soundness of consensus as a non-party polity in the fourth chapter. In this section I wish to consider how a non-party polity can be said to have advantages over a party system. The first consideration of the weaknesses of a party system is practical. The major evil of the party system, according to Wiredu (1997, 2001), is brutal

competition for power. In this competition for power, all decency and consideration for other political players is lost. In America, the most competitive democracy, for example, political campaigns to win votes have become increasingly brutal. Ronald Dworkin, for example notes that American politics is in an appalling state because of fierce disagreements about almost everything. He describes the 2004 presidential elections as

> …sickeningly divisive. Republicans said that a victory for the Democratic candidate would threaten the survival, even the salvation, of the nation. Vice President Cheney said that a victory for John Kerry would be a triumph for Osama bin Laden and America's other mortal enemies. Some Roman Catholic bishops declared that voting for Kerry would be a sin that any Catholic would have to confess the next day. Liberals declared the stakes just as high, but the dangers all in the other direction. (Dworkin 2006, 1)

Though tinged with incredulous and comical flair, there is seriousness in Dworkin's claim that there is a wide and irreconcilable division in the backyard of the land of freedom which is supposed to be a beacon of majoritarian and adversarial politics. Its own divisions are no longer exemplary but sickening. These divisions are traceable to party politics which is drawn along irreconcilable differences between political parties. The very essence and reason for existence of political parties is either to wrest power from those who have it or exercise it at the exclusion of those who do not have it. To achieve the end of gaining power, the different parties, as Wiredu argues, resort to unscrupulous means to ensure that other parties are kept as far away as possible from the seat of power. There are no rules to govern how unscrupulous these parties may get with each other. This untoward behaviour may range from unbridled mudslinging and name-calling to outright acts of violence against members of other parties. In Africa, quite unfortunately, the latter has been all too common an occurrence.

What I seek to do is to outline the problems that are associated with party politics and conclude by showing how a consensual polity may avoid these problems. I reiterate that this outline is largely reflective of what may be considered to be practical problems with party politics as I will look at conceptual issues of consensus as a non-party polity in the fourth chapter. I am persuaded that it is important to consider how practical affairs of parties may be seen as inherently problematic since those practical problems are directly traceable to the underpinning of multiparty theoretical frameworks.

The first problem with party politics has to do with what I was beginning to suggest above. Since political parties exist for the sole reason of accumulating and extending power, they will not stop at anything to gain that power, including using problematic means. Depending on the context in which the competition for power is happening, and also depending on the civility and maturity of party politics, it

may be the case that these means are offensive to common decency or may become a danger to life. In America, for example, Wiredu (1997) points to the practice of negative campaigning as highly problematic, if not altogether not so useful. Of this Dworkin states: 'Formal campaign rhetoric has not been much to brag about in the United States for a very long time: perhaps since the Lincoln-Douglas debates' (2006, 5). However, it is not only negative campaigning that is problematic but also the fact that the after-effects of negative campaigning are felt way after the election.

The negativity between the different political parties is not only limited to campaigning but is symptomatic of how politics will be conducted. The underlying belief could be that there is merit in such open competition for power as the electorate is afforded the opportunity to see the worth of all candidates. The major problem with such a system is that these candidates get together and align themselves in ways they do because they are primarily driven by the desire to capture or obtain as most votes as possible which translates directly into how much power they will be able to wield. The sole purpose of a political party is to expand its reach of power as it continually consolidates around that sole goal of searching for more power. If the sole driving or motivating factor is accumulation of power, those who are inspired by power are most likely to fall victim to unrestrained pursuit of power. Although political parties may have serious ideological differences, and although some parties are more serious than others in terms of their proposed content, they all share the same weakness: a desire for power. This desire for power is then presented in acceptable rhetoric to make the party appear visionary or in service of the people. But behind such a façade is simply the desire or need to gain as much power as possible. But the worst part of this whole arrangement is that the party that gains power wants to do so to the exclusion of other parties.

Wiredu (2001) characterises a consensual polity as one that does not have political parties, since all political players wish to be party to the project of good governance. Political parties may have agreed to being party to the democratic process by participating in the democratic requirements of electioneering. However, their quest for power significantly compromises any meaningful being 'party to' a project. Association along lines of accumulation of power, then, is the most important weakness of party politics. Under such a system it is not impossible to imagine a group of individuals getting together for the sole purpose of becoming power-mongers. There would be nothing that can stop such a group of people seeing power as an end in itself or the greatest good that they must aim for. Quite unfortunately, for this polity, human experience has generally shown that concentrating power in the hands of a few, no matter how legitimate such accumulation is, has a detrimental effect on the responsible and accountable exercise of that power.

The second problem, as articulated by Wiredu (1997), is that political players

become more loyal to their party than to the wishes of the people. Through maintenance of party discipline, all members come to appreciate that they owe their allegiance and loyalty to party doctrine. Effectively, in my view, this undercuts party members' appreciation of points of view that are at variance with their party lines. A different political programme, argument or doctrine is not seen as a political difference but is interpreted as a declaration of either enmity or dissent. Outsiders who hold a different view are seen as enemies, and insiders who hold a view that is at variance with the party's official slogans and doctrines are seen as dissenters or sell-outs in urgent need of a disciplinary hearing which will be quickly followed by some rough treatment ending with punishment that either shames or expels these dissenters. In a word, there is no room for seriously different opinion within a political party. Worse, such opinion is not seen for its merit or lack thereof, but is seen as the highest form of treachery. Political parties, by their nature, thrive on their identity which is maintained by an appeal to unity. What this does is not only to clamp down on improvement of party ideology but also prevents an appreciation of worthwhile views from outside the party. What this ultimately leads to is membership that prioritises being seen to be disciplined over asking uncomfortable questions.

Equally tragic, is an offshoot of this state of affairs that makes members of parties to be not only compliant with party decisions, but to be open to manipulation by their party hierarchy. If interrogation and questioning party doctrine is sacrificed in favour of so-called party discipline, ordinary party members will be highly pliant and receptive to whatever suggestions or commands of their leaders. This can range from accepting bad ideas as discipline, up to incitement to violence. Since all members seek to be seen to be disciplined, they will do whatever is asked of them in the name of the party. This is equally true of other parties and their members. The result is that clashes become inevitable. In the United States of America, as Dworkin shows, campaign rhetoric has no bragging rights, while in Africa, as Wiredu shows, campaign trails may lead to the loss of limb and life.

The third problem, again owed to Wiredu (1997), has to do with the different cleavages of party organisation that are based on ethnic identity. Due to haphazard divisions and arrangements of colonial boundaries, in some African countries certain ethnic groups enjoy a numerical majority. Sometimes they translate that ethnic identity into political organisation which guarantees their party an unassailable majority at the polls. For Wiredu, this leads to a permanent exclusion, from power, of minority groups, which will lead to permanent disaffection of those who are held out of power by virtue of their numerical minority. If these minorities know that they will never be given an opportunity to legitimately express themselves via political processes, they may as well be tempted to resort to violent means of making their political presence known and felt. The damage that may be caused by such

course of action can be very terrifying both in scope and effect. Ethnic divisions fanned by political associations have been a sad feature of African political life. The existence of political parties appears naturally unable to deal effectively with the problem of ethnic-based cleavage. On the contrary, party politics seems to exacerbate such divisions. Political parties bring not only fawning but also dangerous rhetoric about the justification of their own differences with other parties. In this manner of proceeding, political parties paint themselves, to their members, as holders and defenders of the truth and the right course of action. The animosity between parties becomes ever more deeply entrenched, and depending on the political environment, that animosity can be expressed in any number of ways with some of those chosen ways being considerably harmful both to members of other parties and the body politic. If we add party divisions and attendant rhetoric as well as hardened attitudes to fractured ethnic relations, then the political scene becomes highly inflammable. Ethnic divisions in Africa have always been a readily available venue for political exploitation since colonial days and continue to be a source of deep and deadly political division.

Ethnic divisions, then, have to be either drastically lessened or have to be boldly faced and eliminated. The same, it may be argued, goes for any system that either does not seem able to deal with possible tensions of ethnic divisions or seems to fan the flames of such division. Since party politics appears not only unable to deal with the possibility of the debilitating effects of ethnic divisions, but at times appears to actively promote such divisions for narrow ends, it would only be fair in the interests of peaceful co-existence between different ethnic groups to eliminate political parties. Wiredu (1997, 2001) is quite emphatic in pointing out that he is not an advocate of a return to the one-party politics of nationalist ideologues. In fact, he does not bemoan the death of the socialist interlude as he sees it as having stifled democracy. What his complaint really amounts to is that political parties do not advance conditions of peaceful co-existence among different political players. This position, together with my argument, can then be taken as forceful reasons to abandon the party as a political entity in African polities. Besides these forceful considerations, I wish to add that there is no discernible merit in political organisation along lines of strict ideological contradictoriness. If party A, for example, is organised along the strong and founding belief that the death penalty is the most just form of punishment, were it to be the case that another party, B, is formed to oppose this type of punishment, it would be hubris on the part of party A to refuse to engage the arguments of party B. Quite unfortunately, this is what normally happens with party politics. Logical interlocution with an open possibility towards conversion from one position to the other is excluded by the nature of political interchanges between parties. It can never be countenanced that in heated exchange between two parties, the other

would abandon its preferred position once evidence of its vacuity is made patent and public. Quite the reverse prevails, parties will maintain their positions because those positions are the source of their identity. And the strength of each party's identity is basically to show how different it is from other parties — even though the said difference is not logically sustainable.

But the most condemnable characteristic of parties is their organisation, deliberately so, along ethnic lines. This tendency has no merit at all, serve to prop up self-serving as well as destructive political agendas. For what is there to recommend one ethnic group over the other? Nothing, except perhaps numerical superiority. While numerical superiority may have something commendable about it, definitely that commendable feature does not extend to political considerations.

The fourth and final problem with political parties relates to how the eventual winners' leaders are pressured to feel obligated to their constituency to the exclusion of other sectors of the population. As Wiredu (1997) succinctly puts it, those voted into power make a note of who did not vote for them and make it a point to skip them when developmental projects are implemented. To my mind, the real pressure comes from the elected officers' direct knowledge of which numbers in what places were behind their candidature. Perhaps, in the spirit of openness, this information has to be available to the candidate. The only thing, hopefully, hidden from the winner's knowledge is the actual individual behind each vote. But if it were to be the case that the winning candidate is displeased by the lack of support shown by a particular region of the electorate, she may resolve to exclude that region from the benefits of her rule. She will then show her appreciation for the votes she received from the supporting regions by paying special attention, directing all manner and form of service delivery and benefit or being close to those she deems her 'supporters.' Since parties know where their members are and since they know with precision where they did very well in the last election, they are not likely to view all the electorate as deserving of their equal attention. While they may pay lip-service to the idea that they are leaders of all and sundry, their true mandate and consequently legitimate target of service delivery, is from and for the people who voted them into power. It would be extreme political folly for anyone who, having mustered an unquestionable majority, at the assumption of office, were seen to spend her energies concentrating on the needs of the minority that did not vote her into power. Instead, such a minority would be left to fend for itself or would be condemned to exclusion or largely forgotten. Such a leadership and form of governance is not only factional but inadequately representative.

In as far as representativity is concerned, any factional form of it, is likely, as previously noted, to induce disaffection among those who feel aggrieved at being excluded from their representative's list of priorities. Most importantly, however, is the question of what a losing candidate and her supporters are to make of their loss.

If they are lucky, they may be given the job of official opposition, opposing party, opposition, etc. They may even get some rights and privileges that could come with such a position. It is unlikely, however, that this position would be cause for any celebration save in those instances where the opposition feels that it has sufficiently embarrassed or hindered the ruling party in executing its programme. The opposition will therefore seek ways to perfect the trade of opposing for the sake of opposing. Although such contrariness is obviously counterproductive, a stance of this kind is legitimated by the understanding that this is their only role to play. Under majoritarian constitutions the role and space of the opposition is guaranteed and protected, and they will be regarded as having failed their constitutional obligations should they either be found to be an ineffective opposition or an opposition that is in agreement with the ruling party. No matter how brilliant the ideas of the ruling party are, and no matter how persuasive and progressive the policies of the ruling party could be, the opposition has to stand fast and condemn those plans as unworkable, ill-thought, etc. while, at the same time, presenting alternative views. While the ruling party is pressurised to be loyal to its constituency that enabled it to win, the opposition is also pressurised to carry out the mandate of those who stood behind it. The downside of all this is that what was started in the electoral process, as differences in preferences of candidates, now mutates into fixed antagonism along party lines. When, for instance, the ruling party starts to get it horribly wrong, they cannot bring themselves to take the views or advice of the opposition, no matter how relevant or even helpful such suggestions could prove to be. The hostility between these two camps just does not allow that. Each camp would simply prioritise the need to have its own constituency see that they are doing exactly what they promised and what they were elected for.

A sympathiser of party politics may argue against all these cited problems as follows: the problems cited here are consistent with infantile democracies. Those juvenile democracies must be allowed to grow and appreciate the importance, relevance and viability of parties in the political set-up. Political parties are a necessary feature of a truly democratic dispensation as they allow for free political activity. Moreover, a mature democracy has other fully developed non-political institutions that regulate how political parties behave as well as keep a check on the exercise of power by elected officials. The dangers stated above, the sympathiser may argue, are not as terrible as they may appear. What needs to be done is to allow multiparty democracy to mature. Once it has matured all these dangers will be taken care of by institutions whose legitimate business is to check on the excesses of political parties or party-based governments. Further, the sympathiser may argue, multiparty democracy is the most perfect form of democracy that allows people to openly and freely organise themselves along party lines with the aim of gaining power. More so, under this political framework, there is no one who is naturally excluded from seeking public

office. As long as an individual garners a sufficient number of votes, that person is entitled to assume public office in an open and transparent way.

While this response has some force, the sympathiser must be reminded of the dangers that lurk in the world of realpolitik. Power-hungry individuals, despotic individuals and others who will stop at nothing until they get power, will have little tolerance for the growth of democracy or respect for rules. They will actually never allow these institutions or democracy itself to grow. They may have a real benefit in manipulating and ordering these institutions to fit their own purposes. In less developed democracies, such manipulation can escalate into violence if these other institutions and the people in them seem to resist being manipulated.

While there is much to admire about open competition for power, party differences do not end the moment victors and losers are announced. Those differences always become further entrenched from that moment onwards, with varying outcomes. It is because of these considerations that party political relations must be viewed as extremely dangerous if they can only be conceived through a prism of irreconcilable difference. If political parties exist primarily to show how different they are from each other, such an insistence may end up with vicious campaign rhetoric as in the United States or with dead bodies on the streets as in many an African country. Whatever the merits of party politics, they become easily lost in unrestrained competition for power, where no one wants to be the loser, as everyone knows that to lose is to lose it all, whereas to win is to have it all. In Africa, particularly, where political victory is a ticket to luxury, state funds, adulation and a whole new life unimagined before political victory, party politics takes a different form of competition for power. Eliminating one's opponents has become rather all too literal in many instances.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to achieve two things: to demonstrate how consensus is claimed to be superior to majoritarianism and to show how party politics, an off-shoot of majoritarianism, is problematic. The first part of the chapter sought to advance the argument for the advantages of by removing consensus from its traditional format. This was done to sidestep the argument that the era of consensus is so long gone that any attempt at either reviving it or finding approximations of it will lead to yearning after anachronistic polities that are not well-suited to present conditions. The second part of this chapter sought to demonstrate some serious problems that are attendant to party politics. The open and aggressive competition for power in party politics leads to deadly outcomes. Although there are some features of majoritarian party democracy that are commendable, the downside of this system is that it is open to abuse either openly or subtly by clever political players. Worse, this system

seems to leave it open and possible for power mongers to pursue their desire for primitive accumulation of power without fear of reprisal, as long as they appear to keep their pursuits within the boundaries of the rules of the game. My major aim in this chapter, though, has been to show that there could be some instances where the theory of African consensual democracy can be said to have clear advantages over majoritarian party politics. These instances are not based on some atavistic appeal of consensus in its traditional set-up, but on the coherence of consensus as a possible polity, a polity that shuns competition for power along party cleavage not because it is untraditional but merely because it is inherently impoverished in many respects of the requirements of democracy. Hence, the subject of my next chapter is a consideration of what democracy can be interpreted to be and whether consensus lives up to this interpretation.

3

Democracy and consensus

Introduction

The title of this chapter deliberately juxtaposes democracy with consensus, as it is my main aim to determine whether consensus is a truly democratic polity or to establish if, at least, consensus satisfies the broad requirements of democracy. As Wiredu (2001, 227) correctly notes, democracy is easy to define but hard to interpret. What I, therefore, seek to do in this chapter is offer the broadest possible interpretation of democracy and then evaluate whether consensus satisfies that broad interpretation. While it is easy to give an answer to the question what democracy is, proverbially, the devil is in the detail. In this respect it is the detail of what elements combine to give a truly democratic dispensation. The simple option is to repeat that 'democracy is power for the people, by the people with the people'. The hard bit is to interpret what this means or amounts to. There are many varieties of democracy but the challenge is to work out whether they have the same aspirations, amount to the same thing, or make the same claims. Democratic centralism, majoritarian democracy, populist democracy and consensual democracy – are all identified as democracies but they are not the same sort of thing.

What I seek to establish is what type of governance qualifies to be regarded as democratic. I will do so by setting out what is commonly mistaken as the core requirements of democracy and then move on to consider the genuine, broad requirements of democracy. The reason for this line of pursuit lies primarily in the multi-faceted definition of democracy (Cohen 1998, 185) as well as the equally multi-faceted practices that either call themselves or are identified as democracies. While it is easy for any regime to claim that it is democratic, it is quite another thing to understand what a genuine democracy really amounts to. My guiding principle, in establishing a democratic ethos, as well as evaluating whether any given polity is democratic, is the people, although I believe that the idea of 'the people' raises other problems such as: Who are the people? Who qualifies as the people? Who can speak on behalf of the people? How do we know what the people really want?

In essence, what these questions point to are the complexities of ascertaining who/what the people are as well as who/what has legitimacy to speak on their behalf. While I believe that this is a legitimate concern, I suggest that it should not detain us. When we speak of the people in this instance, I propose, we are speaking of ordinary interests that ordinary people might be said to have in the manner they are governed. In precise terms, I have in mind the sort of things we imagine the governed assent to or allow their rulers to do. I have in mind the sort of things that rulers would not do on account of their knowing or reasonably suspecting that the people would never assent to such conduct. Joshua Cohen captures the matter correctly in his discussion of democratic and political legitimacy when he writes: 'The fundamental idea of democratic, political legitimacy is that the authorization to exercise state power must arise from the *collective decisions* of the equal members of a society who are governed by that power' (Cohen 1998, 185). In support of this broad idea, Michael Saward, though cognisant of differences in models of democracy, identifies four basic principles as the cornerstone of any democratic dispensation. The 'four principles that are often evoked are: political *equality*, *inclusion*, *expressive freedom* and *transparency*' (2003, 162). In essence, what legitimises democratic political authority is the very fact that the people have assented to the authority not only deciding but also to the manner of deciding. In a word, the people must assent to how the decisions that affect them are reached.

While it may be said that the problem is that rulers can never be sure what the people would not assent to, I believe that at the beginning of each regime's power or at the assumption of power by each regime, there are certain expectations and restraints that the regime knows proceed from the people. A party that comes to power, for instance, through competition for votes, derives its mandate and restraints from its campaign promises. On the other hand, a regime that is selected, as in some traditional African societies, receives explicit instruction at its inauguration as to what is permissible and what is not. It is, therefore, not hard to imagine that there will never be a people that will assent to being oppressed or having their lives destroyed. While the detailed needs of the people may vary in accord with their specific social, political and economic objectives and goals, what remains constant is a certain desire to be treated fairly, with dignity and in ways that do not denigrate their existence.

The foregoing considerations relate to democracy in respect of the desires of the people everywhere to be free from the excesses of their rulers. Democracy in a sense becomes essentially about securing the freedoms of the people, freedoms such as pursuing their goals and realising those goals as is humanly possible. While this position may be interpreted as speaking to a specific type of democracy, an individualistic, liberal type of democracy, it should be borne in mind that I am not intent on outlining the basic details of what could constitute those goals. They could

be goals of an individualistic or a communalistic sort. What is important is that these goals are permitted to play themselves out without undue influence from a hidden hand.

What democracy is not

Democracy is not a charade. In order to eliminate unworthy articulations, in considering the features of democracy, I start by charting what democracy is not. Although my subtopic is borrowed from Schmitter and Karl (1991, 85), I differ with their characterisation of what democracy is not. They do not concentrate on outlining what features could never be a part of a democratic regime. Rather, their position points to what democracy cannot do. My aim, conversely, is to articulate those features that cannot sit side by side with a dispensation described as democratic.

One way of working out an authentic articulation of democracy is through understanding moments of its vulnerability to being manipulated into a charade. If a political process, posing as democracy, is manipulated into a charade for some end, then it is not democracy at all. One of the key charades that democracy has become associated with is the whole process of voting. While it is taken as a basic requirement that must be fulfilled in order for any regime to even begin presenting itself to be identified as a democracy, this very requirement is open to all sorts of abuse, which surreptitiously democratise would be illegitimate regimes. In most of Africa, the cynicism with which the electoral process is handled leaves no doubt that democracy is absent in those places. While it can be argued that we should not be confounded by these African charades, but either look at ways of perfecting them or look at perfected electoral systems to chart an understanding of democracy, the story is quite far from this simple. While this position may appear to have some initial promise, that disappears when we consider how limited voters are in participating in affairs that directly affect them. Voters only vote periodically to elect representatives who are supposed to make decisions on their behalf. But as we have seen above, supporters of consensus reckon this is the weakest aspect of majoritarian democracy. Although this does not eliminate majoritarianism from being a democracy, it just makes it a poorer version. It is not my intention at this stage to investigate what mode of democracy is better; I simply wish to evaluate whether consensus and democracy can be synonymous.

While voting has come to be seen as an indispensable part of democracy, the problem with it is that it can be engineered into a charade. And where it is not engineered into a charade there is no guarantee that its occurrence will always lead to democracy. For instance, it is possible that people may vote freely in a kleptocracy, theocracy or dictatorship. A dictator, for example, may wish to know how the people

feel about a certain aspect of the political system. She may genuinely allow the voting process to be free and fair. However, that does not make the system a democracy. The dictator may disallow a free expression of the popular vote by deploying any number of manipulative tools that ensure an outcome that favours him. This, quite patently, is still not a democracy. What this points to is the idea that democracy as primarily determined by the populace's vote is apt to be either doctored or could occur in a framework that is not, by definition, democratic.

It, however, could be argued that the voting requirement is either only the beginning of the democratic process or that it could be framed in a manner that avoids the problems of the process being manipulated in a way that secures an outcome that does not truly reflect the wishes of the electorate. To understand the objection, we could formulate its argument as follows. In a truly democratic dispensation, voting is an indispensable part of legitimising that democratic order. In order for voting to successfully play the part of legitimising the democratic order, it must be free of shortcomings such as manipulation of votes to favour a certain outcome. Further, the argument could go, any proper sense or definition of voting can only occur within a democratic framework. While voting may occur in other frameworks, it is not of the proper form of a politically oriented democratic process. What this suggests is that while rigging may occur in other frameworks, without a serious consequence for that system, the same cannot be said within a democratic framework. In a democratic framework there are mechanisms, institutions, and rules that govern the legitimacy and validity of that vote. All these are combined into a rigorous system of guaranteeing the verification of the voting process as 'free and fair'. While this process may not even matter in a kleptocracy, it matters in a democracy just as other requirements might matter.

The more serious point, however, has to do with how the process of voting, even when rendered plausible and even when it meets all the requirements of a democracy, is an insufficient form of expressing choice or adjudicating over competing choices. Supporters of consensus point to the fact that when decisions are made by processes that settle disputes by resorting to voting, such decisions are never qualitatively compelling. Firstly, such decisions could be a result of whipping up the electorate's emotions in a manner that is populist or in line with demagoguery. The argument would seek to show that numerical alliances or superiority can never replace qualitative deliberation with the aim of reaching a widely examined position that leaves no room for divisions along minority and majority lines. It thus can be said that popular vote for the sake of the popular vote, does not ensure the attainment of democracy. If anything, there could be overt or subtle manipulations at play that may ultimately result in compromising the authentic expression of that vote or any meaningful expression of its guarantee as a proper mode of securing democracy.

The argument against voting either as a requirement of democracy or a precursor to democracy is not convincing. Even in those instances, of mature democracies, where electoral systems neither need monitoring nor evaluation because they are routinely taken to be free and fair, it still remains the case that the argument that the process of voting is not the best manner of settling decisional moments, is forceful. The worst thing about voting democracies is not only the periodic nature of the voting system but also how limited the vote is. Voting amounts to nothing more that placing a mark against a preferred candidate or preferred position. There is no room for even a little comment or suggestion on the ballot box. Commentaries are in actual fact treated as unsolicited and render the particular ballot on which they are made invalid. This raises the question of what good the electorate is. In this context, serious consideration would give new meaning to the term 'voting fodder'.

Democracy, also, is not about the functionality of the arms of government. It is common, in establishing the democratic credentials of a regime, to refer to the arms of government as a triad of the legislature, the judiciary and the executive performing checks on each other that attain what is known as checks and balances. At the core of the functions of these arms is the idea that in the exercise of power these three arms, by working in the way they are supposed to, would eliminate the possibility of power becoming concentrated in one arm. Such concentration, were it to obtain, would possibly lead to the abuse of power. The judiciary, for instance, is meant to interpret the laws, make judgements and keep both the excesses of the executive and the legislature in check. They may do so by knocking down certain pieces of legislation as unconstitutional, or may force the executive to make certain provisions or offer certain services. The judiciary's functions are in turn determined by the legislative arm and the executive plays a crucial role in, at times, influencing who sits in the highest court. In essence, the relationship that characterises these three arms should be one of healthy tension where they keep a close check on each other's performance and by so doing protect and defend the interests of the ordinary or common people. The basic understanding, therefore, is that once the electorate has done its job of electing, there are institutions that will work towards the promotion and protection of the electorate's interests. All these three arms may claim to get their mandate from the people. If the members of the legislature are directly elected by the populace, either as party members or independent members of parliament, they could come to understand their ultimate role as pushing for the desires and wishes of those whom they represent. Thus in all they do, and in their interactions with the other arms, they try to push for what they see as the people's wishes and they derive their mandate from the electoral process. The executive understands its work to be primarily animating the wishes of the electorate by developing policies that correlate with those wishes. The judiciary ensures that the decisions, policies and

programmes of the executive abide with the provisions of the law, that none of them is in violation of the basic spirit of the law. The view is that the electorate's interests are well represented in the legislature and the executive while the people's interests as a whole are well protected by the judiciary.

The story, however, is not that simple. This form of function of the government and arrangement of the exercise of power has some inherent weaknesses. The first obvious weakness is how the notion of representation is considerably reduced to functions of institutions. Both in the legislature and the executive, friends of consensus would argue, there is no real representation of the people present. While it is true that formal representation is met, as Wiredu (1997) argues, the substantive part of representation, is absent. That is quite a serious problem and Wiredu is correct in dismissing this sort of representation as inadequate and inferior when compared to the consensual type. The truth of the matter is that the people are not truly represented as other factors take over, such as loyalty to the party, playing oppositional politics, and dealings and alliances between parties all undermine true representation of any given constituency. Effectively no constituency can ever express utmost satisfaction with the representational outcome. The voice and express needs of the people get less audible in the decisional processes of the executive. Working under the belief that they have to take positions that advance the interests of the country as a whole, the executive arm, when acting in a responsible manner, behaves and decides like true business executives. This is understandably derived from the multi-faceted functions that the executive has to execute ranging from managing the economy to influencing external relations with other countries and international bodies. They, then, respond to a certain set of conventions of behaviour that does not always prioritise strengthening the relations between their official functions and the needs of the electorate.

But a more serious issue has to do with how the executive, the judiciary and the legislature can be conceived as an elite arrangement. The judiciary is neither elected nor accountable to the people but only through the veneer of upholding the law. The law's interpretation and application must be equal and for the benefit of all. But nothing is further from the truth, not only does justice see, but its discriminatory tendencies towards the poor, the uneducated, and those who exist on the fringes of the intellectual and material upper-end of society are only too real. It is not a scandalous or an outrageously false assertion to aver that justice can be bought. Of course, it will not always be bought by direct bribing of judges or having them in one's pockets (though that is one way). It will be bought by other means which are permissible in law such as exhaustive representation. Hence the existence of the institutions of the legislature, the judiciary and the executive is elitist in the sense that these three arms are conceived as having the capability to work out what the people's interests

are and how those interests are to be adjudicated over, and possibly what avenues give life to the correct interpretation of those interests. In doing what they consider to be their jobs, in all their respective priorities they become 'professionalised' in interpreting and applying rules as well as execution of tasks. It is no longer the people who are prioritised but some task that is defined by the constitutional stipulations or legislative framework. In the technical interpretation of such tasks and duties, the people's bare and necessary issues are relegated to some of those things that have to be interpreted in the light of the rules of conduct. My argument should not be misread as if it were attempting to advocate a free for all that is not governed by a set of rules and division of legitimised functions. The complaint is that the rules are only taken as a preserve to be understood by a few who work in those areas without the benefit of the active input of those for whom the rules are supposed to primarily exist. If this is the case, it becomes quite clear that members of the judiciary, the executive and the legislature derive their elitist authority by direct appeal to the special powers vested in them. No individual can make binding rulings except a judge, no individual can propose or vote in legislative debates except a member of the legislative body, and no one can even suggest a policy except the executive.

Yet another danger born from this elitism has to do with how members of these bodies may either overtly or covertly collude or become belligerent to entrench their own positions. This can be achieved either through manipulation or through a vicious competition for dominance. In the former we can imagine such a scenario obtaining when we have a powerful head of the executive influencing the appointment of key personnel in the judiciary and ensuring that they are beholden to her generosity. The same head of the executive has sole authority in appointing members of the executive. What she simply does is ensure that both bodies are filled with people who demonstrate an unquestioned devotion to her thinking and preferences. In some cases the head of the executive's party is dominant in the legislature and members of that legislative body are also equally eager to toe the party line or individually and collectively to please the head of the executive. Some members of the legislature could even be harbouring ambitions to make it into the executive but their only way to those positions is through the benevolence of the 'chief' (read 'head of executive'; also formally known as head of state and government). The judiciary can also seek to entrench its power and influence by belligerently insisting on its independence. It can make decisions, in the name of upholding the law, that ultimately paralyse the functioning of the other arms of the state.

My point is not so much to claim that these characteristics do not aid democracy or that they do not further democracy. I do not even seek to claim that where the characteristics of voting and the three spheres of government exist, democracy will be absent. Rather, what I seek to argue is that these issues, that are seen as principal

and inalienable features of a truly democratic dispensation, do not necessarily always secure the best democratic practice or best theoretical formula of a genuinely democratic dispensation. This is the case by virtue of how these important facets of democracy are so vulnerable to manipulation and how they can eventually drift away from the task of serving the ordinary people in favour of protecting and furthering the interests of those invested with exercise of power.

What I seek to do is to outline how a truly democratic dispensation may be understood (Ramaphosa 1998). My discussion will be informed by an outline of those requirements that can be taken to be responsive to the idea of a government of the people, by the people and for the people. In the next section I will attempt an outline of what I consider to be an interpretation of democracy that is consistent with any system being a government of the people, by the people and for the people. This will be followed by a consideration of how other institutions, social and political, may be conceived as support for democratic practice. I then conclude by judging how consensus fares as a system that is judged against democratic values.

What democracy is

Democracy is about the people. When I make the claim that democracy is about the people, I refer to the idea of people directly participating in their own governance. This direct participation can be conceived as either people taking direct control of and influence over their affairs, or, where this is not possible, people's will being meaningfully and sufficiently represented where decisions that affect them are taken. Claude Ake puts it well when he identifies these basic expectations as principles of democracy. He expresses it thus: 'The principles of democracy include widespread participation, consent of the governed, and public accountability of those in power' (1991, 34). This brings to the fore two contesting ideas which are not easy to adjudicate. The first idea has to do with how people, in taking control over their affairs and in directly taking part in decision-making processes, are giving reality to the idea of a government of the people, by the people and for the people. In this instance, the people are able to direct their affairs for better or worse by virtue of deciding in their affairs. The alternative is one that is characterised by people having representatives make decisions on their behalf. These representatives directly come from the people and are of the people, they know the people's needs and will strive to ensure that the people's needs are met. These two distinctions or developments arise necessarily out of the form of society that they operate in. Regarding the former, it is possible in small-scale societies whose members are not radically differentiated. These would, normally, be traditional societies with a small population, and mostly tight-knit. With the latter, it obtains in situations where the society has grown much bigger

and it would be impossible to have all members gather and decide on affairs that affect them. However, the most important thing is to work out which of these two modes of governance is closer to the people and which is furthest from the people. So our comparison is between what we may term direct participatory democracy and representational democracy.

The best way to chart a path towards the form of interpretation I have in mind is by starting off with comparing these two forms of democracy. The greatest simile between these two types of democracy is that they seek to speak to a particular form of government that takes the issue of people's needs or express desires, seriously. In both systems, the social and political institutions are modelled in such a manner that they further the interests of the people. Strong measures are taken, or measures that already exist are strengthened, to ensure that the desires of the people are guarded. If there is any cynicism or failure at all, about securing this goal, this can only be so because the institutions would have authentically failed at their task. What would then follow is that these institutions are re-oriented towards their original goals, of prioritising the people's needs. The significance of this comparison is that it points out the difference that exists between a genuine form of democracy and one that is a pretence and a sham. A democracy that is a pretence and sham thrives on defending some goal other than furthering the people's interests. While the sham version of democracy may explicitly state and claim that it is there to further the interests of the people, its practices will be at variance with proclaimed values. The difference between these two systems is one of scale. With what I have characterised as direct participatory democracy the population as well as social and political structures that support democracy are of an intimate sort. They look after the interests of people who are intimately connected both in social value and organisation. With the latter system, not only is the scale large, but there could exist serious differences between the people and the systems that seek to give adequate frameworks of representation to these very people.

While it may appear legitimate to object to my proposed comparison by pointing to the differences inherent in social and political institutions of these two systems, it should do to point out that the real debate is around what form captures the idea of democracy better than the other. My suggestion, therefore, is not so much to set out to see what works better than the other but merely to investigate what better captures intuitions we have about democracy. Democracy is a broad lexicon which may be understood differently if read from different situations. However, there will always be articulations of democratic systems that are further from the ideal. Despite the differences that may exist in our attempts at understanding what democracy is all about, and perhaps in different eras under different social organisations, there will always remain, at the heart of democracy, certain things that cannot be departed

from, compromised or ignored.

My reason for limiting my consideration to these two types of democracy should be evident and simple to apprehend. These two forms are the most prevalent in Africa, with the direct mode being characterised as a part of Africa's past and the representative mode having become the fad that Africa is expected to be, or should aspire to be.

