Democratic Leadership and the African Metaphysical Reality

Osam Edim Temple, Ph.D.

Professor of Philosophy
American University of Nigeria

Introduction

In the last two decades, we have witnessed scores of African nations embracing democracy. In spite of this, the development of democratic culture remains subdued in many parts of the continent. The reason for this is that we seek to practice democracy without aligning with its metaphysical foundations. The aim of this article is to show that democracy, like most socio-political concepts, is a product of a metaphysical world-view and that for us to develop democratic leadership in Africa, we must shift from a cultic metaphysics to a democratic world-view. Democratic principles, beginning from the ancient Greek era to recent western models, are all rooted in this metaphysical base. The central point I wish to make in this article, therefore, is that for Africa to develop a genuine democratic culture, she must shift from a cultic metaphysics to a democratic metaphysics.

I argue in this article that there is an incongruity between democratic ideals and the African metaphysical reality which prevents the emergence of true democratic leadership. Some of the early African leaders like Nyerere, Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, and Senghor recognized this challenge and labored hard to develop political philosophies that aligned with Africa's metaphysical reality. Their successors did not build on their efforts, however, and so we witnessed the sunset of political philosophy in the continent. I argue that for this reason, within the womb of current African politics lie strong metaphysical undercurrents which procreate what I call *cultic leadership* instead of democratic leadership.

In this article I shall clarify the concept of metaphysics and show its link with socio-political behavior. I shall argue that democratic ideals are products of metaphysical world-views and that for us to have genuine democracy we must embrace a certain way of looking at the world. For democratic leadership to grow in Africa,

there must be a metaphysical paradigm shift from a hierarchical universe of the cultic world-view to a level universe. I shall show that if this is not done, the result is epistemological slavery of the masses, disdain for the rule of law, and apathy. The metaphysical shift consists in changing the symbols and ideals on which the structures of society are erected. What will bring about this change? I think that this change can only happen if we have a coalition of intellectual leadership, political leadership, and leadership of civil society.

Conceptual Clarification

It is important at the outset to clarify my usage of the word *metaphysics*, since this is the fulcrum on which this article revolves. Without a clear understanding of this term, it is possible to lose the entire essence—indeed the whole point—of this paper. For instance, in this work, I speak of the "metaphysical ideals of liberty and equality." With a cavalier wave of the hand, one may begin to query, are these ideals metaphysical? Are they not rather political or ethical? The fresh air I seek to bring into the philosophical understanding of the concept of metaphysics entails showing that even so-called socio-political and cultural ideas are at bottom offspring of some metaphysical world-view.

In the paper "Metaphysical Challenges of Ethical Leadership in Africa," I argued that there are at least three usages of the word metaphysics (Temple, 2012: 48–49). First is the technical usage of the concept, that is, the attempt to draw a general picture of the cosmos—what it is and the way it is arranged. This had its historical roots in the early days of Greek philosophy, when the sages of antiquity tried to understand the ultimate nature of reality (Solomon, 1989: 56).

The second usage of the concept is far more general and links the concept with the spontaneous attempt by all mankind in all ages and at all places, roused by sheer curiosity, to understand and describe their universe.

> In all ages and places, people have been curious about their world. They had mental pictures of their world and expressed their worldview in song and in dance, in rock paintings inside caves, and even in the languages they spoke. Without the shared metaphysical picture of reality, without a shared worldview, it would have been impossible for men to communicate with one another and form societies. Belief systems, cultures, worldviews, etc., are all expressions of our pictures of ultimate reality. They constitute our metaphysics and lie at the foundations of our behavior (Temple, 2012: 48–49).

This usage of metaphysics simply means "world-view." It is this general sense that can permit us to include Christianity and Islam, for instance, as part of the African metaphysical reality, or even refer to a people as having a metaphysical identity or sharing the same world-view. It is in this broad sense of the concept of metaphysics that we can also talk about creating metaphysical symbols—symbols

that represent the world-view of the people. It is also in this broad sense that we can see how concepts like liberty, equality, and individual rights, which appear to be social and political, are expressions of an underlying metaphysics.

I have also argued elsewhere that the real challenges of ethical leadership in Africa are metaphysical and that the metaphysics of a people determine their leadership behavior (Leadership Podcast, 2012). There is, however, a third usage of the word "metaphysics." It is the sense in which metaphysics is a commitment to spiritual and cosmic forces. Omoregbe explains that within the African context "there are mystical or supernatural forces which defy any scientific analysis or explanation" (Omoregbe, 1990: 26–27). This sense includes what Innocent Asouzu refers to as "mythological African metaphysics" (Asouzu, 1998).

