



A COMPLEMENTARIST RECONSTRUCTION OF WIREDU'S IDEA OF SENSUAL DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

The question as to why democracy has not automatically translated to the much-needed development in Africa has attracted many scholarly interventions. One of the most notable, perhaps, is Kwasi Wiredu's idea of consensual democracy. His 'consensual democracy' is based on the establishment of non-party politics as against what he called 'majoritarian democracy'. He argues that the exclusion of minority groups and lack of decisional representatives, which are the major problems of majoritarian democracy, are addressed in his consensual democracy. In the face of different responses to Wiredu, Barry Hallen has called for a reconsideration of the idea by demonstrating its significance and how it can work in a multicultural context like postcolonial African states. Nevertheless, Kazeem Fayemi, on his part, provides reasons why neither Wiredu's nor Hallen's positions can be wholly accepted; through a complementarist approach, he shows how consensual democracy can be improved upon to address the challenges of democratization in contemporary Africa. In this paper, I further strengthen Fayemi's complementarist reconstruction of consensual democracy, using Innocent Asouzu's transcendental existential conversion as the theoretical framework. I argue that Fayemi's position, while largely valid, requires additional fortifications, which transcendental conversion affords. I conclude that a proper remediation of consensual democracy as proposed by Wiredu and defended by Hallen is best achieved for relevance in modern African societies through the fusion of both the majoritarian and consensual democratic ideas.

Keywords: Africa, Consensual Democracy, Existential Conversion, Ontology, Transcendent,

Introduction

The question of whether Africa has an indigenous political system that can be used to re-establish the African current socio-political affairs or not has been affirmatively answered by Kwasi Wiredu through his 'consensual democracy'. His 'consensual democracy' is based on a non-party polity as against what he called majoritarian democracy. Wiredu argues for a democracy that is deeply rooted in African cultural and political practices. He emphasizes the significance of consensus as a fundamental moral and political value in the indigenous African understanding and implementation of democracy (Wiredu, 2012). Wiredu suggests that the essence of consensual democracy can be discovered within the cultural norms and values of Africans. It is interesting how he delves into the Akan culture to illustrate and redefine the concept of democracy, highlighting the democratic principles and values that exist in indigenous African societies. This has the potential to bring about positive changes in contemporary African politics. Wiredu's perspective aims to embrace the rich heritage of African culture and apply it to the present (Fayemi, 2020: 34). He argues that the exclusion of minority groups and lack of decisional



representatives, which are the major problems of majoritarian democracy, are addressed in his consensual democracy. He also posits that there is no political office or officer who has independent power to make decisions since decisions are made through deliberations and consensus (Wiredu, 1997).

Nevertheless, in the contemporary period, the consensual democracy of Wiredu has been heavily criticized by subsequent philosophers. One of the scholars who attempted to affirmatively acknowledge this ideology is Barry Hallen. Barry Hallen's recent article, "Reconsidering the Case for Consensual Governance in Africa" (2019), presents a compelling argument for re-evaluating consensual democracy in Africa. He addresses the common critiques and concludes that consensus as an alternative form of governance should be taken seriously due to its intellectual coherence and potential to improve governance in Africa. This highlights the need to reconsider and explore the practical implications of embracing consensual governance in Africa. Hallen believes that consensual democracy offers hope for African nations to overcome the challenges associated with liberal democracy. He is optimistic for a few reasons. Firstly, consensual democracy is a non-party system that focuses on personal qualifications and suitability for political positions. Secondly, it promotes effective citizen participation through regular meetings where elected or selected representatives discuss diverse ideas. Hallen addresses concerns about multicultural and multi-ethnic African nations by emphasizing that consensual democracy sublimates ethnic identities in favor of national consensus. He draws inspiration from John Rawls' concept of overlapping consensus to ensure diverse ethnic groups are committed to the ideals of consensual democracy. Nonetheless, Kazeem Fayemi in his work titled "Against Consensual Governance in Africa: A reply to Barry Hallen (2020)", critically examines the position of Barry Hallen on his reconstruction of Wiredu's consensual democratic idea; Fayemi shows that neither the position of Wiredu nor Hallen is enough to address the current challenges confronting the African socio-political world. It is based on this, therefore, that this paper attempts to buttress the position of Fayemi by showing the ethnocentric biases that are embedded in the positions of Wiredu and Hallen; it further provides an ontological fact which shows that to institutionalize the indigenous ideology without considering the current reality of African society will be an exercise in futility. However, in doing this, the paper will be divided into four parts. The first part considers the position of Wiredu on consensual democracy; it looks at how Wiredu defended the indigenous political system of Africa. The second part looks at the problem of complementarity in Wiredu's consensual democracy; it looks at how Barry Hallen defended Wiredu's position and the complementarity idea of Fayemi Kazeem on consensual democracy. The third part identifies the ethnocentric biases that are embedded in the position of Wiredu and Hallen; it considers how the two scholars defended the identity of Africa without taking into cognizance the current reality of African societies. The last part attempts to defend and complement the position of Fayemi on consensual democracy; it further strengthens the position of Fayemi by complementing his idea through Asouzu's approach.

