TOWARDS DECOLONISING AFRICAN POLITICAL VALUES: A CRITIQUE OF THE DOMINANT POLITICAL VIEWS AND PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: Since independence, the political systems in African states have been western in character, and have, consequently, failed to synchronise with their peculiar realities, resulting in political crises, coups, and developmental woes. Nigeria – Africa's largest democracy – is one of the states replete with colonially induced contradictions, controversies and developmental conundrum, and is the central focus of this paper. Using desk review of qualitative data, the paper establishes that Western political values operate more as liabilities than assets in Africa, hence the need for complete decolonisation – a multifaceted project that transcends the transfer of sovereignty. In line with a scholarly tradition that advocates the resurgence of functional African values, the paper makes a case for reforming African states' structures, political systems, and economic systems as the surest route to completing the decolonisation project.

Keywords: *decolonisation, colonialism, political values, democracy, Africa*

Introduction

The end of the second world war in 1945, the establishment of the United Nations (UN) shortly after that, and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 were significant forces that blew the wind of freedom at a time most African territories were being colonised by Western powers. Consequently, the various nationalist struggles in the colonies became realistic drives towards political independence, and by the late 1960s, most of them had achieved it. This development, however, did not

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imply that the African continent or any country therein was decolonised, given that the multi-layered and multifaceted phenomenon of decolonisation transcends the mere transfer of political power (Collins 2017).

During colonisation, African political values gradually eroded while Western values got fully entrenched in Africa. And six decades after independence, the continent is still entangled in the shadow of the West politically, economically, educationally, and mentally. Only a few of the 54 sovereign states in it today do not denigrate their traditional forms of governance in favour of some unrefined forms of Western democracy. Yet, the continent is increasingly bedevilled by intractable socio-economic challenges as development continues to evade it. Of the 31 countries with "low development" in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development index (2022), only four are not African. Conversely, no African country is among the 66 countries with "very high development." Ironically, Africa is materially the richest continent on earth, boasting about 30% of the world's natural resources (Irrum 2023).

International developmental initiatives have over the years offered little, if any hope of changing the fortunes of Africa. One of them was the 15 years (2001–2015) of collaboration among international actors to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Africa failed to halve its poverty levels in line with MDG 1, for example, while all other continents did. And a similar fate awaits the continent with regards to the succeeding Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as most of the states in it remain severely off track five years to the target year (2030). Their presence in the bottom of the UN 2022 world's SDG index is conspicuous, with Nigeria, despite being Africa's largest economy, ranked 139th among 163 countries (Sachs et al. 2022).

In light of the continuous effort by African leaders to strengthen their political institutions towards sustainable development, Mutua (2016) decried their persistent importation of western developmental pathways. He asserted that since development is not a linear process amenable to reproduction, the "transplanted models of development and politics have fared very poorly in Africa," and "there is ample evidence, empirical and otherwise, that the traditional tools of the formulaic liberal state are not a panacea for Africa's ills" (Mutua 2016: 166). Africa's continuous romance with Western values is simply a consequence of incomplete decolonisation, while its future lies in home-grown solutions (Obijiofor 2001).

Questions have been, and are being raised, on how Africa can complete

the decolonisation project. There are divergent views among pan-Africanists on this, which have birthed two broad approaches. The first is advocacy for a total restoration to pure African values, while the second is advocacy for a sort of hybridity. Advocates of the first approach simply propose Afrocentrism which, in the words of Connell (2018), is the "alibi for Eurocentrism" (Connell 2018: 404). The second approach requires the integration of African indigenous values with functional Western values. The present article is guided by the second approach in agreement with the belief that total restoration to the past "would both be unrealistic and retrogressive" (Columbus 2014: 216).

Nigeria is one of the African countries replete with colonially induced contradictions, paradoxes, controversies and developmental woes, and thus direly in need of home grown solutions. As subsequently analysed, the country's delicate structure and relentless experiment with unrefined Western political systems have made its large human and material resources – the largest in the continent – the basis for persistent crises that lead to a harrowing political journey.

Decolonisation and African Political Values: A Conceptual and Historical Overview

Decolonisation

Since the winds of freedom blew in the 1940s, discourse on the term decolonisation has garnered the interest of not a few scholars. In one extreme, Pillay (2013) captured what he termed its "most provocative formulation," being the view of a pro-colonialism scholar who dismissed some decolonisation effort as "a dangerous call to participate in applied nationalism" (para. 11). Nationalism in this vein is viewed as an illegitimate struggle against colonial legacies. Indeed, Gilley (2017)[1] among others believes colonialism is a legitimate project for emancipation. Such a view is rooted in the perceived superiority of the colonisers to the colonised.

In the other extreme, decolonisation from an anti-colonial perspective is defined with varying degrees of complexity. The simplest and of course shallowest of them is its conception as independence from colonialism obtained through the transfer of political power, or simply put, "the transfer

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1   This article was withdrawn by the publishers due to the controversy it generated.

of sovereignty from colonizer to colonized" (Smith and Jeppesen 2017: 2). This would mean all African countries, with the exception of two disputed territories (Somaliland and Western Sahara), have been decolonised. However, as Crozier (1964) has observed, merely conferring sovereignty on a country does not make it truly independent, because colonisers have other means of retaining control over colonised sovereign countries. Since independence, there has been a complex system of knowledge and power relations between Africa and the West that perpetuates the incompleteness of Africa's decolonisation.

With regards to the knowledge relation, Kari (2023) observed that Western values and ideas have continued to exert dominance on African formal educational system to the detriment of indigenous ones. The power relation between African countries and the West is rooted in lopsided economic partnership. The West, being highly industrialised and heavily reliant on Africa's natural resources, provide "aids" to Africa, thus paying for the pipers and consequently dictating the economic and political tunes. According to Eurostat (2023), the developing countries (most of which are African) have been at the receiving end of financial flows from the European Union (EU) for a total volume of €111.3 billion in 2021. In light of these facts, decolonisation in African context is equated with de-westernisation.