Let us now turn our gaze to the concept of democracy. It should be noted that some of the concepts used in this article have a universal and general appeal but make sense only when we consider their contextual significance. It is taken for granted, for instance, that a democracy is a people's government or a government run by the will of the people (Pennock, 1979: 7). It is also taken for granted that democratic leaders are people who are freely and fairly elected and authorized to exercise state power (Dahl, 1998: 38). This seems obvious until we enter the African terrain, where many leaders of supposedly democratic nations are not truly elected by the people, do not represent the interests of the generality of the people, and daily contend with the problem of legitimacy.

This does not mean that these African political leaders did not hold party memberships, did not contest elections, were not declared winners by the electoral bodies, or were not sworn in by judicial officers. Of course, all of these things happened, but many of the leaders emerged as winners only after voters were intimidated, credible opponents were disqualified, ballot papers disappeared and reappeared again, and all manner of fraudulent tactics were used. What I refer to as democratic leadership in this article is a leadership which emerges from free and fair elections, which participates in a contest, where ". . . there are periodic winners and losers" (Przeworski, 1991: 10) and which holds as sacred the ideals of what Popper calls the *open society* (Popper, 1971).

Another relevant concept is the concept of *cultic leadership*. Whereas democratic leaders have the mandate of their people, cultic leaders emerge from some narrow cultural device enshrouded in secrecy and their survival depends on the use of the instruments of coercion, the heightening of fear, and the use of divisive tactics. Cultic leaders do not owe their allegiance to the generality of the people but, rather, to a complex network of kingmakers, godfathers, and party stalwarts. Thus, whereas democratic leaders submit themselves to periodic elections, the cultic leaders mobilize the cultic network to abuse the electoral process and perpetuate themselves or their cronies in power.

Cultic leadership in Africa today is an aberration of open and transparent leadership. The inclination towards cultic leadership can be traced to the colonial assault on traditional leadership institutions. It should be noted that before colonialism, there was a respectable traditional leadership which emerged naturally out of the history, culture, and values of the people. Among the Ejagham people of

Cross River Nigeria and Southwest Cameroun, for instance, government was constituted around family heads (Onor, 1994). These heads all belonged to a legislative Council. Every settlement had a recognized head called the *Ntufam* who presided over the Council and who was chosen on grounds of age and wisdom. Crucial to the installation of the *Ntufam* was the principle of seniority and rotation; each *Ntufam* may have occupied the throne between twenty-five to thirty years (Erim and Jaja, 1990: 40). The metaphysical values of the people, the sacred nsibidi writings, and the ethos were all supplied by the elite Mgbe society (Talbot, 1912). To be considered a responsible citizen of the Ejagham society, you must be initiated into the secrets of the Mgbe society.

With the advent of colonialism, however, new structures were imposed which changed the values of governance. The colonial master superimposed on the traditional models, agents, and structures of governance those that would be most conciliatory to its designs. Achebe has described these circumstances very vividly in his classic, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In Ejaghamland, the Germans attempted to ban Mgbe across borders (Bonchuk, 2001). In many places, some people were made chiefs who did not deserve the title and were given privileges over the legitimate chiefs. The colonial powers armed their "friends" with guns and cloths, and these friends did everything to retain these privileges and sustain themselves in power. They created a web of secret loyalties around themselves and were accountable to no one else but the colonial masters. Thus colonialism fuelled cultic governance right from inception to independence. Ake explains:

> Since the colonial state was for its subjects, at any rate, an arbitrary power, it could not engender any legitimacy even though it made rules and laws profusely and propagated values. Accordingly, in struggling to advance their interests, the colonial subjects did not worry about conforming to legality or legitimacy norms. Colonial politics was thus reduced to the crude mechanics of opposing forces driven by the calculus of power. The result was unprecedented drive for power . . . (Ake, 1996: 3)

One other conceptual matter that deserves attention is the idea of an African metaphysical reality. Is there any such thing as a metaphysical reality that is common to all Africans? Of course, there is no such thing as a homogenous Africa.

> Nigeria has a population of over 121 million, while Lesotho has just 2 million inhabitants; Botswana is largely an arid state, but Congo-Kinshasha is lush in vegetation; Ethiopia is racially homogenous, while South Africa is home to several racial communities. The north of the continent is predominantly Muslim and the South Christian, not to mention the mixture of indigenous spiritual traditions found throughout . . . (Thomson, 2000: 3)

Africa, like all continents, is shaped by history, geography, religion, culture,

politics, in fact, by a myriad of factors. It is therefore foolhardy for anybody to place all of Africa in one cultural or economic straitjacket. In discussing Africa's metaphysical reality, therefore, we are seeking a commonality among Africans that survives in spite of obvious differences. What kind of commonality? I think that it is a metaphysical commonality that underlies all expression of Africanness. It is a commonality that is crafted by a history characterized by 500 years of slavery; 100 years of colonialism, decades of nationalist struggles, and years of experimentation with the Westminster style of governance. It is an African personality or identity that has been shaped through the synthesis of traditional beliefs, Judaea-Christian culture, and Islamic culture (Nkrumah, 1970: 79). This is the Africa that has been inundated with economic developmental packages from the Bretton Woods institutions. It is the Africa that has passed through many years of civil wars and dictatorial governments and is presently making the painful and uncertain transition to democracy.