Kwasi Wiredu on Consensual Democracy

In his work, titled *Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional Politics: A Plea for a Non-Party Polity* (1995), Kwasi Wiredu attempts to establish an African indigenous political ideology



independently of Western influences, which can be used to address the representative and minority problems that are embedded in what he calls majoritarian democracy. Wiredu observed that the African Traditional Political system had a wide range of variations. Some societies had a centralized social order, while others had a more decentralized structure. The concept of consensus was particularly valued in the second type, where authority was based on moral and metaphysical prestige. Also, this idea was also found in some highly centralized societies, like the Ashanti Political System that Wiredu focused on. To Wiredu, the Ashanti people, who were matrilineal, considered lineage as their fundamental political unit (Wiredu, 1995:55).

According to Wiredu, in Ashanti society, consensus played a crucial role in decision-making. The first instance where consensus became evident was during the election of the lineage head. This principle of consensus was intentionally chosen, reflecting the belief that the interests of all society members ultimately converge (Wiredu 1995: 57). According to Wiredu, consensus plays a vital role in the traditional life of the Ashantis. The practice of decision-making by consensus is not limited to politics but reflects an inherent approach to social interaction. This suggests that social connectedness and relationships are fundamental in the African traditional setup, particularly through the lineage system. Wiredu sees a consensual basis for joint action as a fundamental principle. He emphasizes the significance of consensus in the Ashanti society because of its implications for democracy. While current forms of democracy often rely on the majority principle, Wiredu distinguishes it as majoritarian democracy, while consensus-based systems are referred to as consensual democracy (Wiredu, 1995: 51-55). According to Wiredu, both majoritarian democracy and consensual democracy are considered forms of democracy because they involve the government being based on the consent of the people and subject to their control through representatives. In Wiredu's analysis, the Ashantis highly value rational discussions as a way to reach consensus among adults who possess the ability for eloquent and persuasive discourse. The pursuit of consensus was a deliberate effort to move beyond decision-making solely based on majority opinion, which Wiredu refers to as majoritarian democracy (Wiredu, 1995: 56-57).

Wiredu believes that there are multiple ways to gain people's consent, but he considers one way to be particularly admirable. This approach involves representatives who have direct approval from the people and are closely connected to their aspirations. Wiredu argues that striving for consensus is a superior form of democracy compared to majoritarianism. This is because in consensual democracy, the focus is on reaching agreement and considering the perspectives of all individuals involved. According to him, in consensual democracy, political players actively seek to find common ground and reach a consensus, whereas in majoritarian politics, the losers often become opposition solely for the sake of opposing. This leads to increased competition for power and positions, which may not be achieved based on merit alone. Additionally, consensual democracy offers not only formal representation but also substantive representation. Wiredu emphasizes the importance of substantive representation because one of the major challenges facing democracy in Africa is the insufficient representation and participation of citizens in democratic processes and institutions. This is clearly seen in the way power is concentrated in certain groups within African society, while excluding others. Wiredu emphasizes that majoritarian democracy, as a decision-



making and governance system, is incompatible with consensual democracy in African traditional life. Wiredu makes a clear distinction between his concept of non-party and the idea of one-party. He believes that one-party systems have no roots in African consensual democracy, and any attempt to compare the two would be misleading. Nevertheless, it can be argued from the above view that Wiredu is wholly rejecting the complementarity of both the majoritarian and consensual democracies in the face of what Al-Mazrui called “triple heritage”. Can such ideology work in the face of the mixed identity of contemporary African societies? although Wiredu’s position has been heavily attacked both destructively and constructively but these positions will be examined next.