Beyond the simplistic view of decolonisation, several anti-colonial thinkers have offered more profound conceptions that illuminate its multidimensional nature. For wa Thiong'o (1986: 87), decolonisation transcends political kingdom to include the entire realm of language, thoughts, and memory, necessitating "the search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe." Smith (1999: 98) conceptualised it as reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems and methodologies, arguing that it centres on "the long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power." Similarly, Césaire (1972[1955]: 73) viewed it as a process of radical humanism that restores dignity and agency to the colonised. These definitions reveal decolonisation as an ongoing, comprehensive process that addresses psychological liberation, cultural reclamation, epistemological sovereignty, and structural transformation – in stark contrast to the shallow notion that focuses solely on the transfer of sovereignty while leaving colonial economic relations, cultural dependencies, and internalised hierarchies intact.

In all, the conception of decolonisation by Fanon (1963) is adopted as

a working definition in the present article. He viewed it as a process that involves various programmes geared towards de-centring colonial rationality, structures, institutions, knowledge systems, and worldview. Thus, it is a revolutionary movement that aims to restore the lost dignity of Africa and its people (Sankara 2007). This involves "the abolition of all prejudice, of any superiority complex in the minds of the coloniser, and also of any inferiority complex in the mind of the colonised" (Senghor 1957, cited in Smith and Jeppesen 2017: 4). Rather than an event like independence, it is "an ongoing process of struggle across a range of fronts' to which intellectuals – African and non-African alike – have significant roles to play" (Creary 2012: 7). This implies an ongoing struggle against entrenched Eurocentric dominance in African education, economics, culture, and politics since colonial legacies persist through marginalised indigenous knowledge, neocolonial economic ties, and governance structures misaligned with African realities. Intellectuals play a key role in this struggle by challenging colonial assumptions, recovering suppressed African epistemologies, and re-imagining institutions to reflect local contexts, making decolonisation a continuous process of intellectual and structural transformation. Even Ethiopia and Liberia, being the only African countries not physically colonised, are part and parcel of the process (Chitonge 2018).

African Political Values

The hybridity of African institutions emanating from the overlap of African traditional and colonial values led many intellectuals to call on the continent to culturally, politically, and economically define itself (Chirisa et al. 2014). While most Africans have embraced Western values as the necessary consequence of colonialism, African traditional values refer to the social ideals that pertain to and are indigenous to African people (Columbus 2014). African political values, therefore, refer to essential political principles and ideals indigenous to the African people. These are remarkably diverse, reflecting the continent's vast cultural, geographic, and historical variations. While generalisation must be approached with caution, several core political principles can be identified across many traditional African societies. In order to engage these values analytically, it is helpful to distinguish them into the following key typological categories that intersect and interact dynamically within African political life:

i. Institutional Values

These involve the structures and frameworks through which power is organised and exercised. A prominent example is the concept of consensus-building and communal decision-making that appears in various forms – such as the council-based governance of the Berbers, the village councils of West Africa, and the age-set systems in East Africa. Many societies practiced forms of participatory governance where elders, clan representatives, or community members had meaningful roles in political processes, and even – where centralized kingdoms existed (like in the Oyo Empire or the Ashanti Kingdom) – institutions such as councils of elders or checks on royal power were integral. African political systems were thus majorly built around kinship and communalism. In contrast to the Western notion of individuals' political and social rights as democratic ideals, African values de-emphasised individualism and promoted collectivism (Samuel and Joshua 2010). The principle of *Ubuntu* ("I am because we are") in southern Africa exemplifies the African communitarian ethic that prioritises social harmony and collective well-being over rigid individualism. Accordingly, familyhood and brotherhood dominated the decolonisation ideas of Ahmed Sekou Toure, Kwame Nkrumah, and Julius Nyerere among other pan-Africanists. In his decolonisation project as the first president of independent Tanzania, Nyerere experimented with what he termed *Ujamaa* or "African socialism" (Nyerere 1971). The *Ujamaa* policy was however, a "heroic failure" – heroic because it was one of Africa's few home-grown routes to development, and a failure because it did not yield the fruit of development and was revoked by succeeding political regimes (Mazrui 2005 cited in Kelter 2018: 12).

In his exposition of African political structure, Idang (2015) observed that family is the first point of the hierarchy (2015: 104-5). Family heads represent their families in all political matters while village and clan heads represent their respective villages and clans in the ruling council superintended by the paramount ruler. And, in spite of the totalitarian nature of most paramount rulers, there were usually institutionalised means of checks and balances. According to Antia (2005: 145), these were enforced by various societal norms and values through secret cults, chief priests and king makers among others. In the Oyo Empire, for example, checks and balances on the paramount ruler (*Alaafin*) were maintained through three main institutions (Johnson 1921). The legislative council (*Oyo Mesi*), led by the *Bashorun*, could compel the *Alaafin* to abdicate by presenting an empty calabash or parrot's eggs. The secret society (*Ogboni*), composed of respected elders, safeguarded justice and religious order, acting as a moral check on both the

Alaafin and the Oyo Mesi. Meanwhile, the army commander (*Aare Ona Kakanfo*) operated independently to prevent the *Alaafin* from monopolising military power. Together, these bodies ensured a balance between royal authority, governance, religion, and military strength.

ii. Normative Values

These encompass the ethical and philosophical principles that guide political behaviour and relations. A few examples are justice (*ubuntu* or *omoluabi*), solidarity, reciprocity, respect for elders, communal responsibility, and the moral economy of leadership. These values prioritise community welfare over individual gains and offer a relational approach to authority, where governance intertwined political authority with moral and spiritual stewardship with leaders seen as custodians rather than sovereigns. Thus, normative values frame legitimacy – rulers are expected to embody wisdom, justice, moral uprightness, and service to the collective, or risk losing the support of their people. In practice, this varied significantly across regions and societies. Centralised kingdoms like those of Mali and Asante developed complex administrative hierarchies, while decentralised societies like the Igbo operated through more diffuse consensus systems.