It is this Africa I am referring to in this work. In doing this I must acknowledge that the variables that come into play in South Africa, with its long history of Apartheid, cannot be the same variables that will come into play in Algeria, with its challenges of Islamic militancy. What comes into play in Darfur cannot be the same as what comes into play in Eastern Congo. In spite of these contextual differences, however, the point of this article is that there is a common African metaphysical reality shaped by historical and cultural circumstances. It is this reality that can be referred to as the continent's *metaphysical identity*. This identity is the product of Africans' understanding of their universe, their world-view or conscious or subconscious description of their universe.

Metaphysics and Leadership

Some may wonder what metaphysics has to do with leadership. This is because there is long-standing confusion about what metaphysics entails. To those uninitiated in philosophical discourse, metaphysics is a journey into the occult, an exercise in stargazing, palmistry, and the like. From the standpoint of professional philosophy however, metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that deals with first principles of existence. It is the attempt "to arrive by rational means at a general picture of the world" (Quinton, 1973: 235). It asks ultimate questions about the nature of being and the world. What is reality? What is its nature? Is it one or many? Is it mental or physical? Is man free? Are things determined? These and many other questions are central to metaphysics and, as I shall argue, are also preliminary questions in other fields of study.

There is a line linking metaphysics to other fields of philosophical inquiry. Although metaphysics has had tough luck in its long and brilliant career and has endured near-fatal blows from formidable assailants like Hume, Russell, and the logical positivists, it has continued to play a crucial role in philosophic history. It is for this reason that Richard Taylor asserts that "one's philosophical thinking, if long pursued, tends to resolve itself into basic problems of metaphysics" (Taylor, 1962: 1). Metaphysics, quite interestingly, connects with four fundamental areas of philosophy: ontology, epistemology, ethics, and axiology. While ontology

is the study of what exists and epistemology is the study of our knowledge of what exists, ethics is the study of the moral conduct of the knowing subject towards others and axiology is the study of how the knowing subject values things that exist. There is hardly any field of study that does not emerge from this metaphysical cauldron. I believe that it is also from here that the real questions on leadership ought to be tackled.

In a recent article I stated that "To answer questions on what exists (metaphysics), we find ourselves asking questions about our knowledge of what exists (epistemology); in order to answer questions about our knowledge of what exists, we also find ourselves asking questions about our relationship with what exists; and in that same manner, answering questions concerning our relationship with what exists takes us into ethics, values, influence and goals, all of which are crucial rods within the pillars of leadership" (Temple, 2012: 49).

Leadership is essentially about a relationship of influence between man and his society. To understand, assess, and evaluate the nature of this relationship (which is what leadership studies has been all about), one needs to return to fundamental questions about the nature of man and the nature of reality. There is more to leadership than fighting for rights or higher pay, making speeches, and making people dizzy. Leadership involves understanding "both the rational and emotional sides of human experience . . . Good leadership is more than just calculation and planning, or following a 'checklist' " (Hughes et al., 2006: 8). Good leadership is about understanding the nature of man in the cosmos. Metaphysics therefore serves as the base on which we can understand leadership.

My point here is that leadership theories have roots deeply embedded in some metaphysical framework. To understand democratic leadership, therefore, it is important to understand its metaphysical foundations. Democracy may mean many things to many people, but at bottom it rests on two fundamental ideals—the ideal of liberty and the ideal of equality.

The ideal of liberty emerges from the metaphysical assumption that all men are born free. It is an assumption that the entire universe is populated by free beings who can make reasonable choices and aim at high goals. The ideal of equality also emerges from another metaphysical assumption. It is the assumption that men are fundamentally equal and that social hierarchies, where they exist, are basically accidental. Now, these are not merely social ideals. They are expressions of an ontological vision—the vision that reality is populated by free and independent beings who desire to create a society with little or no hierarchies.

The Athenian Experience

The Western world, it should be noted, did not just stumble on the metaphysical assumptions of freedom and equality. Athens, which is generally regarded as the birthplace of democracy and the most important democracy of antiquity, was not always a democracy (Raaflaub et al., 2007). Around the 7th century BC, Athens was under the grip of a powerful aristocratic class which exploited the people and created great disharmony in the society.

