RETHINKING DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: A THOMISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON GOVERNANCE, IDENTITY, AND THE COMMON GOOD

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the trajectory of democracy from its Western philosophical origins to its contested application within African political contexts. While liberal democracy was adopted in post-colonial Africa as a model of governance, its implementation has often diverged from its intended ethos, resulting in authoritarianism, political instability, and weakened civic engagement. Drawing upon the political philosophy of Thomas Aquinas—especially his emphasis on the bonum commune (common good), moral leadership, and subsidiarity—this study explores how a Thomistic lens can offer constructive critique and direction. It also considers the resonance between Aquinas' principles and traditional African political systems, particularly their communal orientation and ethical vision of leadership. The study contends that revitalising democracy in Africa requires not a wholesale rejection of liberal principles, but their recontextualization through ethical and indigenous

frameworks that prioritise virtue, justice, and the dignity of the governed.

Introduction

The global rise of democracy as the preferred model of governance is rooted in Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and rational political participation. In the Western world, democracy emerged through centuries of philosophical development and political struggle. However, when transplanted into African nations during the post-independence period, liberal democratic systems encountered radically different socio-political and moral landscapes. The result has been a patchwork of democratic forms—many nominally compliant with democratic norms but practically subverted by corruption, electoral violence, and, invariably, institutional decay.

This paper interrogates democracy not as a static system but as a historically situated and ethically charged process. It explores the disjunction between Western models of democracy and their African implementations, seeking to uncover why the system frequently fails to deliver its promises on the continent. To deepen this inquiry, the political thoughts of Thomas Aquinas is brought into dialogue with both Western democratic theory and traditional African governance systems. Aquinas' focus on moral authority, the common good, and the virtue of rulers offers a compelling framework for rethinking democracy in Africa—not merely as procedural governance, but as a morally guided project of human flourishing. The integration of Thomistic insights with African indigenous wisdom points to an alternative

democratic imagination, one capable of transcending the superficial transplantation of Western models.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATION DEMOCRACY AND ITS EVOLUTION IN THE WEST

Democracy appears to have become a global phenomenon with which humanity has gradually come to terms, accepting and endorsing it as the crème de la crème of systems of government. Although democracy is an expensive venture, requiring both material and human resources, it also demands discipline, patience, vision, and commitment. However, contemporary so-called democracy is but a sham—a wolf in sheep's clothing—because unity, human rights, freedom, dialogue, tolerance, a free and fair electoral process, and morality, which are among its acclaimed philosophical values and principles, are more utopian than real in the political landscape, especially in Africa, though not excluding Western states.

On all fronts, according to World Bank reports, the coefficient indices for any modicum of development in Africa remain abysmal: life expectancy is in decline, poverty persists, and the continent is haunted by despair, death, destruction, and decaying infrastructure. Indeed, as Bishop Kukah remarks, "a weak state is an alchemy for disaster and a poor platform for erecting the structure of democracy or civil society."[1]

[1] Mathew H. Kukah ,Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria Ibaḍan: Spectrum (Books Limited, 1999), 61.

One of the shortcomings of an etymological approach to definition is that it can be misleading. First, words often fail to correspond directly to the concepts they are meant to express. Second, concepts and the terms that denote them frequently have divergent historical developments, such that a term comes to be applied to a concept it originally had no relation to. Furthermore, concepts are not as linguistically limited as words.[2] Nevertheless, despite the insufficiencies of an etymological approach, the relationship between the concept of democracy and the term that expresses it is intimate, and their historical evolution is similar.

Etymologically, therefore, "democracy" is derived from two Greek words: demos (people) and kratia (rule). When combined, they imply "rule of the people." Democracy, then, is said to be a government of the people, wherein the people are the custodians of power.

However, several scholars have contested this definitional perspective. Sophie Oluwole opines that the above definition gives no specific indication that democracy is a form of government; it provides no concrete structure of political organisation in any particular democratic state. For her, democracy is, rather, a theory that sets down the basic principles by which good governance—regardless

[2] Godfrey Onah. "Africa and the Illusion of Democracy" in Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa , ed. J. Obi Oguejiofor (Enugu, Nigeria: Delta Publications, 2004), 278. A word can only belong to a particular language, but a concept can be expressed in different languages. Thus, it may not be completely adequate to assume the meaning of a word based on the etymology of the term expressing it.

of its form ought to be run.[3] I shall return to this point later.