iii. Procedural Values

These relate to the processes and practices through which decisions are made and power is exercised. Traditional African systems often employed consensus rather than majority rule, reflecting an emphasis on social harmony and collective agreement. Processes such as the *palaver* (open forum for deliberation) or *indaba* (consultative assembly) demonstrate a procedural commitment to inclusive dialogue and conflict resolution. Therefore, in decision making, consultation and consensus are highly essential principles to which various organs must conform. All people, directly or through their representatives, take part in the political process. And the paramount ruler in centralised systems is always duty bound to execute the will of the people based on the trusteeship principle that ensures his accountability to them (Awoniyi 2015: 9). In post-colonial democratic settings, however, these procedural values have struggled to find expression within electoral politics, which often prioritise speed and finality over communal deliberation.

iv. Cosmological Values

These are derived from African metaphysical and spiritual understandings of power, nature, and society. Many African societies view political authority as embedded in a cosmological order, where rulers are accountable not only to their subjects but also to ancestral spirits or divine forces. Land, for instance, is often considered sacred – not merely a commodity but a site of ancestral presence and spiritual continuity. This cosmological worldview influences governance values such as stewardship, sustainability, and intergenerational responsibility. It also informs African critiques of neo-liberal land commodification and environmental degradation.

Methodology

Desk review of qualitative data is employed in the present article. Drawing inspiration from Smith (1999, 2021), our research resists reproducing colonial epistemes by privileging African intellectual traditions and critical interpretations of Nigeria's post-colonial trajectory. Sources were carefully selected based on their relevance to themes such as political sovereignty, land governance, colonial and post-colonial statecraft, and indigenous systems of authority. Priority was given to peer-reviewed academic literature, policy briefs, and reports authored by African scholars and institutions. Colonial and mainstream policy documents were not excluded but treated as texts of critique rather than neutral repositories of fact. This approach aligns with Smith's advocacy for centring the margins and resisting the dominant narrative structures that have historically silenced indigenous voices.

The scope of literature reviewed spans the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence periods of Nigerian history. Emphasis was placed on understanding the political and social transitions across the country's four republics, as well as the ruptures introduced by successive military regimes. The review drew from multiple disciplines including history and political science in order to identify and synthesise multidimensional themes. This interdisciplinary approach enabled a richer contextualisation of how political values and governance converged in ways that marginalise local agency.

Data from the literature were synthesized using a decolonial analytical lens. The process involved identifying recurring themes through thematic coding. A comparative reading method was employed to juxtapose the state's post-colonial practices with indigenous models of land tenure and

governance. Throughout this process, critical reflexivity was maintained to account for researcher positionality and to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in mainstream scholarship. The resulting synthesis weaves together insights from various sources to construct a historically grounded narrative that not only interrogates the legacy of colonialism but also re-imagines the possibilities of governance rooted in indigenous values and local participation.

Colonial Rule and Its Political Legacies in Africa

In the early 1880s, the African continent was partitioned and taken over by seven foreign powers, namely Germany, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, France, Britain and Italy. After the defeat of Germany in World War I, the treaty of Versailles stripped it of all its colonies, which the League of Nations distributed among the other colonisers – except Namibia, which was given to South Africa. Following World War II, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, Britain and France granted independence to their African colonies, which together accounted for about 80% of all colonised countries on the continent as shown in Table 1

While Britain adopted indirect rule through traditional rulers in their colonies, France adopted direct rule through the policy of assimilation (later replaced with the policy of association). And while Britain administered their colonies as separate entities, France administered theirs as a federation. However, they both ruled with "arrogance" as they strived to degrade not only the culture but also the humanity of Africa (Mazrui 1978: 11). Their only difference in this regard, as Mazrui explained, is that Britain was famous for "racial arrogance" and France for "cultural arrogance."

Coloniser	Colonies				
	Western Africa	Southern Africa	Central Africa	Eastern Africa	Northern Africa
France	Niger Togo Mali Senegal Benin Burkina Faso Guinea Cote d'Ivoire Mauritania		Gabon Central Africa Cameroon Chad Congo Rep	Comoros Djibouti Madagascar	Algeria Morocco Tunisia
Britain	Nigeria Ghana The Gambia Sierra Leone	South Africa Lesotho Botswana Eswatini		Kenya Malawi Mauritius Seychelles Tanzania Uganda Zambia Zimbabwe Somalia	Egypt Sudan
Belgium			DR Congo	Rwanda Burundi Mozambique	
Spain			Equatorial Guinea		
Portugal	Cape Verde Guinea-Bissau		Angola Sao Tome & Principe		
Italy					Libya

Table 1. African Colonisers and Colonies (Source: Authors' compilation)

In the course of over half a century of colonial rule, the colonies were sufficiently subjected to conceptions of African inferiority in the socio-political sphere among other spheres. The Eurocentric power relation was such that tried to "portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations

between human beings, rather than a system of exploitation and oppression" (Mbembe 2016: 32). Though African nationalists fought this, violently in some cases, and the colonisers eventually left, the following legacies of colonial rule had been too firmly established to be totally uprooted.

Structural Legacies

The sizes of African states represent the most enduring structural legacies of colonialism. They are the result of the elaborate partitioning of the continent and the creation of countries with arbitrarily drawn artificial boundaries. In the words of Ogbunwezeh (2005),

> almost all the Modern states in Africa today were built on political ontologies, oozing from this engineered political metaphysic. The people never dialogued their differences as a basis for federating. They never talked to each other about a political union. They woke up one morning, and saw themselves conscripted into geopolitical constructs they neither chose nor bargained for (section 2, para. 6).

For example, as both Britain and France colonised Togoland, the British part of the Togoland was integrated with Ghana. Birmingham (1995) has observed that more than fifty years after colonialism, the boundaries have not much been altered as the now independent Africa has the same shape of the colonial Africa of 1946. These artificial boundaries are the most volatile features of the continent, as they continue to escalate conflicts within and between countries (Asiwaju 1990). This is because,

> where Europe attempted to unify those who were different, it sowed the seeds of future separatism... Where Europe divided, it sometimes left behind latent passions for reunification – and political killings at the grassroots level have resulted from such division. In short, balkanization is a breeding-ground for political violence, including the phenomenon of assassination. And balkanization is what Africa is burdened with for the time being (Mazrui 1973: 183).