Above, I suggest that democracy is essentially about the people. Specifically, it is about how ordinary people are allowed or enabled to participate effectively in decision-making processes and outcomes that directly affect how they are governed. In ancient Greek society, eligible free adults directly and equally participated in the affairs of the state. Citizens were allowed to shape and influence outcomes that would affect them directly. However, this form of democracy has completely disappeared for practical reasons. In its place there have developed various forms of democracy that still seek to give due satisfaction to the requirement that people, ordinary governed people, be accorded the right to be heard and actively participate in influencing the outcome of decisions that affect them. In the absence, then, of the benefit of direct participation in decision-making processes, a suitable mode that represents capturing the moment of people's wishes has to be found. For Wiredu, this is where the whole point of a democratic system's claim to either superiority to other democracies or its claim to authenticity will lie. I will take the distinction Wiredu (1997) makes between formal and substantive representation to be the essential difference between the two types of democracy under discussion. As explained above, Wiredu is of the view that the maximal interpretation of democracy will have to satisfy the substantive requirement on top of the formalistic requirement.

It follows that if democracy is about the people, then it will take seriously the idea that there has to be a more substantive notion of representation that goes beyond numerical calculation. Consensus, I will suggest, in its traditional practice as well as its proposed conceptualisation, takes this idea of representation seriously.

Yet a necessary accompanying feature of representation is freedom. The notion of freedom that I have in mind refers to a number of aspects that do with how democracy is satisfied maximally. While Wiredu confines his evaluation of democracy to the issue of representation with passing comments on the presupposition that this happens in a free environment, it is essential that we make explicit that the requirement of freedom be stated in greater detail than Wiredu does. The need to state freedom in explicit terms and tie it to democracy has to do with two epochs that Africa has experienced. Both these epochs have to do with how the citizens of Africa have been denied freedom. The first instance refers to the denial of freedom brought by exploitation in the form of slavery and colonialism. The second instance refers to the denial of freedom by fellow Africans in the various episodes of dictatorial and

pseudo-democratic regimes that Africa has experienced. These denials of freedoms continue up to this day in various ways and places. If we wish to tie the idea of freedom to maximal representation we might work out what the best interpretation of democracy could be.

The notion of free, or broadly, freedom which I consider here, is limited to the idea of political freedom. The idea that we start with has to do with greater political freedoms as conceived in terms of free political association, freedom to belong to any political establishment or view, freedom to pursue certain political goals (within justifiable limits) and, of course, to be free of harassment by authorities for trying to exercise these freedoms. While these freedoms have been defended by those who belong to the liberal tradition or the liberal democratic tradition, it is important to emphasise that political freedoms should not necessarily be seen as limited to the liberal tradition but as proper to all democratic regimes. The idea that freedoms are necessarily implicated in the definition of democracy is probably well-captured by Eze (1997) who in his disputation of Wiredu's (1997) definition of democracy states that democracy is not about securing consensus. Eze argues that securing consensus could be one moment of democracy but the real essence of democracy relates to a successful management of ever-present individuated desires. Although Eze does not make any specific reference to the notion of freedom, I suggest that such an idea can be read from his view that democracy's chief concern has to be a successful management of individuated desires. I suggest that the idea of individuated desires is rooted in some strong understanding and advocacy of freedom. If, following Eze, we take seriously the idea that there are always individuated competing desires, then we can see that there should be a real commitment to the defence of freedom. The fact of the existence of individuated desires, that each individual seeks to pursue, essentially suggests that there should be freedom that guarantees the ability to pursue those desires. What Eze really understands the essence of democracy to be has to do with how differences (which he calls competing desires) are to be successfully managed. Some desires will, naturally, coalesce into a union that seeks to achieve shared goals.

When this happens, people may form themselves into distinct groupings that may overtly compete for dominance in determining or influencing the outcome of social, economic or political policy. It is here that Eze suggests that consensus runs into serious problems, for it could just as well turn out to be the case that a certain group of people has a morbid desire to dominate others. He asks, what then would be a consensual position between those people who seek to dominate and those they seek to dominate? True democracy then, for Eze, has to manage these competing desires successfully as opposed to trying to work out a consensual position between divergent groups. What can be drawn from Eze's position is that people within a democratic dispensation must be allowed as much freedom as possible with the proviso that if,

in the course of the exercise of their freedom, they impinge on the freedom of others, there will be mechanisms that adjudicate over the governance of those differences. The strongly implied idea is that people should be allowed to exercise that freedom up to an extent that may just as well include the possibility that they stand to violate other people's freedoms. However, that reality will not obtain since the system will be able to stop those who wish to violate others' freedoms.

While the idea of freedom may be extended to cover concerns about the kinds of freedoms that are proper to individuals and how they are to be limited in the social arena (Gyekye 1997), important as that debate is, I am mostly interested in those freedoms that are properly considered as group political interests. What I have in mind has to do with how individual freedoms may be organised in a manner that leads to the development of distinct political action. In a sense, I specifically have in mind those interests that lead to the formation of political parties that then seek to pursue power in order to animate in the public sphere whatever interests and policies they have. What informs my consideration is the claim that is at the heart of consensual democracy as presented by Wiredu. He specifically states that consensus is a non-party polity. In essence, ordinary political parties cannot exist in this dispensation. Yet, ordinarily, majoritarian democracy valorises political parties as they are seen as the rightful vehicle for not only chosen political preference, but also political difference. From a majoritarian multiparty democratic view, it is hard to think of a democracy as essentially conceived as a non-party affair.

The legitimation of difference can be seen as the cornerstone of democracy. This is what differentiates democratic regimes from non-democratic regimes. The legitimation of that difference goes as far as institutionalising difference in the form of political parties. The question, then, becomes one of whether political parties are the best expression of difference or whether difference and attendant freedoms can be pursued through other forums. If we consider the question to be really about political freedoms that imply that there could be contestations of a political sort among ordinary citizens, it becomes quite important that there is some formation that is recognised, that is responsible for allowing different people to vent their political aspirations or commitments. If they so wish to organise themselves around particular views or principles as a distinct group that is known as a political party, our intuitions can only say that this must be permissible. We cannot have a situation whereby political parties are essentially proscribed in preference of some loose, pre-determined social association. But that is merely what our intuitions may inform us. In as far as argument is concerned, Wiredu (2001) has good reason to think that political parties are neither the best forum to capture coalesced interests nor to express difference. In their place he has a weakened sense of reference to parties as people who recognise that they have the same interests and seek to eventually be

party to the common decision that is taken. In as far as political parties are concerned; Wiredu (1997; 2001) argues that they are authors of bad practices such as pursuing power to the exclusion of others as well as entrenching oppositional politics. For this reason, he argues that in the place of oppositional politics, we should develop a model that emphasises arriving at consensus while acknowledging the existence of different preferences.

While I will look at the notion of parties in the next chapter, it is important that I spell out the significance of Wiredu's (1997) rejection of political parties as we know them in majoritarian democracies. Political parties, for Wiredu, are not able to carry the same type of representative capacity as is to be found in the nature of parties in consensual democracy. Parties, in consensus, are not obsessed with seeing through their specific programmes; they are more concerned with the following programme as Jon Elster puts it in his definition of deliberative democracy:

> All agree, I think, that the notion includes collective decision making with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or their representatives: this is the democratic part. Also, all agree that it includes decision making by means of arguments offered *by* and *to* participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality: this is the deliberative part. These characterisations are somewhat rough, but I believe they capture the intersection of the extensions reasonably well. (1998, 8)

He extends the idea of the real makeup of this democracy when he claims that:

> Deliberative democracy rests on argumentation, not only in the sense that it proceeds by argument, but also in the sense that it must be justified by argument. It may not be obvious that arguing is the best way of making collective decisions. All things considered, bargaining or simply voting without prior communication might be superior. (Elster 1998, 9–10)

I take consensus to be part of deliberative democracy which James D. Fearon sees as a procedure of decision-making that involves discussion before decisions are taken as opposed to resorting to merely voting (1998, 44). The foregoing emphasis is not on freedom directly but on inclusivity and the power of argument in reaching decisions. Whenever there is doubt thrown on deliberation or consensus, that doubt follows the path of attempting to show that deliberation leads to domination of others as they are converted to positions that are not in their best interests or that it is not possible to agree on a course of action without agreeing on values associated with those actions (Ani 2014b).

What is evident is that the real value that consensus is in search of, is that of inclusivity in decision-making, and the criticisms targeted at consensus, or other similar modes of democracy, seek to interrogate that value. What is hardly considered

is whether this system allows freedom in the sense that our ordinary expectations of democracy would. As already alluded to, the sense of freedom that I am working with is one that allows people to organise themselves under the same banner of interests to pursue certain outcomes within legitimate frameworks in society.

A supporter of consensual democracy, may, in response to my insistence on freedom as I have conceived, challenge the prioritisation of oppositional politics as not so essential to democracy. The objector may state that freedom may be conceived in different ways that may include collective decision-making processes that value free expression, an idea which is not alien to consensus. The objector may argue that the most important consideration, for democratic freedom, should be how decisions are weighed equally and are taken to have the same sort of status in their ability to influence the final outcome. The objector may insist that the real judgement of whether a system is democratic or not has to be judged on whether it takes any voice seriously, depending on the ability of that voice to convince others, or not. If a voice knows that it will not be railroaded by the power of the majority or the wishes of the majority, then a truly free democratic dispensation has obtained. It would have obtained in the sense that every voice is given exactly the same weight and has the same gravity to be of influence. In that sense, it is not only genuinely free to enjoy unfettered access to institutions that guarantee free expression but also has an equal chance at being the reason for the final decision.

I think what the foregoing really points to are the differences that exist in the interpretation of what the actual purpose of democracy is supposed to be. Going back to Eze's (1997) difference with Wiredu (1997), in the interpretation of democracy, the former holds that democracy is essentially about recognising that there will always be differences between social players and seeking to manage those differences successfully. Wiredu, on the other hand, thinks that representation is at the heart of democracy. What I seek to suggest is that it is important in any democratic dispensation that people are allowed to organise themselves into formations that they please, to further whatever goals they have in mind. While it may be argued that under a genuine majoritarian dispensation, people are never refused the opportunity to organise themselves in ways that they please, it is equally important to emphasise that there is a real requirement that people are sufficiently represented in the maximal sense that Wiredu suggests.

If we look at Eze's conception of democracy as an alternative to Wiredu's, we might be tempted to think that these two alternatives are essentially opposed. I do not think that this is the case. Each of these thinkers makes two admissions that are instructive in showing that they might not be so far apart. Eze states that consensus must not be seen as an essence of democracy but just one of its moments. The interesting concession that he makes is that consensus is capable of capturing a

democratic moment. While it is not the essence of democracy, it still is a legitimate democratic moment. In contrast, Wiredu emphasises the idea that even in a consensual dispensation, dissensus was recognised as ever present. The idea, then, was not so much to quell dissensus but to find ways of smoothing the edges so that a common position could be reached. Effectively, in my view, Wiredu's claim is really close to Eze's view that democracy is about the successful management of differences. I take Wiredu's recognition of dissensus as equivalent to Eze's claim of the existence of competing and individuated desires. Although Wiredu glosses over the seriousness of these differences by claiming that at the rock-bottom there is an identity of interests and all it takes is right knowledge to appreciate that the differences that exist between people are mere perceptions, the most important thing is that he recognises that such differences do exist. Eze's dismissal of Wiredu's depiction of the nature of that rock-bottom identity of interests as akin to the two-headed crocodile that sees the senselessness of its two heads fighting over food that is destined for the same stomach has some merit. However, the issue on which I want to concentrate has to do with how inadequately both positions actually interpret democracy. On one hand, in response to Eze, we could say that democracy's all cannot be merely the management of ever-present individuated desires. While such management must be seen to be fair, effective and just, there are also other requirements of democracy that come with this kind of management. Those requirements cannot be alienated from the process of the management of desires. On the other hand, we could challenge Wiredu to specify what aspect of the system will ensure that the tyranny of consensus (Eze 2008) does not ride roughshod over any genuine articulation of individual difference and associated desires.

My suggestion is that these two forms of democracy are not as opposed as they initially appear to be. However, I propose that if we consider them individually, they represent truncated interpretations of democracy. If we take the points that they make and bring them together we could have a more comprehensive definition of democracy. There is nothing inherently at odds with both definitions that bars combining their points into a single statement of democracy. For example, we could revise both positions into a single definition of democracy that runs along this line: 'Democracy is a system of governance that aims at successful management of individuated desires while retaining maximal notions of representation'. While such a definition might be accused of being simplistic, what it imbues are the central claims of both Eze and Wiredu. From Eze we take the idea of the need to be aware of the fact that society is always characterised by an ever-present reality of differing desires that have to be managed in satisfactory ways. From Wiredu we take his central claim that democracy must be about attaining maximal representation of those who are to be affected by the decisions that are made on their behalf. This combination does not

in any way undermine the democratic project or the most important claims of both Eze and Wiredu's definition.

However, a supporter of either Wiredu or Eze could have good reason to show the combination I propose here should not be attempted. Alternatively, it could also be shown that Eze and Wiredu are in such diametrically opposed camps that any attempt at reconciling their positions only leads to some incoherence of sorts. While either move is perfectly possible, I am unable to think of ways of filling the details of what any of these moves would really include. I only can imagine that they are possible moves. However, what I am aware of is how Eze and Wiredu's positions fail to speak comprehensively to what we seek democracy really to be, and to do.

The problem with a notion such as democracy is that it is supposed to be responsive to some aspects of people's existence in a society. Those aspects are to ensure that the people are governed fairly and have an actual say in how they are governed. Eze picks up the aspect of fair governance by his insistence on that those competing desires must be successfully governed. This implies that no desire will take priority over the other, or that no desire will be allowed to trump others. Effectively, each desire is equal and will not be subjected to being negotiated out of its own realisation or fulfilment by some procedure that seeks consensus. In contrast, Wiredu accurately picks up another aspect or requirement of democracy. Wiredu's account ensures that people have as great as possible a say in how they are governed. Through the idea of maximal representation which insists on that the representatives must see to it that the will of the people is reflected in the final decision, the people can be said to be truly participating in the determination of their affairs.

But there is a problem that both Wiredu and Eze's formulations do not appear to be alert to or, at least, do not seem to take sufficiently seriously to warrant their detailed attention. This is the problem of how democracy can on its own, or can be led to, fail to be/do what it is meant to. While Wiredu refers to the conditions that could have led to a king being deposed such as a refusal to listen to the people, dictatorial tendencies as well as moral decay, he does not go into detail regarding how these instances can be avoided. The same applies to Gyekye (1992), who while acknowledging that rulers may stray, restricts his check on that possibility to injunctions that were made at the installation of the king in traditional Akan society. In defence of the traditional Akan system, and other systems like it, conditions under which a king could be destooled were clearly spelt out. That process could also have been enough to keep the king's conduct in check. However, as Jan Hoogland (1997) points out, there are moments of the vulnerability of democracy. These moments of the vulnerability of democracy could also be human-made and we need to specify how we deal with such moments. Depending on who the author of those moments of vulnerability is, the whole democratic dispensation may be delegitimised. Also

depending on the reasons for which the vulnerability proceeds, we must be careful what we are referring to when we speak of democracy as a legitimate framework of governance. In certain instances the delegitimisation of democracy does not occur in overt ways but in very subtle ways. Since not all delegitimisation of democracy occurs in blatant manners as envisaged by Wiredu and Gyekye; J. Obi Oguejiofor notes 'that unless a democratic system is really legitimate in a specific sense, the exercise of power is bound to be predatory even if it is subtly so' (2009, 27). The important consideration is that we must work out what specific sense legitimises democracy since there is a possibility that there are subtle ways in which democracy can be delegitimised. Another important consideration is that such delegitimisation occurs in the course of the ordinary exercise of power. What this suggests is that democracy on its own could be a very good idea that speaks about how people's desires may be managed and represented, but once it comes to the actual exercise of power, then these ideals are rendered obsolete.

In a different manner, to both Eze and Wiredu, Oguejiofor seems to have a comprehensive definition of democracy when he offers this expansive remark about its precise nature:

> Democracy is not a mere label. It is not a title, and thus requires some minimum conditions in order to exist. Democracy is very often described from etymological derivation as the rule of the people. This is understood as a system of government in which ultimate legitimacy is conferred by the free will of the specific part of the population of a nation. Freedom of choice is therefore the most fundamental element in any democracy. (2009, 27)

I find the idea of tying freedom to democracy quite important in setting the parameters that are considered as legitimising any regime as democratic. While the idea exists in an implicit manner in Wiredu and Eze, it does not seem to command the importance that Oguejiofor accords it. For Eze, I suppose, the idea of freedom is to be found in people being allowed to pursue the individuated interests they have. For Wiredu, I also suppose, there could be a sense in which we are referring to freedom when we talk about how his system allows people to air their authentic views and how those views are taken seriously. But, for Wiredu, the question remains whether moments of conversion on what to do, that result in what he calls a residue of difference, really represent freedom in the sense that Oguejiofor conceives it. Even though I am sympathetic to the idea that conversion in Wiredu's scheme is owed to logical persuasion, there is a niggling suspicion that the system itself does expect, that at the end, consensus has to be obtained in one form or the other. While I am not prepared to go to the extreme, to claim as Ani (2014a) has done, that all is sacrificed for the value of consensus, I am willing to see the possibility that those who are convinced to go with an option they do not subscribe to, may come to feel aggrieved

in as far as the exercise of their freedom is concerned. Their grievance may stem from consensus expecting all members to rally behind a decision from the moment it is made. Dissenting voices may not be allowed from then on. Once that dissenting voice is disallowed by structures of a particular dispensation, then there is good reason to suspect that true freedom is not entirely met in that system. Sometimes the cessation of having room for the dissenting voice may just work in favour of the rulers. Hence Oguejiofor conceives the function of democracy as follows: 'The primary end of democratic governance is to protect public interest against the inherent tendency of abuse of power by public office holders. This is why democracy is taken to be government of, for and by the people' (2009, 27). For Oguejiofor, the notion of power resting in the people, is solely to check the excesses of those in power. Interestingly, he suggests that those in power have a natural tendency towards abusing it. This, strictly, means that wherever power is to be had, those who have it will naturally seek to abuse it. Whether this is human nature or the nature of power itself is an interesting consideration. Oguejiofor considers that the abuse of power proceeds from the reality of the fact that people will never have direct rule but will always have someone rule on their behalf. Hence he notes:

> But there is nowhere in the world where the populace rules, not even directly since the act of electing a ruler for a given time gives him such powers that he can act contrary to the wishes of his constituency. In most industrial democratic systems, it is usually the parties and the administration which rule. In majority of African countries, it is in the final analysis the rule of one man who succeeds in the majority of cases to hijack his party apparatus, hamstring other parties, and bring under his beck and call, the state administration, the forces of law and order as well as the organs of information. (2009, 128)

The three ideas that emerge from Oguejiofor about the nature of democracy are as follows: the importance of the exercise of freedom by ordinary people, the need for the prevention of power being hijacked by an individual or a clique of cronies, as well as the need to guard against subtle delegitimisation of democracy.

I suggest that in order to achieve the sort of aims that Oguejiofor points to, it is imperative that there be institutions that work to guard against the realisation of the dangers that threaten democracy. These institutions should also be able to protect and advance the interests of the people. Since the people cannot rule directly, the sole purpose of those institutions is to ensure that the people's views are accorded proper and sufficient regard. While I above expressed reservation about the formulation of some of these institutions, it is important to emphasise that as long as institutions are not elitist in their make-up and function, they remain close to the people. Hence, a distinction can be made between manipulated or self-serving institutions and those that seek to serve the people. One way of working out whether an institution

is still in service of the people or not is merely to look at its efficacy in addressing whatever ordinary people legitimately expect from such an institution. Let us take the example of the judiciary; if it is the case that in a particular jurisdiction the judiciary has earned itself the reputation of keeping the law but to the chagrin of the citizens, then it is questionable whether such an institution is of any use to the people. Even if it were to be argued that an institution such as the judiciary does not exist to please the masses, it should not be underestimated that once such an institution fails to speak to the people's ordinary sense of being satisfied by the purpose of that institution, then it has failed to live up to what is expected of it. It would even have failed in its functions to dispense justice on behalf of those people. While institutions get their reputation and pride from their long and unchanging history, this may also be their Achilles' heel since they may be found to be out of touch or to have ceased to serve the needs of real people. Or worse, such institutions may be found to be serving long dead ideals which mean nothing to any real person.

Is consensus truly democratic?

In this section I wish to adjudge whether consensus lives up to some of the basic tenets of democracy indicated above. I will follow a three-pronged evaluation to establish if consensus is in line with what I have outlined democracy to be. The first avenue of evaluation will have to do with how the requirement of representation is satisfied, the second has to do with how free association is conceived, and the third has to do with whether social and political institutions within a consensual set-up actually support democracy or not. My evaluation is not an historical appraisal of what traditional societies looked like or how they functioned. Rather, it is a consideration that is based on what I speculate to be the deep commitments of consensus as a theoretical postulation of a democratic system.

With regard to the first consideration, since it is not possible to have a society that is characterised by all its ordinary members sitting in decision-making bodies, to participate fully in processes that determine the final outcome of decisions that affect them, a suitable and meaningful mode of representation is needed. Starting with Kwasi Wiredu's (1997) observation that representation should be understood as satisfying two forms of requirements, the formal and substantive, as well as that majoritarian democracy only satisfies the former, we need to investigate which type of meaningful representation satisfies the requirement of democracy. By meaningful representation I refer to the idea that whoever the representatives of the people are and whatever they do, they solely exist to give full articulation of the people's views in the final decision. Following Wiredu's distinction between the respective aims of majoritarianism and consensus, in issues of representation, it seems as if a consensual

dispensation is more likely to give full effect to the notion of representation than any other democratic system could. If it is the case that consensus aims at satisfying both the formal and substantive aspects of representation, then it follows that it is a preferable model of democracy in this respect. If the interplay between those who exercise power and democracy is really about allowing ordinary people to have a voice and, as Oguejiofor (2009) suggests above, restrain the powerful from abusing power, then the maximal representation of people can ensure such an outcome.

Legislative bodies or other cognate bodies exist for the purpose of fulfilling or giving expression to what people desire or wish. If we understand the dynamic of power to be essentially about subjects acceding to being ruled by surrendering their own sovereign powers to some recognised body, then we naturally expect such a body to be organised in a manner that shows respect for the people who have given up their power for the constitution of such a body. However, the reality of the matter, as indicated by Gyekye and Oguejiofor, is that leaders or bodies that are invested with such power are either tempted into or actively seek opportunities to abuse such power for their own ends. The first avenue of the abuse of such power occurs when the will of the people is no longer taken seriously or into account when decisions are being made that affect the very same people. At such a point, representation can either be made meaningless or it can be reduced to a façade. Wiredu is correct in pointing out that the problem with majoritarian democracy is that the representatives are more loyal to their party's wishes than the wishes of the people they are supposed to represent. If that is the case, the possibility of representatives not fully representing their constituencies is real. In this process, it is easy for representatives to either be manipulated or be whipped into service of the party. If representation is able to avoid this trap by ensuring that the representatives are only loyal to the views of their constituencies, then real democracy has been animated. The animation is a direct result of the people being the centre of all decision-making. In that way, the people's voices and wishes are reflected throughout decision-making institutions.

On the score of representation, then, a consensual system appears to meet the requirements of meaningful representation. Representatives are only loyal to their constituencies by virtue of absence of party political alignments. The only factor that matters to any representative is the constituency from which that representative comes from. Hence, what each representative is ultimately loyal to is the express wish of her constituency. Besides loyalty to their respective constituencies, representatives are only expected to be loyal to the process of securing agreement by consensus. In-built, in such loyalty to the process, is the accompanying realisation that there are no permanent alliances by virtue of party or other partisan identity. Hence, ordinary people can be sure that they are not only formally represented but that their view has been sufficiently taken into account in the final decisions (Wiredu 1997). Even

if the decisions do not favour their particular preference, at least the represented will know that their view was given equal attention as any other view and stood an equal chance like any other view.

However, critiques can point out to a number of problems that go with this system. The first problem has to do with how decisions are made in practice. Wiredu (1997) makes much of the case that there was no act of formal voting in traditional Akan society both in selecting leaders as well as in deciding matters in council. If ever there was to be voting, that would only be done in very rare cases to break an impasse. Ani points out that there is no way that decisions can be reached without using a formal system of voting. This essentially casts doubt on the idea that there can be such a consensual system that entirely relies on discussing matters until a position is reached that is agreeable to all. A second objection from Ani (2014b) points out that in any group that relies on consensus for decision-making, not all participants will enjoy the same status when it comes to contributions that determine the final outcome. A third and final objection, again from Ani, points out that participants in such groups tend to be committed to certain values. Since they are not entirely non-committal, they are likely to push for, or go with those ideas that speak to their commitments. Taken together, these objections cast sufficient doubt not only the veracity of consensus as practised in traditional societies but also on its applicability in radically diverse societies such as modern African states.

If left unanswered, it seems, these objections may prove quite threatening to the viability of consensus. However, I am not convinced that these objections spell such a grave danger to the concept of deciding by consensus. With the first objection, which relates to the matter of the inevitability of voting, as a representational tool, it suffices to point out that even if it were to be the case that all political decisions, or any group decision for that matter, are as a matter of principle or simple unavoidability to be settled through voting, what needs to be looked at closely is the scheme under which the voting takes place. The contrast between majoritarianism and consensus is that with the former, the voting is done without accompanying consideration of the opponent's points or arguments. What simply happens is that the voters either have pre-existing loyalties or are whipped into adopting a certain position. Put simply, the sole factor responsible for how or what people vote for under majoritarianism is pre-set and is not likely to change. Meetings or the process of hearing a different point of view, no matter how persuasive it is, are not likely to move adversaries towards a common point or compel them to change their minds. Quite the opposite; in the face of such powerful and persuasive argumentation, opponents only proverbially dig in their heels.

Consensus prioritises engagement, exchange of ideas and finding positions that tend to be shared by almost everyone in the group. While majoritarianism prioritises

difference and resorts to using numbers to settle those differences, consensus seeks to reconcile, as Wiredu (1997) states. The point, then, is even if it were to be the case that consensus relied on a procedure of voting to break a deadlock, that process would be radically different from what voting entails in adversarial systems. This follows from the consideration that voting to break a deadlock, though it may still be voting, is qualitatively different from voting in order to register a victory. With the former this is seen as a last and undesirable resort, while with the latter it is seen as the first and most necessary move of decision-making. It is hardly surprising that with the latter voting is seen as a matter of deciding who the winner is and who carries the day, while the former only recognises that it had become unavoidable to reach a decision.

If the qualitative distinction I am suggesting here holds, then it is equally important to claim that there is no universal meaning and significance of the word and actual process of voting. As Wiredu (1997) notes, in traditional Akan society there was no formal word equivalent to the word vote. The word that exists now is a corruption of the English word vote. If that is the case, and Ani finds it inconceivable that there could be decision-making processes that do not involve voting, then it could very well be the case that whatever form of casting lots that Akans engaged in, were not premised on the understanding that a winner had to be decided. In my view, what Ani has in mind is voting of the majoritarian sort. One in which right from the beginning of the political process, the majority, by virtue of their ability to vote for the same preference are sure not only to carry that day but other days to come. Their association, is one that is based on the knowledge that they have been able to come together by virtue of their desire to dominate others through sheer numbers. Or if they do not explicitly wish to dominate others, they just understand that they have come together in order to ensure that their numbers carry them through to put in effect their pre-determined preferences. Such alliance remains more or less permanent as long as allies are able to use the power of the vote to further sectional interests. The justification of this arrangement may be implicitly contained in Eze's (1997) view that there always are individuated desires that must be successfully managed. Such management may merely involve aggregating which desires outnumber other rival desires. With consensus the opposite is true; what has to obtain is a management of difference that prioritises reconciliation more than insisting on that difference. What Ani and Eze seem not to take seriously, is the little truth that Wiredu recognises that there will always be differences among people., What Wiredu also equally recognises is that there are ways of solving differences that do not have to involve further entrenchment of either those very differences or the source of their origins. Hence, I argue that voting in a reconciliatory framework is not qualitatively equal to voting in a confrontational set-up.

As far as the difference in participants' social status, which Ani (2014a) points to, playing a role in determining who has a more prominent input in the final decision is concerned, I wish to point out that Wiredu himself admits this characteristic is a mark of good leadership. It is a plain truth that hardly needs engagement to state that persuasion based on intellectual capacity is not an endowment that is uniformly distributed over any given population. Some individuals are more persuasive, more perceptive and more logical than others. Individuals, who have an intellectual endowment both naturally or by virtue of their education, are more likely to be listened to and believed. We do not doubt that they retain a special status as purveyors of knowledge. We treat them with respect and we respect their word for they have earned that place in society. It is a plain fact of life that no two people are equally persuasive, wise, and logically compelling. Whether it is in an American jury system or a remote African village, there will always be people who are more logically compelling than others. If it is the case that all groups will always have dominant players leading and directing the way a discussion will evolve, Ani's criticism loses its initial force. However, Ani can insist that while it may be correct to point out that that in any given group there will always be individuals who either direct or influence the final outcome of any given discussion, that admission effectively undermines the whole point of consensus which was supposed to render it superior to majoritarianism. What is undermined, Ani may insist, is the important requirement that everyone is an equal participant in the discussion and everyone stands an equal chance to influence the final outcome of that discussion. If dominant individuals are allowed to play a leading role by virtue of their naturally superior intellect or by virtue of their education, then an unequal system will be created. That system is one that favours those with a superior intellect or those who are wont to convince. If this were the case, then we can say there is subtle discrimination. We can even argue that while the system purports to be of equality of weight amongst the participants, it actually is not. There is a prioritisation of opinion of certain people over other people. This prioritisation is not upfront as is the case in majoritarianism. Does this then make consensus a democratic façade?

I am not persuaded that this construal could be correct. The basic premise of discussion in consensus, at least African traditional consensus, is that knowledge is dialogical in nature (Wamala 2004). And as Wiredu argues, even experts are not exempt from interrogation. If it is the case that knowledge is dialogical, it means that knowledge is something that is not seen exclusively as a preserve of this or that individual. On the contrary, since knowledge is dialogical it is seen as something that everyone shares in. Even if there were to be experts in a particular area under discussion, those experts are expected, I suggest, to make available their expertise for the benefit of all participants or the community at large. These experts do so, I further

suggest, under the realisation that they will also need the expertise of other people in the future and that they will also be equally entitled to examine that expertise. If knowledge is communally owned and is put to use for the sake of the benefit of all members of the community, there is no reason for anyone to choose to dominate others through manipulation of that knowledge.

While Eze (1997) is wary of the real possibility that in all human set-ups there is no guarantee of an ultimate identity of interests that works for the benefit of all, there is at least one consideration that mitigates that reality. This is the fact that even if there were individuals who were to set for themselves the task of abrogating a communally shared process in favour of processes that advance sectarian interests, they would find that such a course would be self-defeating. Sectarian interests can only be advanced when there are other competing interests. If there are no competing interests, then there is no sectarian interest to advance. In duping the community out of dialogical knowledge, they would be duping themselves from benefitting from what the community is capable of providing, even for their so-called sectarian interests. In any system that seeks to attain consensual outcomes, then, the overriding consideration is one that seeks to consider the interests of the collective as opposed to sectional interests. While it does not necessarily follow that the interests of the collective must be marked by a complete identity of desires and values, it is sufficient that the interests of such a collective is guided by a common realisation that all players in the decision-making process are co-dependent. This co-dependence is not only realised in moments of decision-making but in the entire life of the community and each and every individual who contributes to the wellbeing of that community. Putting aside the debates of what type of community this would be, it suffices to point out that the degree of co-operation that may exist between people under social and political circumstances conceived by consensus may be higher than what Eze suspects. While the danger of the possibility of some people seeking to usurp processes of power for their own ends is always present, there will also be in place systems that seek to stop usurpers of power from realising their ultimate goal: total control. Other social and political players can also attempt to stop such an occurrence from happening, thus restoring the status quo which favours a dialogical approach to both the use of knowledge as well as the exercise of power. Even though it is granted that it will always be the case that power tends to make people seek to exploit others, institutions conceived under a consensual dispensation will ensure that such tendencies are sufficiently curbed or kept in check.

Representative decision-making bodies, then, under a consensual dispensation ensure that the true wishes of the people are given sufficient latitude to determine the final decisional outcome. The idea that all decisions are a result of a negotiated outcome, as well as the use of voting as a last resort, ensures that each idea is not only

heard but accorded the same standing in possibly influencing the final outcome. Thus, in the absence of direct participation by the entire population, consensus maximally satisfies a meaningful notion of representation.

The second consideration of the quality of a democratic dispensation pertains to how individuals are allowed to freely associate. There are two traditional senses in which we can understand freedom of association. The first which I deem to be an ordinary understanding of free association entails that individuals who may have an express desire to band together for some stated or desired common purpose are allowed to do so without fear of reprisals from authority or other groups. The second has to do with how individuals are allowed to freely associate with a particular idea. Be it that they have certain beliefs in certain principles or they believe in certain outcomes or programmes that they would want to see implemented. The first we shall call freedom of association, the second we shall call freedom of thought. Regarding the second, it also entails meeting the requirement that there is room for people to express their ideas without suffering undesirable consequences for associating with that idea. I take both these senses to be equally important in determining whether there is real freedom or not. I also take these requirements to be important in determining whether a political dispensation is democratic or not. In instances where there is absolutely no freedom of political association and where the freedom to articulate and defend an idea is equally restricted or results in some nefarious outcome, then democracy does not exist despite protests to the contrary. In instances where fake associations that serve the oligarchy are the only ones that are allowed to exist, then freedom of association is farcical. In such oligarchies, if there is a string of puppets that pretend to advocate freedom of ideas, the result is that democracy is compromised in significant measures. We could also think of varying arrangements in which both senses of freedom are compromised by either deliberate pursuit of programmes that either openly deny the citizenry any claim to such freedoms or regimes that severely limit these freedoms right up to those that cynically pretend that these freedoms are guaranteed.

While it is important to consider legitimate limitations that may be placed on freedoms, I will not be pursuing such a consideration since, in my view, it does not affect the real investigation I wish to carry out. By limiting myself to freedoms of association as well as freedoms of expressing ideas, I assume that such associations and ideas are not conceived by their supporters as necessarily harmful or intended to be so from the moment of their formulation. I assume, instead, that the cases we are dealing with involve people who ordinarily wish to pursue programmes and ideas that are free of discriminating against others or bringing reasonably foreseeable harm to others. The only exception to be made in this consideration is that humanity is incapable of fully foreseeing the consequences of their actions. So my working

assumption is that the pursuit of freedom is for higher values that are good for those who seek to pursue those freedoms without necessarily an accompanying desire to prejudice, harm or infringe on others' rights.

In a consensual dispensation that shuns party political formation and association, is it likely that freedoms of association are compromised? If we follow Wiredu and Wamala's depiction of traditional African societies we see that in those societies there were ready-made associations which an individual had no option but automatically claim membership of. These associations were lineage-based as each lineage was automatically treated as a political unit. It was from this basic unit that representatives were drawn to constitute the king's council. Since individuals do not have a choice in matters of which lineage they belong to, they also do not have any choice in their political associations. The trouble with this kind of political arrangement is not hard to see. If lineage membership entails political association and membership, then there is really no choice in where individuals eventually get situated politically. Since, according to Teffo (2004), this is a communocracy, it follows that what is prioritised is the stability of the community and each individual is expected to contribute to that stability. Little regard is given to the individual's rights or other proclivities that seek to declare her as a self-governing entity with capacity to freely choose and associate as she sees fit. This is made very clear by Wiredu, who in the communitarianism debate sides with Menkiti's (1984) extreme version which accords a secondary status to the individual. Wiredu states that Menkiti is correct in his description of the community as having a perduring reality over the individual's as well as that the individual's rights are subservient to the community's.

