

Review

Traditional oath-taking as a panacea to ‘democratic corruption’ in Nigeria

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No society can survive outside its culture and tradition. The preponderance reality of this claim reveals the need and essence of cultural values and traditions in advancing the course of a nation. Therefore, this paper interrogates the possibility of approving traditional oath-taking with particular reference to Yoruba as a panacea to ‘democratic corruption’ in the Nigeria political space. This necessitates a conceptual narrative of ‘democratic corruption’ within the purview of democratic principles vis-à-vis its operation in Nigeria. The paper adopts the analytical and critical methods of philosophical investigation to advocate the adoption of traditional oath-taking in curbing ‘democratic corruption’ in Nigeria. It hopes that when this is done, ‘democratic corruption’ would be reduced drastically while on the other hand, it will help in stabilizing the political stance of the nation.

Key words: Oath-taking, ‘democratic corruption’, Yoruba, Nigeria, democratic governance.

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets to examine the present democratic governance in Nigeria. It, among other things, delves into the meaning and nature of democracy as a form of governance within the purview of its technical principles. These principles, though many of them given the psychic of Nigerians are considered utopia in nature, such as equality, equity, accountability, free and fair election; nevertheless, it appraises their tenacity in galvanizing the standard of human experience and essence of humanity.

The study, however, argues that one of the major obstacles to the attainment of right sense of democratic principles hinges on the fact that the political class who are supposed to utilize the democratic principles to better the lots of the nation are found wanting as they often contravene their oath of office. This act is not unconnected with the fact that the contents and

instrumentality of oath-taking in Nigeria democratic culture gives room for corruption. The process in itself is culturally unsuitable for Nigerians who through their contact with new religions and philosophies emanating from democracy have devalued their respect for their traditional cultures, values and heritages. Thus, the significance of oath-taking as that which plays cautionary roles under the democratic governance and administration is not functional in Nigeria because of its corrupt nature in which virtually all the principles and tenets of democracy has been jettisoned. This is evident in the religious beliefs of the new religions, exemplified in Christianity and Islam, where forgiveness of sin is of utmost importance. With this possibility, majority of the political office holders delight in corrupting the system on the platter of seeking forgiveness after their misdeeds

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from a loving father whose name is used in taking oath of allegiance.

Against this presupposition, the paper suggests the adoption of traditional oath-taking with reference to Yoruba culture as a leeway out of the corrupt attitudes of office holders in the Nigeria political space. It is believed that the viability of instant reprisal of defaulters of oath in traditional Yoruba society could go a long way in salvaging Nigeria body politics from doldrums which pictured 'democratic corruption.' The argument of this paper, therefore, is built on the need to have a viable democratic culture that will take cognizance of African culture without necessarily super-imposing western ideas of governance on Africans and the Africa continent. It is crystal clear that for Africa to have a good footing in her governance there is a need to harmonize her past with the contemporary happenings and deduce how the past could be used in establishing a robust and workable social order. Much as cited by Fayemi (2009) articulates this necessity and argues that, "our democracy must neither be a mere return to traditional Africa, nor a replication of Western modes of governance. Africa, he notes, cannot move from one extreme to the other without mapping out its own original path, while taking due cognizance of democratic development in other social formations." The implication of this is that while Africa cannot totally shy away from adopting some elements of contemporary acts of governance as the whole world is tilting toward democracy, it is fundamental that some of the indigenous tools that promote her political and social order be repackaged to meet up with contemporary realities that confront us in the present age. This precaution alludes to Gyekye's (1997) submission that "ingenious ways and means of hammering the autochthonous democratic elements as well as elements inherited from alien source...into acceptable and viable democratic form in the setting of the modern world." Thus, it will not be out of place if African culture is blended with western culture to attain the desired goals that promote human existence. According to Falola (2016) "In real life, flexibility bends and survives, rigidity breaks and dies." Falola's position as captured here suggests the possibility of developing a new culture of sustainable democracy in Nigeria from the diverse cultural practices and that of other societies. In view of this suggestion, the present model of oath-taking is not effective as demonstrated in the failure of the political office holders to adhere to the demands of the oath of allegiance sworn to, after which they go scot free at the end of their tenure in office. This is because the effect of the oath taken by the political players that ought to deter others and/or would be political players from promoting personal gains at the detriment of collective interest is not visible. It is within this practicality that it is apt to suggest a way out. Thus, this presentation of the adoption of African model of oath-taking in African democracies should be seen as one of the ways of