The Problem of Complementarity in Wiredu’s Consensual Democracy

The consensual democracy of Wiredu has been heavily attacked by different scholars. One of the scholars who attacked him is Emmanuel Eze in his work titled “Democracy or Consensus: A response to Wiredu.” The consensual democracy of Wiredu has been heavily criticized by various scholars. One of the scholars who criticized him is Emmanuel Eze, in his work titled ‘Democracy or Consensus: A Response to Wiredu.’ Eze critiques Wiredu’s assertion that rational persuasion is the primary factor in converting people to a consensual view within the Ashanti traditional setting. Eze disagrees, arguing that reason alone is insufficient. In his view, other factors also play a significant role in decision-making and in achieving consensus. Additionally, he disagrees with Wiredu's belief that traditional methods can still work in modern society. Eze suggests discarding old approaches and developing new ones instead. Overall, Eze sees consensus as more challenging to achieve than Wiredu does (Eze 1997: 317-319). Paulin Hountondji also recognized the need to take into consideration the nature of contemporary African societies while establishing an African ideology by arguing that Africans need to completely detach themselves from their premodern past to effectively address the pressing issues of the present. He believes that modernization requires a mindset that is relevant to the current challenges, rather than attempting to revive ideas from ancient societies. Hountondji emphasizes the importance of focusing on the present and adapting to its demands (Hountondji 1996: 48).

In the face of several criticisms levied against Wiredu’s theory, in his work titled “Reconsidering the Case for Consensual Government in Africa(2019),” Hallen provides historical justification for the idea and the needs to reconsider it by virtue of the incompatibility between majoritarian democracy that is practiced in the contemporary world and the consensual democracy that was practiced in the pre-colonial era; the quest to revisit the ideology is triggered by the political instability that is embedded in the African societies. Hallen argues that through consensus, social harmony will be established in a multicultural society; consensual governance could be a more suitable alternative for sub-Saharan Africa. He argues that consensus goes beyond being a mere negotiation tool in power struggles. Instead, it serves as a common instrument for promoting social harmony and everyday exchanges. Consensus allows for agreed actions without necessarily having agreed notions, fostering a willingness to suspend disagreement.

Hallen challenges the characterization of African traditional societies as authoritarian and lacking abstract thinking. He believes that such labeling creates uncertainties around the notion of consensus in precolonial societies and hampers the potential effectiveness of consensual



democracy in modern political discourse. Hallen argues that the stereotyping of African communal societies as lacking historical consciousness of consensus cannot disprove the existence of consensual practices among Africans. He supports Wiredu's cultural reconstructionist view of consensus, which emphasizes that interpersonal relationships in African societies are primarily based on consensus. Traditional African societies were communalistic, with interactive communication at their core. This interaction fosters a sense of belonging, collectivity, and sharing. Extended kinship plays a vital role in moral and political order, creating obligations, rights, and reciprocity based on natural feelings of sympathy and solidarity. A key principle in this communal attitude is sympathetic impartiality, where individuals are willing to compromise their interests for the common good. Working towards consensus is a political value derived from traditional African communalism. In traditional African societies, consensus is achieved through dialogues and rational conversations that aim to harmonize differing interests. Negotiations and compromises are essential, along with freedom of thought and respect for others' opinions. Interestingly, consensus does not require individuals to change their personal beliefs. Instead, it involves suspending disagreement and finding a compromise.

He uses the term "palaver," which is derived from Portuguese, to describe the consensual nature of certain traditional African societies in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. He explains that palaver refers to organized and open debates where everyone, regardless of age or gender, is encouraged to participate. The goal is to reach a consensus and maintain strong community bonds. He refers to Wiredu's view that consensus leads to harmonious relations in traditional African communities. Whether these societies were centralized with a king or decentralized with limited formal governance, consensus played a crucial role. Kings, chiefs, and nomads did not make decisions in isolation but instead relied on consultation and compromise. Hallen argues that consensus, which he considers essentially democratic, is relevant to the search for effective political governance in postcolonial Africa. He suggests that the "majoritarian form of democracy" practiced in postcolonial Africa is contrary to the indigenous traditions of democracy and the complexities of the contemporary African situation (Fayemi, 2020: 59).

He argues that the clash between traditional African democracy and the modern Eurocentric version, which is predominantly adopted in Africa, subtly explains the complex challenges faced by post-colonial Africa today, such as corruption, ethnic crises, civil war, refugee crises, terrorism, poverty, and bad governance. The majoritarian democratic model has several shortcomings. Firstly, it fails to encourage continuous and genuine citizen participation in governance. Secondly, its periodic elections can alienate minorities or election losers from the governance process. Lastly, the model's strong emphasis on political parties in a multi-ethnic region like Africa leads African leaders to associate parties with politically dominant ethnic groups, fueling ethnic rivalries and unrest in African nation-states.