Besides the difficulties in respect of individual rights that are occasioned by the portrayal of the community as having priority over the individual, there are other serious issues relating to freedoms within traditional communities. In my view the two related difficulties are that the individual is not given freedom to freely associate with other individuals who might be outside her clan. The second difficulty is that the individual is obligated to choose only those options that clearly advance the collective interests of the community. Not only is the individual limited to which group she will belong to, but she is also burdened with expectations and directives of what ideas are worth defending. Thus she fully understands that there are certain ideas that are not to be pursued as they undermine the collective interests of the community. She also understands that if she were to pursue those ideas she risks admonishing by her community. That admonishing may range from a word of rebuke to excommunication. This is not a matter of pure speculation but reality. Above, I cited Wamala's (2004) extensive discussion of the Ganda system of consensus. Where a conflict between the king and any one of his chiefs became unbearable, the chief and his people could withdraw from the territory of that king. Although Wamala cast

this as a positive check on the possible abuse of power and excess by the king, there is a downside to it. The downside is that the vaunted system of consensus which prioritises discussion until a solution is found, has moments when that agreement cannot be reached. What happens if the agreement has not been reached and disagreement persists is more ominous than what happens if disagreements persist in say majoritarian democracy.

Effectively, and literally, there is no room for the 'rebellious' chief and his people. They leave behind their entire lives, their usual surroundings, their networks of existence and identity, their political home, their ancestors' graves; in brief they leave everything behind to start a new life. While Wamala tries to make this appear as if it is a desirable check on power, what it practically amounts to is the destruction of a clan's entire life. They give up their everything because they could not agree with their king. This is not a mere matter of relocation; it is being exiled. One must bear in mind that in most traditional African communities, the most extreme form of punishment was simply being driven out of the community. With all physico-material and psychological support of fellow community members withdrawn, the individual's fate was pretty much sealed. The same applies to a community that is exiled, referred to in nicely packaged terms such as relocation or withdrawing from a king's domain. It could only have been hard for the people who withdrew to start a life elsewhere. If this is not a form of punishment, it is not far from it. While it is true that a king could be deposed, it is interesting that in Wamala's account it was not the king who was asked to depart both from his throne and kingdom, but the less powerful chief and his people. What is clear is that there is real power at work here and that power is firmly on the side of the king. Even though the system is construed as one that places high premium on notions of solidarity and decision-making processes that are strictly consensual, when irreconcilable differences arise, weaker parties in that dispute will suffer real harm.

In the traditional African set-up, then, we can conclude that freedoms were severely limited by other considerations that were regarded as important in the social and political coherence of the community. These considerations stem from Wiredu's claim, above, that consensus was not only viewed as a political tool but as axiomatic in all adult relations. It follows, therefore, that if the most important goal in all social and political interaction was the attainment of consensus, then all actions that were considered to be potentially dissonant with the goal of fostering oneness were frowned upon (Eze 2008). Although I maintain the position that all deliberations, in traditional African society, were guided by rational discourse, it was mainly a rational process of the consensual sort. Even in instances where there were very strong disagreements and each side was subjected to severe questioning or criticism, all these processes were ultimately aimed at reaching the goal of consensus.

This should not be understood as the differences and the cross-examination of ideas being any weaker than in any other system. Rather, the most important point to keep our eye on, is that even in cases of such severe differences, limits were always imposed on the processes. These limits would eventually ensure that consensus was attained despite the initial 'appearance' of difference, as Wiredu would put it.

Although Eze (1997) argues that there is no such thing as a rock-bottom identity of interests in a communocracy, I argue that something very close to it may obtain. If the community is the most important reality, and its maintenance is an obligation that is placed on everyone, then all energies are directed towards the maintenance of the integrity of that community. Deviation may be allowed only if it does not threaten the continued existence of harmony in that community. Freely expressing one's idea may be permissible only for a while or under very strict settings. Once those settings are gone, the expression of dissenting ideas, from those that have been adopted, is most likely to be strictly condemned. However, Wiredu is not entirely clear as to what happens to those dissenting voices besides identifying them as a residue of difference. There are two ways of interpreting the term 'residue of difference.' One possible interpretation is that after differences have been entertained and disagreements aired, what remains is a useless residue, a residue that has no value whatsoever. The alternative view is that the residue has value to those who held it before it was deemed to be a mere residue of difference, but from the moment it is deemed as a residue, for the sake of group unity and coherence, it has to be suppressed. It could be added that this residue is somehow reflected in the final decision anyway. Further, it can also be added that those whose views are seen as residue today may be the winners tomorrow since under this scheme there is no ultimate or permanent winner (Wiredu 1997). Everyone stands an equal chance of holding either the victorious or the residue position. A consensual polity would prefer to go with the latter view, as it insists that there are no permanent alliances demarcated along lines of the majority and the opposing minority. However, the latter position can only be said to be what supporters of consensus would want to see or want to believe is actually what will happen. The truth of the matter could be far from what the desires of supporters of a consensual polity could be.

Ordinarily, when people invest their energies into supporting a particular idea or position, they really want to see that position prevail over others. Not many people go into a political debate, where stakes are possibly high, without being seriously attached to their respective positions or as well as the desire to see that position emerge victorious. When people advance a particular position, that position probably represents what they value, and what they value will not go away simply because a contrary position has been adopted. The holders of the residue are likely to continue defending their position, even quietly. They will most likely seek future outlets to

restate or re-emphasise the merit of that residue. They will do so even, at times, in cases that are not directly related to the residue. This is a direct result of the fact that positions that are held by people mean a lot to those people. This is more so in political debates and decisions. People do not simply depart from their former positions just because a different decision has been arrived at. They store up these positions for future use and when the opportunity presents itself they show their position. Since Wiredu argues that consensus, in traditional societies, was about what to do as opposed to what is right, it is quite easy for these types of decisions to cause further conflict. While Wiredu might have supposed that practical decisions about whether to go to war or not are easier than debating on the justifiability of war in general, the opposite is true. An example will illustrate the point I have in mind.

Let us imagine that there is a kingdom made of various chieftaincies. Each of these chieftaincies is represented at the king's council by its paramount chief. The council is the highest decision-making body in the land, on all matters ranging from fiduciary, military to legal. The council is also tasked with deciding how the kingdom relates with other kingdoms, both neighbouring and far off. Unfortunately, in the historical development of our kingdom, it had to expand and some not so far off kingdom feels aggrieved over some territory. Over the years these kingdoms have tried to settle the issue without much success. The aggrieved kingdom is preparing to fight, to battle hard for what it considers to be its stolen territory. Our kingdom learns of these plans and the king together with his close cabal call for two meetings. The first meeting is to ask the councillors, the chiefs, to solicit their people's opinion on whether to cede the territory in question or go to war over it. The second meeting is meant to reach a decision over this question. The first meeting is informative and the second meeting is meant to make a decision. In the second meeting the debate is free and there are minimal rules governing how contributions are to be made. The king does not chair the meeting directly, he does not even have to say a lot, his right hand man chairs the meeting and he decides who speaks. Those who wish to speak simply raise their hands. There are two bodies of experts at this meeting, the warriors and the farmers. These bodies are represented by their leaders who are drawn from the collective of the chieftaincies. At the meeting there are different views which are thoroughly examined from different directions. The experts, the warriors, are rather hesitant to go to war. The other experts, the farmers, submit that the kingdom does not necessarily need the contested territory. However, they add, the territory might prove crucial to the future food security of the kingdom. The debate whether to defend this territory or not goes on for a while with various points of view being presented as solicited from the ordinary people by their respective representatives. The chief whose territory contributes the greatest number of warriors is against defending this territory. He points out the risks involved in going to war and the advantages of ceding

this territory. After lengthy deliberation, the decision, inclusive of concessions by all parties, is as follows: our kingdom shall go to war, and to war they go. However, in order to keep the territory in question untainted, the farmers asked that no blood be spilled on it. The warriors promise that they would do everything in their power not to allow any battle to extend to the territory in question. The two kingdoms declare war on each other and they have many indecisive but costly battles. The last battle spills over to the territory in question nearly breaching the territorial integrity of our kingdom. Each side suffers heavy losses and there are dead bodies strewn all over the land. The chieftaincy from which most of the warriors came, is in mourning. The so-called hawks are celebrating over what we might call another demonstration of our kingdom's military might. The farmers and religious leaders know the just defended territory is now cursed. A lot of corrective action has to be carried out in our kingdom. At least some kind of appeasement process must be initiated with the chieftaincy that had the greatest number of young men who formed our warrior corps and who subsequently lost their lives in battle.

In the foregoing examples, a few things come to the fore that undermine the easy workability of consensus. The most prominent of these is that although the decision to go to war was practical in accord with Wiredu, the differences in the commitments are not any less significant. While Wiredu never explicitly states that practical suggestions are easier than those that necessarily involve value, at least he implicitly suggests that these decisions are more geared towards creating more consensus than fostering maintenance of dissensus. The implicit suggestion in Wiredu, therefore, is that once a practical decision is taken the residue of difference will not continue with the same intensity as those decisions that were to involve value. In the foregoing example, those who were opposed to going to war had their reasons, and once those reasons materialise, they feel that they were wrongfully ignored, or outplayed. Those who feel aggrieved by the outcome of the war, which they were opposed to anyway, will carry on with that grievance into future discussions. The effect will be that there may just as well be a loss of trust between the parties. While the aggrieved parties may not necessarily be openly rebellious, they may begin to mistrust their fellows' capacity to judge and make decisions that are not injurious to some sectors' interests. They may even hold a lifetime grudge against people they perceive to be the authors of their loss. They may even develop a sense of alienation from the processes of decision-making since those processes would have cost them dearly, quite literally.

The second challenge is that although all parties are legally allowed to participate in the decision-making processes, there is a possibility that parties that have been left out in previous occasions may just as well get together and form a more or less permanent alliance to protect their respective interests. An example will illustrate my point. Let us imagine that in the same traditional set-up as outlined above, little

chieftaincies feel aggrieved about the manner in which their interests are constantly faced with the possibility of being reduced to a residue. To counter that possibility being realised, they form an understanding that binds them to support each other whenever their respective interests are up for consideration. They do not have to believe in each other's cause or even like each other's position. After all, consensual gatherings are for purposes of reaching practical decisions. It hardly is surprising that convenient practical alliances will be formed along lines of what each party thinks works. If such alliances do obtain, and decisions are eventually made along the power of those alliances, then the initial value of consensus would have been lost. What the initial value of consensus sought to guarantee was the possibility that all decisions are made in accord with tenets of debate and rationally argued out best options. Once there are alliances on grounds other than the plausibility and persuasiveness of an idea, consensus becomes like any other decision-making process which lacks scruples of genuine consultation.

Wiredu appears not to want to entertain the idea that any consensus based political activity or political decision-making process could be tainted with the possibility of underhand dealings and other well-documented shenanigans that are ordinarily employed in political situations. I do not think that Wiredu thinks that it is possible, under the scheme he describes, that some people could have a morbid desire to dominate others as Eze suggests. The reason for Wiredu's not having those unkind suspicions about political players is that he sincerely believes that all human beings are able to find a way through their differences where they end with a rock-bottom identity of interests. However, such a position presupposes that human beings are predisposed to be co-operative by nature. It further assumes that where that co-operation is not forthcoming it is due to some mistaken views that adopted by some members of the political body. All it takes is for the mistaken view to be laid bare and the correct position will be understood by everyone. Once that happens, individuals will have no option but to reconcile themselves with the correct position. The reason why it never occurs to Wiredu that political participants may have differences that are not based on some mistaken view that they have yet to overcome, is due to his communitarian commitments. As indicated above, Wiredu conceives of African communities as radical formations. This sort of communitarian view emphasises the importance of the community over the individual. The individual's reality or proclivity necessarily has to be tailored, both metaphysically and politically, to satisfy the community's interests. Within this conception, if we go back to our question of individual freedom, it is easy to see that this system does not prioritise that type of freedom. If there is any individual freedom to talk of, it is either subservient to communal interests or in service of those interests. If we combine the absence of such freedom with the restrictive structures of political

association that individuals face, then consensus as a political system begins to lose its initial gloss.

While my foregoing consideration as well as the examples I have given in support of it, have proceeded from an evaluation of traditional society, the same can apply to non-traditional consensual systems. The basic factor that makes consensus work, either in traditional communities or modern societies, is the strong communitarian ethos that is supposed to tie people together. Without such a strong ethos, there is nothing to work towards or to attain. A communally-oriented political outlook imposes obligations of a communitarian sort on its members. While such a communally-based political orientation may have advantages, it also could potentially suffer some weaknesses. These weaknesses are of the sort I have outlined above. Eze's (1997) point is instructive; individuals will always have their individualised preferences. What is important is that these preferences are managed in ways that do not cause undue restriction to what they ordinarily prefer to do. The most useful supposition from Eze is that all people cannot be expected to have interests that coincide in the manner that Wiredu (1997) suggests. Yet for Wiredu to succeed in making his case for a consensual polity, individual interests must coincide so that the residue of difference is merely that: a residue that can be dispensed with. Yet ordinarily it is true that people are attached to those residues. They wish to see those residues realised, and would not want to give them up in favour of communally-agreed preferences. The tyranny of the community, the ideals and pursuits of the community, the good of the community easily trump those of the individual. While the temptation may be to dismiss this argument as an objection that is based on a defence of liberal principles, that objection would not be entirely true.

In contrast to the belief that the concerns I have been raising above are ultimately the sort of questions that only appear in liberal inspired traditions, they are quite at home within the communitarian tradition. Communitarianism, for example, has always had to deal with the question of how an appropriate relationship between the individual and the community has to be construed. There is a sharp divide between communitarians on whether the individual is to be accorded any rights or not. Those like Gyekye, who believe that the individual has to be accorded some rights, run into trouble when they cannot defend those rights to their necessary conclusion. For others such as Masolo (2010), who propose a defence of individuality within the communitarian framework, their defence of rights is accused of representing the old communitarian prioritisation of the community over the individual (Tshivhase 2014). In rejecting this accusation, Masolo points that his communitarian theory is clearly one that understands the primacy of the individual when he writes:

> It is pretty straightforward that I think of human selves as communitarian rather than as atomic individuals. A major misconception of a communitarian

> conception of human selves is that it erases their individuality…Nothing could be farther from the truth. No-one needs any theorization to notice that we are born, live, and function pretty much as individuals. Biology affirms that each one of us humans bears a unique genetic coding that not even identical twins are, contrary to the conventional usage of the term, really 'identical'. Denying this sense of individuality would therefore dwindle into triviality. To be sure, communitarians uphold this individuality as pivotal to some of the core positions it holds such as democracy as a socio-political process, and human fallibilism in the quest of for epistemological truth. (2014, 187)

Let us contrast the above argument and quote with Menkiti's own position, which incidentally Wiredu approves of. In dismissing any similarity between the Sartrean and the African view of personhood Menkiti writes:

> For the Sartrean view that man is a *free* unconditioned being, a being not constrained by social or historical circumstances, flies in the face of African beliefs. Given its emphasis on individuals solely constituting themselves into the selves that they are to become, by dint of their private choices, such a view cannot but encourage eccentricity and individualism—traits which run counter to African ideals of what the human person is all about. (1984, 178)

Menkiti rejects the idea of reason as playing an important part in determining the nature of personhood. He argues, by way of endorsing William Abraham, that 'if reason is part of our nature, then we cannot be enslaved by reason as Sartre sometimes seems to suggest; for no entity can be enslaved by its own nature' (1984, 178). To appreciate his argument in full I quote him at length:

> In the light of the foregoing observations, I take it then that the African view of human personhood and the Existentialist view should not be conflated. Even though both views adopt a dynamic, non-static approach to the definition of human-selfhood, the underpinning metaphysical assumptions diverge significantly. Above all, whereas in the African understanding human community plays a crucial role in the individual's acquisition of full personhood, in the Sartrean existentialist view, the individual alone defines the self, or person, he is to become. Such collectivist insistencies as we find in the African world-view are utterly lacking in the Existentialist tradition. And this difference in the two approaches is not accidental. Rather it arises because there is at bottom a fundamental disagreement as to what reality is all about (1984, 179).

In addition, Menkiti distinguishes three senses of community. The first,

> which I shall call *collectivities* in the truest sense; the second of which might be called *constituted* human groups; and the third of which might be called *random* collections of individuals. The African understanding of human society adopts the usage in description number one above, whereas the Western understanding would fall closer to description number two; the difference

> between the two being that in what I have called 'collectivities in the truest sense' there is assumed to be an *organic* dimension to the relationship between the component individuals, whereas in the understanding of human society as something *constituted* what we have is a non-organic bringing together of atomic individuals into a unit more akin to an association than to a community (1984, 179–180).

I do not wish to enter into debates about whether Menkiti's position is a true reflection of African communitarianism or whether it is a justifiable view of some sort of African essence. All I wish to illustrate with the discussion and quotes above is that the debate on how we are to conceive the relationship between the individual and the community is at the heart of communitarianism proper. There are those communitarians such as Gyekye and Masolo, who defend the idea that the individual has inalienable freedoms that also contribute to her definition and that the community must also take into account. Further, Menkiti's citing of different communities by regions is meant to underscore Africans' insistence in making no distinction between the individual and the community. In arguing that a constituted community entails defending an organic alignment of individuals, Menkiti seeks to show that individual arrangements of their existence as individuals is one that is best understood as parts who constitute a complex whole. It is not by accident that Menkiti uses the term 'organic'; his real point is to show that the community is as good as a living thing and all individuals must contribute, as parts do in living organisms, to the smooth functioning and life of this community. It is from this belief that he draws the point that the individual's interests are secondary to the community's. While it can be said that Menkiti recognises the fact of individuality, for him, the purpose of such a fact only serves the purposes of aiding in animating communal reality.

In contrast to the foregoing, Gyekye and Masolo hold that the social and political arrangements of society cannot ignore the fact of individuality. Whatever the conception of rights and obligations could be, individuality, as a metaphysical fact, must be reckoned with. The difference, then, between communitarians is one of metaphysics. This metaphysics of the constitution of the person in turn informs the sort of political theory that each camp deems appropriate. Since Wiredu supports what has been called the extreme version of communitarianism, it is not hard to imagine that the sort of consensus he has in mind is one that prioritises the rights of the community over those of the individual. By so doing, the consensual polity that Wiredu advocates may just as well be comfortable with abrogating the individual's rights in favour of communal rights. If consensus were to occur within a framework of communitarianism that sees the individual as belonging to second order importance compared to the community, then that political system would also follow the same manner of treating the individual as less important than the general social and political

aspirations of the community. If it is the case that the dictatorship of the majority is what consensus seeks to avoid, it equally falls prey to the dictatorship of the ethos of the community. Since all participants will seek to work towards the realisation of communal ethos, individuals who diverge from such paths will be condemned as misfits.

Since the success of consensus is anchored in the ability of the community to maintain itself as a coherent and lasting collective, it follows that wherever consensus, as a polity, is adopted, the shortfalls of collectivist societies will be attendant. In its modern set-up, where clan identity and king's councils do not exist, other equivalent structures will emerge to do what traditional structures did. In the case of a modern African state, it is not hard for such a state to fashion its rhetoric as well as political and social organisation as one that seeks to satisfy requirements of collectivist societies. A country can define itself as a collectivist community with clear set goals that each individual is supposed to pursue in order to meet collectivist consensus. Wiredu may respond to this position by arguing that what I have created is a caricature of what he has in mind. He may argue that a political system does not have to depend on the communitarian commitments that I suggest he is essentially committed to. He may even point out that there are various metaphysical conceptions of personhood that do not rely on the radical communitarian position I suggest he is associated with. However, I suggest, such an objection will not work. The fact of the matter is that the metaphysics of how persons are construed, ultimately determine what political statements and commitments are. If the metaphysics is entirely communitarian and of a radical form, then, the social and political outlook have to satisfy that communitarian metaphysics. This point leads me to my last consideration in this section.

The last consideration which proceeds from the immediate point above, involves looking at how the social and political institutions in a consensual dispensation may be said to support democracy. In other words, I am interested in establishing whether these systems lend maximal support to a broad definition of democracy. In simple terms, the question that guides this investigation is whether social and political institutions conceived under a consensual dispensation do a better job in the fulfilment of the requirements of democracy than majoritarianism. A question at this stage could be raised to challenge my proposed investigation. Such a question may query the idea that different types of democracies retain different types of institutions that give a difference in the qualitative feel of those respective democracies. It could be argued that if a system is democratic, then it has to necessarily retain social and political institutions of a democratic form. However, such a query misses the point that was raised by Oguejiofor above. The point is that democracy has to be legitimised in a specific sense lest it becomes predatory. It is not enough for a system to claim that it is democratic; it is equally not enough that

a system goes through the ordinary motions of democracy. A system has to specify what it means by democracy and it has to be seen to be living up to what it means when it refers to democracy. This is necessary since a system can declare itself to be a democracy, but its behaviour, institutions and values could be at odds with minimal understandings of democracy.

Democracy on its own, either understood as an ideal or an institution of regulating human interactions in society, has to be supported by other institutions that share its values. If there is a dispensation that either aspires to be democratic or proclaims to be democratic, but has institutions that do not share the same values, then that democratic dispensation is in name only. If there is discord between social and political institutions, then there will always be a problem in satisfying the maximal interpretation of democracy. The inquiry I have in mind in respect of this last consideration is divided into two. Firstly, I look at the political institutions themselves and try to work out if they satisfy broad expectations of democracy. Secondly, I look at whether social institutions that are said to favour consensus are consistent with democratic principles.

The defining characteristics of the political institutions that are associated with consensual democracy are stated as follows: it is a communocracy which valorises consensus in all adult relations, all political decisions are reached through lengthy deliberation with the aim of achieving a consensual decision or an inclusive decision, leaders at any level are not voted into office but selected by virtue of their age, wisdom, maturity and reputation for logical persuasiveness. The leaders are normally royal descendants. The chief's claim to his position is hereditary. Even though there are a number of candidates to be chosen from the royal family to fill the vacant chief's position, those to be elected are limited to those who are considered to be of royal descent.

I suggest that the hereditary nature of the political positions is the biggest problem for consensus as a democratic system, particularly in its traditional setting. Any system that only permits a select group to be leaders is patently discriminatory. Even though the argument is made that royalty was always in the service of the people, and that the people were strongly aligned to their royal figures, the problem with this sort of arrangement is that the pool from which leaders are to be drawn is severely narrowed. By so doing, other members of society who might have talents that would serve society well in terms of leadership, might just as well get left out simply because they are not of royal descent. Further, the idea that only royal family members deserve to occupy positions of leadership seems to privilege them with some inherently distinct qualities or talents. There is nothing that specifically marks royalty as a collective or any single member of the royal family to be deserving of leadership positions. Even if it may be argued that the royal family is a beneficiary of

training and education that gears them to be leaders and that puts them apart from ordinary people, that training and education is just another rung of discrimination. Why should that training and education not be available to anyone who has the patience and time to take up its rigours? In such a society, I argue, there exists an entrenched system of discrimination that favours the royal family for no other reason than that they are the royal family.

In the first chapter, I outlined how such a consensual system was conceived in the past and how Teffo (2004) is convinced it could be put to good use in the future. The success of these arguments lies primarily in that members of society recognise the value of the royal family, acknowledge its scared and privileged position and are willing to submit themselves to it. They also have an understanding and hope that the royal family, by virtue of being royalty, will look after the interests of ordinary people. Even if such an understanding existed and was abided by, the issue of privileging the royal family at the exclusion of other social members will never go away. Even if it were to be claimed that God and the ancestors desired that royalty should rule, there would still be a need for an explanation as to why God particularly desired this to be the case. My argument should not be taken as support for republicanism and committed opposition to having royalty. Rather, my real point is that once a system settles on a certain group over the rest of the population for leadership positions, that system is inherently discriminatory.

A second associated problem with consensus is the leader is selected on grounds of a combination of personal characteristics that are deemed desirable for office. While this leader eventually is everyone's leader, not everyone participates in her selection. The selection process is the preserve of a few people. Such a process violates the important requirement that in a democracy people must participate to the greatest possible extent in deciding on affairs that affect them. If people are to be led by a particular individual or if power is to be vested in a particular individual, then the people must have a direct say in who that person is going to be. Any process that limits or by-passes the people's participation is equivalent to imposing the said leader on the people. In response to this, it could be argued that it does not matter who the leader is, individually, because there are guidelines on how a leader who assumes a particular position behaves in that office. It could even be argued that traditional systems ensured that whoever was selected to be the leader was supposed to represent and carry out the people's interests. This response will not work. The nature of power is such that those who have it may depart from what they have been tasked to do and use it to further their own proclivities. That is why there were provisions of destooling a chief or king in traditional societies. Such provisions give support to the natural suspicions against holders of power. Not only is it necessary to keep holders of power in check. It is also absolutely important that either people who are interested in

holding power or who might end up holding that power, are open to as much public scrutiny as possible.

While, above, I pointed out some of the problems associated with majoritarian canvassing for votes, those problems are associated with an aggressive type of negative campaigning that is found in the United States of America. There are of course other problems in Africa such as restricted campaigning or persecution of the opposition. But in a situation where both these problems are absent, there is a good chance that the ordinary people will gather some understanding of what the campaign of each individual stands for. They may have a good idea of what to expect once that person is in office. With consensual systems, however, there emerges a different sort of problem. The problem is no longer about the crude negative campaign and the violence that may occur in majoritarian democracy; the problem is about how secretive the process of finding a leader becomes. It is almost as if no one knows who will be the leader and what they stand for. While Teffo may argue that in a communocracy there is little importance attached to what the leader stands for, as an individual, since all decisions are collective, this position is hard to accept. A leader will always have some kind of marginally greater influence than all other participants in a system. In the traditional consensual system, by virtue of the political leader being a religious leader, that gave him some marginal edge over other participants in council. While I maintain that people could see that a leader was proposing unreasonable arguments, they could also listen to their leader if he explicitly relied on his other source of power – communication from the ancestors. Both Eze and Wiredu are never clear whether this was ever the case, but we cannot rule that this possibility never happened. Leaders could possibly invoke powers other than political, whenever it became necessary for their own purposes. Since interrogation of what they stood for had never occurred, such leaders could have been aware of what resources were available to them in order to further their own interests. And they would have not hesitated to use those resources.

If we look at the decision-making process and what its ultimate goal was, a serious problem about the democratic nature of the consensual system begins to emerge. If consensus was premised on the understanding that there had to be, as a rule, an understanding that the most important social and political goal was to attain consensus, then it follows that in all political processes this was the end of consensus. This takes us back to Eze's original objection. Is consensus the essence of democracy or just one of its moments? If a system is to be truly democratic, should it ever essentially define itself as consensual? Or as Eze says, consensus is just one moment of democracy. I think that democracy has many moments, and consensus is definitely one of them. If a dispensation is to be truly democratic, it could possibly include decisional consensus. For Wiredu decisional consensus also includes maximal

representation, a notion which is elusive for majoritarian democracy. Is it then the case that maximal representation and decisional consensus are the best forms of democracy? This question proceeds from the reality that the true advantages of Wiredu's system lie primarily in how people are maximally represented and how decisions of an inclusive nature are ultimately sought. I suggest that while these two aspects are important and are inalienable to the idea of democracy, there are other equally important aspects that consensus appears unable to take into account. As I have sought to argue above, the two important issues that compromise the efficacy of consensus as a maximal interpretation of democracy have to do with freedoms due to individuals within that system as well as the intended aims of the political structure. Briefly, the problems can be stated as follows. As a result of some core expectations of how individuals are supposed to behave and hold themselves in a consensual dispensation, their freedoms to pursue certain ideas and actions may be deemed inconsistent with the ultimate ethos of the communitarian bedrock of consensus. The most important expectation of individual conduct and interpersonal interaction, which extends to social and political conduct, is one that emphasises finding a common position. Such an emphasis may unduly pressure individuals to sacrifice their true identity, intentions, and preferences in favour of achieving a communally-approved outcome.

Closely connected to this is the second problem wherein the political structure is solely defined in terms of attaining a single goal. The attainment of that single goal is what determines the entire process. All supporting political and social structures seek to foster the values of this ultimate goal. In their own make up and operations, they retain the same type of value at the expense of differing opinion and other avenues of action. Since the system prioritises fostering consensus, its social and political structures may be faced with defects of any system that prioritises unanimity. This is because, ultimately, unanimity of some sort or of some degree has to be attained in order for decisional consensus to be possible. This may not be a bad thing in itself or at a particular moment. However, if such practice is fostered over long periods and it becomes the essential character of democracy, it may induce homogeneity which may prove to be the undoing of a society's creative tapestry. Wiredu's argument is that the maximal definition of democracy is representation of the sort that he has suggested in his formulation of consensus. While the sort of maximal representation he has in mind has some attractions in as far as the question of representation is concerned, Wiredu has to extend his consideration of democracy to cover other important aspects as the place of the individual in his scheme, how the individual's wishes are protected beyond being accorded a residue of difference status and how safe the individual is from harassment if she is at odds with communal commitments. Institutionally, Wiredu has to account for how the apparent discrimination of 'electing' select people

on the basis of hereditary backgrounds must not be seen as such. If there is open competition for power and people can remove those who no longer perform to their satisfaction, that democracy is preferable to one that limits competition for power to some convention about how the right candidate for leadership is obvious to some secretive conclave.

In my final consideration, I seek to evaluate whether social institutions within which consensus operates, actually favour democracy or not. In this consideration, there are only two important institutions that matter. The first is how society is conceived and the second is how interpersonal relations are conceived. Regarding the first, at the risk of unnecessarily repeating myself, Wiredu is committed to a view of communitarianism that prioritises the community over the individual. Such a view has other commitments such as that individual rights are secondary to community rights, whatever the individual's reality is – it is secondary to that of the community, the community is a perduring reality of the self and the community is both a metaphysical and an epistemological foundation of the individual (Menkiti 1984). What is self-evident from this situation is that the community takes precedence over the individual in all aspects of the individual's existence. If the community has both metaphysical and epistemological priority over the individual, then that individual's rights are going to be trampled on, whenever they clash with the community's (Agulanna 2010, 288). Unfortunately, such a clash is inevitable in any political set-up. The communitarianism that Wiredu and Teffo support is of a sort that appears unable to adjudicate fairly over such a clash. It prioritises the community and leaves the individual to suffer the ignominy of being found to be at odds with communal ethos. Politically, the cost is quite high as Wamala suggests that the only avenue that was available to such persons was to physically withdraw from their erstwhile territories, homes, entire lives and identities. Wiredu, as Eze points out, curiously suggests that human interests are at rock-bottom the same. According to Wiredu what is needed is to remove the wrong perception that some individuals have about their true interests and they will all arrive at the same interests. Eze is correct in questioning whether such a rock-bottom identity of interests exists or if it humanly desirable. He is also correct in showing that there are instances in which people who have a morbid desire to oppress others can never be said to have the same interests as those they seek to oppress. The instructive point, however, has to do with how supporters of consensus have conceived the interests of the community as primary and more important to those of any given individual. If this is the case, what then can we say about these social institutions and their relations to democracy? Unless democracy is understood in a collectivist frame, these institutions cannot be said to support any form of democracy. For these social institutions, democracy is a specific form of governance wherein the interests of the people or individuals are collated

into an amalgam of communal interests. Once such interests are collated and known, all individuals are expected to abide by these same expectations.

While I have not laboured to proffer my preferred version of democracy, I suggest that collectivist democracies have had quite a bad reputation on the continent. Wiredu distances his theory from collectivist socialist theories of former leaders of African states. There is a good reason why he does that. Those leaders, their projects and their states turned out to be absolutely undemocratic. Even though the leaders of those states would have welcomed Wiredu's opinion that at the rock-bottom there is an identity of interests, the way they went about animating that rock-bottom identity of interests only shows that such a rock-bottom does not represent what they had imagined. It actually represented the station that many an African country had arrived at. The problem with collectivist ideologies is that they are permanently closed to change and invest their all towards the attainment of their stated ideology.

Unless Wiredu, and supporters of traditional consensus, provide reasons or arguments to show that consensus is not in the mould of collectives of the socialist order, there is no reason to think that the consensual order will not run into the same trouble as African socialism (Jacques 2011). The biggest threat and worry that stems from the doctrine of placing so-called communal interests at the centre of social and political life is that differences are treated in a facile way. For socialists, it was some misunderstanding of African values; for Wiredu, it is the failure to have correct knowledge about one's interests. These two, in practice, amount to the same thing. They amount to stifling the individual's rights in favour of the collective good. This good is taken to pre-exist the individual's own interests and will probably remain more or less the same after the individual's departure.

The second important social aspect to consider when looking at whether consensual social institutions support democracy or not, is how interrelations between individuals are conceived. Consensual dispensations put a high premium on harmonious relations. That is why Wiredu argues that consensus was axiomatic in all adult relations. If all relations are characterised by either a desire for, or the reality of harmony, then all institutions that govern those adult relations will be modelled on sentiments that seek to promote the attainment of that harmony. One way of doing this is to establish or advocate structures that promote either feelings of oneness or feelings of relationality. Social structures are then modelled on the family or, if not, then close kin associations become the most important political unit. Once interrelations are formed on the grounds that there is serious affinity that exists between members of society, then there is an obligation for people to behave in ways that accord with that stated affinity.

Since these institutions are geared towards promoting harmony, they will prioritise or be tailored towards political goals that also promote harmony. Harmony oriented

political institutions are not necessarily democratic. Neither do they have it as their stated aim nor do they seek to foster the requirements of democracy. This does not mean that they are necessarily anti-democratic. What it simply means is that they will be more oriented towards developing systems that seek to grow feelings, at interpersonal levels of oneness, and will advocate the development of institutions that promote social and political cohesion. Political cohesion, in this way, may range from democracy by consensus and socialist-inspired regimes right up to some other benevolent form of dictatorship.

I admit that my criticism has been largely restricted to the traditional outlook of consensus in traditional societies as described by Wiredu and Wamala. However, I am convinced that these problems will arise for any modernised apparatus of consensus as long as the basic premise on which the whole ideology of consensus is built does not change (see Agbakoba 2009, 572–575). The fundamental idea that has to change or that needs to be clarified is how the individual is allowed to exercise her freedoms within a political system that is thoroughgoing communitarian. And the communitarianism that Wiredu thinks appropriate is of a radical form as espoused by Menkiti. Such communitarianism does not afford the individual any rights unless those rights are understood as secondary to the community's. Secondly, political institutions that are built on that basic premise of communitarianism overriding the individual may just as well have problems of their own. We no longer believe that the community is of such a great significance that the individual's own concerns must be politically sacrificed in favour of communitarian political reality. Wiredu has to address the inherent tensions that exist in the proper conception of the relationship between the individual and the community. If he sorts out that relationship, with due attention to the complexities of these two realities, he may be forced to reckon with some instances of consensus which are largely dissonant with the broad requirements of democracy.