Under the weight of the aristocracy, the economic and social circumstances of the people became very harsh. By the 6th century BC, the general discontent had reached a crescendo and, not surprisingly, the people rose against the nobles. In Plutarch's account, the conflict which ensued was resolved through the mediation of Solon, who emerged with formidable intellectual credentials and won the trust of all parties (Plutarch, 2001). Although Solon still maintained the class distinctions, he is known to have legislated for all the citizens to be admitted into the *Ekklesia*. He tactically gave common people the power not only to elect officials but also to call them to account. Although there are disagreements among scholars as to the extent of the radicalism of Solon (Hignett, 1952: 92–96), there is a fairly general consensus among scholars that he laid the foundations of the Athenian democracy (Blok, 2006). In these early beginnings of democracy, we see clearly a shift from an aristocratic world view to a democratic one. The metaphysics of the aristocrat can be summarized in the following six important, though seemingly trivial, propositions:

- Reality is hierarchical
- Reality is populated by people who are placed on different rungs of the ladder
- People are placed on different rungs of the ladder because they are inherently different
- These differences are expressions of certain inner qualities, and these inner qualities determine where in the hierarchy an individual may belong
- All men are not equal
- All men are not free to change their estate

This was a whole metaphysical system which determined everything that happened in that Athenian world. For there to be a paradigm shift, most of the rungs on this aristocratic ladder needed to be eliminated. Solon, it should be noted, did not completely abolish classes, but he did a lot to achieve a metaphysical shift. He changed the taxation system radically and changed concepts where necessary. Taxes were now called *contributions*. Such a conceptual shift had far-reaching effects. It was a shift to the idea that the people were not qualitatively inferior and that they individually had a voice. It was a shift to the realization of personhood and the worth of the individual in the structure.

The clash between the aristocrats and the people was a clash of metaphysical world-views. Thus when the shift took place, the old world-view was thrown overboard. Although there were still propertied classes, all citizens belonged to the *Ecclesia* or Assembly and had the power to vote. The constitutional reforms eliminated enslavement of Athenians by Athenians and made it possible for the poor to seek redress from the rich. Political privileges were no longer determined by nobility of birth but by the ability to produce wealth. It was Cleisthenes, after Solon, who introduced the principle of *isonomia*—equality of rights. This was among the formidable concepts in the Greek conceptual scheme that, once embraced, jolted the entire metaphysical framework. With the principle of *isonomia*, the

Greek understanding of political obligation was changed. Family loyalty gave way to political loyalty and more people now had access to power. It was during this period that the word *democratia* (democracy)—"rule by the people"—was first used by the Athenians to define their new system of government.

Two Kinds of Leadership

As we have seen above, Greek democracy did not emerge without a clash of world-views. In a similar manner, in Africa, the transition to democracy has also revealed a clash of two distinct world-views—the cultic and the democratic world-views. The distinction between the two reveals a distinction between two kinds of leadership—cultic leadership and democratic leadership.

The cultic world-view describes life as interdependent, hierarchical, and having primordial centers of power. In this world-view, power comes from somewhere high up in the hierarchy. Knowledge and wealth are privileges gained only through one's location in the social scheme and initiation into some cultic secrets of the hierarchy. The democratic world-view, on the other hand, is totally different. It sees life as a level playing field with few or no hierarchies. It considers all individuals as independent and capable of making informed and rational choices.

The cultic leader is first and foremost a member of a cult—a small group in the society with tall ambitions. He or she may be a member of a secret society, an aristocratic club, a military cabal, a drug cartel, a dominant clan, a criminal gang, or even a religious society. One characteristic of all cults is the obsession with, and unquenchable thirst for, power. These little groups or cults have a code of ethics mostly enshrouded in secrecy and known only to initiates. Somehow or the other they wield amazing influence in society and may even control the apparatus of state.

The cultic leader gains his/her primary inspiration from the cult. His/her first loyalty is to the cult. He/she is not able to see all men as equal. He/she is not able to understand the doctrine of freedom because he/she him/herself is tied to a regimented system. His/her definition of reality is that which is provided by his/her cult. Whenever he/she rises to national prominence, he/she seeks first to boost the position of cult members and governs primarily in the interest of his/her cult. In his/her metaphysics, he/she sees reality as made up of hierarchies and factions. For him/her, you are either an outsider or an insider.

The cultic leader respects positions. His/her position is maintained through his/her unalloyed loyalty to the centers of power. He/she maintains a complexity of loyalties and often sacrifices the interest of the many for the benefit of the privileged few. The cultic leader manipulates the public to achieve his/her goals. His/her political survival has nothing to do with the people. It has everything to do with the godfathers and kingmakers.

Democratic leaders, on the other hand, necessarily hold onto the metaphysical ideals of liberty and equality. They believe in the fundamental liberty and equality of all men and derive their powers from the majority of people. They are believers in the rule of law, have passion for the ideals of society, and are always willing to sacrifice personal good for the collective good. Democratic leaders are also willing

to submit themselves periodically to the test of an election. They are tolerant of the opposition, make use of the media to reach a wide section of the populace, believe in the fundamental rights of man, appeal to the judiciary when their rights are violated, and respect the pronouncements of the courts. Democratic leaders have an unshakeable faith in the democratic process and do everything in their power to defend openness in government and tolerance in society.