Hallen believes that consensual democracy offers hope for African nations to overcome the challenges associated with liberal democracy. He is optimistic for a few reasons. Firstly, consensual democracy is a non-party system that focuses on personal qualifications and suitability for political positions. Secondly, it promotes effective citizen participation through regular



meetings where elected or selected representatives discuss diverse ideas. Hallen addresses concerns about multicultural and multi-ethnic African nations by emphasizing that consensual democracy sublimates ethnic identities in favour of national consensus. He draws inspiration from John Rawls' concept of overlapping consensus to ensure diverse ethnic groups are committed to the ideals of consensual democracy (Fayemi, 2020: 40).

Nevertheless, In his work, titled “Against Consensual Governance in Africa: A reply to Barry Hallen (2020)”, Fayemi critically appraised Wiredu/Hallen’s consensual democratic ideas. He started with the position of Hallen, who attempts to reconstruct the consensual democracy initiated by Kwasi Wiredu. Fayemi examines the positions of Wiredu/Hallen’s positions, particularly the emphasis that African societies historically functioned based on consensus, which challenges the notion that it is purely mythical. While some scholars still debate the extent of traditional African societies' organic nature and authoritarian governance, according to Fayemi, this is a less forceful issue in the African intellectual debate on consensual democracy. The more pressing concern, which Hallen does not explicitly address, is how to translate the ideals of consensus into practical institutional forms in contemporary sub-Saharan politics. With the diminished role of kinship in power dynamics and the complexity of political interests and representations in post-colonial African politics, the question arises: How can the political ideals of consensus be effectively implemented in today's African politics? Can consensual democratic theory truly address the multitude of crises facing Africa and lead to sustainable development? Fayemi asserts:

Given the facilitative roles of kinship in traditional communal consensus and the near absence of kinship affiliations in power interplays, political interests and representations in post-colonial African politics, the question is: how can the political ideals of consensus translate and transform the political landscape in contemporary African politics? How, in factual terms, can consensual democratic theory hold practical sway in Africa today? If the problem confronting the African states is fundamentally that of how to effectively make democracy work in terms of resulting in sustainable development, would the adoption of consensual democracy be a panacea to the plethora of crises confronting Africa? (Fayemi, 2020: 40-41)

However, these questions were not answered by Hallen in his reconstructive idea of consensual democracy, even though he sees Wiredu’s scholarship as worthy of being acknowledged in contemporary Africa. Based on this, Fayemi decided to establish a middle ground between liberal democracy and consensual democracy through a complementarity approach, which embraces seemingly contradictory ideas as ontologically relational, provides a framework for understanding reality and formulating social values and actions. He argues that while Hallen's work on establishing historical evidence for consensual governance in traditional Africa is valuable, it is important to address what comes next after this historical grounding. Fayemi asserts that Hallen thinks that Wiredu's idea of consensual democracy is important and should be taken seriously. However, Hallen does not explain why Wiredu's advocacy for the traditional African model of consensual governance is more plausible than other models like Switzerland or the Netherlands.



Hallen believes that Wiredu's thoughts on consensual democracy are not influenced by external factors.

Hallen's defense of Wiredu regarding the status of consensus in traditional African societies seems to be successful; Wiredu claims that lineage heads represented their lineages by common consent, but this contradicts his earlier view in his work titled "Philosophy and African Culture (1980)" that African traditional societies, including the Akan, were authoritarian. If traditional African societies were authoritarian, it would be unlikely for rational persuasion or consent to play a significant role in political discussions. The gerontocratic posture of lineage elders would have dominated the political discourse. To address this contradiction and salvage Wiredu's argument, Hallen could have provided clearer distinctions and examples that differentiate between the levels of the traditional African political system, such as the family, village, and national levels. While authoritarianism may be prevalent at the family and village levels, at the national governance level, ideas and decisions are deliberatively and collectively agreed upon. However, further sociological explanations are needed to understand why this historical distinction exists. Hallen focused on linguistic considerations, specifically the concept of "palaver," as evidence of consensus in traditional African societies. While "palaver" typically denotes a troubling atmosphere in West African pidgin, Hallen may have used it in a different context to indicate a public sphere for debate and reconciliation of different views on communal issues. Instead of providing a clear explanation of the consensus practice in African traditions, the term "palaver" actually confuses it. Even if "palaver" is used as a synonym for consensual practices in some African societies, relying solely on a foreign word instead of traditional terms may not accurately represent the historical reality of consensus governance among traditional Africans. Even if Hallen had provided indigenous words like Mbongi, Kgotla, or Izu, it is important to remember that linguistic considerations alone cannot definitively establish the historical fidelity of a consensual democratic culture. So, it is crucial to exercise caution when using linguistic facts to support a thesis. For example, palaver has been seen as a metaphor for the public sphere where everyone affected by an issue comes together for discussions that involve substantive representation. Palaver is a metaphor for the exchange that is intended to bring about justice under the cover of reconciliation. It also refers to critical discourse that is directed towards justice. In contrast to Hallen's assertion that palaver is "a synonym for consensus" and "organized open debate" of a rational kind, palaver is a metaphor for a setting where participants take an oath of allegiance to the ancestors and where a confluence of emotions, angers, reasons, eloquence, and wits exists. The main goals of this space are justice, reconciliation, and political action.