Epistemic Legacies

After the colonisers brutally conquered Africa, "the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom" (wa Thiong'o 1986: 9). The primary aim of this was to annihilate African indigenous knowledge. And having so succeeded, "on the graveyard of African indigenous knowledges, colonialism planted European memory. The church and the school played a major role in the planting of European memory including imposition of colonial languages" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018: 24). Over time, being fluent in a colonial language comes to be equated with being educated or intelligent and vice versa.

With few exceptions, all African countries still use colonial languages as their only official languages in schools, governmental and all other formal institutions. In the same vein, a vast majority of African countries have retained their colonial names most of which are portmanteaus originating from the colonial languages. For example, while the name "Nigeria" (coined by a British journalist, Flora Shaw, from the words "Niger'" and "area'") was imposed on a colonised entity, all attempts to change it in the over 60 years of Nigeria's independent existence have been unsuccessful. The most recent attempt speculated on a rather self-imposed colonial name: "United African Republic" – apparently half a dozen of the six. Few countries have, however, succeeded in this venture as shown in Table 2.

Colonial Name	New Name	Year of Change
Gold Coast	Ghana	1957
French Soudan	Mali	1960
Northern Rhodesia	Zambia	1964
Nyasaland	Malawi	1964
Basutoland	Lesotho	1966
Dahomey	Benin	1975
Southern Rhodesia,	Zimbabwe	1980
Upper Volta	Burkina Faso	1984
Swaziland	Eswatini	2018

Table 2. Notable African States' Old and New Names (Source: Authors' compilation)

Institutional Dislocations

The epitome of the political legacies of colonialism are the political systems being practised in most African countries. Most of them still practice one of the political systems of the erstwhile colonial masters – the Westminster parliamentary model, the presidential and the premier systems of Britain, France and Belgium respectively. The imposition of these systems in newly independent African states, where traditional political institutions have already been dislocated, made the first generation African nationalist leaders to also denigrate traditional institutions and leaders – whom they saw as stooges of the colonial powers. Today, the only remaining sovereign monarchies in Africa are Lesotho, Morocco, and Eswatini with only Eswatini practicing absolute monarchy. Most of the other countries have persistently reverted to unrefined western political systems after different phases of military administrations.

The series of military coup d'états experienced in Africa over the past 60 years have been partly caused by the lacklustre performance of leaders resulting from the foregoing colonial legacies that formed the ground for intolerable socio-economic and political instability. The most recent countries to experience this are Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Niger, and Gabon. As the coup in Niger sparked sanctions and threats of military action by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), many observers believed the regional body is only being a puppet of western powers since the coup – which triggered massive jubilation and anti-French protests by Nigerians – is widely regarded as a decolonisation project. However, as witnessed in the past, the military are also bound to derail from their decolonisation mantra.

Shortfalls of the western political values in Nigeria

Western political values have been the garments in which Nigerian democratic dispensations are wrapped. Ajayi and Ojo (2014) likened them to "Siamese twins," conjoined, but both "uncomfortable and under intense pressure that could result in all forms of hurt, even death" (2014: 107). This is because, like many other political entities in Africa, Nigeria is a creation of colonialism yet to find its ideal political bearing.

The major political entities from which the country was created were the Oyo Empire, the Sokoto caliphate and the Igbo village system. Between 1914, when the first legislative council for the new colony – the Nigerian Council – was established, and 1960, when the country was granted independence,

four constitutions had fully institutionalised western political values and relegated traditional institutions to advisory roles on peripheral matters. These were the Clifford (1923), Richard (1946), Macpherson (1951), and Lyttleton (1954) constitutions, named after the respective colonial administrators of the colony.

Five different post-colonial constitutions have retained the core features of the aforementioned, encapsulated in federalism, electoral system, and party politics. As many scholars have observed, these served as generating a milieu for unending political crises and public sector corruption (Orluwene 2018; Kifordu 2013; Fadakinte 2013). Consequently, the country meandered through the four republics shown in Table 3, as it embarked on a quest to address its "national question" towards achieving sustainable development.

Republic	Started	Ended	Form of government	Head(s) of Government	Consti-tution
First	1/10/1960	15/01/1966	Parliamentary	Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa	1960
					1963
Second	1/10/1979	31/12/1983	Presidential	Shehu Shagari	1979
Third (aborted)	1989	27/08/1993	Diarchy	Ibrahim Babangida	1989
Fourth	29/05/1999	Date	Presidential	Olusegun Obasanjo	1999
				Umaru Yar'adua	
				Goodluck Jonathan	
				Muhammadu Buhari	
				Bola Tinubu	

Table 3. Nigeria's Democratic Dispensations (1960–2023) (Source: Authors' compilation)

The First Republic (1960–1966)

Though the independence constitution of 1960 transferred sovereignty from British colonisers to Nigerians, it laid the country on a Western political system – federalism and Westminster parliamentary model. A further drive towards

decolonisation culminated in the first republican constitution of 1963, which stripped the British monarch of the ceremonial headship of Nigeria, thus making the country a republic on 1 October 1963. However, the constitution fell short of addressing the controversies beginning to plunge the country into political convulsion. These controversies were deeply rooted in the unsuitable political system, which birthed a clash of personalities, bitter battles among political parties, and fragmentation (Ayua and Dakas 2005).

Prior to independence, party politics and the creation of three regions (North, West, and East) along the three major ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo) began and continued to fan the embers of divisional politics even after independence. The Northern People's Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG), and National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) were the major representatives of the respective regions. The Federal system of government further caused controversies among them, emanating from their unequal resources, revenue allocation, census, representative and distributive federalism, and leadership succession processes among other things (Orluwene 2018: 73). Such crises escalated in a large scale after the federal census of 1962.