Political Leadership in Africa

To provide a fair description of political leadership in Africa today, it is necessary to roughly distinguish three periods of political transformation: the pre-independence era, beginning roughly from the end of the second World War to the 1960s; the post-independence era, beginning from the 1960s to the end of the century; and the democratic era, beginning from the end of the last century to the present day.

The pre-independence era produced nationalist leaders who struggled for independence and presided over the first democratic adventure of the 1960s. These leaders were mostly intellectual, charismatic, and visionary and had a certain degree of ideological leaning. Among them were Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor, Mwalimu Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba, Jomo Kenyatta, and Sekou Toure. They struggled with the idea of having a true African democracy that was in line with Africa's metaphysical world-view or cultural context, but their projects were scuttled from the outset. After independence, when the colonial master had gone, hidden ethnic tensions resurfaced and these leaders turned against one another—Azikiwe versus Awolowo, Kenyatta versus Odinga, Kaunda versus Kapwepwe, Lumumba versus Tshombe—returning to very primordial ethnic ties for political survival. In the end, they were all swept aside by the military—a highly regimented and organized cultic group.

The military rulers that forced the nationalists out were, by comparison, intellectual dwarfs. They were unimaginative, harsh, and authoritarian. They imposed draconian rules on the people and brooked no opposition. This was partly because of their training and partly because, having no legitimacy, there was no other way they could have remained in power. These authoritarian regimes created a network of loyalists which included traditional rulers, religious leaders, and business leaders. The intellectual class was always viewed with suspicion and did not play an important role in government. The few intellectuals who held high office had little or no impact on the direction of government. The military therefore further intensified the cultic consciousness that had characterized Africa for decades.

The third period is the present democratic era. Although most African countries today are wearing democratic badges, the leadership structure is not democratic but cultic. It is a complex network of political, religious, traditional, business, and union leaders. This network is usually a connecting thread linking the politician to the traditional rulers, to the religious community, and to the business community. It also links upwards to the godfather and further to the kingmakers. In conducting an election, it is not so much the manifesto of the political leaders that

makes them win. It is how far they have "settled" the party hierarchy through their godfathers. The business leaders are also linked in the network because they provide the money used to appease the godfathers and kingmakers. The politician also needs money to mobilize "the boys" (if you like, thugs), the women, and the youth leaders. This is necessary to give them a semblance of popularity in the streets during rallies and to show muscle wherever necessary. Money is also needed to fuel the campaigns, rent crowds, and buy electoral officers and the police.

Most African political leaders of this new democratic dispensation are leaders, therefore, not because they are advocates of socio-economic transformation of the people but, rather, because they are to cultivate and maintain arcane loyalties to traditional rulers, spiritual guides, godfathers, and kingmakers. It is these loyalties that shape the leaders' political consciousness and determine their political survival. In the end, politics for most of these leaders is not about issues; it is not even about the people. Instead, it is about the ability of the candidates to sustain the complex network. Under these circumstances, what we have are cultic leaders, not democratic leaders.

I believe that it is this kind of leadership that Larry Diamond was referencing when he wrote:

> State incumbents at all levels use their power and office to appropriate resources for themselves and their families, cronies, clients and kin. State offices are distributed with the expectation and understanding that their incumbents will use them to accumulate wealth. Corrupt resources flow up and down chains of clientage in a vast cascading drain upon public wealth and honest effort. Corruption in these countries is not an aberration. It is the way the system works, the way people acquire power and wealth, and the way officials retain power and expand wealth (Diamond, 2004: 269).

What does leadership mean in this environment? It is about sustaining this complex metaphysical network. Sacrifice plays a very minimal role in the cultic leader's career. Instead, leadership is a vicious circle of demands and appeasements. The leaders want to survive the periodic storms of the political system, and this requires appeasing the leaders of the network and not the people. In the end, they need the masses only when another campaign season is near. Do the masses complain? Not necessarily. A large majority of the people are uneducated. They are unable to connect their poverty and deprivation to the malfeasance of their sons and daughters in government. The leader is a son or daughter of the clan. It is the duty of the clan to protect him or her.