Conclusion

As already noted, Wiredu (2001) correctly states that democracy is easy to define but hard to interpret. What I have sought to do is to offer a maximal interpretation of democracy. I have sought to advance what I think are some basic inalienable features of democracy which any democratic system must fulfil in order to count as democratic. These features encompass both individual needs as well as the basic arrangement of social and political institutions. I have argued that while it is easy for any system to brand itself as democratic, there are basic expectations that go with that identification. A clear advantage that is retained by a consensual system is that it satisfies what Wiredu characterises as maximal representation. However, there are

serious issues that consensus has to overcome in respect of how its political institutions are tailored in order for them to be maximally democratic. The same extends to how notions of individuals' freedoms are to be conceived under this dispensation.

4

Political parties in consensus

Introduction

In this chapter I seek to achieve two things. Firstly, I seek to evaluate the coherence of consensus as a non-party polity through Wiredu's (2001) $party_1$, $party_2$ and $party_3$ distinctions. In this respect I particularly aim to establish whether Wiredu's suggested distinctions actually add any value to the claimed non-party status of consensus. My investigation seeks to establish whether the notions of $party_1$, $party_2$ and $party_3$ are philosophically sound to account for the non-party status of consensus. Secondly, I seek to investigate whether the conception of consensus as a non-party polity is sufficiently dissimilar from Africa's one-party regimes to escape the charge of one-party tyranny. Opponents of consensus have pointed out that its non-party description retains similar features to Africa's repressive one-party regimes. Supporters of consensus have argued against such a reading, identifying it as a mischaracterisation of the true nature of consensus. Further, in all his writings, Wiredu has maintained that the Akan traditional system would not brook a one-party polity. For his part, and to his credit, he does not bemoan the death of one-party regimes.

If the investigation yields a negative finding for consensus, the implications could be quite debilitating for its claimed viability. It could be claimed that its idea of non-party is based on unsustainable philosophical claims. If it is the case that the non-party status of consensus cannot be defended philosophically, or cannot draw sufficient justification from philosophical considerations alone, then it is just an anachronistic practice from the past that may have no prospect of inspiring the future of African polity. If it were also to be shown that there is no difference between non-party and one-party, then the stated advantages of consensus would disappear as the misdeeds of one-party tyrannies are well-known. Anything one-party rulers ever proclaimed to be democratic or to be for the people was a mere veneer of tyranny. I am convinced that consensus has some serious questions to answer in respect of both these considerations. As a traditionally inspired system or one whose articulation is solely traced to antecedent practice, its supporters have not done much in seeking to

advance its social and political outlook in modern-day Africa. Secondly, besides the vigorous protestations that there is a difference between a non-party and a one-party polity, not much has been done in terms of argument to demonstrate wherein exactly that difference lies. In the traditional antecedent, it goes without saying, that there were no political parties so both systems can legitimately claim to be borne from the same source and derive their inspiration from the same place. Unless supporters of consensus show where the merit of the difference in both systems lay, it would not be enough to assert the obvious by insisting on the shortcomings of a one-party system. There has to be an argument in support of the non-party variant which is either responsive to current situations or one that begins to project itself with more detail into the future of African polities.

I, therefore, proceed cautiously by looking at the problems which supporters of consensus claim natural to party politics. This is followed by Wiredu's outline of consensus as a non-party polity that abhors $party_{1,3}$ while embracing characteristics of $party_1$ in pursuit of being $party_2$ to decision-making. I then proceed to evaluate the coherence and success of non-party polity as advanced by Wiredu. This is followed by a comparison of non-party with one-party. I conclude by offering the problems that consensus is faced with as a polity that abhors party based politics.

Problems with political parties

Supporters of consensus do not only see its non-party as an advantage over majoritarian party polity, but they also identify certain weaknesses as inherent in a party-based system. I will briefly repeat the problems associated with parties that I have presented so far. It is claimed that all party systems tend to promote entrenching divisions between those competing for votes by its winner takes all attitude (Wiredu 1997; 2001) Effectively, there is no room for consulting with or accommodating the losers (Bell and Metz 2012). From this, the opposition becomes disenchanted and begins to oppose for the sake of opposing. In the USA, the process of campaigning for votes is not only expensive, but its practice of negative campaigning has almost been accepted as norm (Wiredu 2001, 228). In Africa, vote buying and killing along party affiliations is unfortunately all too real (Wiredu 1997).

Another weakness of party politics is that by virtue of the fact that representatives belong to a particular party, their loyalties are more likely to be towards their respective parties than the people they are supposed to represent. Political parties are arranged in such a manner, and with the sole purpose, to extend their hold on power.

> As a result political life becomes a perpetual struggle for power among political parties. Now, if power corrupts, the quest for power also corrupts. And in the inclemencies of that struggle, not only objectivity in discussion or fairness in

> human relations, but also the very chance of participation in political decision-making is lost. In Africa, human life is also lost, sometimes in numbers too grievous to recount. (Wiredu 2001, 232)

Further, Wiredu asks if it is not preferable to develop a system that does not breed so much tension. Although Wiredu concedes that government by consent has a high moral value, he maintains that it does not have to necessarily involve representation. However, in the modern world, he notes, democratic states must have representation as this is the only link that citizens have to government and it is the beginning of citizens' input to decision-making. This, then, makes parties indispensable as they have become the single vehicle of expression of citizens' wishes and representation.

However, for Wiredu, citizens may be left out of this process for three reasons: firstly, the representative may not be the one that the citizen voted for; secondly, there could well be no opportunity for the citizen to let her feelings be known to the representative; and thirdly, the citizen's views may be ignored especially if she belongs to a defeated party (2001, 232). In addition, Wiredu holds that either political convention or the constitution gives parties a dominant role in this type of polity. This role, in turn, determines the character of these parties as political organisations. He argues that these parties become instruments of the acquisition and retention of power. That is their single objective which colours their internal characteristics and external habits such that they concentrate on the goal of pursuing power successfully.

> Internally, power structures are built around personages in anticipation of power. Externally, mechanisms of propaganda are put in place for securing the support of the electorate and gaining advantages over rival parties by all necessary artifices. The quest for power can easily excite passions, and this is why rational dialogue does not come easily in the relationship among political parties. (2001, 234–235)

Effectively, Wiredu's complaint is that under the majoritarian dispensation political parties exist to acquire power and they will do everything they can to acquire that power. They have no other objective both for their existence and aim besides acquisition and retention of power. Power becomes the end that they pursue and it is the all that they must get. In the process, they do not hesitate to employ crude and unscrupulous tactics to achieve those ends.

After all, the system, which justifies their existence and operation, does seem to encourage both their internal identification and external interactions. But as stated above, power has a tendency to corrupt and the more it is pursued the greater the likelihood that those who pursue it will also employ corrupt means to gain it and eventually be corrupted by it. I may add that the complaint can be extended to claim that if parties exist first to acquire as much power as possible, they are likely to expend

all their energies on that goal, that when they eventually attain it, they have no energy for anything else besides, perhaps, to enjoy the spoils of power. In such a scenario, the victorious party is unable to reconcile itself with any other goal that may advance the general good of all humanity under their jurisdiction. Further, with passions having been excited, it becomes nigh impossible for the victorious party to hear dissenting voices or voices that seek to counsel those in power. Having invested their energies in winning power, which also means vanquishing competitors, the victors will not be motivated or have the need to hear what other political participants have to say. Most of this attitude or behaviour proceeds from the confidence that is created by the knowledge that the party in power are in effect the winners. Winners, we could say, always seek to enjoy their victory without the inconvenience of considering what the losers have to say or feel about the victory.

Wiredu notes that in defence of majoritarian democracy, it can be claimed that despite these weaknesses this is the best system as there is none that is more practicable. However, he retorts that such a response would hardly

> …impress any African who belongs to an ethnic group with a pre-colonial history of government by consensus. Nor, actually, should it impress too many people from other parts of the world, for the consensual approach in decision-making in political as well as non-political contexts is known in other parts of the world too. Most interestingly, there are contemporary approximations to a consensual polity in continental Europe, notably in Switzerland and Belgium that should go some way toward dissipating the impression that in the way of democracy there is something ineluctable about the majoritarian system in the political life of a modern industrialised state. Conversely, it should discourage the idea that a consensual system of politics is only possible for 'simple', pre-industrial, societies. (2001, 233)

Wiredu charges that the notion that views democracy as consent of the majority is merely fixation with the Anglo-American model. He claims that if liberated from fixation with this model it will be possible to develop a system that is even radically more consensual than the Swiss model. 'As far as contemporary Africa is concerned, such a thought enterprise has quite a life-and-death urgency. Fewer things are clearer about Africa in recent times than that the majoritarian democracies transplanted there, sometimes with the encouragement of external economic well-wishers, are in many cases, uniquely unsuitable' (2001, 233). I think Wiredu's complaint can be seen as comprising two crucial points. The first is that government by consent should not only be interpreted as involving representation of the sort that majoritarian democracy retains. There are other alternatives that capture representation better than majoritarianism. Secondly, the form and practice of majoritarian democracy has been imposed on the African continent and this forced imposition has not always

been successful. For Wiredu, the particular problem with this system in Africa is that ethnic stratification keeps many ethnic groups marginalised which is good for neither humanity nor stability. He argues that if a political system were developed that guaranteed making all ethnic groups feel a sense of political belonging, in all African states, that would go a long way towards removing impediments to peace and development. He suggests that consensus could be such a system.

In Africa, Wiredu (1997) claims, the problem of keeping one ethnic group in power leads to other groups being deprived of and denied developmental plans and projects. This is particularly so in the case where those who are voted into power remember those constituencies that did not vote for them. They then repay them by skipping their developmental needs as well as whatever legitimate expectations they might have of their governments. Such discrimination does not only lead to disaffection and alienation but it might lead to those who are discriminated against taking up extra-legal options to register their political aspirations.

All these problems and their consequences are caused by the existence of parties whose sole goal and purpose of existence is basic accumulation of power. If that purpose and goal is legitimised, then the problems can only become deeply entrenched. For Wiredu, these weaknesses are undesirable and unavoidable. In the place of the system that authors these weaknesses, he suggests that we should seriously consider an alternative that does not only avoid the birth of these weaknesses but has distinct advantages over majoritarianism.

To my mind, the most important question that must be asked is whether or not it matters for a polity to have political parties in order for it to qualify as a democracy. Put differently, the question can be stated as follows: do political parties serve a necessary and unavoidable role in adjudging whether a polity is democratic or not. As I indicated above, the answer to this question depends on how we choose to understand what the function of democracy is. I suggest that the function of democracy is quite different from its definition. When we talk of the function of democracy, we are more or less keeping with Wiredu's notion of interpreting democracy. If we understand the function of democracy to be primarily uniting the people or enabling the reaching of widely accepted decisions, then we could say democracy does not necessarily have to retain political parties in its essential make-up. In keeping with Eze (1997), if we understand that the *raison d'être* of democracy is the successful management of ever-existing differences, then the most legitimate expression of those differences as well as any possibility of their successful management is to be found in legitimised party politics. If, by nature, humans are predisposed to have differences, then it is perfectly legitimate that room is created for their legitimate expression of those differences as well as their pursuit. This claim, as we see from Eze, is radically different from Wiredu's position that at the rock-bottom there is an identity of interests and all it

takes is right knowledge to remove ignorance about that shared identity of interests.

This is no longer just a political question about the nature, purpose and use of political parties but it now becomes a question of metaphysics. It is now a question of how we choose to view human interests, how we think humans understand their own interests, and most importantly what value they place on those interests. While it is true that political parties may be largely responsible for political discord, such discord, I suggest, is indicative of the nature of human beings. If human beings were hard wired not to be intransigent, but to seek each other out and find that rock-bottom identity of interests, it would be the case that even when given the opportunity to become members of political parties, they would naturally avoid the excesses that are associated with parties. I believe this is why Wiredu concedes that even in traditional consensual systems, there were bound to be mortal differences. This possibility occurs in a situation in which consensus was axiomatic in all adult relations, according to Wiredu. In my view, it could be the case that political parties only become vehicles that express the excesses of human beings that are already there. These excesses have the potential of being expressed in different ways but, as Wiredu claims, supporters of majoritarianism could argue that there is just no better system than what majoritarian politics offers. However, I am unable to pursue this point in detail. What is absolutely essential is to devise successful ways of managing those differences. This requirement, however, is not the maximal interpretation of democracy. It only works in tandem with other requirements as specified in the previous chapter.

Consensus as a non-party polity

Let me leave the detour in the last paragraph and return to the real issue at hand. The question I wish to address in this section is the philosophical explanation forwarded by Wiredu which seeks to show the sense in which consensus is a non-party polity as well as, possibly, the difference between consensus as a non-party polity and a one-party polity. I will start by outlining Wiredu's notion of a non-party polity and end by expressing my own disquiet with the argument he has proposed as evidence of how consensus is to be understood as a non-party polity.

In a number of places, Wiredu (1996, 1997, 2001, 2011) maintains that consensus is a non-party polity. At the same time he maintains that consensus is a democratic system. In his dismissal of both voting, and political parties, he holds that 'fundamentally, it follows, as a conceptual consideration, that democracy in itself, does not necessarily even require elections, multiparty or otherwise' (2001, 230). In reference to representation which he concedes to be a cornerstone of modern understanding of democracy, he writes: 'At issue in these discussions are not any internal changes in the mechanism of representation, as in the idea of proportional

representation, but a substantially different cast of polity. The fundamental thought is that a consensual approach to statecraft is incompatible with the party system' (1996, 8). He is sure to immediately distance consensus as a non-party polity from the one-party system which he condemns as 'a more drastic negation of the ideal of consensus than the multiparty system' (1996, 8). Although his rejection of the party system largely relies on the workability of consensus as a non-party polity in the traditional Akan system, he at least provides a detailed outline of the theoretical basis of consensus as a non-party polity. He does so in his 2001 article aptly entitled 'Democracy by Consensus: Some Conceptual Considerations.'

Wiredu argues that a distinction must be made between consensus on normative and cognitive issues, and consensus on issues of policy. He identifies the former as cognitive and normative consensus and the latter decisional consensus (2001, 235). With the first, he claims, it is the case that consensus is held to a high degree, such as some consensus existing in the scientific community. This would also include decisions about what ought to be done, such as that in America a man ought to marry one wife. Here the game is of numbers ranging from near unanimity to high agreement. This is not always the case with decisional consensus. With decisional consensus, though it involves numbers, there is always likelihood that there will be differing opinions on what shall be done, barring instant unanimity. He states that there are four possible options to this reality. The first possibility is to stay deadlocked, eventually proceeding by compromise as either the majority or minority wishes; the second is dictatorship; the third is majoritarian democracy; and the fourth is consensus which is not widely celebrated because of its perceived difficulty:

> What seems to make it difficult is that it presupposes a willing suspension of disbelief. In a situation in which none of a given set of competing agenda recommends itself to all it is possible, through the targeted pruning of each, to obtain a workable compromise, something not believed by any to be, objectively, what *ought* to be done, but acknowledged by all to be what *is* to be done. (2001, 236)

Wiredu urges noting three things. The first is that it is not possible to have a compromise of beliefs about what ought to be done. There is no one who can ever say that they believe A but B ought to be done. While people cannot be forced to change their cognitive position, reasoned persuasion might work, in Wiredu's view:

> What we can legitimately do is to try to change their beliefs with argument and evidence. It follows that the willing suspension of belief previously mentioned is not any sort of suppression of belief. This means, then, that the consensus that may be brought about by compromise, that is, decisional consensus, differs greatly from the type of consensus that appertains to normative and cognitive issues. (2001, 237)

The second thing is that rational dialogue is crucial to attaining consensus. A great requirement of this dialogue is the realisation by all parties involved that they will not always manage to attain their desires. This, ultimately, involves compromise amongst all parties so that there is no permanence of a majority or minority and that the final decision taken belongs to all. The third aspect is that all parties in group deliberations that produce consensus are party to the decision. This differs sharply from majoritarianism where the decision of one party, mostly the majority party, carries the day.

Wiredu then distinguishes the three senses in which he uses the term party. The first refers to an individual or individuals with a particular concern or issue they wish to pursue. The second refers to what he calls an adjectival use which means being a participant in a decision-making process. The third refers to the political sense 'in which a party is a group of people, basically of like mind, organised with the aim of winning governmental power. (We will use numerical subscripts to track the differences)' (2001, 238). Restricting himself to political decision-making, Wiredu maintains that consensus could be obtained. Further, he holds, if consensus was to be adopted as the guiding principle of a government's decision-making, then 'the distinction between government and opposition would lose its raison d'être. If all parties_1 are party_2 to the decision, there is nothing to oppose and no need of a party_3 to do the opposing' (2001, 237). To accurately capture Wiredu's thinking on the operations of the notion of party in a consensual dispensation, I will quote him at length. Immediately after the quote above he writes:

> On the other hand, there will always be parties_1 wanting to be party_2 to decisions that affect them. From this standpoint, a party_1 is an association of citizens interested in promoting preferred political ideas and policies. Any one (sic) who tries to take liberties with the citizen's right to take liberties with the citizen's right to form or belong to a party_1 of his choice is trifling with one of the most fundamental of human rights, namely, the right of free expression, association being a form of expression. In a consensual dispensation, then, there will be parties_1 but no parties_3. Obviously, a set of political conventions or constitutional provisions that envisages a consensual system of politics will not include a rule that mandates that the party_3 that is victorious at the polls gets into governmental power to the exclusion, normally of other parties_3, since there will be no such parties in that system. But since, there will be parties_1 in the given state, it will not be a non-party_1 state. The advocacy of a consensual polity, then, is the advocacy of a non-party_3 form of government but not a non-party_1 type of state. The crucial factor here is the absence of the rule of the sectional appropriation of power. (2001, 239)

Wiredu then proceeds to condemn both the system of governance as well the resultant parties_3 produced by such a system. I apologise for these long quotes but

I have to provide them as they are, lest I be accused of misrepresenting his position in my analysis. The condemnation of both the political system and its product the parties$_3$ that compete for power goes thus:

> The power of this rule, which invests triumphant parties$_3$ with the prerogative of forming the government, is well nigh magical. It is the root of virtually all the evils of party$_3$ politics. It is this that makes general elections into life-and-death struggles among contending parties$_3$. Dispensing with it will result in the radical transformation of existing parties$_3$. They will cease to be machines for the conquest of power. Their multi-facetted quest for money to lubricate the machine will subside. The mutual hostility among parties$_3$ too will most certainly abate. With these, one can expect an increase in the civility of political discussions and an upgrade in the sensibilities of political leaders. It should now be clear why exhortations to moral rectitude in party$_3$ political life, however eloquent, will avail nothing within the structure of the majoritarian system. The allure of sectional power is stronger than the power of words. (2001, 239)

Wiredu then asks if the absence of parties will not induce apathy among the electorate. His response is that once the exuberance that is caused by political party affiliation is gone, together with parties$_3$, then people will be able to engage with issues that affect them in a rational manner. The evidence for this assertion, according to Wiredu, is to be found in the dedicated manner in which people fervently participate in their local governments. At that level, people see the real effect of policy on their lives. Further, he holds, at that level the influence of political parties is minimal unless the system is run by a totalitarian regime. He thus forcefully rejects the possibility of apathy ever occurring under a consensual dispensation. Quite to the contrary, the problem lies elsewhere as he writes:

> In fact, the likeliest source of trouble might be ambitious and ingenious power seekers who might scheme to create a *de facto* one party$_{1,3}$ state (note the double subscripts) under the disguise of a no-party rhetoric. A de facto one-party$_{1,3}$ situation would exist if one party$_1$ is allowed to function and flourish while all others are proscribed on (inevitably) false accusations of gross wrongdoing. Ostensibly, everyone would be entitled to build or belong to a party$_1$ of his or her own choice, but observably, only one party$_1$ would be in existence. In such a case, only that one party$_1$ could possibly have ambitions of governmental power. It would thus become, in reality, as distinct from legality, the party$_3$ in power and the only one with such an opportunity in the state. And this would be notwithstanding profuse proclamations of a non-party$_3$ dispensation on the part of the power seekers behind these hypothetical machinations. (2001, 240)

He then proceeds to outline the guiding principles for a non-party$_3$ system. The first and most obvious principle is that decisions are to be made by consensus. This, for Wiredu, will not mean much to the rest of the population unless the issues at

hand are made as accessible as possible. While it is the case that in most parts of Africa the official language is English or French or Portuguese, Wiredu notes that the majority of the population is not literate in these languages. He suggests that this impediment could be overcome once requisite information is provided in vernacular language. This leads to the second principle which is that the press must be free as well as informative and educative without harassment from the politicians, which in his view is all too common. He notes that in Africa the free press is under-resourced, while government controlled press has not always promoted political education or free expression. 'As a rule, the categorical imperative instituted for such newspapers is, act always in such a way as to let the truth be known only when it is to the advantage of the government or the resident dictator, otherwise do your best to shield it from the public gaze' (2001, 241). He also notes that the conditions of service in the public press are not good enough to attract the best personnel. Thus not only does he condemn its under-resourced nature but he also criticises it for having, in some instances, involuntarily promoted low-level thinking. He suggests, as a solution, that the press be state funded but not state owned. This will ensure state independence in the same manner that universities and the judiciary, which are state funded, have succeeded in remaining independent, at least in some parts of Africa. According to Wiredu,

> If these conditions are satisfied, a one party$_{1,3}$ system by the stratagem noted above would be hard to contrive. It would be but child's play for a free and highly educated press to unmask the one party$_{1,3}$ chicanery. And the resources of civil society, which would, by hypothesis, have free expression, would then kick in even more forcefully than in the recent successful democracy struggles in Africa. (2001, 242)

Further, he holds that institutions such as the judiciary, trade unions and universities would have a crucial role to play in non-party$_3$ politics as they would serve as centres of independent thought. In noting that in the recent past these civil society organisations have demonstrated a non-partisan attitude that has even taken dictators by surprise, such a role, he maintains, is a continuation with the role played by civil society in traditional African polities. He adds that if it were to be the case that elections could never be avoided in modern representative democracies, civil societies could 'become valuable sources of representation in addition to the electoral constituencies, as we now know them. Those civil organisations might be assigned some agreed number of representatives in the governing body. This plan should raise the probability of any given individual being in at least one large voting group' (2001, 243–244). He ends by arguing that decentralisation gives a solid meaning to representation. Since it is at the local level where people meaningfully participate in affairs that affect them, it is also there that the link with civil society is most palpable. While Wiredu maintains

that consensus is structurally different from, and to be preferred to majoritarianism, with all its evils, he makes a telling concession when he writes:

> By no stretch of the imagination can those traditional African societies that in historical times operated a consensual polity be called paradigms of unbroken harmony. Neither can one suppose that a consensual system can be devised in the foreseeable future to end all political evils. Actually, it may be well that government in itself is an evil, necessary only for the time being. Perhaps all we may hope for is the elimination of the gross blemishes of majoritarian democracy that in post-colonial Africa have been so utterly crippling in their effects. (2001, 243–244)

I have some serious reservations about the foregoing analysis provided by Wiredu. I am convinced that the whole consensual edifice is sure going to collapse when we bring the notion of non-party polity under the scrutiny I suggest here. But before looking at the worries I have about the manner in which Wiredu has formulated his notion of non-party as represented by the subscripts he has given, I wish to start from the last quote above. Effectively, Wiredu has conceded that political evils will always be present whenever humans engage in politics. The great thing we can try to do is to minimise the occurrence of evils we naturally associate with politics or governance. For Wiredu, that means only one thing, particularly on the African continent. It means eliminating the evils that have been brought by majoritarian politics. These evils are properly encapsulated in the excesses of political parties both in their internal formation as well as their external relations. In particular, the last sentence in the quote above shows either Wiredu's complete displeasure in majoritarianism or his dissatisfaction based on some knowledge or experience he has. The displeasure or knowledge and experience that Wiredu has must be stated in comparison to other systems of governance. There are two obvious candidates. The first is the system of one-party polity as advocated by African socialists. The second is consensual democracy. If it is the case that majoritarianism, by virtue of historical juxtaposition, can be compared to one-party polities as well as consensus, a necessary question is whether majoritarianism is as bad as Wiredu states it to be. Alternatively, we could ask if majoritarianism is the worst of these three polities. These questions have to be posed in light of the suspicion that it could well be fact that government is in itself an evil. Interestingly, Wiredu adds that it is possibly an evil 'necessary only for the time being.' I cannot help but wonder which time frame he is referring to as the time being.

I wish to address the alleged crippling effects of multiparty politics. I suggest that in order to successfully evaluate those effects a distinction must be made between the crippling effects of a system and the crippling behaviour of people within a system. We start by noting that Wiredu's actual interpretation of democracy is limited to the

single question of representation. He stridently condemns majoritarianism for failing to satisfy the maximal requirement of representation. Attached to this, are other failures such as unbridled competition for power leading to the marginalisation of the defeated. His argument against majoritarianism, particularly its evils, is sustained through these two major concerns. The question is whether these weaknesses have been utterly crippling for Africa or there have been other factors that have contributed to the crippling of Africa. Obviously, Wiredu thinks that these crippling effects have been caused by majoritarian multiparty democracy. He does not seem to entertain the idea that any number of factors could have worked against multiparty politics. I suggest that the actual crippling effects on the political form of Africa may have to do with other things save sole weaknesses of multiparty democracy. This is not to be taken to mean that multiparty democracy has not contributed anything at all to the decimation of the integrity of political systems. It has, but only in sync with other factors. The distinction between the system and the people who use the system is to be understood as follows; in Africa, multiparty democracy has yet to mature. By making a reference to maturity of a system I wish to emphasise the way in which the system has been abused to further the ends of those who inherently have a need to retain power for their nefarious ends. Wiredu admits that the transition from one-party rule to multiparty systems was manipulated by erstwhile dictators who suddenly sprung up as democrats. However, these dictators soon learned the rules of the game and succeeded in hoodwinking international foreign bodies into accepting them as if they had gone through a genuine transformation from one party to multiparty. They simply morphed themselves into apparent adherents of the multiparty system. The reality was that it was a system that they never believed in, a system that they did not want to see succeed, and a system to all intents and purposes, they were bent on using for their own ends. Let us take, for instance, the issue of ethnic division which is made all sharper in multiparty democracy. Wiredu has correctly assessed the problem of ethnic majority versus ethnic minority as the author of some discontent. The discontent arises when, by virtue of being an ethnic minority, some sections of the population are perpetually confined to opposition or altogether excluded from political power. This, as correctly observed by Wiredu, can lead to the minority resorting to extra-judicial means to register their political unhappiness. However, a question we must ask is whether multiparty politics is solely responsible for ethnic divisions that we see in politics. The question becomes what precedes the other; multiparty politics or ethnic division. I think the latter precedes the former. While the former might enable a perfect expression of ethnic discrimination and favouritism, it cannot be held as structurally pre-disposed to giving rise to such habits. There is nothing in multiparty democracy that enjoins either its structure or practice to be essentially predisposed to giving rise to ethnic-centred problems.

Such problems would either have always been part of the social fabric or would be emphasised for political opportunism.

Another factor to consider is what is responsible for the entrenchment of difference along party lines, difference which Wiredu has characterised as irreconcilable. While it is true that such entrenchment is both undesirable and is sharply raised in multiparty systems, there is another factor to be considered. Just as in consensus, people, under the majoritarian dispensation, have some readiness to co-operate if there is sufficient reason for that co-operation. They also have reason to entrench difference if there is sufficient reason for the entrenchment of that difference. While co-operation or entrenchment of difference may be explained in terms of social structures and what is immanent between social players, it is my argument that there is nothing, structurally, in majoritarianism that prioritises entrenchment of difference. While it is true that positions and affiliations are fixed, it is equally true that negotiations aimed at arriving at less permanent fixations may also be initiated and seen through by political parties. The history of humanity, in multiparty democracies, testifies to that possibility. I suggest that what is responsible for the entrenchment of difference could be a factor that has little to do with multiparty majoritarianism. When differences are entrenched, I think, there will always be people who will benefit from those differences. This benefit may come in various ways but the most important consideration will be to see how particularly positioned people in the multiparty system are likely to benefit from the maintenance of irreconcilable differences. The maintenance of difference as a problem, may either be traced to the problematic of politics in general or the corruptive nature of power. Those in power have a real interest in keeping certain people out of power and if there is a way of identifying them as perpetual enemies, that will be used as an instrument of keeping power.

Yet another factor has to do with how majoritarianism is characterised as peculiarly favouring or encouraging fostering of some uncouth behaviour such as vote-buying, low quality decisional debates, and party loyalty. We could also add to this list any other problem we think distinct to majoritarianism. My suggestion is that the most that can be said about these problems is that they are political problems. While my point does not seek to deny that there are problems that are felt or seen more acutely in a multiparty system than in any other polity, we must be careful in our delineation of the nature of the problem. What we must not end up with is an insistence on the nature of the problem that confines it to a particular political system without understanding the true origin of that problem. The true origins of any set of political problems that are attendant to a system have largely to do with the nature of human beings as opposed to the nature of the system. Let us return to Wiredu's claim that humans by nature tend to end up appreciating their rock-bottom identity of interests. Not only is this an enabler of consensus to be attained, but it is a specific

statement about the nature of humans, that they have the same sorts of interests, and that once the appearance of difference is removed, they will be able to see the their shared interests. As Eze (1997), argues, for Wiredu (1997), what it takes for the removal of those perceptions is right knowledge. But the relationship between right knowledge leading to right action is intractable in philosophy. Political problems, I propose, are human problems, born of facts about the human constitution and the ordinary nature of humans as ever competitive entities that have reason to clash and exacerbate those clashes. Wiredu cannot but admit this point. For he points out that even deadly conflicts were possible in consensus. What made consensus work, was the willingness of participants to suspend their differences in favour of a more comprehensive solution that took into account all their needs. What can be said about the social and political structure of traditional consensus is that it left participants with no practical option except to co-operate to a large degree. While Wiredu points to the possibility of complaining about the tyranny of the majority, in a multiparty system, it is also equally possible to complain about the tyranny of consensus in a consensual dispensation. The tyranny of such a system is seen in that it forces people to compromise without providing alternative avenues for venting their differences. The promise that participants in consensus were not inclined to coalesce around fixed alignments of difference, since there were no fixed pockets of interests, is merely psychologically soothing. It is as soothing as the promise that the opposition stands a good chance to be the next majority government. Both promises merely keep political participants from resorting to extra-judicial means to assuage their unrealised political aspirations.

My point, in keeping with Eze, is that human beings, by their nature, are always likely to have unrealised political aspirations which lead to some degree of frustration. Dealing with those frustrations may differ from one political system to the next. The point is not so much that under a consensual dispensation those frustrations are any less than in majoritarian politics. Rather, the point is that whatever system is put in place, it will have to find a successful way of managing differences that have a distinct possibility of resulting in frustration. One system may choose to deal with these differences by pointing to legitimised structures of parties; another may deal with them by asserting the identity of interests and how no interests are dominant, etc. At the bottom of this, whatever system we conceive, essentially, it seeks to successfully manage already ever-existing differences among would-be political players.

While Wiredu may respond by pointing out that he agrees with my assertion that any political system is primarily devised for purposes of dealing with differences, he could argue that the majoritarian multiparty system is the most ill-equipped of all polities to successfully adjudicate over differences. He could point out that the multiparty system does not in actual fact deal with differences successfully. On the

contrary, he could argue that what majoritarianism does, is merely to exacerbate these differences to a point of intractable difference. While I am willing to grant Wiredu this kind of objection, I think the real issue that has to be apprehended and dealt with is not really about what a system does with humanity's predisposition to have differences. Wiredu's charge, thus far, against majoritarian democracy has been that, or at the very least it has sounded as if it is alleging, that majoritarianism's biggest problem is that it authors the entrenchment of difference. However, that is just one possible view. Another view, following Eze (1997), would be that majoritarianism recognises the fact of the existence of differences. It then tries to find ways of managing those differences successfully.

One way of managing those differences successfully is by arranging those differences into clear and identifiable sectarian interests. The aim of such an arrangement is meant to ensure that the differences are known and have a legitimate manner of being vented, and that there are mechanisms in place that seek to deliberate and balance those differences. I may add that majoritarianism may even claim to be the most open polity that seeks to arrange differences in a publicly known manner with publicly known rules of engagement. What I think Wiredu does not say, but heavily insinuates, is that whenever there is an instance of majoritarianism, there will be entrenchment of difference along irreconcilable lines. And wherever there is consensus, edges will be smoothed over with the final result being that there is a restoration of goodwill that would have formerly been lost. What is most perplexing is that he does not specify precisely what is responsible for the loss of that goodwill. It could be the case that goodwill is lost as a result of infractions that occur during the course of human interaction or perhaps that it is guaranteed that goodwill must be lost on account of humans being human. But whatever the case is, Wiredu is of the view that consensus is better equipped to deal with these differences. That could be the case, but it could also be the case that in dealing with differences in the way Wiredu suggests, consensus also gives rise to another set of problems that are associated with the tyranny of maintaining communal harmony. This problem is perfectly articulated by Michael Onyebuchi Eze who in the introduction of his essay writes:

> Many Africanist writers have projected a peculiar understanding of African communitarianism which advances a priority of the community over the individual. In this essay, while I do not debunk the role of the community in facilitating the good of the individual, the community in my view, is not prior to the individual and the latter does not pre-exist the community. The individual and the community are not radically opposed in the sense of priority but engaged in a contemporaneous formation. Key in understanding such contemporaneity is a discussion of the politics of common good which many Africanist writers have equated with consensus. Consensus, in my view

> does not give an adequate account of the praxis of common good in African Communitarianism. Consensus absorbs multiple viewpoints through a totalitarian uniformity. (2008, 387)

I do not wish to enter into an extended discussion of the relationship between the individual and the community, as I have extensively done so in my previous work (Matolino 2014). However, what I wish to do here is to emphasise the link that exists between an extreme view of community, in relation to the individual, with consensus. Although Wiredu does not give a lengthy treatise on the appropriate relationship between the individual and the community, he approves of Menkiti's (1984) very extreme view. This scheme, as Eze (2008) correctly points out, prioritises the community over the individual and implores the individual to live out a common good that favours the reality of the community. It, therefore, if Eze (2008) is correct, becomes easy to see why Wiredu believes in consensus. He believes in consensus primarily because it is linked to some other belief he has; the priority of the community over the individual. If that is the case, then the viability of consensus is strictly restricted to those communities that understand individuals to be secondary to the communal good. As Eze (2008) argues, the individual's own good is restricted by the communal good and the individual can only find affirmation of her own identity through the reality of the community.

There are two simple but very crucial points to make here. The first is that consensus could just as well be a specific polity that is grounded on communal mores. In the absence of such communal mores, which is fraught with its own tyrannical possibilities, consensus may not obtain. Consensus thrives only when specific conditions of prioritising communality are met. These conditions have a tendency to give a short thrift to human rights (Fayemi 2010) and fail to outline how justice will be secured in multi-ethnic societies where the moral authority of traditional societies has largely disappeared (Oladipo 2014). Further, there is an intractable link between facts of communality and the chances of consensus being a success. In instances where the community is not as communalistic as traditional societies are, in Africa in any case, the likelihood of consensus retaining the advantages Wiredu envisions, is simply not real. The second point is that the extreme view of the community that is defended by supporters of consensus is not philosophically defensible. Gyekye (1997), Ahiauzu (2011), Famakinwa (2010) and (Matolino 2014) have in different ways shown that the extreme view of communitarianism is fraught with insurmountable philosophical problems. These problems render traditional communitarianism an ineffectual basis on which to build a political theory that will serve any use to the realities of multiethnic modern African societies. I do not want to make much out of the fact of the obsoleteness of extreme communitarian mores. But the fact remains that in all the descriptions given above, about how consensus worked, they were very

specific to mono-ethnic kingdoms that did not know any meaning of differentiated existence on various front, including ethnic diversity.