Population, being a major determinant of revenue allocation, constituency delimitation, parliamentary seats allocation, boundary adjustments, and developmental projects among other political favours was in high demand by the regions. Most of them were dissatisfied with the 1962 census figures that led to strong dispute and its cancellation. Had the 1963 constitution sufficiently addressed the problems of Nigerian federalism and the "national question," a fresh census conducted in November that same year would have been a course for lesser or no controversy.

The 1963 census was accepted by the NPC-controlled federal government and the Western region. While the Eastern region rejected it in totality, the newly created Mid-western region accepted it only for the sake of national unity. The controversy escalated, was brought to the supreme court by the Eastern region, and ended with a ruling in favour of the federal government. Such merely indicated the extent to which governments across the regions were susceptible to lies, cheatings, and all sorts of manipulations in pursuance of political gain (Falola and Heaton 2008: 168). Another pointer to this was the 1962 leadership-induced AG crisis that resulted in the declaration of the state of emergency in the AG controlled Western region.

In 1964, the federal election conducted once again turned the country into a theatre of political crises. The ruling NPC had formed an alliance with other parties – the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) – which battled the United

Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), being another alliance involving the opposition AG. The NNA allegedly rigged the election, sparking a large-scale crisis and consequently forming a unity government to calm the storm. The rivalry was shifted to the Western region in 1965, leading to another massive electoral crisis. As Falola and Heaton (2008) asserted, the 1964 and 1965 elections were "severely flawed elections" in which "all kinds of dirty tricks were used by every side" (2008: 159). They further revealed that, "under these circumstances, many Nigerians came to believe that the federal system was dysfunctional and that Nigeria should cease to exist in its present form."

Amidst the unresolved federal and Western elections crises, the First Republic came to an end on 15 January 1966 when the military took over power. Divisive politics and abuse of public offices were the reasons the junta cited for their intervention, as they referred to the politicians as "enemies," "political profiteers," and "swindlers" who have corrupted "the Nigerian political calendar by their words and deeds" (Amaechi 1994: 20). Had the junta been consistent in their coup operations across the regions, they might have been regarded as nationalists who cleaned the country's Augean stables towards achieving a complete decolonisation. But they, being mostly of Eastern region extraction, failed to kill any politician from the Eastern region after annihilating those of North and West. The coup was thus deemed sectional and eventually seized by the military. Events that unfolded thereafter laid bare the complications of the colonial concoction – Nigeria – having resulted in different military administrations and 30 months of civil war.

The Second Republic (1979–1983)

Preserving the major heritage of British colonialism – the single political entity called Nigeria – was the first major achievement of the military, achieved under General Yakubu Gowon who succeeded the first military administrator, General Aguiyi Ironsi. Gowon had to reverse the country to federalism as Ironsi replaced it with unitarianism in what was deemed Eastern region's marginalisation plot. He also had to create 12 states to weaken the strength of the Eastern region. Yet, the Eastern region attempted to secede, resulting in a civil war between 1967 and 1969.

The second major achievement of the military was ushering the country to a Second Republic on its 19th independence anniversary by the Murtala/Obasanjo administration. This administration deemed it necessary to experiment with a new political system, which culminated in drafting the 1979 second

republican constitution, with the American model presidential system as its focal feature. This was in "an effort to enhance the federal government's ability to deal with national problems and thereby hold the country together" (Ayua and Dakas 2005: 4). However, this objective was barely achieved. As Elaigwu (1998) observed, the presidential system only over-centralised political power, giving the country more of a unitary than a federal reflection, thereby forming a ground for regional marginalisation (1998: 6). The same was reflected in states headed by powerful executive governors who superintended the affairs of different ethnic groups across various local governments.

Beyond experimenting with a presidential system, the 1979 constitution made grossly inadequate, if at all, any attempt to address the country's "national question" or accomplish any decolonisation project. It retained the federal system with 19 states as the component regions of the federation. Having also retained a multi-party system, elections into various offices were contested by different political parties, more or less incarnates of the First Republic's. Although conducted under supervision of the military, the elections were also controversial due to fierce political battles, appeals to sectarian rather than national interests, and allegations of monumental irregularities. Then came a constitutional imbroglio regarding the inability of all presidential aspirants to convincingly win 25% in two-third of the 19 states (Simpkins 2004). Notwithstanding, Alhaji Shehu Shagari (who won 25% in 12 states) was declared the winner, sworn in as the country's first executive president, and survived legal actions by the election's runner-up.

Hardly was there any serious attempt or result thereof by Shagari to address the national question or champion any decolonisation project. The regional rivalry of the First Republic was revived, with the First Republic's opposition party leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, assuming the same role after losing the presidential election. And while the American model bicameral legislature was introduced to increase representation towards addressing the national question, members of the National Assembly failed to offer any genuine answer. Again, while the profligacy that characterised the First Republic was expected to be tamed under an executive president, corruption and impunity continued to permeate every public sector. Ogbeidi (2012: 8) claimed that Shagari, himself a gentle man, was pathetically unable to prevent public officers from embezzling over $16 billion of oil revenues.

The re-election of Shagari in 1983 birthed another serious political crisis that resulted in another coup. While the development triggered jubilation in many quotas, it was likened to "riding a camel in a jet age" by the defunct

administration's justice minister (Oshunkeye 2010). Apparently though, "the first experiment with presidential system of government turned out to be an antithesis of the constitutional treatise to guarantee a less personalized form of government" (Kifordu 2013: 102). Public officers, as the military junta opined, "revel in squander mania, corruption and indiscipline, and continue to proliferate public appointment in complete disregard to our stark economic realities" (Emuleomo 2016, para. 6-7). In essence, the experimented system was not home-grown, and so, it did not further the course of the country's decolonisation.

The Aborted Third Republic (1989–1993)

Under the leadership of General Ibrahim Babangida, who ousted Shagari's successor General Muhammadu Buhari on 27 August 1985, Nigeria had been a laboratory for a series of political experimentations. The military embarked on endless attempts to impose a "home-grown" democratic model, in search of a more decolonised political system. But as later events unfolded, that became a ploy to elongate or even perpetuate themselves in power.