The people are connected to the entire framework not just physically but spiritually. It is this spiritual linkage that makes them feel satisfied merely from the fact that one of their sons or daughters has access to power. Through this spiritual participation, when their sons or daughters have "eaten" the national cake, it is they who have eaten it. The masses don't expect anything except handouts during campaigns. During burials or weddings, they have somebody to turn to for

financial assistance. It is not accountability they want. It is access in time of need. The followers are uneducated and dissatisfied with their lot, but they are unable to draw the crucial line linking their circumstances with their primordial loyalties. The opposition in the cultic environment is helpless. If you are outside the circle of power you starve to death and risk rejection by your own people. Therefore, the will to live in opposition is slender. The few who remain in the opposition are persecuted and harassed daily. They are even summoned by their kinsmen and advised to cooperate with the ruling party. In the end, the cultic leaders prevail.

Metaphysical Undercurrents

The reason for the continued prevalence of cultic leadership in Africa is that old metaphysical concepts continue to rule people's consciousness. Democratic leadership is failing to emerge because the new democracy is not backed by new metaphysical concepts and values, metaphysical ideals to which people can relate. It is not the whole package that is being received.

Traditional African societies had a very strict sense of cosmic values and instilled them in the people's minds in many formidable ways. Many of the current African leaders would never have emerged in the old African set-up, where sanctions for corruption included public disgrace, banishment, and even forced suicide. The old society was saturated with metaphysical concepts, which explained the universe and the role of man in the cosmos. In that ancient African society, life was a rhythm and all men participated in its fullness. Life was hierarchical, and it was the existence of rungs on the social ladder that made things meaningful. It was a society with a vibrant system connecting both the physical and the spiritual (Gyekye, 1987: 68–76). Life was a continuum connecting the sky and the earth, the living and the dead, the present and the past. Reality had an "intrinsic interrelationship" (Ekanola, 2006: 75–76) and there was always harmonious interdependence between the self and the world (Ruch et al., 1981: 163).

People understood their roles in that society and lived for one another. Traditional African leadership prized harmony above all and sought the rhythm of governance through consensus. The quest for consensus often led to long speeches dressed in proverbs and aphorisms. Democracy, from the traditional African perspective, does not simply boil down to majority rule. It is something that somehow unites both the majority and the minority.

The concepts that dominated traditional African politics were neither liberty nor equality nor individual rights. Instead, they were the metaphysical concepts of oneness, harmony, and wholeness. You couldn't excise any part of a community to talk about its particular rights. One's individuality—one's essence—was defined by one's relationship with the clan. In other words, it is *Ubuntu* (humanness) and *Ujamaa* (familyhood) that dominated traditional African morality (Metz, 2007; Farland, 2007; Wood, 2007).

After colonialism, the African society found itself running a system that could not explain the people's existence or define their reality. The modern state did not give spiritual, emotional, or material support to the ordinary people. It offered the

people a democracy without doing away with the cultic hierarchies. Today, as we celebrate democracy, old metaphysical paradigms have still not shifted. The old cultic paradigm of leadership which is hierarchical is still very much in place. The high priest and his shrine are still intact. The intellectual is still suspect. The transition to democracy taking place in most African countries today is a mere ritual. What Africans have embraced are the garments of democracy, not its soul. What they have embraced are the campaign rallies which involve a lot of colorful cultural displays. What they have embraced are the voters' registration exercise, the external rituals of belonging to political parties, pasting posters on street corners, wearing T-shirts and hats, and singing intoxicating songs. What they have not embraced, however, is counting the votes and knowing who the winner is.

The reason for this is obvious. Embracing genuine democracy requires us to accept the metaphysical ideals of democracy which state that all men are born free and equal. Popular vote makes godfathers and kingmakers irrelevant. Popular vote means placing all citizens, including godfathers and ordinary voters, on level ground. It means allowing people's leaders to emerge rather than leaders of the cultic network. Popular vote means allowing people to think and giving room to intellectuals to play a role. All of these things upset the ontological sense of balance of Africa's cultic politics. In a very important sense, in the cultic environment, all men are not free and equal. Leadership comes from the shrine and not from the people. It is therefore very difficult for a true democrat to emerge from the structures of the African cultic environment. Without doubt, over the years a lot has changed in Africa. What has not changed, however, are the metaphysical postulates about governance and the cultic essence of leadership.

Democracy without a Metaphysical Base?

What is happening in Africa's transition to democracy is, at bottom, a clash of metaphysical posits. It is a clash of the metaphysical ideals of democracy (liberty and equality) against the cultic ideals that emerged in the brutal days of colonialism and were heightened during the military era. The efforts of the founding fathers to develop a true democratic ideology were abandoned by successive leaders. Today we are implementing democracy without its metaphysical base. The result is epistemological slavery, apathy, and disdain for the rule of law.

1. Epistemological Slavery

Epistemological slavery is characterized by the forced dependence of large groups of people on others for knowledge, for truth, for meaning, and even for belief. It could even be a more dangerous and debilitating form of slavery than the trans-Atlantic slave trade because the victims of epistemological slavery are not even conscious of their chains. In Africa today, this form of slavery is experienced first at the intellectual level, and second at the socio-political level.