According to Fayemi, Hallen and Wiredu do not explore the idea of combining the best aspects of both majoritarian and consensual democracy for better governance in Africa but this does not negate the significance of their ideas. He argues that there is actually a lot of overlap between the two, and they can complement each other. It is all about finding that balance and understanding that they do not have to be mutually exclusive. The tension between them is actually quite significant and can lead to better democratic principles in Africa. He argues:

Contrary to Hallen, the elements of consensual democracy and majoritarian democracy should not be treated as mutually exclusive just because of



different responsibilities they confer on political decision making. There is a thin line of convergence between both, and as such, there is no need of a real tension between them. The supposed tension which comes to light as a result of their different democratic principles is fundamentally significant (Fayemi, 2020: 45).

To Fayemi, the most important thing in Wiredu's and Hallen's consensual democratic framework is the spirit of consensus, which involves putting aside our disagreements and focusing on finding common ground to take actions that benefit everyone. In majoritarian democracies, there is often this tension between the minority and majority, but if we embrace the consensual principle, we can minimize that tension and work towards compromise for the well-being of the citizens. To make democracy in Africa even stronger, we should blend the representative nature and communal structure of consensual democracy with the majoritarian system.

By the above views, Fayemi proposes four complementary ideas, which can be institutionalized into contemporary Sub-Saharan African societies: One, what we need to do is to establish these independent town or village assemblies and district councils in African democratic institutions. This way, we can promote participation, liberal values, and the community structure that's present in traditional African democratic practices. It is all about giving the local people a chance to be involved in decision-making beyond just national or general elections. This idea can be related to how consensual democracy values equal representation, and majoritarian democracy has local government, but with some slight differences. In traditional consensual democracy, there is a hereditary chief leading the village council, while in majoritarian democracy, local government acts as an agent for regional projects. But both district councils and village assemblies bring the government closer to the people. The tenable thing about district councils is that they have more room to accommodate representatives and have the final say in political matters that affect them. It is all about finding that balance and empowering local communities.

Two, the next thing we need to do is to bring back that consensual decision-making nature in modern African democracies with a multi-party structure through the help of a referendum. The essence of this idea is to make sure that everyone's ideas and opinions are included and represented equally. And the best way to achieve that is by having representatives from each constituency present during the village and town assembly meetings. That way, we can organize referendums through a forum discussion of different political propositions or an efficient, effective, and fair electoral system. Unlike the current majoritarian system where representatives hardly converse and meet regularly with the people at different levels of legislation and local government, an eclectic democratic option would value interactive engagements between the leaders and the people, all guided by the consensus principle of arriving at agreed actions regardless of differing notions. It is all about making sure that everyone's voice is heard and that we can come to agreed actions together, despite our differences.

Three, we should have a symbiotic relationship between the super-majority method and the simple-majority method of decision-making. The simple-majority method is like a "first-past-the-post"



approach, where the decision is made based on the majority vote. On the other hand, the super-majority method requires a near-unanimous two-thirds majority for decision-making. Now, the thing is, the super-majority method can sometimes slow down the decision-making process, while the simple-majority method can be influenced by the dominant group, leaving the minority at a disadvantage. However, when we bring these methods together, we can strike a balance. The super-majority method ensures that the views of both the majority and the minority are equally considered, while the simple-majority method ensures that the decision-making process is not unfairly advantageous to the minority. It is all about finding that sweet spot where everyone's voice is heard and decisions are made fairly and inclusively.