injecting African culture to universal democracies without losing the grip of what governance entails. Additionally, this paper presents an analysis of the notion of traditional oath-taking from the Yoruba perspective. It also attempts to narrate what 'democratic corruption' is, from the understanding of the principles of democracy, in order to proffer a viable democratic culture to curb the current challenges of governance in Nigeria.

OATH-TAKING IN YORUBA SOCIETY

Oath-taking is universal. Though it is believed to serve same purpose(s), its processes differ from one culture to the other. Oviasuyi et al. (2011) aver that "Oath from the Anglo Saxon *eoth*, is an explicate pledge invoking a god, spirit, ancestor, place, or sacred object as witness unto the truth of the words sworn, and is among the most ancient forms of ritual solemnity. A much-venerated pagan relic is the Hippocratic Oath, a pledge of medical ethics held in high esteem among healers from the 1st century onward. Its preamble calls forward the gods of curing to bear witness to the oath: 'I swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses...' The oath concludes by pronouncing that he who remains true to the oath shall prosper, while he who does not shall attain 'the opposite lot', inviting the scrutiny of the gods themselves upon his actions." The implication derivable from the nature of oath is that it has to be honoured by the oath taker and the god by whom such oath is taken. This is evident from the wordings of oath in which the oath taker placed his/her life and possessions in the hand of the gods through whom such oath is sworn. Failure to honour the contents of traditional oath is believed to have a great adverse effect on the violators for such being is bound to face the wrath of the deities in the presence of whom the oath is taken.

Oath-taking in Yorùbá traditional society is herculean in nature. It is believed to have a metaphysical backup. In a matter of necessity, it is held in high esteem. The Yorùbá, therefore do not play with oath-taking especially when it has to do with duties and responsibilities. The nature and procedure of oath-taking in Yorùbá traditional society is sacrosanct and a means of codifying the essence of truth in discharging one's duties to the community. It is important to note that the archon of oath-taking in the Yoruba society are believed to be the gods and deities and any person who takes an oath to perform a task and run contrary to the allegiance of the oath he/she is disposed to stand the wrath of the gods/divinities.

It is pertinent to reiterate that for the Yorùbás, invocations of the gods are involved during oath-taking and symbols of these gods are used as instrument of oath-taking. Some of these instruments include thunder stone (*edun ara*), and waden (*ose sango*) for Sango and cutlass (*ada*) for *Ogun* as god of iron. Olaoba (2001)

gives a vivid exposition of the instrument. He writes:

Aside from the iron object (sacred to the god of iron) used for oath-taking, the Yorubas also use *apasa* (weaving instrument) and *iru* (chiefly scepter), royal shrine or religious sanctuaries are also used. The wrath of the gods is used for eliciting facts of the dispute. Such gods as Sango (god of Thunder), *Yemoja* (goddess of river) and *Ayelala* (guardian of social morality) are used to ascertain the veracity of the story told by disputants.

Though Olaoba's investigate the place of oath-taking as it relates to conflict resolution, it is apposite to explain that as it is effective in dispute/conflict resolution so it is in addressing abuse of office. Hence, abuse of office could also be classified as conflict in its own right. An instance cited by Oyebode (2016) that corroborates this goes thus:

Ògún ò féro
Sàngó ò fé ètàn
Ení bá ríjà Ògún rí
Ení bá ríjà Sàngó rí
Kò ní í parò - sètàn jalè ni Koso

Meaning that:

Ògún detests lies
Sàngó detests deceit
 Anybody who has witnessed *Ògún* vex
 Anybody who has witnessed *Sàngó* vex
 Will not lie and deceive to steal in *Kòso* (the home base of *Sàngó*).