At the intellectual level, African scholars, having received western education, find themselves helplessly working with concepts borrowed "from the conceptual

toolkit of scholars working on Europe or North America" (Austin, 2008: 2–3). They find themselves wearing Eurocentric eyeglasses which inevitably dim their perception of the African reality. African scholars are therefore trapped in a conceptual prison and saddled with a hermeneutic burden. Since this bondage is not physical, many of us are not even aware of it. We are not even aware of the need to embrace the concepts of Europe with an African conscience—to drink European wine, so to speak, from the African calabash! In my generation, many of us read, write, and even think in European languages. If we must be relevant to Africa we must unlock the conceptual prison, deconstruct its epistemology, and adapt relevant metaphysical concepts to our use. Without doing this, our conceptual banks will remain barren, we shall continue to suggest European answers to African problems, and we shall continue to be irrelevant to the leadership crisis facing Africa.

The absence of relevant concepts and symbols makes it difficult for people to understand their circumstances. This creates a situation where the people have to depend on a privileged few to explain the processes and policies of government. The masses are dependent on the few for knowledge and understanding. It is this situation that engenders an epistemological slavery at the socio-political level.

Among the ways African leaders have controlled knowledge is by controlling the press, the school's curriculum, and access to education. If information is free, if the populace is educated, if there is intellectual freedom, then there will be a culture of critical rationality which will boil down to new political consciousness and the demand for accountability. What is rewarded in politics is not individual initiative but loyalty, and loyalty often means obedience without questioning. In this environment, many young men and women have learned that their growth in politics depends on their dependence on political leaders for truth and knowledge.

Most citizens in African nations can neither read nor write. They are therefore susceptible to manipulation by the political elite. Many of these citizens know that they cannot make informed choices. They would rather let others make choices for them. Illiteracy fuels abdication of responsibility and dependence on others to make choices

To deprive a people of the powers of independent reasoning is to assault their very essence. It amounts to depriving them of the right to an epistemology (which is the right to think, inquire, ask questions, and form opinions) and therefore the right to reconsider their metaphysical concepts. You cannot have a genuine shift in paradigms without a new metaphysical framework with which to identify. Leadership in Africa is in dire need of new metaphysical symbols. The African National Congress anti-apartheid struggle, for instance, provided South Africans with the symbol of "the spear of the nation." Today, post-Apartheid South Africa will do well with new symbols of *Ubuntu*. Where will these symbols come from? Will they come from Europe and America? Certainly not! These symbols can only be developed by the intellectual class within Africa. Since Nyerere's development of the *Ujamaa* concept, not much has been done by the intellectual class to develop cultural concepts and symbols reflecting Africa's metaphysical reality.

2. Disdain for the Rule of Law

Another brutal consequence of the metaphysical dilemma is disdain for the rule of law. Law is meant to make society function harmoniously. To be committed to the laws of a society, one must have commitment to that society itself. Nobody takes seriously the laws of a society that they do not consider to be important in their lives. Many Africans may easily break the laws of the state without thinking twice, particularly if they are loyal to some powerful cultic leader. On the contrary, they tremble to their marrows when they mistakenly break the laws of their clans. This betrays where their loyalty actually lies. What is important to the masses are the rules set by their cultic leaders. During elections, ballot papers disappear, election officials do not show up in many places, even the police collude in multiple thumb-printing. All is right so long as it is in favor of the cultic leader. Why is this so? The cultic leader provides the citizens with meaning. He or she is their leader. Right and wrong are seen through the leader's eyeglasses. More importantly, the people's hope for food, shelter, and clothing—their hope for the satisfaction of the Maslow basic needs—does not come from the state. It comes from the "big man" or *Oga* (in Nigerian slang). Government is therefore generally perceived as a "hostile force to be feared, evaded, cheated and defeated as circumstances permit" (Ake, 1990: 2).

3. Apathy

Another effect of the incongruence between Africa's metaphysical reality and the democratic experience is apathy towards politics. The metaphysical quandary in which Africa finds itself, along with the epistemological slavery of the people, manifests in a dependency syndrome. In many cases, there is total abdication of social responsibility and a sense of fatalism in politics and governance. This affects almost every other area of life. For instance, there is no motivation towards creativity and there is general sloppiness in industry and commerce. For this reason, most African countries do not have what it takes to run a capitalist system. This sort of system rests on a metaphysical world-view which defines man as a being dwelling in a fragmented universe. Such metaphysics can only engender rugged individualism, fierce competition, and focus on profits. With so much apathy towards government, with slavish dependency on others for ideas, many Africans can only engage in a halfhearted commitment to capitalism. The general apathy is also not giving Africa the chance to evolve a capitalism that will be refined to suit the sensibilities of the people.

