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To cite this article: Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani (2013) Africa and the prospects of deliberative democracy, South African Journal of Philosophy, 32:3, 207-219, DOI: [10.1080/02580136.2013.837650](https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2013.837650)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2013.837650>



Published online: 23 Sep 2013.



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Africa and the prospects of deliberative democracy

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Preoccupation with multiparty aggregative democracy in Africa has produced superficial forms of political/electoral choice-making by subjects that deepen pre-existing ethnic and primordial cleavages. This is because the principles of the multiparty system presuppose that decision-making through voting should be the result of a mere aggregation of pre-existing, fixed preferences. To this kind of decision-making, I propose deliberative democracy as a supplementary approach. My reason is that deliberation, beyond mere voting, should be central to decision-making and that, for a decision to be legitimate, it must be preceded by deliberation, not merely the aggregation of pre-existing fixed preferences. I agree with arguments that when adequate justifications are made for claims/demands/conclusions, deliberation has the potential to have a salutary effect on people's opinions, transform/evolve preferences, better inform judgments/voting, lead to increasingly 'common good' decisions, have moral educative power, place more burden of account-giving on public officers, and furnish subjects/losers/outvoted with justifications for collectively binding decisions. I argue that a deliberative turn in politics in Africa will have a mitigating effect on tribal and money politics.

Introduction

References have been made to a culture of deliberation in precolonial African societies. Though these references have been presented as references to reaching decisions by consensus¹ and raised many controversies that surround the routine workability of consensus,² they can be interpreted (and ought to have been presented) basically as references to a culture of deliberation and deliberative democracy in some traditional African societies. The emergence of the modern state structure, which can often encompass a multiplicity of traditional societies, is a development that has extended the social arena beyond the boundaries of the immediate traditional community into a multiethnic society. This sociospatial extension was not accompanied by an equal extension of deliberative institutions, since the modern state inherited the aggregative democracy of the colonial masters. The result of this is that while the practice of deliberative democracy can be used to sustain the inclusivity of primordial communities, there is no mechanism for this sustenance at the state level, save for the aggregative pitting of societies, ethnicities, political ideologies, and even religious worldviews against each other. A more heterogeneous society is in much more need of a culture of deliberation compared to a more homogeneous society. This is because deliberating presupposes diversity. The current picture in many African countries is quite the contrary: deliberation often functions to foster the cohesion of many primordial societies while aggregative politics remains the only constitutional mechanism for bringing these societies together. It is puzzling to imagine how this kind of bringing together—the togetherness of mere aggregation of numbers—can transform into national unity. Unfortunately, aggregation can tend towards aggregation of the majority over the minority and, in Africa, aggregation can translate to aggregation (and

1 See, for instance, Kenneth Kaunda in Mutiso and Rohio (1975: part VII, p. 476) and Wiredu (1996: p. 182).

2 See, for instance, Eze (1997), Matolino (2009) and Ani (2013).

entrenchment) along ethnic cleavages.³ This is by no means the only threat, since money can also be an ‘aggregative weapon’.⁴

In discussing aggregative democracy, I refer to the institutionalisation of *voting* as a basic standard for decision-making, instead of its usual function of being a last resort in cases of intractability or failure of consensus. This is because the most ideal form of group decision is usually a unanimous one. Wiredu had asserted that there was no word for voting in some traditional African societies, and that it seems to be a Western import (1996: p. 184). However, I argue that voting is a basic human solution to resolving intractability, and intractability exists everywhere. The very idea of voting cannot have been imported. What could be a Western import is the *standardisation* of voting as a tool for decision-making, often without deliberation, which usually leads to a mere aggregation of pre- or un-deliberated preferences. In objection to this, it may be argued that the political campaigns that precede electoral decision-making are instances of deliberation, but these are true only as far as advertisements (and other instances of one-way communication) can be seen as instances of deliberation. Even presidential debates can often pass as the competitive advertisement of rival candidates for public office, and cannot pass as deliberation unless care is taken to structure them into a real two-way interaction between candidates and the electorate. People need to deliberate more thoroughly with and about their leaders to make better-informed decisions about them, as well as about other issues of national interest.