The essence of oath-taking in Yorùbá traditional society therefore is to enhance the commitment to saying the truth and doing what is supposedly to be done dutifully by the occupant of any post to the betterment of the society and not for personal benefit. The content of the oath in traditional Yoruba setting has to do with the person taking the oath asking some evil things and/or calamities to befall him/her if any attempt is made to act contrary to the course of what such oath is taken for. In a way of clarifying this, Bascom (1965) espoused the nitty-gritty of the process and essence of oath-taking in Yorùbá society. He observes that, "a plaintiff (political office holder) may be made to answer to *Ògún*, the god of iron, touching his tongue on an iron object while asking to die if he is not telling the truth, or to drink from the ground at the *Ògbóni* house while swearing on the earth." Alao (2009) with reference to Sandra Barnes and John Pemberton III, shares Bascom's position by arguing that "apart from the use of sanctions and religious symbols to induce the truth, oath-taking was considered a necessary part of encouraging people to say the truth in their dispositions. The sacred object of *Ògún*, the fiery god of thunder and lightning, was usually used to take oath." This is because, "oath taken either in front of divinity or

religious emblems makes Yoruba people to comport themselves well in the society. A newly enthroned king who swears to deliver justice without fear or favor is duty bound to keep it. Anything contrary to the oath leads to disaster" (Ogunleye, 2013). Akin to the newly enthroned king here, are the political office holders as they are also in charge of making life meaningful for the electorate.

Oath-taking is a tool of ensuring social order in Yoruba traditional society especially when there are misdeeds on the part of those saddled with the responsibilities of protecting the commonwealth of the society. It is unlike what operates in contemporary oath-taking where allegiance is pleaded to a course and reverse is always the case and yet nothing follows. For instance, the dramatic and heroic suicide committed by Kurumi could not, but be linked with his allegiance to protect his people. This is evidence when he considered not the pains and agonies that could result from him sending his five sons to the war, for his belief that when a leader has led his people to disaster and what is left of him is a shadow of his proud past, then his time to be leader no more. For this reason, Kurumi, a Yoruba leader of his own time committed suicide instead of seeking political asylum in another land (Ola, 1971). He, like Socrates, lives and dies for what he preaches, an option not readily adopted by contemporary democratic leaders in Nigeria.

In order to curb such misdemeanor in Yoruba traditional society, whenever it becomes difficult to believe the leader as doing what is expected of the occupant of the post, they often zero down for oath-taking and this according to Fayemi (2009) "they do through administering metaphysical oaths of the spirit of the gods and other primordial entities among conflicting parties (the office holder and the people) in order to ensure compliance to the voluntary terms of agreement." This presupposes the fact that in Yorùbá traditional society, the place of oath-taking is considered to be sacred, such that, Ogunbemi (2011) points out "the efficacy of oath-taking in Yorùbá society is eminent for it *affecting presence*." In the same vein, Oladipupo (2012) argued that "the gods sworn to in traditional Yorùbá societies are known for instant justice." The instantaneous reflection of punishment alluded to oath-taking in Yorùbá traditional society, though may want to be considered as draconic for not giving room for second chance; nevertheless, one is poised to argue that the pragmatic attribute of oath-taking in Yoruba traditional society makes it more active in curbing abnormality than what is entailed in the constitutional sense of oath-taking. This draconic nature of the effect of oath-taking in Yoruba society is taken care of, as part of Yoruba culture. Awolalu as cited by Ogunleye (2013) revealed this inevitability. He posits "A person who is given to oath breaking or falsehood is believed not to be prospering in life. It is strongly believed among the Yoruba that, anybody who swear falsely or break an oath to which *Ògún* (The Yoruba god of iron) is a witness cannot escape severe judgment in a ghastly

accident.”