Moving further, democracy is a form of government in which the people either have the authority to deliberate on issues and make laws (direct democracy) or choose representatives to do so on their behalf (representative democracy), as has become the case in most modern Western states. The provenance of democratic practice is traceable to the ancient Greek city-states—especially Athens—during classical antiquity.[4] In fact, research shows that under Cleisthenes, often referred to as the "father of Athenian democracy," the first practical example of democratic governance was established in Athens around 508–507 BC.[5] This practice continued to evolve across various epochs, supported by the theoretical and philosophical contributions of key thinkers such as John Locke, Baron de Montesquieu, Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Rawls. Their writings provided a firm intellectual basis for the widespread adoption of the enduring features of democracy.[6]

It is important to note that although modern Europe today advocates for democracy, this has not always

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[3] Sophie B. Oluwole, "Democracy and Indigenous Governance: The Nigerian Experience", in *Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa,* ed. J. Obi Oguejiofor (Enugu, Nigeria: Delta Publications, 2004), 419-420.

[4] John Dunn, *Democracy: The Unfinished journey 508 BC – 1993 AD,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 134.

[5] R. Po-chia Hsia, et al., *The Making of the West, Peoples and Cultures, A Concise History. Volume 1: To 1740,* (Boston and New York: Bedford, 2007), 44.

[6] Godfrey Onah, "Africa and the Illusion of Democracy", 279.

been the case.[7] For centuries, many Western European nations flourished under authoritarian rule. The evolution of their present democratic systems was gradual and uneven, made possible only when certain social conditions emerged to support its effective functioning in modern states. These included increased levels of literacy and education, improved living standards for the majority, broader distribution of political and economic power, heightened awareness of fundamental human rights grounded in the dignity and equality of all citizens, the development of an industrial and commercial middle class, some degree of cultural homogeneity, and the establishment of the rule of law.[8] All these, I believe, helped pave the way for democracy in modern Europe.

These social factors, however, are not inconsistent with the core values of democracy. In fact, they are rather complementary. While Heater identifies five core values of any democratic system—equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, the rule of law, and individual liberty[9]- Cohen lists trust, equality, and fraternity as central.[10] More generally, one may deduce that the foundational cornerstones of democracy include

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7 For detailed information on the democratic transformation and evolution in Europe, see Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

8 B. O. Nwabueze, *Democratization,* (Ibadan: Spectrum Law Publishing, 1993). Also see Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 316, 344-364.

9 Heater D., *Citizenship: The Civic Ideal in World History Politics and Education.* (London and New York: Longman, 1990), 134.

10 Cohen C., "The Ideals of Democracy" in *Communion, Fascism and Democracy,* ed., Cohen C. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1997).

equality, tolerance, liberty, fairness, the rule of law, voting rights, freedom of expression, association and speech; trust, popular sovereignty, fraternity, inclusiveness, and more.[11]

THE HYPOCRISY OF DEMOCRACY

Today, there is a widespread consensus that extols the triumph of democracy and affirms it as the ideal system of governance for any social or political organisation. (In fact, wars have been fought in various countries in a bid to democratise those countries and subvert dictatorships. We see examples of such interventions in efforts to democratise countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and North Vietnam by force). This agreement is shared by both the common citizen and the academic elite. Plato, in his work, Statesman, remarked that democracy, or "the government of the many,"[12] is the least bad and least good of them all—being the best of all lawless governments and the worst of all lawful ones. In a similar vein, Fukuyama posits that the ideological contest has ended with the victory of liberal democracy.[13] Thus, the most pressing question is no longer which political system is best suited for society, but rather: when will all societies adopt democracy?[14]

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[11] Christopher O. Agulanna and Peter Osimiri, "African Worldview and the Question of Democratic Substance", in *Themes, Issues and Problems in African Philosophy,* ed. Isaac Ukpokolo (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 340.

[12] Plato, *Statesman,* 2008b, 14.

[13] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man.* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 27.

[14] Kolawale A. Owolabi, "Can the Past Salvage the Future? Indigenous democracy and the quest for sustainable democratic

Democracy is consequently perceived as the crème de la crème of governmental forms—the moral and legitimate framework through which any society can be efficiently and effectively administered.