They oversaw the drafting of 1989 constitution, which retained federalism and the presidential system but significantly altered the political processes to curb the unhealthy rivalry that characterised the previous republics. In place of a multi-party system, it made provision for a government-funded two-party system and the military government (unlike Murtala/Obasanjo's) rolled out a transition programme to be carried out in phases. The first phase included gubernatorial and parliamentary elections. As winners of the former were sworn-in with appointed military deputies, those of the latter (federal) level were sworn in to checkmate a military "president." Azikiwe (1984) has referred to such an arrangement – a government involving both the military and civilians – as a "diarchy."

The military "president," however, was expected to relinquish power in the last phase of the transition programme. On 12 June 1993 – now celebrated as Nigeria's democracy day – a presidential election adjudged to be the freest, fairest, and most credible in Nigeria's history was conducted. When the declaration of the apparent winner was imminent, the "Maradona" (as General Babangida was nicknamed for his numerous dribbles in the political arena) announced the annulment of the election. Hopes for Nigeria's return to civil rule were raised to the peak only to be so dashed. The Third Republic,

a relatively more decolonised system conceived and nurtured by Babangida, was aborted by him at the point of delivery.

This made the arena too hostile for the "Maradona," but for one last time, he dribbled the country to "interim presidency" on his 8th year anniversary. He thus became Nigeria's only head of state to leave power not through death, transition, or a coup. Barely three months after this, the interim president Chief Ernest Shonekan was ousted by General Sani Abacha, whose transition programme was cut short by his sudden death on 8 June 1998. Unlike Babangida, who introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Abacha had a fractured relationship with the West and tinkered with Africanism. But he also failed to accomplish any concrete decolonial project.

The Fourth Republic (1999 – Date)

It took General Abacha's successor, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, less than a year to return Nigeria to democratic governance. The Fourth Republic began on 29 May 1999 with the swearing in of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as president. Obasanjo, being the subject in the first military to civilian transition, became the object in the second military to civilian transition.

Describing the political system of the Fourth Republic is tantamount to describing the Second Republic. Virtually nothing is different as the 1999 constitution is a copycat of the 1979 constitution. Federalism, the American model presidential system, a multi-party system, and bicameral legislature at the centre were all recycled. The major political parties at the beginning of the Fourth Republic were the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP, later All Nigerian Peoples Party, ANPP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). The PDP ruled the country for 16 years until 2015 when the All Progressive Congress (APC), a merger of the ANPP, Action Congress (AD) and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), took over power.

Both in theory and in practice, neither the ruling parties (PDP and APC) nor the successive regimes in the Fourth Republic contribute to decolonisation. Instead, they have romanticised Western political ideals devoid of institutionalised traditional values. Violence and monumental electoral irregularities have again reared their ugly heads in the political process. This is the playing out of the "rivalry and suspicions among the various ethnic groups in the country that have culminated in political instability across

the entire country" (Raji and Wahab 2016). As various political actors seek power, they play the ethnic and sometimes religious cards to gain support while causing division and crises among the masses. The electoral umpire, alongside the security have been accused of being used by the government to rig elections, while the judiciary hardly delivers justice to the aggrieved parties leading to the crises of legitimacy in governance (Omodia 2009: 38).

This was most evident in the third of the seven general elections conducted in the Fourth Republic with the declared winner of the presidential election (Alhaji Umaru Yar'adua) also admitting it "had some shortcomings" (Yar'adua 2007). In fact, the 2007 elections marked "a dramatic step backwards, even (if) measured against the dismal standard set by the 2003 election" as brazenly, "elected officials, alongside the very government agencies charged with ensuring the credibility of the polls reduced the elections to a violent and fraud-riddled farce" (Human Rights Watch 2007, Nigeria's 2007 Milestone section, para. 1-2).

Although the electoral reform initiated by Yar'adua has enhanced the credibility of subsequent elections, the crises of legitimacy in governance, rooted in colonial legacies remain. None of the five presidents in the Fourth Republic has been able to address the long-standing national question. As dissatisfactions with governance led to calls for restructuring the country, President Goodluck Jonathan convened a national conference in 2014, with 14 committees (including "devolution of power," "political restructuring," and "land tenure and national boundary") set up to look into different areas of national controversies (National Conference 2014). Although they unearthed agitations, that should trigger a massive decolonisation project, hope of implementing their recommendations died alongside Jonathan's hope of retaining power in the 2015 poll.

In the 2015 poll, Muhammadu Buhari became a beneficiary of the system he toppled in 1983. His victory, which came on the mantra of "change" from the bad governance, corruption, and impunity that characterised Jonathan's administration, evoked optimism among all and sundry. Ironically, his two-terms administration raised more national questions than it answered. The resurgence of militancy in the oil rich Niger Delta region, secessionist agitations in the South East, armed banditry in the North West, and terrorism in the North East have joined forces with other human security threats to threaten the continuous existence of the country – more than at any time since the 1967 civil war – and re-echo the need for complete decolonisation. These are the challenges the administration of Bola Tinubu

inherited, in addition to the crisis of legitimacy birthed by his emergence on a Muslim-Muslim ticket and through another disputed election. Halfway into his regime, Tinubu's relation with decolonisation has been more of resistance, with the effects of his Western-induced economic policies (like the floating of Nigeria's currency and zero petroleum subsidy) continuing to generate widespread discontentment among the masses.

General Observations and Findings

The major points of the foregoing analysis can be summarised as follows:

1. In the course of Africa's colonisation by seven western powers, western political heritage got firmly entrenched in the continent. These include geographical division with arbitrarily drawn boundaries, country names, and political systems among other things. Nigeria is one of the countries at the receiving end of all these, being a creation of British colonialism.

2. Decolonisation in the African context implies not just the attainment of political independence but a total emancipation of Africa from the shackles of colonialism. This cuts across mental, cultural, economic, political, and social dimensions and involves the reassessment and refinement of colonial legacies. However, the project, which received momentum in the late 1950s and early 1960s when many African countries got independence, remains incomplete over six decades after.