It is relevant to explain here that the effect of Oath-taking in Yorùbá traditional society often goes beyond the individual that swore to an oath. Its effects can manifest in the family such that family members share in the consequences associated with oath taken. Hence, their notion of *ègún àjogúnbá* - inherited curse. This suggests that oath-taking in Yorùbá traditional society has dual legitimacy. This dual nature of oath-taking in Yoruba traditional society is often achieved by appealing to the supernatural being to intervene when human efforts fail or when trust is not reposed on the human panel. Mbiti (1970), explaining this necessity argues that, “it is not the means but the end that matters most. Sometimes that end is sought or attained, but not by the individual alone, but corporately with or on behalf of his wider community of which he is a member or whose religious function is entrusted to him.” It is deducible from Mbiti’s argument that oath-taking at times is beyond private affairs. Formal oaths in Yorùbá traditional society just like any other African society are used:

As method of establishing and maintaining good human relationships, oaths place great moral and mystical obligations upon the parties concerned and any breach of the covenant is feared to bring about misfortunes. The belief behind oath is that God or some power higher than the individual man will punish the person who breaks the requirement of the oath or covenant ... thus traditional oath-taking is no respecter of persons, because every person is ontologically equal in the eyes of the gods (Dukor, 2007).

In fact, in traditional Yorùbá society whenever anybody is placed under oath, the society always remains calm believing that the gods will necessarily visit the wrongdoer. This is not only applicable to the victim but to the society at large, because it is believed that such oath is effective and efficient and cannot but fulfil its mandate. In view of this, it is fundamental to espouse the meaning of ‘democratic corruption’ as adopted in this study.

‘DEMOCRATIC CORRUPTION’ IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL SPACE

‘Democratic corruption’ is a niche coined to rebuff the acceptability of the current practice of democracy in Nigeria. This coinage is informed by the need for sustainable democratic values in Nigeria. As such ‘democratic corruption’ represents an avid disruption of doctrines and principles of democracy under the guise of it being assumed as a widely accepted form of government. By implication, ‘democratic corruption’ in the context of this piece connotes a negation of the fundamentals of democracy as echoed by many scholars and intellectuals.

The etymological conception of democracy is believed to have been derived from two Latin words “*demo*” and “*cratia*” meaning “people” and “rule” respectively (Bamikole, 2000). This etymological conceptualization of democracy has certain credibility. One apart from its pioneering status, the conceptualization is credited for unearthing two fundamental assumptions in democracy, namely, people and rule. The relationship between the two major requirements is that the former is a necessary ground for the latter to exist. Hence, where there are people, there is bound to be a way they govern themselves. This, to the advocates of democracy is “government of the people” or “democracy.”

Beyond the above credibility, however, the definition suffers certain deficiencies. This consists in the failure to carve a unique character for democracy, which should be properly distinguished from those of other political ideologies. For instance, it could be opined that the definition is too broad such that all political convictions qualify for the status of democracy. This is because all governments are “government of the people,” and to define democracy as such blurs the distinction between democracy and other political ideologies.

It should be noted, however, that the most acceptable definition of democracy is the one given by Abraham Lincoln. This was built from the apparent ruins of the etymological definition of democracy. Lincoln, in his bid to push the etymological conception of democracy to its logical conclusion defines democracy “as the government of the people, by the people and for the people” (Bamikole, 2000). It should be noted further, however, that the two definitions are based on the reality obtained in the political arena of the ancient Greek city states. Suffice it to say that democracy was still then understood only in its primary sense, in which all the qualified persons were to have a direct participation in the decision making process of the government.

In recent times, however, democracy has assumed a different dimension. The concept of democracy has gone beyond being contemplated along its people *orientedness*. It is rather now viewed from the perspective of popular support and majority rule. The new outlook of democracy in the contemporary world is partly explicable in terms of the sophisticated level of complexity that characterized the modern world, such that it would be wrong to define democracy strictly as a political system in which all citizens participate in the day to day policy making. The reason for this is that, there is no democracy in which ‘all’ citizens participate in the decision making process. The implication of this realization suggests that democracy as a political ideology was originally designed for society where there is an avenue for all qualified citizens to converge and deliberate on issues affecting them. And since no such avenue exists in modern time, it logically follows that democracy as originally conceived does not include the complexity of modern society.

The possibility of the above claim therefore suggests a corruption of the traditional and etymological definition of democracy as “the government of the people, by the people, and for the people” (William, 2006). Though, this definition appears to be the standard on which democratic ideology is based. The concept of “the people” and “rule” as obtained in Lincoln’s definition is nebulous, and thus in need of clarification. In response to the question who are the people in Lincoln’s definition, William Alton Kelso (1978) contends that “the society is composed of myriad groups of people, many of whom might be called issue publics, thus he identified different kinds of groups representing the people to include, ‘interest group’, ‘promotional group’, ‘group bargaining’.”