From the original Athenian conceptualisation, democracy is the rule of the people. But how much of the people are genuinely involved in its practice today? The rhythmic definition by Abraham Lincoln—that democracy is "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" —may still hold rhetorical appeal.[15] However, as I. Onah proposes, there are two alternative, and more realistic rhythmic definitions: "government of the people, by the parties, and for the powerful," and "government of the exploitation of the people, by the powerful, through the parties."[16] These definitions underscore the fact that Lincoln's formulation is an idealistic abstraction that may never be fully realised in practice. Jacque Rousseau reinforces this by asserting that "if we take the term in its strict meaning, no true democracy has ever existed, nor ever will… So perfect a form of government is not suited to mere men."[17] Dahl also shares this scepticism, contending that true

government in Africa", in *Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa,* ed. J. Obi Oguejiofor (Enugu: Delta Publications Limited, 2004), 1.

15 Abraham Lincoln and G. S. Boritt, *Lincoln on Democracy,* ed. Mario Matthew Cuomo and Harold Holzer (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 203.

16 Godfrey Onah, "Africa and the Illusion of Democracy", 281.

17 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Principles of Political Right" in Ernest Barker, *Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume and Rosseau,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), Bk. 3, Chap. IV, 232-234.

democracy is an ideal that no existing regime has ever fully attained or ever will.[18]

Nonetheless, it must be clarified that one is not unaware of the distinction between an ideal value toward which human beings sincerely strive—and its actualisation, which may remain elusive. The problem lies not in as an ideal, but in the rampant dishonesty that characterises its practical expression: the deliberate effort to portray what is opaque as transparent, and what is unjust as just. Just as we acknowledge that perfect love is an ideal possibly unattainable by human beings, we must also recognise the deceit involved in misrepresenting wickedness as love, or egoism as altruism.

It is all the more troubling that the concept of democracy is not only unattainable in its purest form but is also routinely violated by the very actors who claim to uphold it. The so-called democrats in the West are fully aware that their governance, more often than not, operates against the people rather than for them. This situation is even more acute in Africa—especially in the Sub-Saharan region—where dependent thinking, ethnocentric loyalties, religious and ethnic bigotry, and widespread poverty persist. Most democratic experiments in post-independence Africa are failing.[19] The recent spate of

[18] R. A. Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralistic Democracy,* 7. Perhaps, Dahl's position might be considered too extreme, but the future could offer positive results for democracy.

[19] Jonathan O. Chimakonam, Edwin Etieyibo & Ike Odimegwu, *Essays on Contemporary Issues in African Philosophy,* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2022), 19. See also N. Nyabola, "The Failed Promise of Liberal Democracy," *New Internationalist,* (January 3,

military coups across the African continent, replacing elected governments, makes this case all the more cogent and compelling.

DEMOCRACY FROM AN AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

Democracy, as inherited by Africa from the West, carries with it a paradox. While it promises freedom, participation, and justice, its application in many African states has yielded instability, elitism, and disenfranchisement.

The contradiction lies not only in how democracy is implemented but also in how its philosophical foundations are interpreted within local contexts.

According to Offor, though democracy is desirable, it can be made to work in Africa only if the indigenous continent's democratic heritage is explored, and those ideas that define good governance are brought to bear in evolving a kind of democracy best suited for resolving Africa's peculiar problems.[20]

However, there is a fundamental question that African peoples must confront if any meaningful progress is to be achieved—the question of identity.[21] Kanu articulates this point aptly: "The quest for identity embodies the value of

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2020), https://newint.org/features/2020/01/03/failed-promise-liberal-democracy. Retrieved 12th December, 2023.

[20] Francis Offor, "Democracy as an Issue in African Philosophy" *Core Issues in African Philosophy*, ed. Oladipo, Olusegun (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2006), 121.

[21] M. A. Eno & O. A. Eno, "Surveying through the Narratives of African Identity," In *Who is an African: Identity, Citizenship and the Making of the African Nation*, ed. Jideofor Adibe (USA: Adonis and Abbey, 2009), 62-75.

the first principle of being: the principle of identity. This principle states that every being is determined in itself, is one with itself, and is consistent with itself. The knowledge of the identity of a thing helps you know what the thing in question is and what may be legitimately attributed to it."[22] Where the very identity of the African peoples—if indeed such a collective identity exists—remains contested, how can such a people be expected to govern themselves effectively?