The fourth point, according to Fayemi, is all about making sure that the political and economic rights of majoritarian democracy go hand in hand with the social rights of consensual democracy. This way, we can ensure that the basic needs and interests of the people are given fair consideration. To make it happen, we need an eclectic model that recognizes the important role of civil societies in how democracy functions. Civil societies should have their motivations and a shared vision of what is best for society as a whole. Instead of being controlled by the government or being used as political units for decision-making, civil societies should have a supportive and mediating relationship with the government. They should strategically organize public discussions, mass movements, and critical engagement to challenge government policies and actions that are seen as harmful to the people. When it comes to forming civil society, it should be inclusive and represent a wide range of common interests across different social groups, classes, beliefs, and professions. It is all about coming together and fighting for the greater good of society. However, from the above response of Fayemi to Hallen and Wiredu's arguments, it can be argued that Fayemi only focuses on institutionalization and practical reform of the consensual democracy without taking into cognizance the need to include the current African identity, since African socio-political theory is based on the nature of its identity. Nonetheless, before his position can be further strengthened, the next section focuses on the biases in the positions of Hallen and Wiredu..

Ethnocentric Biases in Wiredu/Hallen's Positions

Ethnocentric bias occurs when the mind misuses or misunderstands its ethnic consciousness. It is the tendency to prioritize and support those who are perceived as close, while disregarding those seen as external. Each member of an ethnic group has a sense of group identity, which, when combined with a divisive mindset, leads to favoring those who are near and disregarding those who are not as close. So, ethnocentric commitment is basically when we prioritize and support those who are closest to us. Asouzu suggests that this is driven by our instinct to protect ourselves, which is influenced by the beliefs we hold. He argues that:

Since we tend to act under this impulse of our primitive instinct of self-preservation always and often unintentionally, one can say that in most multicultural and multiethnic contexts, there is often the tendency for the mind to act in an unintended ethnocentric fashion, in view of securing certain interests and privileges it defines as very important for the inner circle" (Asouzu, 2007: 130).



Hence, our instinct to protect ourselves makes us think that what is closer to us is better and safer. As Asouzu suggests, this belief becomes a guiding principle in our relationships, both personal and global. We tend to cling to and preserve what is near to us, even if it means disregarding the ideas, culture, and beliefs of other parts of the world. According to Asouzu, this inclination to prioritize our own culture and beliefs can be a significant cause of societal conflicts. It also shapes the way philosophy and sciences are approached in Africa. It leads to a supremacist mindset in philosophy, where African philosophers often seek to demonstrate the superiority of African philosophy over others. This ethnocentric commitment is influenced not only by our instinct for self-preservation but also by the ontological framework we adopt. Asouzu even points to Aristotle as a precursor to this divisive ontology. Asouzu believes that Aristotle's approach to ontology has greatly influenced the way many Westerners perceive the world and interact with others. According to Asouzu, Aristotle introduced a mindset that led Westerners to define themselves in relation to those they deemed less wise. Aristotle's view of metaphysics as a superior science created a divisive mindset, comparing it to the relationship between a master and a worker, the wise and the unwise, the essential and the accidental. Aristotle's belief in the rule of the wise over the unwise and his categorization of beings into substance and accident have contributed to a divisive mindset. This mindset, according to Asouzu, has influenced Western philosophy and has also affected Africans through education and socialization. Asouzu accuses Aristotle of being the main cause of ethnocentric reduction, where some individuals are seen as essential and others as inconsequential. Asouzu explains that this mindset shapes our perception of interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, Asouzu believes that many philosophical debates in Western philosophy are characterized by a mindset of complete negation, influenced by Aristotle's thinking. He also argues that African philosophers are influenced by this mindset, as the leadership structure in Africa, including education and philosophy, is often influenced by a Western-style education. Asouzu believes that Western education, socialization, and indoctrination have played a significant role in transmitting the Aristotelian mindset to Africans. This transmission occurred through colonialism, which brought Western education and socialization to Africa. Wiredu also supports this idea, stating that Africans who have learned philosophy in English, for example, have been conceptually influenced by the West due to historical circumstances.