In furtherance of the above view, Kelso (1978) identifies two senses of “the people” as construed by the populists and the pluralists in the following:

... the populists have envisaged the people as the majority of citizens and have insisted that they should express their views through referendums, while the pluralists have usually argued that the numerous issue publics in the society should be the relevant public to decide important issues, and they have argued that these interests should exercise their say primarily through the give-and-take of political bargaining.

It is in this sense that the observation raised by John H. Yoder (1977) is considered appropriate in stating that, “our situation is one in which the question we are least likely to ask is why it should be good that there should be “rule by the people.” He, Yoder (1977) notes that “it again has become visible how in the rhetoric of both sides the appeal to “the people” is both unanswerable and on closer scrutiny undefinable.” This position, to a large extent, has shown that the concept of the people, from Lincoln’s definition, remains ambiguous. In clarifying this ambiguity, John Locke as cited by Scroll and Popkin (1979) opined that “the people” should connote the majority, where the majority is understood from the utilitarian point of view. Kelso (1978), however, warns that, “the notion of majority should not be stretched beyond its limit as such may bring about the danger of always permitting a numerical majority to prevail over their minority counterparts on issues that are of utmost importance to the latter.”

It is apposite in this sense to suggest that the meaning ascribed to the word ‘the people’ as those who are entitled to participate in governance is anchored on what could be termed “the situational assumption behind Lincoln’s definition.” For instance, in the Athenian democracy, only adult males were allowed to vote. That is, they operated what in the modern democracy is regarded as adult male suffrage which disallows women, slaves, children, among others from voting. The idea of suffrage therefore suffices. This is clearly stated in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that voting

age is 18 years but since the practice has been corrupted, the country has been witnessing underage voting in the recent past. Not only this, experience has shown in previous elections that opposition always find it difficult to have their franchise exercised at will which raises the logical question of whether “the people” in the context of Lincoln’s definition is in the final analysis not the minority. Without this clarification the words “of people” in Lincoln’s definition of democracy remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, Dahl (1970) argues that, if we describe “the people” as those who are entitled to participate in governance, we will risk circularity, by oscillating on the word “people.”

Thus, the question of participation becomes imminent. The nature of political participation as evident in Nigeria political space is mutilated as the political godfather dictates the rule of the game with impunity. By this, political participation in Nigeria democracy has equally been corrupted as what operates is against the five basic elements without which no community can claim to be truly democratic. These elements according to Heater (1964) are “equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, the rule of law, and liberty of the individual.”

Given this possibility, electioneering process in Nigerian democratic experience over the years remains corrupted. This reflects the age long doubt expressed about the diverse process of elections within the democratic culture by Diamond (nd). He explains:

In addition to popular participation in the electoral process and respect for the civil and political rights of the people, it must be noted, though, that the existence of numerous parties and the conduct of periodic elections may not result in popular choice of leadership.

Similarly, what operates in Nigeria’s democracy is a deviation of the process of making the decision binding in democratic setting in the sense that citizens who “ought to have an adequate opportunity and an equal opportunity for placing questions on the agenda and for expressing reasons for endorsing one outcome rather than another,” (Dahl, 1989) are not reckoned with. The practice of democracy in Nigeria denied the preponderance doctrine of democracy where “for a decision-making process to be truly democratic and binding as such, each interested participant in it should be in position to enjoy effective participation in the debate that normally should precede the making of a collective decision” (Oladosu, 2004).