While it is fair to note that Wiredu is critical if not impatient with one-party regimes, he does not seem to condemn their excesses with the same strength he reserves for majoritarianism. It could be the case that he considers the failures of one-party systems to be so blatant that they do not require any lengthy condemnation. Or it could be the case that he thinks that his brief condemnation of one-party systems suffices. What is absent, though, in Wiredu's rejection of both one-party systems and multiparty systems, on the African continent, is an analysis of how these systems could have had a very negative influence on each other. What is missing in Wiredu's analysis is how the transformation from one-party state to democracy could have possibly injured any chances of success that multiparty democracy could have had on the continent. Like I suggested above, which is an idea from Wiredu, former one-man dictators learned the rules of multiparty democracy very quickly. They learned these rules not out of love for multiparty democracy and certainly not out of some conviction they had about the promises that this system held. They learned the tricks of multiparty democracy simply to survive the pressure that was made to bear on them from the need to genuinely democratise. However, what then followed was not a genuine democratic process but a façade. The façade took very unfortunate turns, as the end was the survival of one strong man. It is not entirely implausible to imagine that the strong man went out of his way to create the impression that the good old days, when there was no opposition were much better for stability and national coherence, than the recently introduced multiparty system. History is awash with enemies of the state being found everywhere having 'met' deserved justice. What was at work was not so much the failure of majoritarian democracy but the big man's nostalgia for days when he was unchallenged and his deliberate fostering of chaos to make himself indispensable to the political system of the country.

Not only did majoritarian democracy get ushered into the continent through an unnatural birth but the stakes against it were very high because there were people who had real interests in seeing it fail and they had both the power and resources to undermine it. This is clear when we think of how in realpolitik holders of power can never promote their opponents to take over. If there is a system that would encourage such a takeover, then the one man and his cronies would do all they can to make such a system undesirable and unworkable. Consequently, the introduction of multiparty democracy in Africa was carried out in a clandestine manner by those who were supposed to promote it and create conditions for its maximal operation. They did not like what it represented; their loss of power. So they created enough smoke and mirrors that served to show the many insurmountable inherent weaknesses of majoritarianism. In this way majoritarian democracy has never had a chance to actually

succeed. It has been condemned to second-class citizenship of polities. Doomed as an unnatural artifice forcibly imposed on the continent by neo-colonialists and so-called opponents of Africanity, it was not conceivably supported or allowed to unfold in its own natural form. At every turn, institutions that were supposed to render authentic support to ensure genuine success were stymied or eliminated by all manner of trickery. In today's Africa, none of any of our sitting leaders is not popularly elected, but as to a good number of these leaders' real popularity the less said the better. The only commendable quality about them is that unlike Charles King, the election thief of Liberia, they have stoically resisted the achievable goal of allotting themselves votes greater than the entire electorate.

I therefore suggest that a promising analysis of the failure of majoritarian multiparty democracy in Africa may be found in assessing the transition from one-party dictatorships to façades of multiparty dictatorships as crucial reasons for the failures of democratic transformation. Such an analysis might reveal where the real failure has occurred and what really has been responsible for ensuring that this stated failure obtains. A very relevant question will ultimately have to do with trying to find out why it is the case that multiparty democracy in Africa has been a matter of life and death. Why has politics been transformed from a sort of 'agreement to disagree' to an absolutely vicious competition for power? Whatever response is given, I believe, will point to the fact that there are people with a real interest in maintaining power and those people will do whatever they can to retain that power. These people, in a multiparty democracy, are no different from one-party dictators and, at times, that lack of difference is largely because they were literally one and the same person. The interesting insight would be to find out how multiparty democracy was really promoted on the continent. I take the view that multiparty democracy has not only been disallowed to grow but has been dealt a deadly blow by real people with real power and with real interests to undermine what they consider to be the encapsulation of Western hegemony. Maybe if given a true chance to prove itself, multiparty politics may not exhibit the evils that it currently exhibits on the continent. It may just as well exhibit some promising traits which can be refined into virtues, with time of course.

I now turn to analyse the notion of non-party polity as explicated by Wiredu (2001). What I seek to do here is to evaluate whether the notion of non-party polity works as envisaged in the sense suggested by Wiredu. The success of the condemnation of sectional appropriation of power as represented by party$_3$ largely depends on the successful distinction between the three senses of party suggested by Wiredu actually holding. The distinction that must hold has to do with showing that there is real difference between party$_1$ and party$_3$.

I am not persuaded that such a distinction holds. In the quotes above, Wiredu makes two points relating to the nature of party$_1$. He states that it is an association of

people who have the same political ideas and who wish to pursue the same policies. Party$_1$ is, according to Wiredu, permissible in any democracy because banning such associations would be tantamount to stifling people's freedoms of expression and association. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, party$_1$ will not morph itself into pursuit of sectional appropriation of power. Turning to party$_3$, he does not give any detailed description of its evil constitution save to state that its main condemnable goal is sectional appropriation of power. He blames the constitutional provisions that allow a single victorious instance of party$_3$ to exercise power at the exclusion of other instances of party$_3$. The worst instance of party$_3$ is when it transforms itself into a party$_{1,3}$, which is the worst form of appropriation of power as this represents eliminating other parties$_3$ from existence. In Wiredu's view, the biggest difference between party$_1$ and party$_3$ is their attitude to power. The former does not even seek to get power at the exclusion of any other political player while the latter is obsessed with this goal.

If we search for the distinction between party$_1$ and party$_3$, the difference, I am afraid, is nothing but a mirage, conceptually at least. Wiredu's starting point is that party$_1$ is an association of citizens who have the same political ideas and seek to pursue the same political goals. However, the same applies to party$_3$. For what, in essence, is party$_3$? Party$_3$, just like its party$_1$ counterpart, is an association of citizens who share the same political ideas and seek to pursue the same political goals. For Wiredu, the greatest difference, it appears, between these two senses of parties is that party$_1$ does not seek sectional appropriation of power while party$_3$ does. To my mind, this difference is merely a practical one: a difference in what one party is likely to do which the other simply won't. Conceptually, the sense of party$_1$ and party$_3$ are the same. The similarity, I believe, is to be found in the idea that Wiredu directly alludes to. This is the idea that both instances of parties have specific political ideas and policies that differentiate them from other parties. These ideas and goals separate any instance of party$_1$ from other instances of parties$_1$, which are its equivalent counterparts. The same applies to any instance of party$_3$ vis-à-vis other instances of parties$_3$. Effectively, the similarity between both senses of party$_1$ and party$_3$ is that they are identified as distinct political entities that are differentiated from other parties by virtue of their common goals and desire to pursue certain policies. Wiredu's position that parties$_3$ are the source of all evils that are associated with sectarian appropriation of power may be true. However, such sectarian appropriation of power is something that may equally be true of all forms of parties. The only difference between parties$_3$ and parties$_1$ is in the manner that they seek to see to the realisation of their policies. What cannot be refuted is that each sense of party, in whatever subscript, is defined by its distinct policies, as clearly stated by Wiredu. These policies, or whatever name we choose to call them, are responsible for giving any party its sense of identity and purpose. Parties

wish to bring their goals, identities and purposes to realisation. Whatever means it involves, they will feel thoroughly satisfied if not altogether victorious when the final decision/result/agreement either entirely or to some sufficient degree, reflects their initial point. In spite of the legislative or constitutional framework in which it exists, be it in promotion of opposition and sectarian appropriation of power or consensual decision-making, a party will always be so closely attached to its policies and political programmes that it will do whatever is legitimately possible to realise its goals.

If my suggestion is acceptable, then Wiredu's suggested difference between the notion of party$_1$ and party$_3$ is either not as severe as he might have intended, or simply fails to do the work that he had hoped it would. It appears to me that Wiredu is trying to find a difference in order to make a case for his condemnation of party$_3$ excesses in appropriating power at the exclusion of other parties$_3$. To achieve this end, he has downplayed the significance of the instance of party$_1$ being fundamentally tied to its political goals and identity. He does so by merely asserting that the environment of consensus will never allow party$_1$ to seek sectional appropriation of power. He just states that it is the case that the manner in which party$_1$ is attached to its political goals is not the same as the manner in which party$_3$ is. This, for him, leads to party$_3$ retaining and exhibiting the worst party political behaviours which party$_1$ can never be capable of. I suggest this is just a claim that Wiredu has made without so much as providing evidence for how identities and goals of any party$_1$ dissipates into the consensual agreement. I suggest that there is only one way to explain that dissipation. It can only be explained in terms of either all instances of parties$_1$ or any instance of party$_1$ either explicitly or implicitly valuing some greater goal other than their stated political identities and goals that made them to be party$_1$. In this case, the goal can only be consensus.

The trouble that Wiredu is faced with is that his subscripts $_1$ and $_3$ as assigned, respectively, to consensual democracy and multiparty majoritarianism, fail to spell out with precision what the inherent differences are between political goals in party$_1$ and party$_3$. To make the case for his condemnation of the tendencies of parties$_3$ Wiredu needs to show that there is something specifically odious about them. His sole citation is that there is something odious about a party$_3$ being organised on principles of appropriating and exercising power to the exclusion of other parties$_3$. However, such condemnation, even proven worthwhile or correct, does not demonstrate any conceptual difference between party$_1$ political interests and party$_3$ political interests. It cannot, therefore, follow that a particular party$_3$ by nature of its political interests will automatically be evil. Neither does it follow that any party$_1$ will necessarily be precluded from following the evil path of party$_3$.

Wiredu's possible response to my argument has to insist that the problem is not so much about the differences between an instance of party$_1$ and party$_3$. Rather, he

could argue, the problem is with the environment in which these parties operate. With consensus, the environment is perfectly attuned towards discouraging the development of party$_3$ proclivities, while with majoritarianism party$_3$ proclivities are promoted. While this response might work in addressing the environments in which parties operate, it does not even begin to address the concern I have against the characterisation of parties as $_{1, 2,}$ or $_3$. I am of the view that Wiredu can make a successful case against the environment in which multiparty democracy operates without necessarily invoking the distinction based on the subscripts he has provided. It is one thing to say that there are undesirable elements in the environs of majoritarianism and it is quite another to claim that these differences influence the nature of party$_1$ and party$_3$. The reason why I can't accept Wiredu's distinction between party$_1$ and party$_3$ is that these two instances are, it appears, different only by virtue of the environment they operate in. The trouble with these subscripts is that they neither denote nor connote anything specific about the parties they are supposed to represent. Rather, the condemnation or praise due to them is not internally generated, by the significance of the subscripts so assigned, but externally derived from systems within which they are legitimised.

Could it be the case that I have misrepresented Wiredu's position by offering a truncated analysis? Could it be the case that my argument that there is no distinction between party$_1$ and party$_3$ is based on wilfully ignoring what Wiredu has to say about the relationship that exists between party$_1$ and party$_2$? I do not think that the extension to consider the dynamic between party$_1$ and party$_2$ will help Wiredu that much. Wiredu claims that in a consensual polity, parties$_1$ do not transform themselves into sectional appropriation of power, as parties$_3$ do, because they all seek to be party$_2$ to the decision. He identifies this sense of party as adjectival. My understanding of party$_2$ as adjectival is in reference to decision-making. So the adjectival purpose can be stated as follows; any party$_1$ seeks to be 'party$_2$ to decision-making.' Party$_2$ decision-making is the operative reference here. While it makes grammatical sense to claim that 'a party or parties are seeking to be party to decision-making', I struggle to see the conceptual function of that utterance, particularly in the light of the debate at hand. At the risk of sounding impetuous I really can't help but ask so what? But there is some seriousness to my impetuous question. Indeed, so what if any party seeks to be party to a decision? Does it mean that by virtue of any party seeking to be party to decision-making, a polity has been created? Does it mean that if a party seeks to be party to decision-making the evils of party$_3$ have been easily shown? I do not think that such a declaration can be seen as providing an affirmative answer to any of these questions. On the contrary, the most that can be obtained from the adjectival use of party is that parties have a real interest in being seen as party to decision-making. If this is the case it takes us back to Michael Onyebuchi's criticism,

above, of the tyranny of community and consensus. What the adjectival use simply shows is that consensual decision-making is so highly prized that all parties seek to be party to a consensual decision. Lest, I may add, those parties run a distinct risk of being condemned as undesirable potential instances of party$_3$ or some other subscript that may be fitting to any dissenting party$_1$.

Conceptually, the use of party$_2$, even as an adjective to decision-making, does not succeed in foreclosing the possibility of party$_1$ transforming itself into party$_3$. Besides the call that it is not desirable or in the interests of party$_1$ not to be party$_2$ to collective/consensual/communally shared decisions, there is absolutely nothing stopping party$_1$ from crystallising into obstinate opposition to the decision taken. This point is not new or very insightful; it is a point that is made by both Wamala (2004) and Wiredu (1997). Wamala states that if there was irreconcilable disagreement between a single *omutaka* and the *ssabataka*, then the *omutaka* could withdraw from the *ssabataka*'s rule and jurisdiction.

Wiredu holds that consensus does not presuppose unbroken harmony as deadly conflict could be had in such societies. What, then, party$_2$ simply does is to re-emphasise the necessity that was imposed on everyone, to reach consensus and be party of that decision. It is simply akin to stating that consensus was absolutely necessary as all parties always sought to be party to it.

In the light of Wiredu's ascription of subscripts to the notion of party, the subscript $_2$ as used in party$_2$ is distinctly of no conceptual use or force. Even though he ascribes adjectival use to it, that use is to buttress what either has already been shown to be desirable or simply re-affirms what all parties$_1$ are to search for. All parties are to search for consensus and that is what the adjectival use of party$_2$ simply re-emphasises. My suggestion is that what Wiredu needs is a conceptual mechanism that is equivalent to both senses of party$_1$ and party$_3$ that works to show the sustainability of party$_1$ while eliminating the possibility of party$_3$. The problem with party$_2$ is that it is not a conceptual equivalent of either party$_1$ or party$_3$ but an emphasis of the need for decisions to be owned by all parties within a consensual set-up. Since party$_2$ is not a concept or a mitigating factor against the occurrence of party$_3$, it cannot be said to do any work at all in showing the undesirability of party$_3$. If Wiredu's characterisation of party$_2$ was to succeed, it was supposed to perform the same function as party$_1$ and party$_3$. Party$_1$ and party$_3$ are not adjectivally used in reference to anything. They are real collections of people with distinct interests in particular political outcomes. Whether those outcomes are collected as moments of party$_2$ or some other expression, it matters very little to actual people with actual interests.

But let us return to the stated preference of party$_1$ over party$_3$. On what grounds does Wiredu arrive at the desire to protect the integrity of the former, while

condemning any type of existence of the latter? It is based on his view that political parties are evil since by nature they agitate for power to the exclusion of other political parties. If parties$_1$ do not agitate for power are there, then, any legitimate grounds to compare the nature of both forms of parties?

Above, I suggested that these forms of parties are very similar by virtue of the fact that they are constituted by real people with real political interests that they will seek to pursue. I argued that the greatest similarity between these two types of parties is that they prefer to win the day and see their preferences implemented as a whole or in greater part. While this position is true, there is something that Wiredu does in comparing party$_1$ to party$_3$ which is troublesome. Party$_1$ is not a fully-fledged political party while party$_3$ is. If the latter is a fully-fledged party, then it will do what political parties do. Despite Wiredu's protestations that party$_3$ derives its unbecoming conduct from instruments that legitimise it, he misses the point when he thinks that a system that is identified as a fully-fledged political party can be compared to a loose coalition of citizens who have the same interests. In the modern world we think of citizens who have the same political goals such as those represented in party$_1$ as constituting some pressure bodies such as non-governmental organisations, human rights groupings and some other form of interest groups. Such bodies may seek to have a say in some final decision but will not entirely seek to agitate for power. Such bodies have a veritable function in the sustenance of democracy and do genuinely seek to be party to the final decision, be it law-making or policymaking. However, their lobby status is not lost on them. Either by choice or constitution, they cannot become political parties or seek to be in power. They simply seek to play an influencing role in what is finally decided. This point does not negate the argument above that they have real interests like political parties and will do all in their power to ensure that their interests are taken into consideration. They are most likely to cajole, threaten and, finally, compromise in pursuit of being taken as serious stakeholders whose voice/concern/argument is included in the final decision. They are not likely to behave in an agitated manner as if they were seeking power. The comparison between party$_1$ and party$_3$ does not augur well for Wiredu's arguments, for, in our modern experience, it is akin to comparing a pressure group with interests in a particular/broad matter(s) of governance to the official opposition party in parliament.

The idea of parties operating as either interest or pressure groups can be seen from the nature of their ultimate intent. They do not so much seek to antagonise but to negotiate their own interests into the final decision. Whether their interests are limited to a single issue or a cluster of related issues or broad issues, they ultimately seek to find ways of influencing the final decision. This is not a bad thing in itself. It could even be good in some instances. But the virtues of following a persuasive path have their own limitations. Persuasion and compromise, for instance, do not

always work. At times, it is not entirely unimaginable, holders of power may seek to exert pressure on all participants so that their own wishes may win the day. The case is considerably worsened in situations where we find that the holders of power have evolved into abusers of power. In such situations negotiations which are characteristic of party$_1$ instances become impotent. What would be needed, then, are equally obstinate parties that would effectively challenge the excesses of power holders. This has been particularly the case in Africa, where rights and freedoms of ordinary people have been routinely violated without much care by the holders of power. These holders of power have ranged from colonial oppressors, home-grown dictators, pseudo socialists and fake democrats. In many cases it has been opposing parties$_3$ that have risen boldly to show the oppressors that their time was up. At great risks these parties$_3$, driven not necessarily by sectional appropriation of power, have sought to fight for the freedoms of ordinary people and restore their violated dignity. While sectional appropriation of power may emerge amongst political parties, it is not always the case that this will be their fundamental goal.

For example, let us take all the political parties that fought for independence on the African continent. These parties were not necessarily driven by the desire to be of the form that Wiredu suggests as oppositional party$_3$. They had a higher and nobler goal. Would it not be profitable then to consider the possibility of returning to the noble parties$_3$ of independence that were not driven by sectional appropriation of power but by a desire to see people freed from the yoke of oppression? The same form of nobility also applies to post-independence opposition parties$_3$ that risked all, to successfully challenge the excesses of some former liberation parties. They were not necessarily driven by sectional appropriation of power but by some higher goal of freeing the people from the oppressive behaviour of democratic façades or unapologetic one-party dictatorships. It could possibly be the case that parties$_3$ conceived in this sense are not as bad as Wiredu characterises them to be. Wiredu has deliberately chosen to excoriate the weaknesses of parties$_3$ without casting a charitable eye on some admirable aspects of party$_3$.

He has also chosen to forego considering the future promise they hold. One aspect in which we could say parties$_3$ have possible future use which needs to be jealously guarded is their legitimate expression of difference. Once we understand that where humans are, there will always be difference we will be wont to find suitable manners and forms of expressing those differences. Instead of mollycoddling some value of being party to decision-making, which may be tyrannical, there could be some sense of maximal interpretations of the people's freedom and increased participation in governance that does not involve appeal to consensus.

The last angle of criticism against the subscript notation devised by Wiredu refers to his condemnation of a dictatorial party$_{1,3}$. His notion of party$_{1,3}$ is characterised

as a representation of an instance of party$_1$ that has outmanoeuvred all other parties$_1$ and then proceeds to retain power for itself. This former party$_1$ then proceeds to make other parties illegitimate, thus turning itself into the only political party$_3$. I have difficulty in accepting this characterisation. First of all, any instance of party$_1$ is not, on Wiredu's argument, quite capable of readily morphing itself into a party$_3$. The main goal of party$_1$ is not sectional appropriation of power but an always-present commitment, willingness and readiness to be party$_2$ to the final decision. Once again the question of the actual conceptual function of the subscripts as representing any solid idea that identifies the differences that exist among the three senses of party comes into play. If we take Wiredu's suggestion seriously that there is a difference between party$_1$ and party$_3$ – with party$_1$ always seeking to be party$_2$ to the decision – then the question that arises is how does party$_1$ suddenly succeed to be a new party$_3$. A party$_3$ that embraces characteristics of both party$_1$ and party$_3$ to result in the new and quite dictatorial party$_{1,3}$? What, in this case, has happened to the project of being party$_2$ to good governance and the final decision? In fact what has happened to the moment of party$_2$? As I have sought to argue above, party$_2$ is not just an ordinary decision, but a normative requirement of a communocracy, as Teffo (2004) has called it. Thus specified, this polity would be most interested in securing agreements between members of the body-politic that further the interests of the community as opposed to furthering the interests of any party$_1$ or party$_3$. On this account, it is puzzling that Wiredu would posit a situation whereby any party$_1$ can be combined with a party$_3$ and result in a dictatorial party$_{1,3}$ that becomes an unpleasant dictatorship.

Party$_1$, conceptually, is at odds with the key characteristics of party$_3$. To claim that there can be a successful combination of the two which results in the worst possible representation of party$_3$ politics violates the nature and form of party$_1$. While Wiredu may have reached this position through his understanding of parties$_1$ as distinct political entities that have interests in securing members' preferred political goals, it is hard to think of a lobby sort of political party turning itself into the most extreme form of accumulation of power. But, most importantly, a party$_3$ instance that seeks the accumulation of power will not find any use in combining with party$_1$. The very idea of party$_1$ and whatever its practical representation is, does not add any value to the project of accumulating power. If party$_3$ decides to eliminate other instances of party$_3$, it does not do so by combining with party$_1$. It does so by becoming quite something else which even other parties$_3$ will not realise. Whatever it becomes, it certainly cannot be the case of a combination of party$_1$ and party$_3$.

While dictatorial tendencies are ever present, on Wiredu's formulation, both party$_1$ and party$_3$ are not inherently inclined towards being exclusionary in their outlook. The former seeks to be reconciled to party$_2$, while the latter needs the existences of other parties$_3$ for its legitimation. Though the orientation of these parties are different, they

both seek the same outcome; their own legitimation. Without instances of parties, their existence is not legitimised. Thus Wiredu's characterisation of the evils of party$_3$ as a combination of party$_{1,3}$ is not convincing by virtue of what these subscripts are supposed to represent individually. A mere act of bringing them together does not justify developing a new understanding that attempts to show the evils of opposition majoritarianism. Worse for Wiredu his characterisation of this new party$_{1,3}$ is a precise fit of a one-party tyranny. But by their constitution both party$_1$ and party$_3$ do not seek to attain the operational mechanisms of party$_{1,3}$. The nature and status of such a party is not born out of the subscripts $_1$ and $_3$ as Wiredu has characterised them.

The combination presented as party$_{1,3}$, therefore, is not believable unless Wiredu specifies the conditions under which party$_1$ changes into party$_{1,3}$ and party$_3$ suddenly combines itself with party$_1$ to become an evil party$_{1,3}$. It is not sufficient that Wiredu relies on the explanation that the outwitting of other parties$_1$ by a single party$_1$ will lead to the rise of the dominance of a single party$_{1,3}$. It also does not work to claim that party$_3$, once combined with the notion of party$_1$, has by essence become exclusionary such that it now qualifies as a dictatorship. The problem with Wiredu's use of his subscripts is that it relies on eclectic senses of party which are not commensurate with allowing for a coherent analysis. He loses the sense of his intended target by relying on inconsistent notions of party and inconsistent senses of the subscripts.

Is a non-party a one-party?

As the sub-title suggests, the purpose of this section is to investigate whether a non-party polity is the same as a one-party polity. Helen Lauer cites Emmanuel Eze and Carlos Jacques as leading proponents, in their critique of Wiredu, in arguing that there is no distinction between a one-party and a non-party. Thus she writes: 'The main themes of their critiques are that (i) Wiredu's advocacy of non-party politics functions just as well to defend single-party rule and with it the suppression of free speech and political opposition; and (ii) Wiredu indulges in romanticised fantasy through his accounts of pre-colonial Akan society' (Lauer 2011b, 176). Hence she seeks to 'show that these criticisms depend upon a reading of Wiredu that ignores what he has actually expressed in his published works' (2011b, 176). I will limit my consideration to Jacques's argument and evaluate his success in light of Lauer's response. I will not treat Eze as suggesting that Wiredu is committed to a one-party state. I think a charitable reading of Eze, in contrast to Lauer, will not point to him in any way accusing Wiredu of being an advocate of a one-party state. None of Eze's three objections outlined above point to him thinking Wiredu a sympathiser of one-party regimes. To recall Eze's three objections to Wiredu, queried: first, the source of legitimation of the king's political power; second, the possibility of the existence of a

rock-bottom identity of interests; and, third, whether limiting the interpretation of democracy to consensus is a sufficient account of what democracy is all about.

I will argue that while there is merit in Jacques's (2011) intuition that there is reason to believe that there are similarities between a non-party and a one-party polity, his conclusions are rather too strong. I particularly dismiss his suggestion that there is a shared naiveté between Wiredu and nationalists. I argue that while Wiredu's theory is based on a communalist view, he neither seeks to romanticise traditional society nor does he share in whatever naiveté of nationalists. I then seek to rehabilitate Jacques's hunch by showing precisely what the communalist views that Wiredu defends logically entail for him. Next, I attempt to show plausible ways in which we could read Wiredu's non-party polity as perilously close to a one-party system. Unlike Jacques, I do not seek to argue that a non-party polity is similar to a one-party polity. All I claim is that they share sufficient similarities to cause suspicion that they might end up in the same pit of intolerance. My reluctance to take Jacques's strident position is based on Wiredu's care to distinguish a non-party polity from a one-party polity as well as his care to show the serious respects in which he intends to make a non-party polity count as a maximal interpretation of democracy. Even though, I believe, Wiredu's notion of non-party is open to criticism, it is not correct to claim that it is equivalent to a one-party polity.

Jacques's criticism starts by citing Mbiti's dictum 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' Jacques points out that this statement has captured what many African thinkers take to have been the nature of traditional African society, its communalistic and collectivistic nature. 'This notion lies at the basis of much twentieth century African political thought, animating arguments for African socialism and one-party states. More recently it has been rehabilitated to defend moral communitarianism and non-party politics' (Jacques 2011, 1017). He states that the doctrine of collectivism was used by nationalists to coin their political philosophy, and in the modern day has been put to use, particularly, by Wiredu to develop non-party politics. He argues that whatever the political uses of collectivism are, those political goals have been attained by virtue of collectivism 'excluding individuals or groups who do not, for whatever reason, fit the communal norm. This exclusion is not accidental. On the contrary, such exclusion is essential to the meaning and soundness of claims about African communal existence' (Jacques 2011, 1017). This, according to Jacques, comes at a high price. The price is that whatever differences exist between Africans are ignored or rejected. 'Whatever plurality exists is marginalised, obscured, or dismissed as anomalous, or it is condemned as the consequence of foreign influence or intrusion. Should the diversity resist such conceptual strategies of exclusion, then its rejection becomes normative. The other must be sought out and removed' (2011, 1018). From the foregoing, three considerations are worth exploring. The first is that

Africans understand their entire existence as communal and collectivist; second, the collectivist understanding of life translates into some political outlook; and, third, the other is not only treated with suspicion but is actively hounded out.

There is a real case that Jacques is making against the communalistic and collectivist nature of traditional life and politics. The communitarian outlook as a basis of African metaphysics that extends to cover and determine all aspects of life is well known (Matolino 2014). Jacques is also correct to state that both nationalists and supporters of the non-party variant of democracy rely on notions of communitarian and collectivist outlooks of traditional African society to make a case for their respective polities. This has been responsible for the various defences and interpretations of Mbiti's dictum. All these interpretations have sought to prioritise the reality of the community over that of the individual. While there are alternative views (Ahiazu, Eze, Masolo) these are in the minority. The dominant view is one that seeks to prioritise communal reality over individual reality. This leads Fayemi (2010) to attack Wiredu's consensus as unable to protect individual rights. However, the real question is whether the two political systems, that is socialist one-party states and the non-party alternative amount to the same thing. While there may be good arguments for taking either side of this question, what is important to note is that communalist and collectivist societies ultimately lead to polities of a particular form and these polities perhaps will not prioritise individual rights as much as other polities would.

The final consideration has to do with how difference is treated in both polities. Since both polities are based on values of community and collectivism, it is hardly an exaggeration to state that such communal and social arrangements obsess about their own stability, identity and internal coherence. To obtain these goals, there must be minimal conflict. In the event of conflict occurring, it must be readily dealt with and all the members of community must, as Wiredu (1997) claims, attain reconciliation. It, therefore, is plausible to think of this system as largely intolerant of those it deems to be responsible for continued disagreement. Such people could have been seen to be unable to alter their initial positions to be in line with the consensual agreement. Wamala's (2004) contribution to this debate shows that the traditional system was not only somewhat intolerant of difference but where it was sustained, it was dealt with in extreme sorts of ways. The avoidance relationship that existed between the *sabataka* and any individual *mutaka* is, in my view, evidence of intolerance of difference. Whatever this relationship of avoidance really amounts to, the very idea of avoidance shows that these two powers would rather have as little to do with each other as possible since they knew that any occasion of unsolved difference would result in terrible consequences. The consequences, as Wamala states, would have been that the *mutaka* and his people would have to physically withdraw from the

ssabataka's territory. This gives ample support to Jacques's view that once the other was identified, what followed was the hounding of that other.

Jacques proceeds to makes his point by citing Jomo Kenyatta's outline of the Gikuyu life as essentially social. Jacques points to crucial remarks made by Kenyatta in support of the sociality of the self which was only conceived in collective terms. Jacques claims that Kenyatta then proceeds to argue that democratic forms of power were also conceived through communalism and decisions were by consensus. Jacques then cites Kenneth Kaunda who wrote on consensus as follows:

> In our original societies we operated by consensus. An issue was talked out in solemn conclave until such time as general agreement could be achieved. The decision was then binding upon all the parties and it was a major sin against society for any of those who were privy to the decision to continue agitation against it. (Kaunda cited in Jacques 2011, 1019)

Jacques also points to Julius Nyerere who argued that whatever Europeans brought in their civilising mission was not democracy, as democracy was already rooted in Africans' past traditional societies. 'As a consequence of Europe's violence, the African was unmoored from his or her way of life, from his or her past, and thus became lost to himself and to others' (Jacques 2011, 1019). According to Jacques, nationalists then sought to define Africa in contrast to Europe which would help the former in finding its identity. Further, he holds that nationalists did not yearn for a literal return to Africa's past as they were aware that intervening historical events had made that impossible. In the place of traditional harmony was class and ethnic conflict. Thus African leaders sought to restore African communalism which would be responsible for authoring African nation states that would be modern 'but rooted in a reconceived and reworked tradition' (Jacques 2011, 1020). This would result in Africans pushing their boundaries of loyalty beyond the family and clan to include new national identities. 'And the means by which this goal could be reached, many would defend, would be the one party state' (Jacques 2011, 1020). The reasons that were offered in favour of a one-party state were as follows: firstly it could overcome internally and externally generated conflict; secondly, it ensured complete dedication to the most urgent political work which was reconstruction and development; and, thirdly, multiparty systems were illusory as they sought to hide class conflict and oppression without giving voice to the people.

According to nationalists, as cited by Jacques, multiparty politics offered a mere spectacle of democracy without giving full expression of the truth of democracy. A one-party state would be able to represent the entire nation taking into serious account its wants and needs than merely insisting on rotating power (Jacques 2011, 1020–1021). Further, Jacques argues, beyond the political, apologists of one-party

states argued that the problem of Africa was its identity crisis. To effectively deal with it there was need to eliminate conflict and disunity and a one-party system was well-suited to provide a modern communalism that would deal with ills of identity. Jacques cites Seko Toure's description of this system as a 'communocracy' as the best representative of what nationalists had in mind.

Turning to Wiredu, Jacques shows that Wiredu's diagnosis of Africa's current problem is similar to that of nationalists. Thus he writes of Wiredu:

> The crisis of identity persists and the solution can but lie in an effort at self-definition that returns to Africa's traditions. Politically, this implies the refusal to simply import foreign political models, be it of the foreign variety, or western multiparty democracy. For Wiredu, the crucial political task for Africans is to imagine a type of politics that both responds to the modern world, and yet at the same time reflects what is best in Africa's past. (Jacques 2011, 1022)

He then claims that Wiredu's call, like that of nationalists, was a return to a consensual model, steeped in communalism. 'What characterises African communalism, if one is to follow Wiredu, is deference to the common good. Africans acknowledge that such differences can be reconciled because 'ultimately all individuals share a common interest and this constitutes the central basis for the possibility of conflict resolution.' Stated differently, it is the belief in the existence of a common good or common interest which defines African communalism and from which consensus emerges as a human and political value' (Jacques 2011, 1023).

After a brief outline of the key features of Wiredu's consensus, Jacques turns to compare non-party rule to one-party rule. He starts by noting that Wiredu protests against nationalists' interpretation of traditional polities necessitating one-party rule. However, Jacques praises their efforts as contributions to theorising about Africa's polities that would be influenced by Africa's specific history and culture. However, Jacques poses a question that seeks to know the extent to which Wiredu's non-party is distinct from one-party rule.

Jacques is not convinced that there are serious differences between Wiredu and nationalists. Both seek to develop a traditional system into a modern political system that will preserve the virtues of the old system. These virtues are a communal ethos and democracy that is specific to Africa. This will enable Africa to develop responses modern problems and issues.

> And if one looks closely enough at the reasons proffered in favour of this endeavour, one finds common arguments. Wiredu describes multiparty democracy as divisive, as a kind of institutionalised uncooperativeness, and therefore antithetical to the spirit of communalism and the philosophy of government underlying traditional African statecraft. It is, quite simply, un-African. None of these statements can be said to be original in their rejection

> of multiparty political power, on the grounds of what has already been seen of the reasons given for rejecting the same in the nationalist writings. So wherein lies the difference between nationalists and Wiredu? All would seem to hang on the issue of one party versus non-party rule. But this is a very thin difference indeed. (Jacques 2011, 1025)

Jacques states that nationalist would agree with Wiredu that party politics leads to conflict and that a political party only represents sectarian interests which undermine the understanding of collective interests that animated traditional society. Further, when both camps talk of party they do not refer to the traditional political parties of liberal representative democracies found in Europe. Hence the nationalists' political party was not conceived as a dominant political party but primarily as a movement that sought to reflect the people's aspirations as well as to be responsible for development and national affirmation. Citing Kaunda he paraphrases the whole establishment as follows: 'In turn, and as a consequence, the single party was not supposed to impose itself by force or repression. It was to be de facto the only ruling voice, not de jure, expressing as it would the nation's common ambitions' (Jacques 2011, 1025). Since the one-party was never conceived as a party in the political sense of Western democracies' political parties, but as a movement to express the people's will he holds that 'Indeed, but for the name, it is identical to, I would contend, Wiredu's non-political order' (Jacques 2011, 1026).

Jacques then makes a further interesting point. The point is that while Wiredu condemns nationalists for their naiveté in thinking that the one-party system would not be faced with the problems that it eventually was, Jacques argues that Wiredu shares in that naiveté. This proceeds from the fact that Wiredu readily accepts his own interpretation of the traditional system as a panacea to African problems while ignoring that some of these traditional systems were authoritarian in nature. Jacques singles the Akan system as having been shown to be totalitarian, by at least one scholar whose identity he does not provide.