The widespread lack of quality education in Africa, compounded by weak infrastructures, has produced citizens who are often intellectually disadvantaged.[23] From such a background, it is improbable that those who later become leaders or representatives in democratic settings can effect meaningful change, for one cannot offer what one does not possess.

This reality is evident in individuals with limited competence contesting for political positions they are ill-equipped to hold. In contexts such as Nigeria, where the majority of electorates are uneducated or miseducated, it is unsurprising that practices such as ballot box snatching, thuggery, and electoral bribery persist.[24] Conditioned by poor education to prioritise immediate gratification,

[22] Anthony I. Kanu, "African Identity and the Emergence of Globalization" *American International Journal of Contemporary Research,* Vol. 3, No. 6 (June 2013): 34.

[23] A. Jega, Unions and Conflict Management in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions. Issue: *A Journal of Opinion* 24, no. 1 (1996): 62.

[24] O. Jegede, "Quality of University Education in Nigeria: The Challenge of Social Relevance," in A Convocation Lecture at the 22nd and 23rd Combined Convocation Ceremony, University of Uyo, 2017.

many voters readily exchange their votes for transient rewards rooted in bribery favouritism, or tribalism, thereby undermining long term democratic progress.

Africa is both a multinational and multicultural entity. In this estimation, the aim should be the development of a political philosophical framework that fosters constructive solidarity among Africans and also serves as a guide for action.[25] Such a philosophy must search for meaning, identity, and culture, and must encapsulate the organic African experience.[26] Until Africans confront and resolve this identity crisis, democracy as a government supposedly rooted in the will of the people will remain a façade. It is at this intersection that Aquinas' political principles may offer a more grounded evaluation of democratic governance.

In traditional African societies, governance structures were often participatory, decentralised, and oriented towards communal consensus, as seen for example in the egalitarian Igbo societies of south-central and eastern Nigeria and the Akan societies of Ghana.

Councils of elders ruled in concert with the people, and leadership was conceived as stewardship rather than domination. Although not democratic in the modern

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[25] Wambia bia Ernest Wamba, "Democracy in Africa and Democracy for Africa," *Philosophy and Democracy in Intercultural Perspective*, ed. Kimmerle, Heinz and Fraz M. Wimmer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 129.

[26] Marie P. Eboh, "Is Western Democracy the Answer to the African Problem?" *Philosophy and Democracy in Intercultural Perspective,* ed. Heinz, Kimmerle and Fraz M. Wimmer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 167.

liberal sense, these structures were deeply invested in the welfare of the community a trait comparable to Aquinas' notion of the bonum commune(common good). Aquinas maintains that the legitimacy of governance lies in its capacity to serve the common good, rather than in the mere form of its constitution.[27] This Thomistic ideal stands in stark contrast to the prevailing political culture in many African democracies today, where the outward structures of democracy often conceal realities that more closely resemble oligarchy or autocracy. As Oguejiofor observes, "Africa's experience of democracy has been horrendous, and the gist of the problem is that no process has ever been set in motion, taking account of the country's specific context."[28] Aquinas' principle underscores precisely this failing: governance detached from context and inattentive to the true common good risks degenerating into mere formalism, incapable of addressing the concrete needs of the people.

Indeed, Aquinas recognises three forms of government monarchy, aristocracy, and polity as potentially just when ordered toward the common good, and three corresponding perverse forms tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy (in its corrupted form) when they serve private interests.[29] He notes that the corruption of democracy arises when the multitude seeks its own advantage, disregarding the collective good. In African

[27] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 90, a. 2; q. 96, a. 4.
[28] J. Obi Oguejiofor (ed.), *Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa.* (Enugu, Nigeria: Delta Publications, 2004), 42.
[29] Thomas Aquinas, *De regno*, Book I, chs. 1–3.

states where electoral politics have devolved into patronage systems, the distinction is poignant.

Moreover, Aquinas' belief that rulers are moral agents obligated to foster virtue among their subjects[30] resonates with the traditional African view of the ruler as a moral exemplar. In contrast, contemporary African leaders often ascend to power through manipulation, wealth, or foreign influence rather than through a demonstrated capacity for moral and intellectual leadership.
This moral deficit undermines governance regardless of whether democratic institutions are in place.