Against this backdrop, what operates in Nigeria is a dissenting allusion to the fact that, in democracy, decision making is subjected to critical argument and reasoning and not the status of their authors, for others are allowed to present their opinion on a decision or policy. Democracy as understood and within its tenets needs not necessarily impose decisions of an individual on the masses without debates and counter debates before reaching a consensus. This gives credence to Irving

Copi's (1986) explanation that "democratic institution requires that citizens think for themselves, discuss problems freely with one another, and decide issues on the basis of deliberation and weighing of evidence." Consequently, it is evident from Copi's elucidation that in democratic environment the citizens will need to be harnessed in the act of governance. One will not but agree with the claim that the public has the sovereign power to decide all issues of importance, and unless the preferences of each man are counted equally, the wishes of the larger public may be superseded by the wishes of various minority groups, thereby violating the spirit of democratic government (Kelso, 1978). The case with Nigeria democracy is an outcry of this for the suppression of popular opinion by the political money bags in Nigeria to corrupt the status quo. This transmutes to a situation where citizens do not wield the power to influence the political decisions that concern them nor allow them to initiate political decisions that will change their lives, except those that are in the interest of the political office holders. The recent and on-going cry for restructuring and call for reduction of the jumbo pay of the political office holders, especially, the legislature are few examples.

The principle of accountability that resonates the essence of democracy is thwarted on the altar of corruption. What this signifies is that accountability which is one of the major ingredients of democracy has been corrupted which in turn makes sham of the democratic governance in Nigeria political space. Articulating 'democratic corruption' from the point of view of accountability is to raise the questions: What is the principle of accountability? What does it mean to be accountable, and why is it necessary to the survival of the contemporary sense of democracy? Can people be said to be truly accountable? Proffering answers to the above posers is to suggest that the concept of accountability cannot be pinned down without certain sense of right and wrong. This is because the meaning of the concept varies from society to society to the extent that the more complex a society is, the more likely difficult it is to define its idea of accountability (Owolabi, 1999). On a general note, however, accountability refers to the power of the ruled to question the rationality or the justification of the actions and inactions of their rulers. This probably forms the position of Sklar (1986) in the following assertions:

Democracy dies hard. Its vital force is the accountability of rulers to subjects. Democracy stirs and awakens from the deepest slumber whenever the principle of accountability is asserted by members of a community or conceded by those who rule.

It is fathomable from Sklar's argument that the moral justification of the principle of accountability is anchored on the popular participation of the masses. The assumption is, since the representatives did not put themselves into positions of authority, there is moral need

or obligation on their part to be accountable to the electorate, whose popular support brings them into power.

The moral imperative of accountability is often softened by transparency on the part of the elected representatives. Transparency in democratic government ensures that nothing is done without the thorough permission or consent of the electorate. The absence of transparency in Nigeria democracy as it is, is raising concerns in and among the citizens, hence, the continuous agitation by various ethnic groups challenging the right of the government to embark on certain lines of actions. It is therefore a plausible position to hold that when transparency is omitted in a political organization, as obtained in Nigeria democracy the people always resort to the agitation for accountability since they are not pre-informed on the purported motive of the government, which in most cases, could be treacherous. It is this posture that often metamorphoses to acts that engender terrorism, especially when the governed could no longer bear the burden of neglect.

It is, however, pertinent to make recourse to the fact that popular participation and accountability are not the ultimate end in democracy; they are mere means to an end as observed in the words of Owolabi (1999) who asserts that:

Participation and accountability are not the ultimate objective of democracy. Their ultimate objective, which ought to be that of political systems, is the good life, or the happiness of all which has been the theme of political philosophy since Socrates. The assumption of democracy is that when all the people participate, their interest as individuals and corporate beings shall not be compromised.

Though it could be argued that accountability is utopian, given the nature of man which might have informed Owolabi (1999) saying that "accountability as the total responsiveness and responsibility of a democratic government to its people is more of an ideal than actuality," it is important to note that moderation is one of the most enviable virtues that need to be acculturated in making meaning of democracy. This would guide against what operates in the *a-historical* narratives of *Hobbesians'* state of nature where life is solitary, nasty, brutish, short, and poor. One fundamental source of the acidity of 'democratic corruption' is assumed to have been occasioned by the contents and workings of the form of oath-taking before assumptions of duty by political office holders. Thus, there is the need for a revisit of oath-taking in Africa with particular reference to Yoruba tradition.