So, what Asouzu is saying is that Africans have adopted a mindset of superiority-inferiority due to the influence of Western education and socialization. This mindset is reflected in various works of literature, politics, and history that highlight the superiority of African heritage over Western counterparts. These works often criticize Western intervention and exploitation, leading to an ethnocentric perspective. They depict an idealized image of Africans contrasted with Westerners, promoting communalism as uniquely African and contrasting it with Western individualism. However, Asouzu argues that both Africans and the West oscillate between transcendence and immanence, as well as between three-valued and two-valued logic. Claiming one as uniquely African and the other as uniquely Western is a result of a divisive mindset. This mindset also influences theories on African science, philosophy, ethics, and logic, as well as debates like Black Athena and Afrocentricism. Asousu argues that African philosophers like Wiredu and Hallen need



to be open-minded and consider different perspectives to truly understand the African present reality. Asouzu believes that a transcendent existential conversion is necessary for this realization. It is all about breaking free from ethnocentrism and recognizing that closer is not always better or safer. Therefore, Asouzu believes that being ethnocentric and reducing everything to one perspective can cloud our minds and hinder us from attaining true knowledge.

A Reconstruction of Wiredu's Consensual Democracy

To overcome this bias, Asouzu introduces the method of Ibuanidanda, which emphasizes the importance of mutual dependence and complementarity. Asouzu coined the phrase "ibuanidanda," which translates to "no load is insurmountable for danda the ant." It is derived from three Igbo words: "ibu," which means weight or task; "anyi," which means not insurmountable; and "danda," which refers to a kind of ant. Just like ants working together to lift heavy loads, traditional African philosophers believe that humans can achieve great things when they act in harmony. Ibuanidanda ontology aims to break free from ethnocentric thinking and see reality from different perspectives, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all things. It is all about building a harmonious whole through mutual service. Therefore, Ibuanidanda ontology is an effort to reinterpret, polish, rebuild, and liberate our philosophical framework from any ethnocentric commitment, enabling everyone to view reality through the gaps in our knowledge. Gaps in the universe made up of things and things of things, essences and essences of essences, accidents and accidents of accidents, forms and forms of forms, ideas and ideas of ideas, thoughts and thoughts of thoughts, and so on are called missing links. To create an essential harmonic whole through mutual service, they relate to one another in terms of time and space as well as other forms of this complementary interaction in terms of amounts and qualities, kinds, and differences (Asouzu, 2007: 267). Ibuanidanda ontology suggests that when humans work together in harmony, they can attain certainty in knowledge. However, if they continue to be divided and polarized, their progress will be limited. Africans need the West, and the West needs Africans and other regions of the world, to bring knowledge to the forefront. Similar to ants, humans can achieve more when they collaborate rather than being divided. We need to realize that we share a common purpose and work together to achieve great things (Asouzu, 2007: 320)

Basically, Asouzu believes that in order for our minds to truly understand the interconnectedness of everything, we need to go through what he calls "transcendent existential conversion." It is a process whereby human consciousness reaches a higher level of understanding and intuition about the nature of reality. It helps us to see how everything that exists is like a missing link that contributes to the bigger picture. Asouzu believes that this idea of "the nearer, the better" can lead to clannish and ethnocentric tendencies. But when someone goes through existential conversion, they start to realize that proximity is not always the best option. It is like a lightbulb moment when they understand that all individuals, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, are part of a unified existence. When someone goes through transcendent existential conversion, their consciousness reaches a higher level of understanding. Instead of seeing reality as fragmented and divided, they start to see it from a more comprehensive and universal perspective. It is like a shift from a limited mindset to a global mindset. This conversion helps the mind move away from divisiveness and



towards complementarity. It is like a transformation from a "we-them" mentality to a "we-we" mentality. It is all about embracing inclusivity and egalitarianism (Asouzu, 2007:323).