Sanya Osha makes a similar point when he condemns Wiredu's consensus as utopianism that can't be retrieved to be used in Africa's current polity, arguing thus:

> How such political utopianism could be re-established in present-day Africa is unimaginable. If the spirit of consensus ever existed at all in the political realm in Africa, it was during pre-colonial times and even this claim is indeed doubtful. But surely the realities of post-coloniality are so disruptive of the lure of traditionalism that naïve historical recall is impossible. If indeed we consider reverting to the old pre-colonial political order, then surely it would also make sense to reinforce pre-colonial geographical boundaries and its essentially itinerant territoriality an obvious impossibility. (Osha 2005, 93)

I am generally sympathetic to the broad problems that Jacques and Osha have

raised above. I also think that Jacques, in particular, has read Wiredu correctly and has represented him accurately. I particularly am persuaded by his demonstration that the fact that Wiredu and nationalists draw on the same traditional resource to argue for a political system that is not characterised by the presence and activities of political parties. If the resource is the same for both Wiredu and nationalists, any weakness that can be pointed out regarding the traditional system's repressive nature is equally applicable to both systems. Although Wiredu may argue that the real difference is in the interpretation that he has provided, which distinguishes him from nationalists, that difference of interpretation is not compelling enough to secure his case, for it is simply possible that many other interpretations can be provided.

Jacques holds that the common view running through all of the literature he cites, is the view 'that *unity* is distinctively African, whereas division is foreign, something brought with colonialism and destructive of African tradition' (Jacques 2011, 1026). He then holds that contemporary thinkers such as Wiredu can dismiss multiparty democracy on account that it is divisive, foreign and a result of colonialism. Jacques cites Hountondji's (1983) criticism of Nkrumah's consciencism, to support his point. Hountondji argues that Nkrumah's strategy for doing away with disunity by trying to revive traditional modes that were characterised by unity is based on an illusion. The illusion is that there was a continuous rhythm of unity in traditional African societies. Jacques believes 'that Hountondji is correct to call this an illusion and I may add it is this very same illusion that inspires Wiredu's work' (Jacques 2011, 1027).

Lauer (2011a) rejects Jacques's reading of Wiredu as erroneous. Citing several places wherein Wiredu condemns one-party rule, Lauer succeeds in showing that there is no similarity between Wiredu's consensus and the nationalists' one-party. Hence she writes: 'Wiredu repeatedly and explicitly disparages one-party politics and the ideological fig leaves used by early nationalists to cover their brute stronghold on power by suppressing political party opposition' (2011a, 1032). While Jacques's reading of Wiredu is largely correct, it is truncated as he chooses not to spell out the full condemnation that Wiredu has of one-party states. In respect of this truncated reading Lauer writes: 'Again in the (1998/1999/2001) publication that Jacques repeatedly cites, Wiredu explicitly distinguished his non-party vision from one-party suppression of the freedom of the press and of political association that make diversity of political opinion articulate and party formation possible' (2011a, 1032). For Lauer, there is a clear difference in the scope of intent between a one-party system and a non-party system, as conceived by Wiredu. The former is essentially intolerant of opposition while the latter allows for opposing views to be heard.

In addition to Lauer's critique of Jacques I find Wiredu never to gloss over

differences in traditional society or to romanticise traditional unity. He explicitly holds that in traditional society there were differences, at times even deadly differences. The only problem with Wiredu's position is that he thinks that the sole way to account for this difference is by finding the common good. However, the manner in which this common good can be found is by understanding that the initial difference is based on a misapprehension of the nature of that good, and the accompanying claim that discovering that common good will lead to right action.

Most importantly, Wiredu does not share in the nationalists' refusal to defend political freedom that is owed individuals. In his 2011 essay he emphasises the difference between his non-party and one-party in detail, and I quote him extensively:

> In concluding this advocacy of a non-party system of politics, I would like to dissociate myself from any concealed hankering after a one-party system. This is especially necessary since some politicians in power wishing to create a one-party situation without a one-party designation have been known to use the banner of the non-party idea. The fundamental difference between a non-party system and a one-party one is that the former embraces the freedom of political association while the latter execrates it. The one party system is, in fact, not only incompatible with freedom of political association but also with the freedom of expression, for the expression of ideas among persons is already a kind of association. It is obvious, then, that those who use the name of the non-party system but look unkindly upon political associations do take that name in vain. Political associations in a non-party polity would, in fact, be an exceedingly important point of mediation between civil society and the state, because as a forum of discourse, they would belong to civil society just like literary societies, while, as vehicles of political education and representation, they would be directly connected with the state. (Wiredu 2011, 1065)

There are a few points that directly proceed from the quote above that need careful attention. The first and foremost point is that not only does Wiredu condemn a one-party state, he also condemns any other polity that attempts to use the banner of a non-party when it has no intention of defending freedoms associated with the fullness of democracy which is expressed in the freedom of association. Thus Wiredu is intolerant of one-party states as well as any other arrangement that seeks to use the idea of a non-party arrangement to bolster authoritarian suppression of political freedom of association. He explicitly disassociates his notion of non-party from any suggestion that he could be secretly hankering after a form of one-party or any variant of it. Secondly, he places a high premium on freedom of association as the key defining element of democracy. Such association encompasses individuals freely expressing their political ideas and organising themselves around the very ideas they would have chosen. Thirdly, Wiredu defends a particular interpretation of political associations. He sees political associations as a link or mediating point between

civil society and the state. Further, he likens them to literary societies while at the same time seeing them as responsible for political education as well as fulfilling the requirement of representation. The latter function directly links them to the state.

I suggest that to evaluate whether there is a difference between Wiredu's non-party and the one-party version, it is important that we take the above three points seriously vis-à-vis Jacques's accusation that there is no difference between Wiredu and the nationalists. Jacques's major point is that Wiredu and the nationalists use the same resources of traditional African society to argue against modern Western political party democracies. For Jacques, both do so by pointing to the disruptions caused by foreign powers and they seek to restore interrupted African pride. Wiredu, on the other hand, explicitly rejects romanticism or attempts to restore the traditional mode of politics. Is it then the case that Wiredu differs from the nationalist programme in name only? As Lauer (2011b) convincingly argues, Wiredu is not committed to a traditional mode of polity that is based on fantasies of unbroken harmony (2011b, 177) and the conflation between nationalists and Wiredu as advocates of one-party systems is far from justified (2011b, 179).

There is no reason to believe, as Jacques does, that Wiredu's non-party polity is nothing more than another manner of advocating a one-party polity. The grounds which Jacques provides, which are basically an assortment of quotes from nationalists and another set of quotes and passages from Wiredu, which both at times refer to consensus, the negative impact of colonialism on traditional polities and the rejection of multiparty politics as a foreign imposition, do not achieve the end of clearly demonstrating that Wiredu and nationalists are of the same orientation.

The only valuable suggestion from Jacques, which I seek to develop here, is that both Wiredu and nationalists support traditionally based polities that are essentially opposed to the institutionalisation of political parties. Instead of following Jacques' rhetoricising the similarities of these commitments, it would be useful to look at the actual implications of these similarities. The crucial aspect which calls for investigation here has to do with whether an absence of political parties necessarily means that such a system would be tyrannical in the mode of nationalists' one-party state. My view is that such systems have certain basic problems which must be attended to. In the long Wiredu quote immediately above, he seems to treat any political association and attendant freedoms as nothing more than a mere appendage to the state. In Wiredu's view, political association is firstly a representative forum of the people, and secondly it belongs to civil societies. Still, Wiredu insists on the weakest possible interpretation of party. This is not entirely surprising since he does not hide his objection to political parties. The question then should become whether the civil society type of political association that Wiredu suggests is the best way of registering and expressing ordinary people's political aspirations. I suggest that

the type of political association that Wiredu suggests only works in a very narrow construal of politics as necessarily associated with statecraft. In other words any political activity must seek to be of service to the good of the state. Parties are only conceived as participants in the shared good.

Herein lies the biggest problem with Wiredu: his failure to appreciate the significance of political parties as legitimate political agency, and his determination to reduce legitimate political agency to participation in some shared good which is expressed at state level, only works for traditional African communities. Political parties are now, legitimately, representatives of people's distinct wishes which approximate to Wiredu's notion of freedoms to associate and form political ideas as well as pursue those ideas. If it is the case that division has always been a feature of traditional and modern African life, and that difference is legitimate in the African scheme of political life, then there is no reason to think that political parties will bring a worse type of difference than one that already exists between people by virtue of being people.

The real problem is not so much whether Wiredu is one with nationalists. Rather, the real problem has to do with how a polity that does not retain legitimising expression of difference via party politics, may be said to fundamentally violate allowing people to legitimately coalesce around a political idea for its own sake as opposed to pursuing state-centric interests. Wiredu, just like nationalists, only sees the role of any political organisation to be of service to the common good. But this only is an acceptable formulation when political agency, in parties, is not tolerated as a legitimate and serious avenue for capturing and expressing people's aspirations. Combined with his notion of $party_1$, $party_2$, $party_3$ and $party_{1,3}$, which does not cohere very well, Wiredu's contribution to non-party polities is in the same neighbourhood as one-party polities.

Conclusion

Wiredu's problem is that his notion of party as represented by the subscripts he assigns to the four distinct senses of party do not work to secure the kind of strong condemnation that he has against political parties. Effectively, his subscripts as assigned to parties do not secure the point of showing the viability of a non-party polity and the natural evil of $party_{1,3}$. Added to the incoherence that the subscripts represent as well as the unclear usage of the term 'party', Wiredu's notion of non-party, though not quite like one-party in intent, is equally intolerant of any project or political activity that is at variance with the common good. Such a position leaves the concept of consensus and one-party close to each other in as far as intolerance of political difference is concerned. Although they do not aspire to the same sort

of thing, they are severely handicapped by their prioritisation of communalistic valorisation of reality at the expense of any other possible legitimate contribution to the good of community. In this regard the charge of the tyranny of community for both systems, does stick.

5

African aspirations, democracy and African democracy

Introduction

In this closing chapter I seek to propose what I consider to be some of the most crucial things that Africans wish to see attended regarding what their polities actually achieve for them. I evaluate aspirations of Africans, as people, human beings, bipeds, members of humanity, persons. Is it the case that Africans who populate this continent, this place called Africa, are essentially exclusively concerned with the development of a local democratic version? Even if it were to be argued and it were to actually hold that this local variant of democracy meets the political needs of the local situation, does it begin to address other equally important human needs and interests? My argument proceeds from the view, which is also coincidentally defended by Wiredu, that all humans essentially share to a great extent in the project of humanity. As members of this species, humans have basic needs everywhere which must be satisfied to secure a dignified and meaningful existence. What I therefore seek to do in this chapter is to describe what I consider to be basic requirements of human existence that must be served by any political outlook. Such an outline will lead to an evaluation of whether consensus as a democratic practice, is equipped to meet effectively the basic needs of Africans as a people who are very specific in their existence, but who are also participants in the global project of being humans.

Being a human person, naturally evokes specific expectations of things that are due to this entity. Such things are generally encompassed in the social and political dues that are taken as appropriate to the individual and collective of humans. There are measurements, in economics for example, that specify what individuals deserve in order to qualify as leading minimally decent lives. Such indices may just as well

be informed by the type of political regime that is in place. I do not seek to go into the details of what such measurements and indices are. I will simply appeal to the general facts which are known about the state of Africa and how it has failed its most ordinary of people. My main concern in this chapter, therefore, is to work out how a political theory such as consensus can be of use to the people of Africa. While there is value in thinking of discussing a political theory for its merits without necessarily being constrained by considerations such as what its practical impact could be, I believe that for a theory such as consensus, which has been suggested to be a panacea to some of the greatest ills that afflict this continent, it is necessary to look at the promise of its effects on some minimal requirements of dignified human existence.

Africa

This foreign imposed term is a source of great pride for some people such as those in the negritude movement or pan-Africanists. At the same time it is a term of deep dismay for others such as Afro-pessimists or victims of Africa's notoriety such as refugees, the hungry, the jobless and victims of war. For many others still, it is a simple term that describes the geographical location of what they call home. Yet this term carries many connotations for the inhabitants of this place. To be an average African citizen, is qualitatively different from being an average European citizen or an average American citizen. Even if we were to narrow down the consideration to looking at the average citizen of an average African country in comparison to an average citizen of an average European country, the African may still fare worse-off in many comparative respects. While it could turn out to be the case that in one serious comparative respect of experiencing democracy, living as a free citizen, the average African's experiences could improve immediately when consensus is introduced, we still need to look at other things that consensus may propose to do for the African. A polity is, restrictedly, for purposes of governing and for satisfying requirements of representation. But, a polity is also responsible for many other facts of how people experience their lives and qualitatively live them out. As Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, capitalism caused the redefinition of democracy as liberal democracy. In its economic effect, which was expressed as a separate form of power from the juridical, military, or political; the operations of capitalism gave rise to new social relations of power based on distribution (1995 234). This, in turn, according to Wood, led to a state of affairs wherein capitalism had created a new social sphere that was not subject to democratic accountability. For Wood, the development of liberal democracy leaves this economic aspect ungoverned by rules of democracy such that it would still be true 'even in the unlikely event that our "formal democracy" were perfected so that wealth and economic power no longer meant the gross inequality of access to state power which

now characterizes the reality, if not the ideal, of modern capitalist democracy' (1995, 234). One way to read this is to see democracy as either being disempowered from doing what it is supposed to. Yet another way would be to see this as an opportunity to call upon democracy to adjust in keeping with other facets of our existence that are changing or directly challenging the political reach of democracy. Wood certainly goes with the first option. She suggests that the development of the 'sphere of economic power in capitalism has expanded far beyond the capacities of "democracy" to cope with it; and liberal democracy, whether as a set of institutions or a system of ideas is not designed to extend its reach into that domain' (1995, 235). If it is the case that there are certain aspects of our life, economic life, that may escape political control and accountability, we need detailed specification of how consensus proposes to deal with those aspects of our existence. We need to know whether it makes a concession that it will not be able to control them or that it will make alterations to economic arrangements such that they remain accountable to the political regime of consensual democracy. The unavoidability of this requirement lies in that democracy, as a system of governance, finds it inevitable to be intertwined crucial arrangements of its subjects' economic activities.

As already seen in the first chapter, Carew complains against what he considers to be the dominance of Western models of economic arrangements of society. These models are forcibly imposed on the continent to the detriment of the quality of life of citizens. He suggests that there is need to replace IMF-inspired models and attendant politics with more home-grown transformative polities and economic frameworks. However, he does not specify what the polity would entail in as far as its economic commitments are. He simply states the matter as follows:

> But what is transformative politics and how is it different, if at all, from deliberative politics? Deliberative politics, as I have argued, emphasises dialogue and mutual consideration and respect as the base on which citizens can come to an understanding about the public good. Thus the practice of this form of politics would presuppose that transformation in a way has occurred in such attitudes as are envisaged by, say, liberal egoists, who hold that politics is only about self-interest and the market. But how exactly might such a transformation occur? What crucial move or moves could lead to the moralisation of social relations? Theorising this overlap is clearly the concern of transformative theory. This requires a full-length essay by itself and ought not to detain us here. However, that which is certainly worth noting here is how a focus on the transformative process within deliberative politics might lead us to innovative institutional designs that can embody deliberative principles. (2004, 462)

The question, then, that occupies me in this chapter is: What are the economic commitments of consensus. Since its advocates are less than forthcoming when

it comes to explicating what its economic commitments are, I will endeavour to glean such commitments from the explicit values of community, reconciliation and restoration of harmony of consensus. What appears to be the operative prescription is the recommendation of the need for a dose of what Carew calls 'transformative politics'. However, what is short is the detail of what that transformative politics is actually committed to when it comes to the economic structure of consensual societies, specifically African consensual societies.

Etymologically, the term Africa does not describe or depict any thoroughgoing Africanness about this place but is an outcome of Africa's interactions with other civilisation (Mazrui 2005, 69). Ramose (2003) states that this is a term that was coined by the Romans to describe the sunny climatic conditions of this place. He bemoans the fact that this description does not do the philosophy of this place any favour as it limits its description and understanding to a solar philosophy. Such a description is hardly appropriate or fitting as this people, the people of this place called Africa, are not essentially interested in solar philosophy. I suggest that with a term that is as vacuous as Africa, it is already a bad start. Effectively, the people are stripped of their true identity through a name and identification that is neither theirs nor speaks meaningfully to their condition. With such a term, it becomes quite difficult to work out what the representation of Africans should be and what Africans really are. Besides failing to capture the reality or experiences of the people it claims to describe, the term also fails to offer any hope. It does not represent something that ordinary Africans can deeply identify with or see as representing their future. It is just a term that is known to be a noun for this place. Some, woefully, mistake this noun as a source of their pride.

Conceptually, as Ramose states, this term Africa can only be used under protest. Not as an affirmation of the solar descriptions of what this place is taken to represent but as a search for the reality of the people who populate this place. I propose two paths in discussing what the African is. The first is a conceptual possibility and the second is a practical consideration of living as an African. Conceptually, we must search for those elements that are said to make an African distinct. These elements may have to do with an African's orientation to life. Such an orientation is generally taken to be communalistic, imposing duties and obligations of a communitarian nature on the individual African who exists here. This might be described as a way of being, a manner that informs each individual what they are expected to do and how they must execute those expectations. We could call this an ethical dimension of Africans. But the question that directly proceeds from this has to do with finding out what the basis of this ethical outlook is. Is it something that is a result of social convention or it is something that is deeply embedded in the nature of being African? Both options have been forwarded as correct explanations of the basis of

the ethical outlook that Africans have. Thinkers of an ethnophilosophical orientation have sought to find the certitude that describes the metaphysical underpinning of Africans (Hountondji 1983; Masolo 1994). The search for this certitude is fuelled by the belief that Africans are essentially distinct from their erstwhile colonisers. That there is an African essence that accounts for the way that Africans are, or the way they view the world is seen as a route to explaining the philosophical categories that either Africans have or are said to have.

As Wiredu (1980) states, this desire for an African difference is driven by many other groups of people such as nationalists in search and defence of a distinct African political programme, foreigners in search of an exotic diversion and Afro-Americans in search of their roots. Thus the conceptual foundation of this African difference is driven by real interests that are protected or pursued by real people who have invested themselves in securing that African difference (Ibuot 2011). Conceptually, it leads to statements that promote the dignity of African people in the face of exclusion and oppression by other races. While there is merit in affirming the dignity of African people, the problem is that there has always been a dogmatic pursuit of the search of African difference. This dogmatic search for the African difference has tended to produce articulations of theories that are not always philosophically defensible. In the service of the defence of dogma, there have been characterisations of African essences that have led to insistence on certain views as specific to African existence (see Bongmba 2008, 101–102). Although African consensus is not straight dogmatic, there are some worrying features that are built into its commitments. For example, it is taken to be the case that this was the dominant form of polity. Wiredu (1997) goes as far as to argue that even in militaristic societies, such as the Zulu traditional society, consensus was the rule of the day. Further, it is insisted that consensus was axiomatic. Though this is not a very big problem, it begins to suggest that other than consensus there was no other way of seeing life in Africa. Most importantly, it is claimed that this form of democracy is natural to Africa. This has led some thinkers such as Ani (2013) to object to the framing of consensus as if it were an essential feature of being African. While supporters of consensus may have agile responses to these and other similar objections, what they cannot avoid is the fact that consensus is spelt in terms of something distinctly African. While this may not be a problem in itself, because there are indeed African things, it raises the worry of seeing Africa in limited ways. As Ani argues, the problem is not so much with consensus but its particularisation to African people. Such particularisation, according to Ani, only reifies discrimination against black people.

The point that supporters of consensus have to reckon with regarding this objection is that black people or Africans are essentialised. This essentialism is deeply rooted in the pride that Africans seek to assert about themselves in the light of the history of

discrimination. However, as Ani argues, the opposite of the intended effect is what actually obtains: the reification of the black person as an inferior other. Although I have maintained that this essentialisation is not like that of ethnophilosophers; there is a family resemblance of the problem. The problem is that the past consistently has something fundamental to say to Africans even when the present is considerably at a distance from that past. Even if it can be argued that the past has some superior aspect about it or that it has some crucial things to teach the present, it does not have to follow the path of essentialisation. While supporters of consensus may object to this characterisation as false, it remains to be seen how that past can be made to be a mere assertion of certain values without necessarily invoking their authentic Africanness. While it can be rightly seen as a moment of pride in showing that there were equal if not superior systems of governance in Africa's traditional past, the insistence of particularising those values as African only serves to exclude the African from other possibilities. These are possibilities of engaging in discussions about the commonality of human beings.

Wiredu (1996) is fully aware of the implications of going the particular route to the exclusion of other routes. In his *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, he specifically abjures the two extreme versions of either exclusively taking the particular or the universal route. He defends a middle point between the two. As Ani correctly points out, there is tension in Wiredu's position since he holds one position that advocates consensus as a particularised feature of Africanness as well as one that advocates a middle orientation between the particular and the universal. Although Wiredu could argue that democracy or governance is a human feature, and what consensus is contributing is merely a maximal interpretation of that human feature, what remains to be seen is whether such a contribution could be conceived without necessarily tracing its antecedent roots to traditional African practice.

My point should not be seen as an argument for a straight defence or advocacy of universal conceptions. I have my own reservations about the possibility of straight universals ever holding (Matolino 2015). However, what I am arguing for is the need to consider the possibility that the remoteness that Africa's past represents may actually be indicative of its potential ineffectiveness when it comes to providing a prescription for today's ailments. As Wiredu (1980), again, correctly points out, the milieu of the past is gone for good. In its place is an amalgam of the history of conquest, the noble fight for freedom, and the decadence that followed the attainment of independence. That decadence has continued in many ways, up to this present day, condemning many parts of Africa to poverty and less than satisfying modes of existence. The question that is more urgent, I suggest, has to be around how Africa can improve its situation so that it becomes a competitive global player. Such a status, I am afraid, will not be achieved by resorting to invocations of the traditional polities.

Not only is there a disjuncture between the traditional mode of existence and the modern mode but there is also a serious disconnect that exists between traditional social structures and modern structures. Until we learn of how consensus proposes to deal with a developing modern economy such as that of South Africa, we can only surmise that it is communalistic in all aspects of its appearance. This will, crucially, mean that consensus is close to the economic policies of socialist regimes which were also equally premised on communalist values.

Practically, the term Africa clearly refers to a geographical place. It is a place that is known for its dominant inhabitants, its distinct flora and fauna, and mineral wealth. This too has been a source of great pride and promise for many. This specific aspect of Africa has been overly celebrated as worthy of admiration and praise. As a physical place that actual people inhabit, it may be said that Africa has certain advantages and disadvantages. These considerations may refer to the sort of things that are considered either necessary or indispensable to the comfortable existence of humans. These considerations have very little to do with natural endowments that Africa has. If we look at infrastructure development, Africa still lags behind most parts of the world. If we look at the sort of amenities that must be available to Africans, it is quite plain that they are hardly sufficient to meet the needs of the most ordinary of residents of this continent. It is all too common for any resident of this continent to be a witness, on any given day, of small barefooted schoolchildren trekking an unnecessarily long distance just to be in class. Indeed many a citizen would have witnessed desperately sick patients lining up at dilapidated hospitals in the hope of getting to the front of the queue so as to be attended by a qualified medical practitioner. Many are turned away and condemned to otherwise early and preventable deaths. Many citizens rely on dangerous roads and equally dangerous modes of transport to move between any given two points. Many a citizen is basically malnourished and in need of a little more food than they actually are able to scrounge. Many a citizen lives in dilapidated buildings or shacks with little cover from the elements. Such existence is hardly human. Many find themselves out of hope as they have no future prospect, with no jobs, income or chance of breaking from the vicious cycle of crippling poverty. Condemned to experiencing life in shanty towns, refugee camps, and overcrowded hostel dwellings, life can only be proverbially nasty, short and brutish. It is not my intention to whip up emotions or rely on graphic details of suffering to arouse pity for the people in these circumstances. There is a point, however, which I seek to advance and it may have philosophical implications for how we look at what Africa is for many of its people.

In African philosophy, the dominant position about how life is interpreted and how a person is conceived as constituted is essentially practical. By this I refer to the fact that in the composition of the person and what is considered to be the ultimate

expression of reality, recourse is made to the physical reality that surrounds a person. Such reality starts with the recognition that a person is a body that has qualitative experiences that are encountered in community with fellow human beings. While there is a spiritual world, that world is conceived as operating in tandem with the physical. As a continuum of the physical, what is sought, is the harmonious co-existence of these two aspects which speak to the wholeness of existence. There is, after all, no heavenly existence to look forward to. If we look at traditional African existence, with its insistence on equal treatment of all members of society and equal access to the goods of society, the understanding of life as a shared joy becomes patent. If there is anything commendable about African socialists, it was their desire to recover that aspect of traditional economic equality. What was not admirable was the contribution they made to the impoverishment of many ordinary lives.

While it is the case that there are instances of developed Africa characterised by affluent existence, these instances have not either managed to spread their affluence around or to turn around the image of Africa as a continent of despair (see Ramose 2010, 296–297). The physical existence and facticity of many Africans is correctly characterised as underdeveloped. This characterisation calls into sharp attention the general backwardness that Africa suffers in terms of development. The responsibility of development lies within the general functions of the state. What many an African state has done is quietly fail in this respect. While there have been many policies, documents, plans and promises about the developmental path that Africa would take, all this has come to nothing for most people. This failure has resulted in one single reality for many Africans: poverty. This poverty has become a permanent state of affairs for many people. Living with as bare material resources as possible, or living with no material security at all, is an all too common a reality for many. While there could be many explanations for the failure of Africa to develop and pull its majority of citizens out of poverty, those explanations do little to massage the grim reality of being poor. Carew's (2004) lengthy complaint, for example, against global capitalism and the dominant democratic system that makes African states vulnerable and powerless, does not prescribe with precision what needs to be done to pull the poor of Africa out of their poverty.

In outlining these real but deplorable African physical realities, immediately after addressing the concept of Africa, I wish to point to the immediate task at hand for the African philosopher who is interested in both political theory and the majority of the people of this place. But philosophers are known for dealing with abstract categories. They are under no obligation to venture into practical measurements of how people live and the conditions under which they live. Their job is to speculate, and speculate they will. However, I wish to suggest that any African philosopher who so wishes to speculate about the kind of democratic regime that will be proper to

this place cannot escape reckoning with some hard, cold facts about Africa. Ignoring these facts is irresponsible, I would suggest. The facts about this place called Africa are dire. These are facts about the squalid and depraved existence of the majority of people who live in this place. In the face of such brutally cold facts about this place what is the political philosopher going to speculate about? Can she speculate about conditions under which democracy is necessarily to be seen as a maximal moment of representation without equally speculating about what could possibly improve African lives generally? I think it is either inadequate or irresponsible for the philosophical speculation to end with questions of maximal representation. The speculation must necessarily include aspects of that representation that are going to be materially beneficial or useful to the majority of people on this continent. This suggestion proceeds from the basic view that a political system is ultimately tied to a particular economic system. And, in turn, the economic system becomes the primary author of the people's living conditions and quality of life. Philosophy, as a reflection of, and on life, has an obligation to start with basic things that are known to be of effect in life. If the philosopher chooses to reflect in ways that do not fully account for the effects that certain things have on life, then that is a dereliction of duty of one who is supposed to be reflecting on life. While it may be objected that such an enterprise properly belongs to the domain of economics or development studies, what cannot be ignored is that when philosophers address issues of basic political organisation of society, they have to take into account how that political organisation will ultimately impact quality of life.

To sum it up, the conceptual positing of the polity appropriate to Africa has to be done with an eye on what the actual conditions that people exist in amount to. With the conceptual development of a polity in Africa, there are, in my thinking, up to three factors that come into play. The first is the claimed state that Africa was in before the arrival of colonial forces, the second is the destruction that colonialism wrought and the third is the current state that Africa is in. The polity to be developed has to be cognisant of the movement of African people through these realities. If the polity either chooses or is made to concentrate only on one facet of that tripartite reality, it fails to capture the comprehensive response that is necessary to adequately address Africa's specific condition. Both as a conceptual and practical terrain there is need to be alert to the dynamics of an ever-changing appearance.

Socio-politico-cultural reality

What, if anything, can the philosopher say about the social, political and cultural reality of Africa (see Eze 2008a)? While it is easy to trace the historical background of some reality that Africa was, is it equally easy to state what Africa is today, as a

compendium of these vital organs of a people's life? Supporters of consensus cite it as a genuinely African form of democracy because its roots can be traced to traditional African society. While that is essentially a true claim, what is also equally true is that the networks of social and cultural life that enabled the polity to function in the maximal manner that it did, have largely disappeared. Life, for both the traditional Akans and the traditional Ganda, is not the same as that of the modern Akan or Ganda individual and society. I do not merely refer to the disappearance of traditional modes of existence, but I essentially refer to the changing landscape of values, social organisation, communal structures and the way in which the individual perceives herself in the matrix of inter-relationality (see Eze 2008b, 181).

What made consensus work is found in Wiredu's (1997) assertion that at the rock-bottom there is an identity of interests and all it takes is for individuals to recognise that rock-bottom by removing differing perceptions about its nature. This claim is true, but only true in a specific society, a specific cultural milieu and a very specific ethical system. In small, traditional, undifferentiated communities, there is good reason for people to co-operate and work towards the same goal which is at the rock-bottom. That co-operation is in an ordinary-sense kind of way absolutely imperative for the survival of the individual and the community. What makes consensus work, both as a social tool of interaction as well as a political tool of decision-making, is the inseparability of the individual from the rest of the community. This oneness is both epistemological and practical. When supporters of consensus argue that knowledge was dialogical and that experts were not exempt from the dialogical nature of knowledge, what they are pointing to is the fundamental structure of societies that operated by consensus. They were intricately interwoven and everything was communally owned. Without the community, there was no knowledge as expertise did not reside in the individual but in the collective memory of the community. Organically, the community was a repository of the entire life of what individuals experienced. Practically, no one could ever achieve much outside the frameworks of the intricate interdependence networks that the community provided for each individual.

Such a system is likely to readily generate predispositions in individuals that make consensus a possibility. The predisposition to readily assent to consensus processes and abide by outcomes authored by such processes is necessitated by the desire in every individual either to be seen, or to actually be contributing to the common good. In this sense what was at Wiredu's conceived rock-bottom identity of interests was the continued survival of the community. It is this project that everyone desired to participate in, and it is this project that everyone desired to succeed. When there were misunderstandings, it was essentially a matter of misapprehending how this project could be furthered. Collective decision-making is possible if there is a fundamental

agreement about what the common project is. Even individual aspirations have to be tailored to meet communal expectations. As I have argued above, consensus supporters, as exemplified by Wiredu and Gyekye, are thoroughgoing communitarian. This form of communitarianism is faced with all sorts of objections (Matolino 2014; Nel 2008, 34). But, more crucially, this communitarian framework is hardly true for modern African communities. Whenever it is invoked as the prototype of African social organisation it is nothing more than a re-invocation of what traditional African communities were. As a theoretical exposition it suffers many fatalities (Matolino 2014). The point can be stated simply as follows: there is a disconnect between consensus as was conceived in traditional African societies and how it was brought to life with modern African societies. Modern African societies do not typically have the same structures as traditional societies (Fokwang 2005). In fact what life has become, for most Africans, is characterised by excessively weakened communal ties and senses of belonging to this or that community (Njeza 1997, 52). What this necessitates then, for supporters of consensus, is a restatement of consensual democracies without the scaffoldings of traditional social structures.

Culture is the total summary of a people's life. And, culture does not remain fixed. Yet culture is an important enabler of how people make sense of life. It provides a referential framework for people's beliefs, justification for deep-seated assumptions, and shared values and goals. In its totality, it gives people the necessary cohesion to have a starting point of discussing and reaching common points of agreement. It also provides frameworks of adjudicating how differences are to be solved, whenever they arise. Culture gives a background framework to people's daily practices; it enables people to condemn or praise any individual's actions. Traditional societies have an outlook that is consistent with a multiplicity of other realities that build a culture. For example, the culture of a non-scientific society is radically different from the culture of a scientific society. Polities are either supported by the dominant culture or trace their origins from the dominant culture. The culture of consensus, as we have seen, is both inter-personal and political. The frame of reference of political consensus is well-established in the dominant culture.

If that is the case, the question is: Does consensus enjoy support in the tradition and culture of modern society? When I use the term 'tradition' I refer to common practice that has held for a sufficiently long period of time for it to be recognised as a fundamental part of the orientation of any given society. We could even ask ourselves what the modern traditions and cultural practices of Africa are. This is not a contradiction; surely there must be a tradition and culture of today's Africa. We could demystify the necessity of thinking of these terms as representing a remote past by thinking of them in the following way. Let us imagine a 50-year-old organisation. Such an organisation could be said to have a tradition or culture. It could be a

tradition of inefficiency or a culture of protracted negotiating. While I understand that these terms have a more technical and fundamental use, the usage I suggest is not completely strange. In fact it does make sense. There is no need to resort to distant mystical pasts to capture the true sense of both terms. A tradition or culture can be created within a short period of time, ostensibly to replace another tradition or culture. Politically, Africa started seeing independence in the 1950s. From that time up to this day, what culture can we say Africa has developed, politically? Further, could such a culture be capable of supporting consensus as a polity? Is consensus axiomatic, in today's Africa, in all adult relations? My point is not to merely assert that there is a misfit between consensus and prevailing social and cultural practice. Rather, my stronger point is to claim that social structures are always changing so that there could very well be little reason to cling to polities that do not match the realities of social structures. If a polity is to resonate properly with prevailing circumstances, it must be able to reflect those structures it seeks to serve. Unless the polity is stated from an ideological and fundamentalist viewpoint, there is no need for insisting on its purity by virtue of not only its merits but its historical rootedness. While historical significance may have a role to play under different considerations, the historical veracity of a polity does not necessarily make it fit for purpose in the here and now. It could well be the case that such historical facticity proves something fundamentally important about the democratic credentials, independence of thought, respect for equality and logical persuasiveness of Africans in their natural habitat. But, as Ani argues, such essentialisms might invite perpetuation of the stereotypes it seeks to undermine.

In case there is some misunderstanding, I will try to put my point in a different way. The problem with consensus, in the current manner it is stated, is that its advocates make it clear that it is a system that is based on traditional African society. It is a system that was natural to traditional societies. It was the democracy of traditional societies. They also make it clear that the basis of consensus was the enabling communalistic social arrangements. Since this is the case, what would enable consensus in today's Africa? Africa is far from the traditional communalistic outlook of yore. It has become other things which are quite distressing for both the ordinary citizen and the fan of communalism.

The only way that consensus can shed its ideological slant and contribute to the development of an appropriate polity is by addressing the concerns of the here and now. These concerns are born out of the reality that has become the culture and traditions of Africans (see van Binsbergen 1998). If consensus were to engage in a serious appraisal of the current conditions that Africa exists under, it might as well change its commitments or propose things that are different from the traditional mode and polity of consensus. While it is true that no one has argued for a straight

transfer of consensus from the past into modern African society, it is punted as a distinct possibility in the modern era without accompanying adjustments to reflect the environment in which it could possibly operate.