Aquinas also acknowledges the need for civic participation in governance, especially in the context of a mixed regime where monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic elements are harmonised.[31] Such a system allows for checks and balances that prevent the concentration of power and encourage deliberation. The applicability of this principle to Africa lies in recognising the continent's political plurality. Rather than a one-size-fits-all liberal democracy, political structures could evolve through a subsidiarity framework, a concept that has Thomistic roots and suggests that decisions should be made at the most immediate level consistent with their resolution.[32]

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[30] Thomas Aquinas, *De regno*, Book I, ch. 15; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 95, a. 1.

[31] Thomas Aquinas, *De regno*, Book I, ch. 2.

[32] The Vatican, *Catechism of the Catholic Church Revised PB*, (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2002), §1883–1885, for the developed notion of the principle of subsidiarity rooted in Thomistic anthropology.

The current wave of democratic backsliding across Africa evident in election-related violence, repression of opposition, and constitutional manipulations signals the failure not merely of democracy as a system but of its decontextualised transplantation.

A Thomistic critique, with its emphasis on the moral quality of rule and orientation toward the common good, offers a lens through which to examine and reform such failures.[33] It suggests that democracy should not merely be measured by procedural metrics such as elections and parliaments, but by the extent to which governance fosters justice, peace, and communal flourishing.[34]

Accordingly, integrating Aquinas' political thought into the critique of democracy in Africa provides an ethical framework rooted in both classical philosophy and indigenous political wisdom. It reaffirms that legitimacy flows from justice and moral leadership, not from nominal democratic structures. For Africa to reclaim democracy in a meaningful way, it must return to these core principles of virtue, subsidiarity, and the common good that resonate across traditions and times.[35]

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[33] M. C. Ugobi-Onyemere, "Thomas Aquinas' Notion of the Common Good: A Panacea for Nigerian Contemporary Leadership Malaise." *Truth*, Vol. 17 (2024): 9.

[34] M. C. Ugobi-Onyemere, "Authority and Freedom in the Light of Thomas Aquinas' and Jacques Maritain's Political Philosophy: Implications for Governance in Contemporary Nigeria." in *Moral Education, Socio-Political Science & Religion in the Modern World*, eds. Obananya et al. (Lagos: Dominican Publications, 2024), 549-567.

[35] Ugobi-Onyemere, *Authority and Freedom*, 550-552.

ARE THERE ANY ALTERNATIVES?

One significant metric for evaluating the relevance of any proposed solution is the recognition that every human problem is contextual that is, rooted within a particular historical, cultural, or existential situation. It is true that democracy, as a system of government, is a universal concept. However, the history of its practice is relative and situational. The way democracy is practised today in modern countries such as the United States and across Europe may not necessarily fit into the same metaphysical and sociocultural scheme of Africa, even though the core principles and ideals it upholds such as justice and the common good must remain indispensable to any human society, African or otherwise.

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, there is no claim to finality in proposing definitive alternatives that Africans should adopt. Rather, the sincere objective is to indicate why, on a personal view, the present liberal democracy practised in Africa particularly Sub-Saharan Africa as imported from the West, is moribund. It is important to acknowledge that any viable alternative proposed for one country, such as Nigeria, need not apply uniformly across the continent. African societies are highly heterogeneous in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity, language, and even racial composition. It would therefore be unreasonable to impose a uniform political architecture on such a diverse continent. Instead, each system of governance should be designed to suit the specific peculiarities, cultural experiences, and present conditions of its people.

As V. C. Uchen du aptly puts it, "to know how a people (say, traditional Africans) view the world around them (including their mode of governance) is to understand how they evaluate life; and how they evaluate life provides them with a character of action."[36] Thus, the search for alternative models must begin with an appreciation of the world view and identity of the people in question.

The main contention is this: even if democracy may be the more tolerable form of government in many respects, there is neither the oretical nor practical justification in the universal human experience for its elevation as the global standard applicable to all people at a ll times. After all, numerous manipulative, dictatorial, and tyrannical governments have been labelled "democratic." T. S. Eliot once questioned whether the word democracy still retains any meaning at all.[37]

CRITICAL REMARKS TOWARD AN EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Unfortunately, defenders of democracy often stigmatise all alternatives as inherently dictatorial. This act of labelling can be intellectually dishonest, as it limits the possibility for critical engagement and removes the dynamism that alternative governance models could offer.
The quest for responsible governance is a collective task—a shared duty of both the rulers and the ruled.