When one undergoes existential conversion, the idea of "the nearer the better and safer" takes on a whole new meaning. It becomes universally applicable, where everyone is considered better and safer. African philosophers, instead of trying to create a separate philosophy for Africans, would seek a philosophy that encompasses everyone and transcends ethnocentric limitations. The focus shifts from debating the superiority or inferiority of philosophies to advancing the frontiers of knowledge. It is all about expanding our understanding and pushing the boundaries of what we know. After experiencing existential conversion, the mind starts to align with what Asouzu refers to as the "transcendent categories of unity of consciousness." These categories include fragmentation, unity, totality, universality, comprehensiveness, wholeness, and future reference. Instead of dividing and bifurcating reality, the mind now operates following these transcendent categories. It grasps the various aspects of being, recognizing both the fragmented and unified nature of reality, while also embracing its totality, universality, comprehensiveness, wholeness, and future implications. It is like seeing the bigger picture and understanding the interconnectedness of everything. The harmonizing faculty, as described by Asouzu, plays a crucial role in capturing the various aspects of being. This transcendent faculty harmonizes forces that tend towards division and exclusivity, allowing the mind to grasp the fragmentation, unity, totality, universality, comprehensiveness, wholeness, and future reference of reality. With the harmonizing faculty in control, the mind is not led astray by ethnocentric commitments. It harmonizes differences, preventing polarization and bifurcation that lead to such commitments. This enables us to embrace the otherness of others as an extension of ourselves, without discrimination. It is through this global and transcendent mindset that we can see the world as a collective "we" rather than a fragmented "them." It is a mindset that erases ethnocentric commitment and fosters inclusivity (Asouzu, 2007: 316). To demonstrate Asouzu's ideas of complementarity in consensual democracy, we consider two practical cases where the principles of traditional African consensual governance have been integrated with Western-style democracy or democratic elements from other civilizations within functional political systems. These examples illustrate how consensual democracy can be woven into modern political frameworks and how Asouzu's theory of complementarity can bridge opposing political practices. For instance, In South Africa, after the end of apartheid, the new democratic government faced the challenge of integrating the Western-style majoritarian democracy with the African communal decision-making process that emphasizes consensus.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is a good example of how this integration worked. The TRC focused on dialogue, mutual understanding, and reconciliation between different communities and political groups, thus blending the Western principles of justice and individual rights with the African emphasis on community and consensus. It was not just about punishing wrongdoers but fostering a collective process of healing and building national unity. This complementary approach allowed South Africa to establish a political system that recognized the importance of majority rule while also respecting consensual processes thus strengthening the country's democracy (see Teitel, 2000). Another example is deduced from the Nigerian political



structure. In various parts of Nigeria, traditional rulers, such as Emirs, Obas, and Chiefs, continue to play an influential role in decision-making, both at the local and regional levels. While Nigeria's national governance is a Western-style democracy with presidential elections and political parties, at the local level, traditional councils provide a space for consensus-building and conflict resolution. Traditional rulers often act as mediators in local disputes, creating a complementary relationship between the formal democratic structures and informal traditional governance systems. This helps to prevent conflicts and build consensus among diverse ethnic groups (Oluwole, 2012: 134). In many areas, the local political structures reflect Asouzu's ideas of complementarity because traditional and modern systems work together to facilitate governance, thereby ensuring social harmony. The integration of traditional consensus practices with modern democratic institutions demonstrates that cultural traditions and contemporary governance can collaborate to strengthen political stability and foster social cohesion

Conclusion

Despite the heavy criticisms leveled against Wiredu's consensual democracy, Fayemi revisits Hallen's argument in favour of consensual democracy as an alternative to majoritarian governance in post-colonial Africa. He demystifies some of the conceptual intricacies surrounding consensual democracy in traditional African cultures and defends Wiredu against certain charges, which shows the ethnocentric biases that are embedded in their position. However, Fayemi critically engages Hallen's grounds for reconsidering consensual democracy, arguing for the institutionalization of credible elements of traditional consensual democracy in post-colonial African states. Rather than excluding majoritarian democracy, he suggests enriching it through a fusion of moral-ontological aspects of indigenous political practices found in traditional consensual democracy. Therefore, it can be argued that Fayemi's complementarity approach is in line with the transcendent existential conversion of Asouzu. He can show that the focus of the present African scholars should be directed to the introduction of an ideology that reflects the current identity of the Africans. It has been acknowledged by some scholars that the identity of the Africans today revolves around what Al-mazrui called "Triple heritage", which involves western culture, Arabic culture and African cultures and all these are to be taken into consideration when introducing indigenous African ideology that will befit the current African reality. It is on the basis of this, that both Wiredu and Hallen are conceived as being biased ethnocentrically; they fail to consider the existential fact that revolves the current African identity. While Wiredu and Hallen are trying to protect the identity of the Africans, they fail to realize that there is a missing link which can only be acknowledged through consideration of the indigenous ideology and that of the one brought by external civilization or influences. Although Fayemi's recommendation acknowledges the current African reality which is in lack of institutionalization and practical reform but not showing the nature of current African identity which serves as the basis of African socio political ideology makes his theory incomplete. It is on the basis of this, that I further strengthened his position through Asouzu's Ibunya ontology to show that the current African identity cannot be treated in isolation; it requires both the external and internal contributions. The reform of consensual democracy is incomplete without the inclusion of the missing link in the current African reality. Hence, consensual democracy is best practiced when consideration is not restricted to indigenous identity alone but also acknowledges the missing link



in it and the connection between the current African identity and the practicality of any sociopolitical ideology.

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