3. Most African countries have since their independence been trying to practice western types of democracy with little, if any, recourse to their indigenous political values. Nigeria, being Africa's largest democracy, has since independence been a subject of western political values, having practiced the Westminster parliamentary system in the first republic and the American model presidential system in the second and fourth republics. The military's attempt under General Babangida to experiment with a home-grown democracy ended with the ruthless abortion of what would have been the country's Third Republic.

4. Over-reliance on western political values accounts for the lacklustre performance of political institutions in most African countries. For example, the presidential system of government, practiced in Nigeria and other African countries has concentrated political and economic powers in the executive organ in general, and the president in particular, resulting in tyranny, impunity, and corruption (Mutua 2016). The

national assembly, which ought to represent people's interests and foster transparency, is itself accused of being an epitome of corruption, with its members not seen as true representatives of their people. In Nigeria, the high cost of running the national assembly is believed to be a stumbling block to many developmental projects in the country.

5. The perpetuation of colonial values in many aspects of African social systems is facilitated by the knowledge and power relations between the west and African countries. As the west produces knowledge, even of Africa, Africans acquire the same and continue to be subjected to the ideality of western political and other values. The power relations between them are influenced by economic relations in the form of a beggar-donor relationship. As the west provides economic "aids" to African states, they make the continent "a product of active operations of colonial matrices of power" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015: 15).

6. The consequent political instability and gross developmental challenges being experienced in many African countries have led to military interventions at different times. Nigeria has experienced a total of six successful military coups and a cumulative 28 years of military rule, which ended in 1999. The wave of military incursion is once again sweeping over African democracies with the Republic Niger and Gabon as the most recent casualties.

Decolonizing African political values: An Imperative for Africa's Development

In light of Africa's developmental woes and the incompleteness of decolonisation projects, some scholars advocate the resurgence of traditional institutions of governance as an imperative for state-building and sustainable development (Samuel and Joshua 2010; Skinner 1998). Skinner reiterates that:

> Without a compromise that would ensure 'ethnic justice', neither (the) so-called 'liberal democracy', nor any other species of government will succeed in Africa. If 'liberal democracy' presently has any evolutionary advantages, it will have to adapt to local realities, and its contours will be shaped by indigenous African socio-cultural traditions (Skinner 1998: 17).

This can be achieved by reforming the state structure, political system, political process, and the economic system as analysed hereunder.

State Structure

With the artificial boundaries created within states being one of the causes of disputes, marginalisation, and conflicts among different ethnic groups, African states need to undertake re-structuring projects serious. In Nigeria, for example, some communities inhibited by the Igala ethnic group are needlessly separated from the Kogi state where they are dominant and merged with the Igbo-dominated Enugu state, thus making them a minority.

Some of such boundaries were created not by the colonisers but by military rulers who, much like the colonisers, where only concerned with administrative convenience. Until such anomalies are rectified, mutual suspicion and inter-communal clashes will continue to jeopardise the peaceful coexistence needed for sustainable development.

Political System

The western systems of government adopted in many African countries need to be reformed in line with their peculiar realities. Since being relegated by the colonisers, traditional institutions have lost the ingredients of relating with the people through family heads, village heads, and clan heads. Indeed, "citizen participation in planning – akin to the traditional African *baraza* (public open-air meeting) – allows communities to claim their own development and gives meaning to their agency" (Mutua 2016: 167). The current system of parliamentary representation is ineffective as it lacks the institutionalised means of such a relation. In most cases, the parliamentary members are only affiliated to the system and lack knowledge of their constituencies, the people, and their needs.

In fractured states such as Nigeria, where federalism and a presidential system of government are practiced, a hybrid devolution of both political and economic powers vertically (among government organs) and horizontally (among tiers of government) will strengthen the means for checks and balances on the one hand, and narrow exclusion on the other. This will ensure that the centre does not over-marginalise the states, nor does any state over-marginalise the ethnic enclaves therein. Although Nigeria's federalism is theoretically designed to ensure this, it remains largely ineffective owing to many factors. First, structural imbalances persist, as oil-dependent revenue sharing leaves states financially dependent on the centre. Second, historical legacies of military rule have established patterns of centralisation that democratic transitions have failed to reverse, while

elite capture at all government levels transforms mechanisms meant for inclusion into instruments of patronage. Finally, implementation failures, including weak institutions, endemic corruption, and selective adherence to federal principles have created a system with formal federal structures but without their functional benefits, resulting in what scholars term "feeding bottle federalism" where states remain dependent on central allocations rather than developing autonomous governance capacity.

Reviving traditional African political institutions to work side by side with the elected political office holders will ensure that the voices of the masses are heard. For instance, Nigeria's emirate system, Ghana's chieftaincy structures, and South Africa's indigenous councils could enhance governance by creating complementary channels for citizen representation alongside modern elected offices. These traditional institutions, which often maintain grassroots legitimacy through cultural connections, could serve as advisory bodies to elected officials, mediators in local disputes, and accountability mechanisms that leverage community respect rather than formal authority. As Whitaker (1970: 467) has observed, the "significant elements of the traditional political system of the emirates proved to be compatible in practical terms with significant features of the modern state."

One practical method of institutionalisation is statutory recognition of traditional authorities within the formal political framework. Botswana provides a compelling model through its *Ntlo ya Dikgosi* (House of Chiefs), a consultative body composed of tribal leaders that advises the national parliament on matters affecting culture and tradition, such as land tenure and chieftaincy. Rwanda also offers an innovative model through the formal incorporation of *Abunzi* (local mediators) into its justice system. The *Abunzi* system functions as a quasi-legal structure for resolving local disputes through reconciliation, reflecting the country's pre-colonial emphasis on communal resolution and restorative justice. Although traditional leaders in Nigeria perform such functions to an extent, their roles remain informal, unregulated, and often manipulated.

Political Process

Reforming the political system will not yield fruit if African traditional values are not entrenched in politics and governance. Such include the spirit of respect, sacrifice, transparency, equity, and social justice. With humungous salaries and allowances in the offer, public offices in western political systems being practiced in Africa are too attractive. They offer

riches and bestow on the holders a "masters" rather than "servants" status, thus encouraging unhealthy political rivalry, electoral fraud, and violence while vying for power.