The Way Forward

From what has been said so far, it is obvious that to build a democratic culture and develop an authentic democratic leadership, Africa needs to experience a metaphysical paradigm shift—a shift from the cultic metaphysics to a democratic metaphysics. This will require changing old metaphysical concepts and symbols.

What we have here now is not a sincere commitment to democracy, but a selection of items to be used whenever convenient; it is not a rupture of the old system, but a negotiated continuity through which the metaphysical ideals of democracy can only perch but not seep into the capillaries of the African soul. The result is what we have today—an epistemological slavery, disdain for the rule of law, and total apathy towards politics and government.

Democracy is a full package, beginning from metaphysical postulates to its actual practice in the ballot box. It is a full package containing a world-view, a frame of mind, attitudes, values, and behaviors (Oluwole, 1998: 420). You cannot operate a democracy with a cultic mentality. We cannot seek to follow the rule of law when we are programmed to believe that all men are not free and equal. For there to be a change in the practice of democracy, for an authentic democratic leadership to emerge in Africa, new metaphysical postulates have to take root in Africa's conceptual bank. The metaphysical shift consists of changing the symbols and ideals on which the structures of society are erected. What will bring about this change? I think that this change can only happen at three levels, that is, only if we have a coalition of intellectual leadership, political leadership, and leadership of civil society.

Level 1: Change comes about when the intellectual class has offered society new metaphysical symbols. It is the duty of African intellectuals to develop a social conscience and to introduce into social discourse concepts and symbols that can reshape the thinking of the people. For example, among the crucial concepts that need to be developed is the concept of liberty. Rather than an extremely negative notion of liberty that is individualistic, we require a concept of liberty that would highlight both the individual's critical rationality and his or her social responsibility. Furthermore, the concept of majority rule should be stretched to accommodate focus on the preservation of minority rights. African scholars also need to develop a concept of consensus that builds on the old African quest for harmony and unity in the face of ethnic diversities.

Level 2: It is important to note that the concepts introduced by the intellectual class will have little effect on the ordinary people if they are not delivered by effective communicators and statespersons. The intellectuals therefore need statespersons—not just politicians—to use these symbols to strengthen the constitution and to fire the imagination of the people.

Level 3: The third level is mass education. This is not going to be achieved by the intellectuals or statespersons but, rather, by civil society writ large. It is civil society that is closest to the people, carries out practical campaigns in the streets, and serves as a watchdog on government. A vibrant civil society will inspire the people to interact practically with these new concepts and challenge government to live up to expectations.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that democracy rests on some fundamental metaphysical assumptions about the nature of man. The present situation is that

Africans are becoming democratic without accepting the basic metaphysical postulates that go with it. The reason for this is the continued prevalence of the cultic mindset derived from two historical aberrations: colonialism and military rule. The result is that the socio-political terrain is characterized by an epistemological slavery, disdain for the rule of law, and general apathy, all of which promote cultic leadership.

Essentially, the following points have been made in this article:

1. Democracy is not just about a voting process; it also involves the expression of a metaphysical world-view, a way of looking at the world.
2. Wherever democracy has grown in the world, the cultic and aristocratic world-view, which is hierarchical, has often given way to a new world-view—a level ground allowing the ideals of liberty and equality to thrive.
3. For democratic leadership to grow in Africa, there must be a metaphysical paradigm shift from a hierarchical universe of the cultic world-view to a universe of essentially equal human beings.
4. In Africa today, democracy is imposed without a shift away from the underlying cultic metaphysics.
5. This results in epistemological slavery of the masses, disdain for the rule of law, and apathy.
6. To correct the anomaly, there must be a metaphysical shift consisting of changing the symbols and ideals on which the structures of society are erected.
7. This change can only happen at three levels—if we have a coalition of intellectual leadership, political leadership, and leadership of civil society.

The intellectual class needs to develop concepts that can plant democratic ideals on the African soil. However, the intellectual class cannot do this alone. Intellectuals deal with concepts. Concepts need legs to run in the hearts of men, and these legs are often provided by statespersons. Developing democratic leadership in Africa requires a coalition of leadership, a progressive political class in alliance with an intellectual class along with a vibrant civil society.

In the American experience, we have a clear example of this coalition. Intellectuals and philosophers like John Locke laid down the principles of the social contract and argued that all men were born free and equal. It took statesmen like Washington and Jefferson to make these ideas the pillars of the American Constitution. Based on this, Lincoln, another statesman, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Nevertheless, the American society was still racially segregated. It therefore needed the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr., representing civil society, to demand the actualization of the promise. The result all these several decades later is that a person of African-American descent became president of the United States of America. Africa today needs a vibrant intellectual class. We also need statespersons

who will connect with the ideas of intellectuals. Finally, we need a civil society that will insist on the ideals of these intellectuals and statespersons.

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