While the stated goal of consensus is important – the attainment of maximal representation – there are issues that consensus must necessarily attend to which are also equally important. As I have sought to argue here, the issues have to do with the changes that have come with the cultural outlook of modern African society. It is not sufficient to think that consensus is superior to majoritarianism and leave the matter at that. Even if it were the case that consensus is superior to majoritarianism in all conceivable respects, it does not follow that it is free of its own conceptual problems. Further, it cannot be the case that consensus has answers to all problems that the continent is faced with. Its supporters have an obligation to show that it has a workable fit with the environment it will operate in.

Purpose of democracy

Delineating the purpose of democracy is mired in controversy. For example, according to Wood, the foundations of the American model of democracy were never meant to further representation. This is largely because the trajectory that the American model followed was not Athenian but of a liberal streak. That liberal orientation was rooted in the capitalist economy that was responsible for the organisation of relations among citizens that ultimately created distinctions between those who had access to means and those who did not. Of the relationship between these economic differences and civic equality Wood writes:

> Capitalism, then, made it possible to conceive of 'formal democracy', a form of civic equality which could coexist with social inequality and leave economic relations between 'elite' and 'labouring multitude' in place. Needless to say, however, the conceptual *possibility* of 'formal democracy' did not make it a historical actuality. There were to be many long and arduous struggles before the 'people' grew to encompass the labouring multitude, let alone women. It is a curious fact that in the dominant ideologies of Anglo-American political culture these struggles have not achieved the status of principal milestones in the history of democracy. In the canons of English-speaking liberalism, the main road to democracy runs through Rome, Magna Carta, the Petition of Right and the Glorious Revolution, not Athens, the Levellers, Diggers and Chartism. Nor is it simply that the historical record belongs to the victors; for if 1688, not Levellers and Diggers, represents the winners, should not history record that democracy was on the losing side? (Wood 1995, 213)

I think three significant issues emerge from this. The first is that the capitalism led to the development of liberal democracy. A distinction that was created in the economic

sphere between the elite and labouring masses was not supposed to be carried over to civic equalities. Civic equalities were supposed to remain untainted by differences of an economic nature and standing. However, and this is the second point from Wood, the intent to secure equality in civic liberties did not immediately get translated into reality. It would be quite a while before all ordinary people were recognised in the equality of civic liberties. Thirdly, and most importantly, it does not appear that democracy was coined for the people. If democracy did eventually triumph, as the Anglo-American variety did, it did not do so on behalf of the people. Its triumph was the triumph of the classes that had sponsored it, and those classes that were propertied, either sought to protect themselves from the intrusions of the majority into their property rights or were fighting against the claims and rights of monarchies. What is significant, particularly in respect to the third point, is that the Anglo-Saxon version of democracy is not the sort of democracy that takes people seriously. The failure of its democratic standing lies in the fundamentals of its conception. *The Federalist* (a series of newspaper articles), emerging after the drafting of the American constitution, shows its authors' opposition to the interests of a faction prevailing. This faction is to be understood as a section of society or group of people that have a particular interest. It is this faction and its interests that have to be stopped so that the will of the citizens or aggregate of the good of the community could prevail. It is on this point that things begin to get fuzzy. There is no specification of what the good of the public is and there is severe condemnation of the faction and its ends. The faction is seen as a group of people who is brought together by some interest they may have and this grouping will occur as a result of people's differences in relation to property ownership and their ability to acquire such property. Those who have property and those who do not, form different interests and are aligned differently. The primary job of government is to adjudicate over these differing interests. In order to ensure that the majority would negatively impact the rights to property, through their common purposes, *The Federalist* authors suggest that the extent of government be expanded. This would ensure that citizens do not directly exercise their power, but that the power they might have is exercised by their representatives. But the real aim and effect of this representation was not to give an adequate and fair voice to the citizens but to ensure that whatever views the citizens had, they would be distilled by the representatives who knew what was good for the state. The strange outcome, then, is not that representation is needed because the state is large, but that a large state is needed so that the direct participation of citizens is prevented.

This model of democracy, with such anti-direct participation roots as well as a twisted sense and purpose of representation, is what was transposed to Africa. Not only did this model get transposed to the continent, but it has taken hold everywhere in the world as an exemplary, if not superior mode of democracy. It is

easy to see that a supporter of consensus or any other variant of democracy, would find the above model not only unsuitable but also particularly remarkable for its undemocratic features. Its biggest weakness as a political system is that it starts off by directly seeking to undermine the will of the people. The only reason why the will of the people is so undermined is based on the suspicion that those without property are likely to form factions that would interfere with the rights of property holders. This is precisely what Wood was attempting to show when she revealed the tension between capitalism and democracy. When capitalism gave birth to liberal democracy with the proviso that economic differences could not be allowed to have an effect on civic equality, the latter had a very hard time to catch up. The supporter of consensus would then, understandably, condemn majoritarian democracy, with its liberal rootedness in capitalism, as an inadequate frame of capturing the people's real interests and wishes. Its violation of the notion and substance of representation is in stark contrast with what traditional consensual democracy stands for. She would then be, she could imagine, on very strong grounds to make a call for the abolishment of majoritarianism in favour of consensus. However, as I have already cautioned, the matter is not this simple since consensus, as a democratic regime, is equally faced with a different set of challenges.

With all these historical considerations, what becomes necessary is to ask what the purpose is of democracy in the current African polity, taking into account the continent's history. What does democracy represent and what does democracy seek to achieve for the people? As a mode of regulating political relations, it seeks to articulate how people are to be governed in ways that ensure that the people still retain power over how they are ruled. Though they might not directly exercise that power, those who do exercise it on behalf of ordinary people. This way, the matter of representation is a straightforward part of democracy. But beyond representation there are other needs that people have that must be fully accounted for. Democracy, then, is not only to be seen as a matter of representation but a matter that encompasses satisfying certain crucial elements of people's existence.

As an illustration, let us look at an ordinary campaign in an ordinary majoritarian democratic dispensation. In such a campaign, the various people vying for votes do not necessarily seek to sell themselves on the strength of their ability to give representation a full meaning. Of course they will talk about what they will do if elected, but most of this is not about how they will ensure that representation is maximised or how their form of representation will differ from everyone else's. What they will concentrate their campaign on will have to do with issues that affect people on a daily basis. Such issues may range from providing jobs, food, housing, education, healthcare and security for the voters. Thus, besides the satisfaction of political requirements of representation, democracy is about other things as well. And whatever these things

are, they are largely determined by the socioeconomic conditions under which the country operates. As Schmitter and Karl argue, the trajectory that democracy will take is largely determined by the local conditions under which it operates. They write: 'There are many types of democracy, and their diverse practices produce a similarly varied set of effects. The specific form democracy takes is contingent upon a country's socioeconomic conditions as well as its entrenched state structures and policy practices' (1991, 76). There are three significant points that emerge from Schmitter and Karl. The first is that as there are many varieties of democracy, there are also equally many effects that are produced by the practice of democracy. Since democratic practice and effect is never monolithic, it is important to give regard to the specificities of democratic outcomes as largely determined by its local conditions. Secondly, the shape of democracy is largely determined by the social and economic conditions of the particular place in which it operates. Thirdly, just like the social and economic aspects, state structures and the policies that the state sponsors largely end up determining the democratic outcome. What this points to is the idea that democracy will differ from place to place. In other words, no two democratic systems can ever be the same as they will have different factors influencing their structure and final outcome. However, I wish to extend this point by suggesting that democracy is never consistently the same in any one given place. Since socioeconomic conditions as well as the state's structures and policies in a particular place are always changing, democracy itself will change accordingly. This is especially so in societies that go through fundamental transformations as Africa has.

While it has never been my intention to dispute that there was democracy in African traditional society, my question has been to wonder what its purpose was. I suggest that the purpose of democracy was to cater for the people in the specific situation in which they lived. Democracy sought to animate the important aspirations that people had. These aspirations, as argued above, were largely issued by the social structures that animated the political outlook of traditional society.

What can be said of democracy's purpose then, is twofold. Firstly, while democracy is essentially about representation and how people are factored in, in decision-making and governance, democracy essentially must facilitate the realisation of some fundamentals about society. These fundamentals could be about what people value or what people generally aspire to become. Democratic practice and all institutions that support it must be effectively of service to those values and aspirations. Political institutions, practices of governance and thoughts about effective representation can change. Indeed they have changed in the course of human history. What does not change are aspirations that bring people together to develop systems of governance that will animate those aspirations. If we think of this point in another way we could ask ourselves the following question: What has primacy over the other – democracy

as a system, or the values that democracy seeks to animate? The answer is clearly that the values that democracy seeks to animate are more important than the democratic system itself. If, for example, it were to be found that democracy as a system had become increasingly stymied in working towards the attainment of those values, then it would be perfectly legitimate to overthrow democracy and replace it with an appropriately functional system.

Democracy is not an end in itself; it is something that is essentially in service of a higher end: the people. To suggest, therefore, that there is a maximal or original system of democracy that is to be found in traditional African society is to subvert the position of persons as an end. When it is said that democracy is about the people and for the people, this claim must not be confused to be equal to claiming that the people and democracy are synonymous. What it simply means is that the best way of fulfilling people's basic desires is by some route of democracy. This actual democratic outcome is determined by the practices that are dominant at any given time. The people's values, which are expressed in the arrangements of their social structures, are given to change by virtue of being influenced by any number of factors. A people's advances in scientific knowledge, their suspension of beliefs in mythical forces, their connections and interactions with people who are vastly different, could individually or collectively lead to a change in values that in turn shape society. Once this change is registered, there also has to develop a different political system that guarantees the new values.

Whatever the people choose to attain under whatever circumstances, a polity only has to enable the realisation of that choice. To put the matter differently, I will state it as follows. A polity does not instruct political subjects on what values must be pursued and by what dint of the prescriptions of the polity. A polity is essentially not supposed to be so prescriptive that its recommendation to the people would be one that is based on some stated superiority of that polity. Unfortunately, this is what has happened with supporters of consensus. They have taken it to be the case that there is something that consensus could recommend to the people which they are terribly in need of. While it is true that some democratic rights to representation are violated or not adequately met, the idea that consensus could be prescriptive in ridding these problems is troublesome. For instance, the function for which consensus was developed has all but disappeared. Consensus, as a polity, was specifically developed to be responsible for animating the goals of a society that was structured around an axiomatic principle of consensus in all adult relations. The best way to capture the valorisation of that principle of consensual co-operation was through developing a polity that would also be modelled on exactly the same values as those of the society from which it proceeded. Since adult co-operation, which led to consensus, was voluntary and highly prized, the polity also had to match that value.

But this value essentially came from the simple necessity of co-operation and tight-knit associations which are characteristic of all traditional communities. So, first, there was the fact of life about the essence of co-operation, and this was followed by this fact getting transformed into a value, an ethic, a definition of personhood, a metaphysics. From there, this was transformed into a polity that would guarantee the realisation of this value, this metaphysics. When we refer to the historical practice of consensus, it is absolutely necessary that the context in which it arose and became an indispensable part of traditional society's polity must be fully understood. Without such a correlation, the story of consensus as a panacea to the evils of majoritarianism is not entirely accurate. For the majoritarianism that it seeks to cure was absolutely not necessary when consensus was the dominant polity. If majoritarianism had featured as an inescapable feature and frame of reference to the people's needs, then consensus would have not answered to those needs. It could not have been punted or practised as it would have not fitted with what majoritarianism or other associated principles sought to achieve. The reference to consensus as a workable alternative to majoritarianism without accompanying serious disclaimers about the scope of its application is disingenuous. The move by supporters of consensus of only narrating it within the traditional framework as a justificatory and illustrative point of a version of African democracy is also equally disingenuous.

The purpose of democracy, then, cannot be conceived in terms of a fixed goal that is given as a prescriptive social and political order that ideal human societies must aim at. On the contrary, the aim of democracy is to give sufficient grounding to those aspects that people value so much that they agree they are worth protection in political ways. If these values change, they do not have to be protected politically. The issue with polities is that they must be able to capture what the people's general aspirations are (Gbadegesin 1991, 208). Above I pointed out that both Wiredu (1997) and Eze's (1997) interpretation of democracy is truncated. Wiredu thinks that the essence of democracy is creating facilitative frameworks that enable people to access their rock-bottom identity of interests. In opposition to this understanding, Eze argues that the real task of democracy is to manage successfully ever-present individuated desires. In my view, both conceptions of democracy fail. In the case of Wiredu's understanding of democracy, it only speaks to a specific social order which valorises agreement and co-operation. If Wiredu's democracy speaks to such a social order, it cannot be recommended as a viable system to a radically different social order. Eze's conception equally speaks to a specific social order that is largely characterised by atomistic individuals pursuing their own individualised goals. What it fails to capture is the possibility that there could be societies that do not necessarily value difference to the extent that a polity must fundamentally obsess about the successful management of that difference as a corpus of the definition of democracy.

As I have argued elsewhere (Matolino 2012), both Wiredu and Eze's formulations are just but moments of democracy. Or, if one wishes, versions of democracy that are specific to distinct places and epochs. They both cannot be raised to be corrective models of other democratic practices. Democracy is far much more than these specific moments that Wiredu and Eze differently allude to.

A possible objection to the foregoing could be that what I have outlined is quite a radical departure from the ordinary understanding of democracy. The idea of the objection could be anchored around the firm belief that democracy must necessarily be understood as the formation of government by the people and the continued operation of such a government as of the people. The objection could be further extended to assert that in my claim of the purpose of democracy, what I have actually achieved is diluting the meaning of democracy to any set of social organisation that people might have at any given time as determined by their specific cultural and socioeconomic reality.

This objection misses what I seek to set out as the purpose or aims of democracy. As I have argued above, I believe that there are some minimum conditions that must be satisfied for any polity to count as democratic. What I am arguing against, at this point, is the idea that there is a version of democracy that is conceptually as close as possible to the definition of democracy. Such a strategy, I have sought to argue, does not help as it radically departs from what democracy is all about: the people. If we look at the definitions that both Wiredu (1997) and Eze (1997) provide, it becomes very clear that what they are doing is simply picking a particular function of democracy and over-emphasising its relevance in what they believe is its true articulation. Democracy is varied, and its varied form is importantly determined by the context in which it operates. As contexts of democracy will differ, its application will also differ. And what determines all this are the specific people in its particular context.

This leaves me with the task of outlining what the purpose of democracy is. The task of democracy, principally, is sensitivity to the plight of the people. The first plight has of course to do with how people are governed or how they are represented. As there is universal agreement that the people cannot directly participate in their rule, democracy must principally be about how people are represented politically. As Wiredu (1997) correctly argues, representation which is encompassed in substantive and formal terms is a better version than one that only satisfies the formal requirement. But as I have argued, this only specifies one aspect of democracy: representation. This has been the handicap of the debate on consensus; the debate has only been limited to a single aspect. While representation is an important aspect of democracy, it is not the all of democracy. This view is informed by my position that democracy as a theory of governance has to be much wider than capturing issues of representation. It has to

capture other issues that subjects of a democratic dispensation may consider equally important. Thus in keeping with Wiredu, the interpretation of democracy is quite hard as it must involve matters that go beyond issues of representation.

The plight of the people comes in various ways. Political failure of states or their leaders may author as many tragedies as imaginable (see Oyeshile 2009). However, the purpose of democracy as a theory of governance has to include specifying what institutions will be permitted and protected in the social, cultural and economic interface of society. It is easy for a theory of governance to specify what political institutions will be permitted to operate as aids to the realisation of the stipulated political goals. Such frameworks are always about maximising the possibility of the polity asserting its influence and hold. A theory of governance that prioritises freedoms of individuals will, for example, specify and insist on the development of those institutions that solidify individual freedom. On the contrary, a theory that believes in the importance of the benevolence of a dictator will specify institutions that promote the veneration of the dictator as an all-knowing and all-good individual who consistently acts in the best interests of her citizens.

Any theory of governance takes the role of being the grand theory in relation other theories that seek to support the main goal of the polity (see Temple 2012). If a political theory is premised on co-operation of individuals to give effect to its main goal of harmony, there must be a theory of persons. This theory of persons must specify what enables persons to ordinarily opt for co-operation as opposed to opting for conflict. It also has to specify what the terms and conditions of that co-operation will be, as well as the nature of institutions that will support that co-operation (van Binsbergen 1995, 8–9). The rules of the co-operation between institutions and the rules of engagement between individuals and institutions must also be specified. The very purpose of institutions, and how individuals feature in that purpose as serving the higher goal of the polity, must also be specified. An example of socialist nationalists will demonstrate the point I am making here. Nationalists, principally, had their eye on the political freedom of their people. However, they understood that political freedom on its own was not enough. They saw that the development of a political theory without an accompanying re-interpretation of society that would seek to support that theory was bound to fail. Hence they saw the need of outlining the conditions necessary for the success of nationalist African socialism. This re-interpretive work covered the notions of personhood, family and social organisation, economic organisation as well as relations within and without the continent. The sort of obligations that were placed on the individual and institutions were consistent with the primary view of the polity. This primary view of the polity was about unity and coherence. Though unity and coherence of a nation was a primary political goal, it needed to be supported through sharing the same goal with the polity. Even

in their dictatorial tendencies, such as the creation of one-party polities and the accompanying impoverishment of African lives, they at least had the temerity to develop theoretical postulates of all sectors of society. These sectors would in turn support the grand vision of the polity.

The purpose of democracy then, is to be a meta-theory. A meta-theory of social organisation, personhood and the inter-relation between institutions as well as persons and their respective institutions. There must be details spelt out on how the entire organisation of society coincides with the ultimate political goal. Kwame Nkrumah (1964) was quite alert to the problem that can be created by a disjuncture between social values and organisation, and the goals prescribed by a polity. Nkrumah argued that a society that is characterised by such a disconnection will suffer schizophrenia. This schizophrenia will be a direct result of other institutions of society working at odds with the main goal of the polity.

My point is not so much to specify what the desirable polity is and what its rightful accompanying theories of institutions should be. Rather, my point is merely to illustrate the kinds of responsibilities that a political theory has towards articulating a comprehensive order of what will make that theory work. If the polity is able to specify its underlying commitments and its views on how institutions are to be modelled, we are in a better position to make judgement about whether some of the things it has to say about fundamental issues that characterise human reality are correct or unacceptable. We may even measure the sincerity and relevance of the theory on that score. A theory, for example, that gratuitously misrepresents human interests by depicting them as a harmonious continuum of unbroken patrimony, is wrong. A theory on the other hand, that posits human interests as so radically differentiated that there is no possibility of co-operation, or harmony between social and political players, has also to be rejected for its erroneous rendering of interests as ever diametrically opposed.

The disquieting aspect of consensus has to do with how it has simply chosen to reiterate the traditionally institutionalised polity. Its formulation of the theory of person has even been limited to the traditional communalistic views of personhood. Wiredu has suggested that what needs to be spelt out is how the traditional mode of consensus could be transferred to fit with modern reality. This shows that he is clearly aware of the difficulties that are associated with defending a traditional polity when its traditional scaffoldings have disappeared together with traditional life. What is needed is not so much a spelling out of the traditional scaffolding of consensus, as we see in Teffo and Wamala, but an attentive demonstration of how these scaffoldings will work as transformed modern scaffolding and what modern institutions it will subsequently develop and argue for.

African aspirations and democracy

As members of the human species can Africans be said to have different aspirations from the rest of humanity? Or is it the case that Africans have the same aspirations as other members of the human species who exist on this earth? Specifically, could it be the case that Africans have the same aspirations as those who live in developed majoritarian democracies? If there are any differences in aspirations between different members of the human species, what could these differences be? This series of questions may help illuminate some important aspects that people share. If it is the case that we are all human persons, who have the same genome, members of the same species and participants in human life, it might be the case that we have basic things in common. Although it is true that there are cultural differences and there are specificities which apply to any given people, it is also equally true that there are certain things that bind humanity together.

The question then becomes to what degree are we the same or to what degree are we different. In other words which is greater than the other – our differences or our similarities? In articulating the issue of differences or similarities between people, what I wish to point out is the notion of aspirations that African people may be said to have. The aspirations that people have are of a sort that can be said to fulfil their basic and non-basic needs. With basic needs I refer to those things that humans as biological entities absolutely need. These necessities include food, shelter, clothing, work, and any other basic necessities such as medicines, energy resources, clean water and safe and reliable transport systems. Non-basic needs refer to things such as a quality education, security of future prospects, self-realisation, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

If we look at basic human needs, it is quite evident that all these needs must be satisfied to secure the continued physical existence of people. But besides these needs, there are other needs that people aspire to. One good example would be the issue of freedom. In the struggle for independence the oft repeated mantra was the need for freedom and equality. That humans must be free becomes an inalienable aspect of their existence and understanding of life. The greatest paradox in the story of colonialism is how the colonisers, who were known to be advocates of the inalienability of their own freedoms, could actually manage to convince themselves that it was acceptable for them to humiliate and reduce other people to a secondary and oppressed status. Of course we know that what enabled and justified the colonial mission was the belief by the coloniser that the colonised people were not equal to the coloniser.

However, what became evident at some stage of Africa's post-independence euphoria, particularly under failed socialist regimes, was plainly that Africa was in

serious ways failing to satisfy the basic needs of its people, not to mention that other needs such as freedoms and associated hopes were routinely crushed. What, then, will an authentically African polity do for African aspirations?

There are two ways of looking at this issue. The first issue is to acknowledge that a polity such as consensus is not the first and only one to claim African authenticity. For sure, nationalists made the same claim. We could then go about settling this matter by investigating whether consensus is superior to nationalist socialism and whether it is capable of capturing African aspirations better than nationalists had proposed. The second route is to face up to what those African aspirations are and whether any polity would succeed at capturing those aspirations. Would a polity that has worked well elsewhere be able to capture these African aspirations? Or is it the case that African aspirations are uniquely captured and expressed in ways that are distinctly African?

My suggestion is that the second route is the most plausible manner of proceeding. While the first route might be plausible for purposes of establishing which polity is authentically traditional or African, that will not aid the point I have in mind. The point I wish to pursue has to do with how we seek to understand the uniqueness of African aspirations and how they might be adequately addressed via the development of a unique African polity. To answer the kinds of worries contained in the questions I have raised, I will resort to reiterating the basic commonalities that exist between people. I wish to illustrate this point by referring to what I shall call an average person in any country. The person I have in mind could be any adult in their late 20s or early 30s. This person has a high school education but did not earn high enough grades to go to university, but might have the option of entering a technical college or following a career path of relative specialisation, such as becoming a welder, a plumber, a police officer, a soldier, a clerk, a carpenter, a second-hand car salesman, an electrician, a bus driver, or anything that is consistent with the choices made which were available immediately after high school. This average person is not very sophisticated; she knows enough geography and world politics. She has never travelled outside her country and has no particular reason to do so. At this age she wishes to settle down and start a family not very far from where she was brought up.

Unlike the Rawlsian individual hidden behind the veil of ignorance, my individual is one who is well aware of her situation. She knows that other people are rich, yet she probably will never be. She knows that she does not have the dedication or mental astuteness to become a university professor, a brain surgeon or a US dollar millionaire. Depending on a whole range of factors unique to her specific country, she might even know that she will never own a car, or if she will ever own one it would be a jalopy. She might have aspirations of buying and owning a modest house one day, a place that she can raise her family. She might have a desire to send her children to

decent schools, and by decent schools she means schools in rich parts of her town. This individual is of a particular faith and is generally a good citizen. She is quite realistic about her life and leads a generally frugal existence.

There are two reasons for my choice of this situated individual. The first serves to demonstrate how this individual is quite ordinary in many aspects of her existence. The second reason serves to show how the aspirations and desires of this ordinary individual are actually of the sort that exist almost everywhere. In her situatedness the individual does not aspire for different things from other people in other parts of the world. What this individual desires and aspires for is the security of her existence expressed in terms of the security of tenure of her job, the future security and prospects of her children and all everyday things such as shelter, food, clothing and her freedoms. These aspirations are quite basic and absolutely inalienable.

A possible objection against my suggestion could seek to show that I have downplayed the very idea of situatedness. It could be argued that people, by virtue of being in different places, largely determines the nature of their aspirations. People in Africa, for example, have a distinct history from the rest of humanity. As a result of that history, there are different forces that are at work that would contribute to the shaping of their reality and, in turn, the aspirations they form out of that reality. Africa as a place that has two contradictory historical epochs – that of its pristine past and that of slavery and colonialism – will never be on the same trajectory as the very author of its colonial woes. Not only did the ordinary Westerner benefit from the exploitation of Africa during slavery and colonialism, but skewed relations are maintained up to this day to benefit the ordinary Westerner. The African is deliberately disadvantaged by global economic arrangements, as Carew (2004) has argued, that intentionally seek to disempower the African state as well as the citizen. From this it is possible to argue that freedom has not been realised in its full sense for Africans. Their needs and aspirations, therefore, are largely of a political nature and they must develop systems that first and foremost address these political issues. Such needs and aspirations are of a radically different form from those of formerly oppressive nations. It could be argued that what African nations need is a developmental and consensus-oriented polity which would ensure that Africa adequately addresses its problems. It could even be argued that consensus, specifically, is able to address the aspirations of African people, by the nature of its democratic features which allow for consultation that is as wide as possible. This consultation will not only be restricted to political decision-making but may be extended to other facets such as economic policy.

There is some truth in this objection. The most crucial truth has to do with how Africans can be said to be specially impoverished by a number of factors that have combined to condemn them. Africans have been placed in a special situation where they find themselves as a worse off continent and people. This continent undoubtedly

needs all the help it can to get out of its current deplorable situation. However, with this truth contained in the objection, what might be of interest is to find out how consensus is properly situated to deal with these issues or how consensus may precisely propose to deal with these specially African problems. The stated advantage that consensus has as a polity is that it emphasises its mode of operation of widespread agreement over decisional matters. What that modus of operation simply does is to ensure that there is general widespread agreement on the action to adopt. As Wiredu makes clear, the process of consensus does not look for the value of the decision. In other words it does not seek to establish which, of the available decisions or competing choices, is cognitively superior. The implication of this procedural feature of consensus is that it appears to be unable to ask serious questions about what the good and appropriate action could be. What seems to be prioritised is that people reach agreement about a particular action. While it is the case that issues are debated openly and freely, with a lot of reason adjudicating over those debates, what remains clouded in unhelpful decision-making is the commitment to refuse to go with a cognitively superior decision. Or, at the very least, to go with what appears like a cognitively superior value. The bearing of this consideration on the current issue is that what Africans need the most are not broad consensual positions but the best of ideas that can get them out of their current restrictive and qualitatively poor existence. Even if there were to be general consensus operating as a general rule of decision-making, such consensual procedure and the resultant decisions are no guarantee for the immediate improvement of African lives. What is at stake is the idea that debates will be had, but those debates will turn out not to be the most useful debates or will turn out to be wrong debates about what Africans really need (Ani 2012). While the issue touches on the nature of debating in consensus, the most crucial point here is that consensus is faced with serious limitations in as far as developmental issues are concerned. Short of a full declaratory statement of what consensus's commitment is to the general improvement of African lives we are only left with the promise and prospect of widespread agreement on the need for consensus.

Beyond consensus and majoritarianism

If it is the case, then, that majoritarianism is in trouble as supporters of consensus argue, and if it is also the case that there is a need to revise the many aspects of consensus as I have sought to show here, we could then have good reason to think that both consensus and majoritarianism have to be transcended. The biggest problem in the debate that juxtaposes majoritarianism and consensus, as democratic polities, is that it unnecessarily limits the scope of possibilities that could be available to Africa. Majoritarianism is rightly described as a foreign imposition that does not have the

ability to take full effect on the continent. On the other hand, there are conceptual and practical difficulties that are attendant to consensus as I have outlined above. These two polities, then, can be said to be opposites with generally irreconcilable differences.

But is it really the case that consensus and majoritarianism are so irreconcilable? While I do not seek to develop a hybrid version of consensus and majoritarianism, a word of caution is necessary. I find it rather less than helpful that the two polities are seen as necessarily irreconcilable opposites. Polities morph themselves into systems and they eventually become dominant not by completely crushing what they consider to be their opposites. Of course it is the case that sometimes a formerly repressive and communist arrangement is replaced by a more tolerant and open-market system, but that normally happens in situations where concerted struggles have been waged to overthrow the former. Where there are no such revolutions, struggles or organised methods of dethroning the opposite polity, then the morphing of a polity becomes much slower, unpredictable, and almost always negotiated between the two competing or rival polities. This is likely to be particularly so with consensus and majoritarianism. It could be said that both have their specific weaknesses and strengths, both have, theoretically, found Africa as a home, both are competing for dominance, and both have become peculiar African democratic versions in their own different ways. Theoretically, they are both faced with problems, and practically, they both equally have to negotiate how they are going to register maximal effect on the African terrain. Since consensus is not conceived as a revolutionary alternative to majoritarianism, its ability to eventually take hold in modern Africa will largely depend on its ability to negotiate with the current dominant system. Barring a violent and immediate jettisoning of majoritarianism in favour of consensus, these two systems will have to negotiate, re-negotiate and ultimately accommodate the best of each polity's attributes.

While I do not think it necessary, at this stage, to specify the exact or possible form that this negotiation could take, my position of the inevitability of such a need for the negotiation between these two polities is informed by two crucial considerations. The first consideration is that majoritarianism, despite all its stated weaknesses, has become the universal manner of expressing people's wishes, the source of legitimising political associations and freedoms, and universal suffrage is a major cornerstone of all this. The second consideration is that any system that does not minimally satisfy these requirements is simply seen as undemocratic. If it is the case, then, that consensus seeks to supplant majoritarianism, it has to find ways in which the virtues of majoritarianism are incorporated into what are considered to be the strengths of consensus. This will ensure that the legitimacy of consensus as a democracy that truly captures the high values of consensus as well as the basic values

of a democracy, including the positive values of majoritarianism, are guaranteed. Consensus cannot operate as if it were completely at odds with some of the positive aspects of majoritarian democracy, as if it were a re-invention of the wheel. If we consider the weaknesses of majoritarian democracy that have been outlined by the supporters of consensus, we could say even though the outline of these weaknesses is legitimate, it does not follow that these weaknesses cannot be eliminated by either a revision of majoritarianism or by inducing a fair dose of some positive values of consensus. Take, for example, the division between parties; a bit of education about the need to view political difference as not ultimately destined to decapitation of one's political enemies, could go a long way towards creating a healthier environment of political competition.

As I have argued above, the biggest problem on the continent has been that majoritarian democracy has not been allowed to take full effect and shape. This problem is best captured by Wiredu who correctly states that in modern Africa dictators have learned how to transform themselves into pseudo democrats by manipulating the system in their own favour. This is particularly achieved by satisfying the most minimal condition of democracy, the electoral process. However, that electoral process is rendered as nothing more than a charade, where the citizens' wishes are trumped in favour of the incumbent, who masquerades as a political know it all (Walker 1966). Having control of the state apparatus, including the judiciary and the armed forces, many an African dictator has learned how to create a façade of democracy when in actual fact their rule is largely oppressive. What follows, then, is a complete breakdown in all systems that are supposed to support the possibility and viability of majoritarian democracy. When these systems have been deliberately collapsed or made to be in service of the proverbial big man, we can no longer claim to have a genuine multiparty democracy. This is particularly so in cases where the so called opposition parties are woefully weak with no capacity to organise themselves into a force that can legitimately take over power. This can obtain through two ways: either the opposition is fragmented to the extent of dividing votes or the opposition is deliberately refused space by the ruling party to operate as opposition parties must ordinarily operate. Added to this could be the problems that Wiredu identifies, in particular the problem of dividing party political membership and activity along ethnic lines. Once that division is entrenched as part of the political system, then all other misdemeanours that make majoritarianism so objectionable on the continent are sure to follow. The most objectionable activity on the continent has been the committing of murder in the name of a political party.

These problems are not necessarily borne out of majoritarianism. It would indeed be a poor analysis if the supporters of consensus were to maintain that the flaring up of tribalistic misdemeanours is owed to the presence of majoritarianism

on the continent. Whatever the tribalistic cause is, it cannot be solely authored by majoritarian politics. In most instances, it turns out to be the case that these tribalistic tendencies are already in place and majoritarianism is only used as a handmaid of furthering these hardened attitudes.

It is, undoubtedly, a fact that there are problems with majoritarianism. Some of those problems, in the American scene, have been ably pointed out by Dworkin (2006). However, what should be of interest to those who wish to critique the inadequacies of majoritarianism on the continent is how majoritarianism has failed to develop as a polity and how social institutions that are supposed to support it have also equally failed to mature. Most importantly, if the critique is to hold water, it must be worked out who is responsible for these failures and who stands to benefit from them. While some of these failures are deliberately authored by holders of power, some of them can be traced to factors such as the history of colonial divide and rule. I am oriented towards accepting that democratic problems on the continent can be said to be peculiarly African. What I am reluctant to concede is the argument that these problems are essentially rooted in multiparty majoritarian democracy.

What I propose here, then, is that the real problem is how any political system is open to abuse by power-mongers of this continent (Diamond 1990, 53). Indeed this continent has had very colourful episodes of dictatorial abuse of power which is manipulated in all sorts of ways to further the interests of the ruling party. My concern, then, becomes slightly different from that of the supporters of consensus. My major concern becomes: What is really responsible for the excesses of abuse of power that seem to be naturally associated with Africa? These abuses of power include manipulating the system by the incumbent to remain in power at any cost, including blatantly illegitimate ways.

If we are then to assess the problems associated with Africa, we could come to the conclusion that those problems go beyond the mere failure of majoritarian democracy. Majoritarianism only adds to an already volatile cocktail of problematic political abuse of power. The features of majoritarianism are then used by those in power to attain ends that only serve their interests. The behaviour of abusing any political system for purposes of staying in power is neither new nor only consistent with multiparty politics. This tendency towards abuse of power was first witnessed, in post-colonial Africa, by the excesses of the advocates of socialism or the one-party state. Relying on what they described as national unity or oneness, they operated systems that eventually became politically oppressive for their ordinary citizens. Oppositional political space and activity was either shut down or dealt with terribly. Here we could make two sorts of assessments: we could either look at the logical viability of one-party rule and socialism or we could look at how one-party rule and socialism were inappropriately used to suppress political freedoms. If we look at the

former, it would really amount to a critique of a political and economic system either as ill-suited for Africans or any people. If we look at the latter, it would come to asking and answering questions about attitudes to power that African leaders exhibit. While the first consideration is perfectly legitimate, for my present purposes I wish to pursue the second consideration.

My reference to attitudes to power would essentially involve asking questions about how people who are in power perceive their role in the development and improvement of their subjects' lives. Do they see themselves as powerful agents of change who are therefore tasked with making a difference in their subjects' lives? Or they have another view? While questions of attitude are admittedly of a psychological nature, what is of philosophical significance is how the holders of power actually use that power as evidenced in their public profile. What is also of philosophical significance is how systems are abused and reduced to be effectively only of service to the holder of power. Clearly, the two successive polities, socialism and multiparty democracy, have a key feature in common: the failure of governance and of the state in Africa. Africa, under multiparty democracy is still faced with the same problems it was faced with under socialism. Problems such as leaders refusing to leave positions of power, even when they are publicly acknowledged as failures, are only too common and ever-present in Africa. Problems of underdevelopment and impoverishment of the ordinary people have remained present ever since African countries attained their independence. Lack of political tolerance, inefficient and ineffective rule, abuse of the public purse to benefit the pockets of a few individuals, and the abuse of state power by those who can are a long-established tradition in Africa. The significant issue, to my mind, has nothing to do with the real worth or status of a polity. While, as I have maintained, it is possible to critique a polity on its own merit or lack thereof, such a critique can only be successful if premised on the understanding that its perceived success or failure is directly traceable to its constituent features. That is hardly the case with both multiparty democracy or socialism, both of which consensus is opposed to. There are other factors that can be said to have been responsible for the failure of these systems.