TOWARDS A VIABLE DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

The question of adopting African traditional oath-taking

process in pursuance of democratic ideals has received serious lethargy in African socio-political discourse. Some scholars and politicians perceived such possibility as absurd; this belief is not unconnected with the fact that African (Nigerian) democracy is structured in line with the western models and practices of democracy. The belief, however, seems to have assumed a new dimension as scholars of African orientation in recent times have started to agitate for a revitalization of African worldview woven around their cultural heritage and tradition toward shaping a democratic ideal that would take the continent out of its current democratic quagmire.

The reality on ground as regards Nigeria democratic culture presupposes that it is not in tandem with the doctrines and principles of the widely accepted notion of democracy. This is not unconnected with the assumed possibility of its alien nature to Nigeria traditional culture. By this, it is meant that democracy as it is, in Nigeria political space is more theoretical than practical. The inability of Nigerian democratic leaders to operate within the tenets of democracy makes Nigerian democracy a corrupted democracy. What then do we do?

The importance of the need to revamp Nigeria political order suggests re-invention of some attributes of governance that gives room for care and respect for human person as against the *I aloneism* of current crops of leaders. To achieve this, however, certain things must go, especially, things that destroy African traditional way of life instead of promoting her peace and harmony. These indices, which include but not limited to advance corruption, greed, ineffectiveness of judicial system, unpatriotism, perverted moral laws and crime, which are considered alien to Africa (Yorùbá) must be eradicated. Though the current social order has put in place some mechanism to avert its preponderance in the body politics, it is evident that they are not potent enough as these mechanisms are at variance with African culture. It, therefore behooves the African (Yorùbá) intellectuals to look for a way of re-inventing the glorious past and seek for alternatives that could quicken the attainment of the essence of humanity, hence, the argument of this discourse.

In view of the above presupposition, the argument of this discourse shares the doctrine of traditionalism (others being universalism and eclecticism) one of the categorization of scholars' responses to democratic question as orchestrated from its practice in Africa. Traditionalism is that category of democracy that frowns at the way democracy is practiced today in the continent. In their view, the tenets of democracy as currently practised in Africa cannot solve the problem, for the principles debase African culture. Fayemi (2009) captured this perspective as he argues:

For this school, democracy as currently practiced in Africa can neither be sustained, nor can it solve the bulk of the crises besetting the continent. The apologists of

this orientation have sympathy for an indigenous democratic system, which they believe is more natural to African culture. They have put forward different arguments to establish that the Western idea of democracy, which is gaining currency in contemporary Africa, should be jettisoned in lieu of our indigenous democratic culture.

Without engaging in unnecessary polemics, it is arguable that the practice of democracy could be subsumed under relativism that stipulates the inevitability of changes from one worldview or tradition to another. Given this, then the relative nature of oath-taking is to be adopted to meet the socio-cultural milieu of those involved in different situations, different approaches are often developed to address contradictions. Thus, one is poised to suggest and justify the ebb of culture in democracy. If this possibility is poised, then amending the status quo to enable the usage and adoption of traditional oath-taking processes will serve a potential role in emplacing a viable democratic system in Africa *a la* Nigeria. The profundity of this rhetoric is built on the fact that "many traditional African societies were democratic, even in their monarchical social organizations, and that resorting to their values and principles in contemporary Africa would be an antidote to the plethora of Africa's problems" (Fayemi, 2009). The incongruity of democratic frailty that has raised its hydra-headed quagmire in Nigerian political space could be checked through the deep-rooted and precursor of African traditional oath-taking processes as the existing instrument of oath-taking seems not to possess the prowess and the attendance expectation of its roles in dealing with defaulters. Hence, oath of office sworn by political office holders and followers are broken at will Momoh (1991) reverberates this propensity in the following words:

The present oath by our public officers during swearing-in ceremonies is a passive one. What we need is an active oath. An active oath is one Invoked in the name of indigenous gods, or spirits or juju... spelling out what should befall the oath taker if he willingly and deliberately enriches himself, friends or relations by exploiting or abusing his office.