In traditional societies, the spirit of respect established hierarchies based on wisdom and service rather than wealth, while sacrifice demanded leaders to prioritise community needs above personal gain – contrasting sharply with today's extractive leadership patterns across much of Africa. Transparency was maintained through open village deliberations and council meetings where decisions affecting the community required public justification, serving as indigenous versions of modern oversight mechanisms. Equity and social justice were manifested in customary law, administered by councils of elders who typically emphasised restorative justice and community harmony over punitive measures, effectively preventing the extreme inequality that characterises many modern African states.

While these values have proved effective in smaller-scale traditional societies, adapting them to modern nation-states faces significant challenges arising from the colonial disruption of traditional institutions, urbanisation, and ethnic diversity within arbitrary borders. Nevertheless, the successful integration of these principles is evident in Rwanda's *gacaca* courts for post-genocide reconciliation, Botswana's incorporation of traditional consultation practices (*kgotla*) into modern governance, and community-based natural resource management in several countries – suggesting that re-imagining rather than merely reviving these values could address contemporary governance deficits through culturally resonant frameworks that citizens readily embrace. When properly integrated, these values could facilitate more responsive governance by providing an early warning of emerging social tensions, offering culturally appropriate solutions to local challenges, and creating alternative pathways for community voices typically marginalised in formal political processes.

Provisions for independent candidacy should also be made to remove the encumbrance of having to be either rich or sign a bond to dance to the tune of godfathers to contest election. In this vein, Abba and Babalola (2017: 127) emphasised that "since parties on their own cannot guarantee level playing ground for all party segments within the constitutionally approved processes and the conventionally sanctioned procedures, then there is the need to look outwards within the democratic space." Of course "non-party presidency could go a long way in resolving the persistent confusion over the separation line between the arena of party politics and the real realm of public and national leadership" (Kambudzi 2001: 62)

Economic System

Western capitalist values have eroded African values of communalism and kinship. Therefore, they need to be revived if poverty among other human security threats are to be tackled for meaningful development. Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa* policy was built upon this realisation. As he noted, capitalism propagates excessive individualism, promotes the competitive rather than the cooperative instinct in human being, exploits the weak, divides society into hostile groups, and generally promotes inequality in society (Nyerere 1971).

The major thrust should be a land tenure system reform that, in its current form, defines land ownership and access to land on western values and thus reflects "the reality of the coloniality of power and the incompleteness of the decolonial project" (Chitonge 2018: 32). The traditional communal ownership of land, replaced with the western individual ownership, should be restored. As Chitonge explained, in traditional African societies only things that grow or stand on land (e.g. crops and buildings) could be owned by an individual with the land itself belonging to the ancestors, the living and the future generation. Notwithstanding historical variations in land ownership arrangements across different African societies, pan-African scholars advocate for communal land tenure systems as the foundation for economic reforms, believing they align with indigenous African values of collective welfare and equitable resource distribution, while countering exploitative capitalist models.

Governments across Africa should be the custodians of people's access to land and ease their access to land, having been for so long alienated from it. This will enhance their productive potentials as they now only rely on paid jobs provided by the privileged few who have owned or hired lands. The preservation of the land for productive use by the future generation, which is the hallmark of sustainable development, will also be facilitated by the communal ownership. Indeed, government custody can ensure sustainability by regulating land use, protecting communal rights, enforcing environmental standards, and prioritising land for agriculture, housing, and conservation over speculative or extractive exploitation. Thus, it can balance access, equity, and ecological stewardship – key pillars of sustainable development. Failure to ensure this will continue to deviate Africa's developmental trajectory, because these land issues have direct consequences on Africa's growth and development (Moyo and Yeros 2011).

However, Nigeria now presents a paradox where state custody deepened exclusion rather than reverse it. This anomaly stems not from the principle of government custodianship itself but from its flawed implementation.

In practice, bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and the politicisation of land allocation make access to land especially difficult for the poor, sometimes resulting in forced evictions or land grabs.

Conclusion

Since independence from colonial rule, the political systems practised in Nigeria (and other African countries) have been Western in character, context, and content and have failed to synchronise with the peculiar realities of the country, resulting in political crises, abuse of power, military interventions, and developmental woes. Despite more than two decades of uninterrupted civilian administration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the lingering national questions have not been answered; and the polarisation of the people along ethnic, religious, and regional lines remains as strong as ever. Public sector corruption has continued to stagnate the country's developmental quest as it manifested in successive regimes, despite the avowed war against it by the leaders.

Notwithstanding progress, made in some quotas across the country, "the leading argument is that structural changes have not been expectedly effective in developing the political institutions and leadership agency capable of promoting social development" (Kifordu 2013: 110). African political values not only help to diagnose the failures of post-colonial statecraft in the foregoing analysis but also provide a decolonial framework for reconstructing political systems that are rooted in African epistemologies and historical experience while allowing for adaptation to changing circumstances. Thus, they are invaluable philosophical and institutional resources available for re-imagining governance on the continent, in the light of which we take a cue from hybridisation scholarly frameworks to advocate "the integration of indigenous methods of village cooperation with innovative forms of government, combining the power of universal rights with the uniqueness of each district's or nation's own customs and respected traditions" towards addressing the structural and systemic incongruities bedevilling Nigerian and African democracies (Owusu 1991: 384).

In order to meaningfully entrench African traditional values in politics and governance, Nigeria needs to adopt a multi-tier governance system where traditional leaders are officially represented in local government councils or act as ex-officio advisors with defined responsibilities. The successful examples of Botswana's *Ntlo ya Dikgosi* and Rwanda's *Abunzi*

systems demonstrate how traditional and modern governance systems can constructively coexist in order to improve public trust and policy effectiveness. Policymakers, academics, and civil society actors in Nigeria among other African states should therefore prioritise the development of a national framework that formally integrates traditional institutions into governance through constitutional recognition, capacity-building initiatives, and pilot programs that evaluate the impact of such integration on conflict resolution, service delivery, and democratic accountability.

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