Besides the personal blights that were associated with the personae of those responsible for the failures of socialism and multiparty democracy in Africa, if we follow Carew (2004), there are factors that are externally generated with the sole aim of destabilising the functionality of local polities. For Carew, the authors of the failure and destabilisation of the African state are international monetary bodies and the deliberate positioning of Africa on the margins of global politics. This means that there are serious and powerful agencies that have a real interest in keeping, the ability to keep, and that benefit from keeping African countries in a dependent state. What this means is that African states are going to be undermined regardless of

what they seek to set for themselves as a viable polity. If it is truly the case that there are powerful external agencies that have an interest in keeping African states in a perpetually dependent position, then it is also equally true that there will be forces that will be deployed to ensure that this dependence will continue. The matter of the failure of African states, then, is no longer about the inappropriateness of a polity that is used by the host country. Rather, it is now about how the host country is faced with an array of belligerent forces that seek to ensure that it does not register victory in anything at all.

On the other hand, following Wiredu, we find that most African leaders are not truly faithful to the dictates of majoritarianism, but mainly seek to manipulate multiparty features of democracy for their benefit. If a single leader, or a collection of leaders, in a given country, is solely obsessed with accumulating and retaining as much power as possible, it then is no longer about how multiparty democracy has failed but about how the leaders have simply become power-mongers. As dedicated power-mongers, they will stop at nothing to ensure retention of power. Majoritarian, multiparty democracy as popularised by the USA and the United Kingdom, with its insistence on adversarial engagement, surely has many weaknesses. Those weaknesses are a perfect target for legitimate criticism. Its failure to capture meaningful representation could be such one weakness. However, majoritarian, multiparty democracy's weaknesses on the African continent have tended to take on a regrettable distinct African flavour. This distinct African flavour includes murdering political opponents, manipulation of constitutional provisions, suppression of opposition political parties, suppression of people's freedoms, highly questionable electoral outcomes, a general disregard for the rule of law, and an uncompromising plunder of the public purse. Put simply, many an African country is actually in a state of collapse, politically and economically. In the face of this unmitigated chaos, the question is: Is consensus able to tame whatever is responsible for this state of affairs? Could consensus get to the root of all these problems and effectively chart a way out of this morass? I think that the biggest problem that consensus would find itself immediately confronted with is of the same sort as that which confronts majoritarian multiparty democracy, on the continent. It is the problem of what I will loosely characterise as the lack of will on the part of African leaders to be politically responsible and faithful to systems. While it could be a universal characteristic of all politicians to manipulate given systems to their advantage, in Africa that manipulation has been quite extreme in its tendency to cause a complete collapse of the respect of basic rules leading to widespread degradation of ordinary lives. This may no longer just be a political problem as it immediately necessitates answering the question of what the exact cause of this sort of behaviour is. If the failure I refer to goes beyond ordinary political failure and weakness, is there some diagnostic framework that can, then,

capture what the problem is with African leaders. This sort of inquiry may lead us to moral considerations. Whatever those moral considerations could be, there is serious reckoning to be had with the fact that there are simply undesirable tendencies in all generations of our African leaders from independence to date.

What consensus is unable to do, both as a part of our elegant political past and as an inspiration for our polity, is to stop any predatory leader or leaders from abusing the rules, institutions and practices of consensus for those leaders' narrow goals. Even if consensus is proclaimed as a return to the source, as Eze claims, as well as an author of Africans' genuine freedom, it has to be sensitive to how the struggle for freedom is always open to change. The dynamic of that change is shaped by the specific histories of people as Tsenay Serequberhan argues when he writes:

> The 'practice of freedom' or liberty is grounded on and arises out of the self-formative *ethos* of a people—the temporality or the way of Being of a people. In our context this occurs in the concrete process of struggle of differing African peoples to actualize their free existence. This presupposes the liberation struggle as it unfolds within the context of specific and particular histories, and with it the *concrete implementation*—the practice—of liberty which is the formal and proclaimed *raison d'etre* of the struggle in its very inception. (1994, 88)

This is written in answer to a question that Serequeberhan had just posed: 'On this point, given the central problematic of this study as a whole, the question is: How does one establish the practice or *ethos* of freedom in the process of liberating one's existence from external – direct or indirect – domination?' (1994, 88). Thus the concern that Serequeberhan raises is one of how people of this continent can understand their freedom as historically necessitated by various struggles against all forms of oppression. It is crucial to note that Serequeberhan alludes to oppression either occurring from external or internal forces. What is needed is to confront any of these modes of oppression. It is doubtful, in my view, that the success of such a confrontation will be based on either insistence on consensus or its sole use as an inspiration for our polity. This practice of freedom or liberty, as informed by the people's specific ethos as well as the conditions under which they exist, will ultimately determine the mode which is best suited to attain the specific outcomes that each people has. The reality of the matter is that this struggle for freedom is an on-going battle. When old oppressors are deposed, they are immediately replaced by new oppressors who have different modes of operation. Although the oppression may not be qualitatively the same, it still is oppression which has to be confronted and deposed. An all too common story for many African countries is that the former liberators become the oppressors. This is followed by the violent removal of the local oppressors, and that cycle becomes an established tradition. While the manner of some of these struggles for freedom may be objectionable, such as military coups, what

remains a single truth is that oppression is always present and has to be confronted.

If the greatest political challenge relates to securing people's freedoms, if this has always been the reason for our past struggles, our on-going struggles, and possibly our future struggles, it becomes quite clear that certain systems will be more suited to attaining this goal than others. These systems will not prioritise decisional-making by consensus. They will not be obsessed with trying to arrive at the best form of representation. What they will seek to do is to generate social conditions that can be viewed as pure justice. By pure justice I refer to the satisfaction of conditions that prioritise the equal treatment of all citizens, respect for rule of law, an absence of crude manipulation of systems and the ownership of public resources by all. This presupposes a respect for agreed rules of engagement and such rules of engagement do not prioritise how decision-making, as a process, is the cornerstone of legitimate rule. What has to legitimise any rule is something more than the process of decision-making. While decision-making procedures may be important as part of some democratic practice or view, they do not equate to democracy itself. Democracy, as a mode of governance that seeks to be essentially a rule of the people, involves several other dimensions to capture the moment maximising any polity as a democracy. In the case of Africa, the struggle for democracy has become synonymous with the struggle for freedom. What is essential in this context is to understand what that struggle for freedom entails. Consensus may just be an unsuitable mode of successfully waging that struggle.

As Emmanuel Eze (1997) points out, the basic premise on which consensus is supposed to work, is Wiredu's (1997) claim that at the rock-bottom, there is an identity of interests. In questioning the authenticity of that rock-bottom identity of interests, Eze asks what the identity of interests will be between an oppressor and the oppressed people. He asks whether such an identity of interests could ever be possible or desirable. What this points to is the idea that there is an aspect, in the struggle for freedom and broader democracy, in which consensus is ill-suited. That aspect has to do with the fight for freedom as a continuous engagement between the oppressed and the oppressor. The plight of Africans has been, and continues to be the struggle for genuine freedom. Old and foreign oppressors have simply been replaced by new and local ones. Both sets of oppressors share the flaw of desiring to retain power while exploiting whatever the land and the people have to offer. As the struggle against both oppression and exploitation continues, majoritarianism and consensus have a negligible role to play in the attainment of genuine freedom for ordinary Africans.

What we are left with, are two opposing systems that have different, but equally untenable, recommendations for Africa. On one hand, we have the view that consensus will be a promising starting point for realising the democratic goals and aspirations

of the continent and its people. On the other hand, we have the recommendation that the success of majoritarian multiparty democracy must be allowed to take root if the continent is to be successful. With the latter, the problem, as ably demonstrated by supporters of consensus, is that not only is this a foreign and imposed system; its main failure has been its inability to establish itself as a natural polity on the continent. The reasons for this failure range from the belief that local conditions that understand life as primarily communitarian are not well-suited to play host to such an adversarial system, up to cynical manipulation of majoritarian multiparty democracy by local oppressors. With the former, problems associated with its intent include the difficulty of translating a system that was essentially designed for small, undifferentiated communities to play the role of fostering unity of purpose in modern diverse and individualistic societies. While the system might have worked well in the past, it won't necessarily work well in modern African societies. But besides this practical difficulty, there are conceptual unclarities that are associated with the democratic system of consensus.

To my mind, the key challenge is how Wiredu has conceived consensus as a non-party polity. While the distinction between a non-party polity and one-party polity may appear compelling at first, upon closer scrutiny, the very notion of a non-party polity has serious problems that supporters of consensus must address. The greatest danger that must be avoided is what was pronounced and supported as national unity under the one-party rule, which effectively turned out to be suppression of the people. Without a convincing demonstration of the difference between a non-party and one-party rule, the former can be seen as uncomfortably close to the latter. Additionally, as raised by Ani (2014b), there is a question of whether consensus can be reached without identity of value. While Wiredu has maintained that consensus does not primarily concern itself with conversion from one set of values to another, it is quite doubtful whether consensus can only be had by appealing to what is considered to be the best route of action. For what indeed determines the idea of a best route of action but some commitment to value that informs that very decision?

With each possibility faced with its own set of problems which are quite debilitating for its standing as a prototype of democratic governance on the continent, we need to find ways of articulating approaches that capture what the station of the continent is and what sort of polity would be able to respond to that station productively. I suggest that going beyond majoritarianism and consensus will have to involve a consideration of two issues that are of pertinence to the continent and its people. The first issue has to do with the state of development on the continent. The continent and its people fail at some of the most basic indices that seek to measure the quality of life of citizens of any place. Life expectancy, income levels, educational attainment, job security, life chances, infrastructure development, food security and a whole host

of other indicators are terribly low. What has to be secured is the improvement of the basic indicators of what measures a qualitative human life. A qualitative life does not have to be remarkable or extravagant in satisfying some of its basic needs. While overseas holidays and three course meals are nice and every individual on earth would benefit from such provisions, this is not what Africans are asking for. All Africa has to do is to meet some basic standard that ensures that individuals have lives that are decent and dignified. Citizens of this continent must be free of the terrors authored by internecine wars, political upheavals, displacements and collapsed economies.

Secondly, there is an urgent need to consider what the primary cause if of abuse of systems, ignoring systems, undermining systems, and manipulation of set and agreed rules by those in power for their benefit. If there was an ever-apparent weakness in the polity of post-independent Africa in all its various formulations and appearances, it has to do with how rules are routinely violated to protect the ruling cabal. What is absolutely necessary, therefore, is a theory, in as far as political philosophers could conceptualise, that is not easily open to the possibility of abuse and manipulation by those in power. Democracy is about one thing, the rule of the people, and that rule must be taken seriously. While the people's desires and the institutions that capture that rule may be contingent, what must be respected at all times are the conventions of that contingency. It does Africa little service that in most places the contingencies of majoritarianism are violated, not because people are agitating for what they consider to be a better system. The contingencies of majoritarianism are violated simply because some politician is more interested in retaining power in any manner conceivable. What is urgently needed in Africa are systems that are hard to corrode or will not be easily moved by the strong-willed nature of one individual and a few beneficiaries of his misguided rule. Majoritarianism and consensus are vulnerable to this exploitation as was proved to be the case with socialism. For nowhere was it ever stated that socialism was ultimately going to be a dictatorship. Nowhere will it ever be stated that consensus will be turned into a mockery just as it not stated anywhere that multiparty democracy is a farce. Without institutions that effectively counter the abuse of any polity, and without the development of a public spirit that discourages and properly condemns such manipulation, any polity in Africa, at this stage of our political development will be manipulated.

Conclusion

Any discussion on democracy must not be necessarily reducible to discussions of parts of its constitutive features as consensus and majoritarianism have sought to do. What the discussion of democracy must point to has essentially to do with how the people's desires and basic needs are satisfied. These desires and basic needs could be issues

about the practical and day to day existence of the citizenry or it could seek to speak to some aspirations that people have about the transformation of their condition. Societies, and the people who constitute these societies, are always evolving from one state of affairs to another. This evolution is contingent on social forces and how people interpret those forces. Africa will neither benefit from a foreign imposed system of governance nor from a system whose ethos are largely traditionalistic and remains untested in the modern setting. What Africa is obliged to search for is a system that responds to the pressing contingencies of the day. Africa has also to disabuse itself of the excessive manipulation of systems by those in power by developing a set of values that makes such tendencies hard to obtain. Since the state of affairs that Africa finds itself in is one of flux, what has to be done is to harness all efforts that genuinely seek to free African people from any form of oppression. Since this project of freeing the continent is on-going and dynamic, the strategies of democratising will also equally be on-going and dynamic.

Conclusion

What I have sought to do in this book is to investigate the efficacy of democracy by consensus on the African continent as a viable alternative to majoritarian democracy. While it is largely conceded that majoritarianism has failed to take effect on the continent, the reasons for such failure might be more complex than supporters of consensus are willing to admit. The efficacy of consensus is severely compromised by the various conceptual complications that are associated with the major claims made on its behalf.

Could consensus, then, ever be a specification of what Africa's polity has to be, or what its mode should be? I think this type of consideration may prove either helpful or unhelpful. Whether it is helpful or not, depends, largely, on the basic assumptions that are fed into such a consideration. On one hand, there could be an insistence on the heritage of Africa, the distinctness of Africa in the world, and the painful history of the people of Africa, especially at the hands of other people (Ramose 1992). The trajectory of this discussion might seek to insist on past injustices and violations. It may as well refer to the cornerstone of Africanness as found in traditional societies. There is nothing wrong with this kind of discussion. It may indeed prove to be helpful in pointing out some of the major contributors to what has gone wrong on the continent, and it may prove to be a worthwhile exercise in histories of subjugation. However, where real trouble starts to show itself has to do with how this sort of discussion may wish to find the inspiration of Africa's future from some of its past practices. What becomes unavoidable with such an exercise is insistence on some sort of African essence. While such insistence does not always have to be direct or brazen in its self-identification as a project in essentialising the African, there is a real danger always present even to most subtle references to what is African (Wamba dia Wamba 1992). In our particular case, what has been most troubling is the idea that our past has something of value to say in a deterministic way about what our present should be.

Although I disagree with Emmanuel Eze's position that democracy is essentially about developing frameworks that regulate agreement and disagreement, I find his rejection of Wiredu's raising of consensus to the only acceptable moment of democracy, compelling. Democracy cannot be a moment of consensus, even if it were axiomatic in all adult relations. What I find insightful is Eze's suggestion 'that the best form of democracy is one that culturally reconciles both centripetal and centrifugal political forces of its constituents – while preserving each current in its most vital élan. In

fact, only such a political culture may be called truly democratic' (1997: 321). This position and commitment will avoid any form of essentialisation of the African state of affairs. This is achieved by the view that a democratic system will both embrace the forces that are inward oriented and outward oriented in conceiving what democracy in itself is supposed to be. The inward looking project, though tempting for all sorts of political considerations, must be avoided for it stymies considerations of the reality facing Africa today. This reality is one that calls for immediate attention to pressing social and political demands. If a consideration becomes deeply steeped in the project of retrieval it may just as well lose sight of the current demands. This, ultimately, would be a less fruitful manner of approaching the matter. A more profitable way of looking at any sort of specification of what the African polity could be would have to embrace the reality of our past, our colonial history, and our complicated present as an insignificant global player. While Carew (2004) bemoans that Africa is a marginal player that is disempowered by the dominant forces that ultimately undermine its independence and democracy, and in the place of capitalism suggests deliberative democracy, what is unclear is how deliberative democracy will get Africa out of the very state of dependence that it finds itself in. Carew seems to be satisfied with the belief that finding an alternative to the dominant capitalist system will, ultimately, either up Africa's standing or help Africa in realising its social and political goals. What this suggestion ignores is that developing a different system does not necessarily lead to making one more competitive. A different system, if so developed, may just as well wind up being simply that: a different system. There is no guarantee that it will be a more effective system or a more appropriate system or one that will be responsible for the change that African people are looking for.

I think that the most promising avenue, though not necessarily avoiding engaging with Africa's past, will be one that recognises, indeed as Wiredu (1980) does, that for better or worse the past is gone and that milieu is behind us with no real prospect of ever being brought to life to serve any discernible purpose. Any reference to the past may just as well be good as an exercise in reminiscing with various disagreements on finer details of the polity of yore. With that recognition the next necessary move is to understand how Africa is positioned in global affairs, not with a view to developing an alternative polity, but with a specific view of making Africa as important as it possibly can. Africa, has a very rich belief in, practice of, and ethos in the importance of the community in shaping the individual. Whether such belief, practice and ethos are productive or not is open for further investigation. However, whatever communitarian resources or communitarian understandings that ordinary Africans and their philosophers have, they surely must be well-equipped to read how the global community has become a strange sort of community. If at all it makes sense to talk of the global community, it necessarily implies that the African is part of

that community since the African is part of this globe. The question then is: Is the African content with the position that she has been assigned on this planet? Can she continue with her ethos while everyone else is engaged in a game of exploitation and making the most of what they can wherever they are situated? While my call is not that the African has to become individualistic, self-centred, greedy and exploitative, the African has to be alert to these realities. Assertive self-interest has become the new form of international interaction. What is of concern is Africa's insistence on some form of naiveté in dealing with outsiders with an interest in our resources, trading with us or 'befriending' us. We have moved from imposed colonialism to volunteered colonialism with very little to show for it except thumbing our noses at our former colonial metropolis. With the past well behind us, and finding ourselves caught in a myriad of networks ranging from different polities and economic regimes, and with our station as the least developed and democratised place in the world, our possibilities are infinite. We have to chart a modern path that is development oriented and seeks to put the welfare and wellbeing of the people of this continent first and foremost.

Such an orientation is one that is acutely sensitive to the global forces that are at play in not only seeking to undermine our own democracy and freedom but those particular forces that can be harnessed to propel Africa into the future. With each year that passes, humanity becomes increasingly complex both in achievement and sophistication while simultaneously becoming more and more alike in serious respects. Communication systems, spread of news, shared values and resentments, and the effects that events have on all of us, though not exactly universal, have become more widely shared than ever before. And this trajectory is not about to be reversed anytime soon. If anything, humanity will become steadily and increasingly more connected, with the result that our likes, dislikes, fights, values and aspirations will be evenly spread across the globe. This is not to suggest that there will be unanimity of values and life across the entire globe, but that difference will be limited and rightly understood as parochial and fleeting. My suggestion is not far-fetched, as the fact that global events such as the soccer world cup final, the American election, terrorist attacks, the American banking system collapse, the utterances of the pope and the death of the king of pop evoke some reaction in all of us, attests. This reaction is essentially about how we feel about events that are far from us, from our own distinct perspective and location. However, we do not think of those events as far removed from us because we have a serious sense of interconnectedness as humans, humans who now know a lot about each other, and who are aware of what our common plight could be.

Africa, then, has to find its place in this new global reality. Africa can no longer be seen or see itself as operating at the margins of global reality. It has to take its rightful

place among other nations of the world. But that rightful place will not be secured by reference to traditional society and how its traditional and parochial version of democracy is superior to modern majoritarianism. The very fact that supporters of consensus have either been unable or unwilling to map a definitive task of consensus in the modern world, is more than slightly worrying.

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Index

A

Abraham, William 35, 121
abuse of systems and power 106, 108, 115, 155, 195–196, 201
accountability 55, 68–80
adversarial polities 11, 22–26, 56, 78, 79–80
Africa
  aspirations of Africans 168–176, 189–192
  communitarianism 121–123, 146–147, 161
  complexity of African experience 48–49
  culture of 178–180
  democracy in 51, 66, 91, 135–136, 155
  development of 174–176
  essential features of 171–174, 203
  in global affairs 7, 11–16, 41, 43, 191–192, 196–197, 204–206
  historical contexts 5–8, 40–49, 98–99
  identity crisis of 161
  one-party regimes in 132
  political philosophy in 5–8
  traditions of 178–180
  use of term 169, 171, 174
  violence in 10, 81, 83–84, 87, 133–134, 149, 194, 197
  see also traditional African societies
African socialism 6–7, 28, 44, 129, 142, 158, 175, 178, 187–188
  see also socialism
aggregative democracy 58
Ahiauzu, N. 147
Akan society 34–39, 50–51, 62–63, 74–75, 104, 109–110, 132, 138, 162, 177
Ake, Claude 73–75, 96
America *see* United States of America
analysis, philosophical 5, 60
ancestors (*emizimu*) 18, 23, 35, 115, 125, 126
Anglo-Saxon democracy 181–182
Ani, Emmanuel Ifeanyi
  deliberative democracy 49, 60, 63–65, 77–78, 80, 111
  freedom 105–106
  ideologies 60–61

immanence 63–64, 172–173, 179
traditional African societies 50
values 200
voting 39, 58–60, 109–110
Archard, David 2–4, 6
Aristotle 18, 64
Armah, Kwesi 47
arms of government 93–96
Arrighi, Giovanni 42–45
Ashanti system 34–38, 50–51
see also Akan society
aspirations of Africans 168–176, 189–192
authoritarianism 19, 162, 164
average persons 190–192
avoidance relationships 18, 159
'axiomatic', use of term by Wiredu 63–64
Ayittey, George B. N. 44–47

B

basic needs 168, 189–190
see also needs of people
blame, apportionment of 72
British monarchy 28

C

campaigning, negative 56, 82, 133
capitalism 12–16, 40–44, 169–170, 175, 180–182
Carew, George
democratic capitalism 44
global affairs 41, 170–171, 175, 191, 196–197, 204
transformative polities 11–17, 19, 62–63
charades of democracy 91–93
chiefs 17–18, 28, 34–35, 62, 74–75, 114–115, 117–119, 124, 153, 159–160
civic equality 180–182
civic governance 12–13, 63
civil society 13, 32, 141, 154, 164–166
see also institutions
classes 111–112, 160–161, 180–182
co-dependence 112
see also co-operation

Cohen, Joshua 90
coherence 187–188
collectivist democracies 129
colonialism 5, 11, 14, 48–49, 51, 98, 189, 205
common good 146–147, 161, 164, 166–167, 177
communalism 24–25, 158–161
communitarianism 19–22, 119–123, 128–131, 178, 204
communities
    individuals vs 119–123, 128–131, 146–148, 177–178
    three senses of 121–122
community societies 26
communocracy 30, 74, 76, 114–116, 124, 126, 156, 161
compromise 38, 138–139, 145, 154–155
consciencism 163
consensus
    arguments in favour of 10–49
    conceptualising of 50–88
    democracy and 89–91, 107–131
    disillusionment with 5–9
    efficacy of 203–206
    historical contexts of 40–49
    majoritarian democracy and 52–88, 192–202
    as one moment of democracy 61–63, 99, 102–103, 126
    theoretical model of 51–52
    Wamala on 17–26
    Wiredu on 34–39
constitutions
    American 181
    South African (1996) 27
co-operation 37, 75–80, 119, 144, 177–178, 184–185
councils 23, 30–31, 34–36, 114, 117
crocodile with one stomach and two heads (art motif) 35–36, 103
culture 178–180

D

Dahl, Robert A. 52
decision-making 101–102, 152–153
delegitimisation of democracy 104–106
deliberation 13, 60–65, 71–72, 77–78, 101, 109–110, 117–120, 138–139, 192
deliberative democracy 12–16, 63, 77–78, 101–102, 170, 204
democracy

changes in 183–186
consensus and 89–91, 107–131
definition of 67–68, 70, 72–73, 89–91, 96–107
purpose of 180–188
varieties of 89
what it is not 91–96
democratic capitalism 40–44
demography 17
developmental issues 174–176, 192, 196, 200–201, 205
dialogue *see* deliberation
dictatorships 91–92, 98–99, 123, 143, 148–149, 155–157, 194
differences, as feature of human nature 62, 79–80, 99–100, 103, 106, 110, 116–120, 136, 144
dignity 6, 7
discrimination 5, 124–125, 136
dissensus *see* differences, as feature of human nature
Dworkin, Ronald 81–82, 195

E

eclectic theory of democracy 70
economic policies 11–12, 14–16, 40–44, 170–171, 176, 196–197
elections *see* voting
elitism 79, 94–95
Elster, Jon 101
equality 41, 180–182
essentialism 172–174, 179
ethical considerations 24, 56, 198
ethnic groups
African communalism and 160–161
consensus and 38, 53–54
identity and 30
political parties and 24–25, 29, 38, 56, 66, 83–85, 136, 143–144, 194–195
in traditional African societies 148
executive, as arm of government 93–96
existentialism 121
Eze, E. C.
complexity of African experience 48–49
critique of Wiredu 50, 61, 102–104, 157–158
deliberation 63–64
democracy 61–62, 128–129, 185–186, 203–204
differences, management of 66, 79, 99–100, 104, 120, 136–137, 145–146, 203
freedom 105

non-party polities vs one-party polities 157
objections to consensus 39
religious factors 60, 126
representation 66
right knowledge 145
rock-bottom identity of interests 116, 199
sectarian interests 112
Eze, Michael Onyebuchi 146–147, 152–153

F

façades of democracy 148–149, 194
see also pseudo-democratic regimes
factions 181–182
Famakinwa, J. O. 147
Fayemi, Ademola Kazeem 70–73, 159
Fearon, James D. 101
Federalist, The 181
formal democracy 66–67, 180
formal representation 36, 58, 67, 80, 94, 98–102
foundations of theories 2
freedom
in Africa 189–191, 198–200, 202
of association 113–116
democracy and 90–91, 98–102, 105–106, 187
of expression 70–71, 164
political 70–71, 86–87, 99, 164–167, 187–188
press 141
of thought 113–116
free market economy 12, 14–15, 41–42

G

Ganda society 17–26, 71, 114–115, 177
Gikuyu society 160
global affairs 11–16, 33, 42–44, 175, 191, 196–197, 204–206
goodwill, restoration of 34, 78, 146
governance 12–13, 63, 104
government, arms of 93–96
Greek society 17, 98
Gyekye, Kwame 39, 104, 108, 120, 122, 147, 178

H

Habermas, Jurgen 19
harmony 129–130, 146–147
historical contexts of democratic challenges 40–49, 179, 204
Hobbes, Thomas 1
homogeneity 127
Hoogland, Jan 104
Hountondji, P. 163

I

ideologies 56, 60–61, 84–85
immanence 63–64
individualism 23, 24–25
individuals
    communities vs 119–123, 128–131, 146–148, 177–178
    freedom of 119–123, 127–128
    rights of 114–116, 128–131, 159
industrialisation 37, 50–51
inequality 41, 180–182
infantile democracies 86–87
institutions
    accountability by 47, 76, 86–87, 93, 106–107, 112, 149, 201
    democracy and 13, 123–124, 128–130, 187–189
    see also civil society
interconnectedness of humans 205
international monetary bodies 14, 196–197
interpersonal relations 21, 26, 73, 128–130

J

Jacques, Carlos 157–165
judiciary 93–96, 107
juries, American 60, 64
juvenile democracies 86–87

K

Kalumba, Kibujjo 39, 49
Karl, T. L. 91, 183
Kasanda, Albert 6
Kaunda, Kenneth 160, 162
Kenyatta, Jomo 160

Keynesianism 43
King, Charles 149
kingship 17–18, 23, 28–32, 39, 104, 114–115, 117–120, 124–125
kinship relationships 19–22, 26, 37, 114, 124–125
kleptocracies 33, 91–92
knowledge 18–19, 78–79, 111–112, 177

L

languages 141
Lauer, Helen 39, 157, 163, 165
leaders
    accountability of 55, 68–80
    failings of 44–45, 46, 48, 57
    majoritarianism and 197–198
    selection process of 125–128
legislature, as arm of government 93–96, 108
liberal democracy 9, 99, 169–170, 180–182
Lincoln, Abraham 70
local governments 140
localisation 2, 4, 186, 200
Locke, John 1
loyalty to political parties *see* political parties, loyalty to

M

Machiavellian tactics *see* unscrupulous behaviour
majoritarian democracy
    in Africa xi, 148–149, 194
    complaints against 10, 23, 55–59, 148–149, 194
    consensus and 7, 9–10, 52–88, 192–201
    definition of 10
marginalisation 7–8, 143
market economy 14–15, 41–42
Marxism 2, 4
Masolo, D. A. 120–121, 122
mature democracies 86–87, 143
Mbiti, John 158, 159
Menkiti, I. A. 114, 121–122, 130, 147
meta-theory, democracy as 188
Metz, Thaddeus 6
military interventions 47

minority groups 10, 38–39, 80, 83–87, 136
modernity 31–33, 50, 53–54, 165, 173–174, 179, 188
monarchical system *see* kingship
moral considerations 24, 56, 198

N

nationalism 158–166, 172, 187–188, 190, 200
needs of people xii, 168–169, 174–176, 182–183, 189–190, 200–202
negative campaigning 56, 82, 133
Nkrumah, Kwame 163, 188
non-party polity
    consensus as 137–157, 200
    one-party polity vs 132–133, 157–166
Nozick, Robert 2
Nyerere, Julius 160

O

Oguejiofor, J. Obi 105–106, 108, 123–124
oligarchies 113
one-party polities 132–133, 148–149, 157–166, 195–196, 200
openness 75–78
opposition politics 56–57, 78, 86, 94, 194
oppression 198–200, 202
Osha, Sanya 162–163
othering 158–160

P

participation 73–75, 96–99
'people, the' 68–72, 79, 89–91, 94–96, 98, 186–187, 190–192, 201
philosophical analysis 5, 60
policies 138, 150–151
Political Liberalism 2
political parties
    consensus and 137–157
    democracy and 100–101
    discipline in 83
    identity of 85
    ideologies of 56
    loyalty to 10, 56, 58, 83, 94, 108, 133, 144–146
    non-party polity vs one-party polity 132–133, 157–166

party politics 53, 80–88
problems with 24–26, 33–34, 133–137, 142–146
Wiredu on 56–57, 80–85, 100–101, 132–142, 145–146, 148–157, 166, 200
political philosophy 1–8
populist democracy 52, 89
poverty 174–176, 196
power
abuse of 106, 108, 115, 155, 195–196, 201
in arms of government 93
competition for 81–82, 87, 143, 149
corruptive nature of 87, 144
Ganda system 115
leadership and 125–127, 201
political parties and 133–136, 150, 154–156
representation and 108
usurpers of 112
press freedom 141
procedures, importance of 80
property ownership 181–182
pseudo-democratic regimes 99, 194
see also façades of democracy
pure justice 199

Q

quality of life 168–169, 174–176, 182–183, 200–201

R

racism 63
Ramaphosa, C. 96
Ramose, M. B. 171
Rawls, John 1, 2, 4
reason 121
reconciliation 21–22, 34
redistribution 41
religious factors in leadership 18, 23, 35, 60, 62–64, 115, 125–126
representation
consensus and 107–110
democracy and xi, 2, 55–58, 65–68, 96–102, 180–183, 186–187
formal 36, 58, 67, 80, 94, 98–102
institutions and 94–95, 112–113
maximal 103–104, 126–128

political parties and 134–135
substantive 58, 61–62, 66–68, 98–102
Teffo on 32–34
Wiredu on xi, 36, 38–39, 58, 61–62, 66–67, 80, 94, 98, 104, 107–108, 126–128, 133–134, 137–138, 143, 186–187
residue of difference 59, 116–120
rock-bottom identity of interests 128–129, 144–146, 177–178, 185, 199
royal families 28, 124–125
see also kingship
rural areas 31

S

SAPs *see* structural adjustment programmes
Sartre, Jean-Paul 121
Saward, Michael 90
Schmitter, P. C. 91, 183
sectarian interests 112
selection process of leaders, in consensual system 125–128
Serequberhan, Tsenay 198
shared responsibility 74–75
similarities between people 189–192, 205
slavery 5, 98
social capital 19–22, 28
social inequality 41, 180–182
socialism 174–175, 195–196, 201
see also African socialism
socio-politico-cultural reality 176–180
South Africa 26–34
Soyinka, Wole 47
Streeck, Wolfgang 40–44
structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) 14–15
subsidiarity, principle of 18, 71, 73, 75
substantive representation 58, 61–62, 66–68, 98–102
suspension of beliefs 138, 184
Switzerland 135

T

Teffo, Joe 26–34, 114, 125, 126, 128
'thingification' 48–49
totalitarianism 140, 162

Toure, Seko 161
traditional African societies
Akan society 34–39, 50–51, 62–63, 74–75, 104, 109–110, 132, 138, 162, 177
communalistic nature of 158–160, 204
complexity of African experience 48–49
consensus and 177–180, 184–185, 188
freedom in 114–116
Ganda society 17–26, 71, 114–115, 177
majoritarian democracy and 10
modernity and 31–33, 50, 53–54, 165, 173–174, 179, 188
political theorisation of 6, 8
in South Africa 27–32
unity in 163–164
Wamala on consensus in 17–26
Wiredu on consensus in 17, 34–39
see also Africa
transformative polities 11–17, 170–171
tyranny
of communal harmony 146
of community 120, 153, 167
of consensus 103, 145, 153
of majority over minority 10, 38, 145

U

unanimity 127
United Nations 15
United States of America (USA) 10, 43, 60, 64, 81–83, 133–134, 180–181
unity 163–164, 187–188
unscrupulous behaviour
consensus and 75, 119
democracy and 24–26, 142–147, 196
elitism and 95
historical contexts of 40–49, 173
of leaders 44–45, 46, 48, 57
of political parties 81, 137
power and 87, 144
vote buying 26, 133, 144–146
urbanisation 50
USA *see* United States of America

V

values 183–185, 200

veto power 23–24, 72
violence 10, 81, 83–84, 87, 133–134, 149, 194, 197
volunteered colonialism 205
vote buying 26, 133, 144–146
voting 34, 38–39, 55–61, 65–66, 79, 91–93, 109–110
vulnerability of democracy 104–105

W

Wamala, Edward 17–26, 71, 114–115, 128, 153, 159–160
Western world 11–12, 40, 43, 51, 170
Wingo, Ajume H. 39, 49
winner takes all attitude 133–135
Wiredu, Kwasi
- African differences 172–173, 194, 197
- communitarianism 122–123, 128–130, 147, 177
- consensus 8, 49, 78, 192
- critique of 50–51, 61, 102–104, 157–158
- deliberation 63–65, 111
- democracy 89, 102–105, 130, 185–186
- interpersonal relations 21–22, 26
- needs of people 168
- political parties 56–57, 80–85, 100–101, 132–142, 145–146, 148–157, 166, 200
- religious factors 126
- representation xi, 36, 38–39, 58, 61–62, 66–67, 80, 94, 98, 104, 107–108, 126–128, 133–134, 137–138, 143, 186–187
- rock-bottom identity of interests 144–145, 177–178, 199
- shared responsibility 74–75
- traditional consensus 17, 34–39, 50–51, 63–64, 114, 116–120, 161–165, 188, 204
- unanimity 59–60, 72, 153
- values 200
- voting 61, 66, 109–110

Wood, Ellen Meiksins 169–170, 180–182