The probability of people demurrals to this possibility is paramount as the current crops of political office holders' religious faith does not permit swearing in the names of indigenous gods or spirits, especially with their belief in God's commandment that urged them not to have another god except Him, the Almighty God. While on the other hand, especially from self-deception, the political office holders who are keen in not doing the right things despite their nocturnal hobnobs with traditional religionists to seek for power to sustain themselves in power would label such act as primitive and retrogressive within contemporary realities. The authenticity of these possible refutations can be invalidated, if the swearer is ready to follow the process of traditional method of oath-

taking where the oath is administered by a priest of the god whose spirit is involved. This is suggestive of making even swearing of oath through the use of Bible or Quran more active than its passive nature. This could be achieved by calling on faithful spiritual leaders of such religious faith to administer the oath with reading of relevant passages from the relevant Holy Book, followed by an invocation of what should befall him/her immediately he/she acts contrary to the rule of law, duties and obligations of his/her position. This proposal, if taken could have culminated into making the use of Bible and Quran as tools of oath-taking active than its current passive nature. However, the presupposition that for anything to work through the contents of the Bible and Quran, the user (oath taker) in this case, must have a strong belief and allegiance to the holy books with unquestioned commitment to the basic tenets of the religions which bring into being the potency of the Holy books, and poses a serious challenge to any attempt at making the contemporary instruments of oath-taking active. Aside this, there is nothing primitive or retrogressive about active oath-taking as associated with the instruments and contents of oath-taking in Yoruba culture. In fact, apart from making indigenous culture relevant in contemporary African democracy, active oath-taking will engender faith and loyalty in the political system. As the public officer who has been actively sworn-in will be conscious of the invisible mystical force tele-guiding him/her, the citizens will be taking cues from the actions/inactions of the leaders (Fayemi, 2009).

This call becomes inevitable since the political office holders are not living up to expectation in the discharge of their constitutional duties. The present model of oath-taking is not effective in the fact that despite the political office holders swearing oath of allegiance to be faithful and loyal in the art and act of carrying out their official duties and responsibilities, yet with their failure, evident in their compromise of collective gains for personal benefits, there has not been any viable repercussion whatsoever that shows that an oath has been violated. It is within this practicality, that it is apt to suggest a way out. Hence, the need to revisit and adopt the traditional method of oath-taking which is believed to have affecting presence, that metamorphose into active repercussion on defaulters. Furtherance to this, is the awesome respect for traditional values before the incursion of western culture which is often displayed by the people in reflecting the scary but responsive nature and aftermath of oath when taken.

Thus, the active potency of traditional oath-taking would make people in authority to keep faith with oath of office and the consequences of violating such an oath.

Given Nigerian situation, it is suggestive that a strong preference for traditional oath-taking for political office oath-taking, as repercussion that are envisaged are very slow with modern ways, hence, some of them that violate the oath often escape the expected wrath. Therefore, it is suggested that every political office holder and other non-

political office holders should be sworn-in into office with the symbols of the gods. Symbols like cutlass (*ada*), thunder stone (*edun ara*), waden (*Ose Sango*), dane-gun (*Ibon*) should be adopted as instruments for oath-taking in place of Bible and Quran. Also, occasion of swearing in should be performed and conducted by tested and trusted priests of the gods for no society can survive outside its culture.

CONCLUSION

Two things are important; one, it is either we realize that Africans are gullible and vulnerable with our religious mentality and two, African must take a better approach to politics, that would be from their own perspectives and being devoid of hypocrisy, self-deception and selfishness. If the latter should be the case, then, there is, therefore, the need to recognize our traditional political systems which makes meaning to our past and conforms to our religious philosophy as canvassed in this paper.

Instead of new religions' (Christianity and Islam) doctrine of consoling ourselves by leaving our political office holders into the hand of God because of the sacrosanct belief that Africans are religious, it is therefore arguable that if we want to be religious, we should adopt the tenet of African religion, one of such is oath-taking because the current democratic summersault in vogue in Nigeria cannot be addressed without a moral mindset of the political office holders and the followers that is grounded in African cultural values of which Nigeria belongs. However, if it becomes necessary to adopt any form of new religion's tool of oath taking, it should be made active by inviting religious leaders of proven integrity to administer the oath on the oath takers in place of ordinary people who do not keep to the sanctity of such religious faith.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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