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[36] V. C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria,* (New York: Rinehart and Winston Publishers, 1965), 54.

[37] Williams Adebayo, "The Functionalism of Democratic Struggle in Africa," in *Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa,* ed. J. Obi Oguejiofor (Enugu: Delta Publications, 1995), 65.

First and foremost, we must develop a philosophy both speculative and practical that can provide the ideological foundation necessary to propel African societies towards the realisation of dynamic and sustainable statehood.[38] Such an ideology must reflect the diverse historical experiences of African communities, drawing upon foundational values such as solidarity, mutual respect, unity of purpose, and reverence for leadership structures (e.g. the traditional divine kingship systems). These principles must form the blueprint for governance—defining both what is to be done and how it is to be done.

On the other hand, we must acknowledge that many democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa today are barely distinguishable from authoritarian regimes. This is primarily due to the problem of poor leadership, which is often the product of an equally poor followership. That is why changes in government in many African countries frequently result in worse rather than better regimes. The "foolish majority" tends to elect leaders in its own image, thereby reinforcing a cycle of ineffective governance. In this context, democracy degenerates into a government of the fools, by the fools, and for the fools.

It is therefore imperative that Africans exorcise themselves from the ghosts of ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry, poverty, ignorance, and narrow-mindedness. Otherwise, as the saying goes, when the poor

[38] A. O. Echekwube, A Philosophy for Effective Governance in Africa, in Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa, ed. J. Obi Oguejiofor (Enugu: Delta Publications, 2004), 460.

have nothing to eat, they eat the rich.[39] This may very well explain the escalating incidences of kidnapping, banditry, separatist agitations, and other forms of unrest in contemporary Africa—Nigeria in particular. Democracy is not, in itself, a generator of virtue. Much depends on the quality of the pilot, and equally on the quality of the people being governed.[40]

Moreover, one of the grand deceptions perpetuated by democratic ideology is the claim that it fosters equality and equity. Yet, in many democratic societies, women remain marginalised and bound by systemic constraints. While we vehemently disagree with Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "the representation of the world is the work of men; they describe it from their point of view,"[41] I align with Mary Wollstonecraft's observation that "the mind has no gender." Perhaps it is time for Africa to adopt a philosophy of binary complementarity that is, a fusion of gender roles rather than a divisive gender fission.[42] Gender equity must form part of any model for future governance if Africa is to rise above its inherited and self-imposed contradictions.

Conclusion

Democracy, if it is to take root and flourish in Africa, must be reclaimed from the grip of formalism, elitism, and

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[39] Marie Pauline Eboh. "Philosophy: The Missing Element in the Nigerian Political System" *A Dialogue of Faith, Reason and Science,* Vol. 3 (January 2017): 37.

[40] Jonathan O. Chimakonam, Edwin Etieyibo & Ike Odimegwu, *Essays on Contemporary Issues in African Philosophy*, 20.

[41] Anna Hall et al (eds.), *The Philosophy Book,* (London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 2011), 14.

[42] Anna Hall et al (eds.), *The Philosophy Book,* 175.

moral emptiness. The experiences of many African states show that adopting Western democratic structures without integrating the ethical and cultural foundations of governance leads to dysfunction and disillusionment. Thomas Aquinas' political thought, with its insistence on virtue, justice, and the common good, offers a timeless corrective to this malaise. When juxtaposed with traditional African political values especially the communal orientation toward consensus and stewardship Aquinas' vision underscores the importance of moral leadership and civic responsibility.

The Thomistic framework illuminates the path toward a democracy that is not merely procedural but substantive, not imported but indigenised. It invites African polities to rebuild their democratic institutions upon principles that affirm human dignity, ethical leadership, and social solidarity. Such a vision demands more than constitutional reforms it calls for a renewal of political culture anchored in justice, virtue, and the well-being of all. In this synergy of classical thought and indigenous wisdom lies the potential for a truly African democracy, one that is both philosophically sound and practically transformative.

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