To be sure, the politics of the aggregation of numbers is not producing the desired results in nations that are seen as its chief custodians.⁵ Even in these places, national development can be perpetually strangled, and the state of the nation may hang on the precipice of disaster as meaningful executive governmental policies are blocked by the presence of greater aggregative opposition in other arms of government, especially the legislative. Without a deliberative culture, aggregative democracy stands the danger of translating into a self-defeating technocracy. African nations need to go beyond aggregative democracy, but not necessarily to drop the idea of aggregative voting. I propose deliberative democracy as a supplement rather than a replacement to aggregative democracy. There will be space in this article only to argue the merits of a deliberative turn, but not to list and develop deliberative platforms. The detailed development of the optimal structure and platforms for public deliberation will have to be the subject of another work, and could also be taken up by social scholars.

The concept of deliberation

Deliberation can be understood as ‘an unconstrained exchange of arguments that involves practical reasoning and always potentially leads to a transformation of preferences’ (Cooke 2000: p. 948). Thus in a deliberative democracy:

... actors listen to each other with openness and respect, provide reasons and justifications for their opinions, and remain open to changing their view about public policy problems; they should be oriented toward mutual understanding, the goal of coming to some level of agreement, and should want to learn the reasons why they agree or disagree. They must be driven not only by a search for their personal notion of the best policy, but by a search for reasons that would warrant them and their fellow citizens in believing a policy to be the best. Deliberation is not just an opportunity to learn things others know or what they think, but to more fully articulate a public justification for actions on matters of common concern. That is, deliberators discuss *what we should do as a political community* rather than (or in addition to) *what I want as an individual*. (Dorr Goold et al. 2012: p. 24)

The concept of deliberation received more serious attention with the impact of Jürgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action. Habermas construes ‘communicative action’ to

3 See Ferree (2006), Reardon (2012) and Olowojolu (2013). Ethnic and racial allegiances are fundamental and not restricted to Africa: see Schorow (2009).

4 For instances, see Bryan and Baer (2005), Ameyibor (2007), Adetula (2008) and Al Jazeera (2013).

5 The United States of America is an example.

mean the sort of cooperative action undertaken by individuals based upon mutual deliberation and argumentation. He sees this as possible given the human capacity for rationality. By this he means, not the subjectivistic and individualistic rationality orientations of modern philosophy and social theory, but rationality as a capacity conveyable in language, especially in the form of argumentation (Habermas 1984: pp. 16–18). Generally, arguments contain reasons or grounds given for validity claims, and the strength of an argument is often measured in a given context by the soundness of the reasons. This can be seen in, among other things, whether or not an argument is able to convince or motivate participants to accept a validity claim. Habermas adds that the concept of criticisability means that rationality remains accidental if it is not coupled with the ability to learn from mistakes, to learn from the refutation of hypotheses and from the failure of interventions. Thus, he couples the concept of argumentation with the concept of learning. Reiterating Toulmin et al., Habermas (1984: p. 18) emphasises that:

Anyone participating in argument shows his rationality or lack of it by the manner in which he handles and responds to the offering of reasons for or against claims. If he is “open to argument”, he will either acknowledge the force of those reasons or seek to reply to them, and either way he will deal with them in a “rational” manner. If he is “deaf to argument”, by contrast, he may either ignore contrary reasons or reply them with dogmatic assertions, and either way he fails to deal with the issues “rationally”.

Thus, Habermas sees communicative action as reflective in the sense that participants in an argument can learn from others by reflecting upon their premises and questioning suppositions that typically go without question. The criteria of argumentative speech, which Habermas identifies as (1) the absence of coercive force, (2) the mutual search for understanding and (3) the compelling power of the better argument, form the key features from which intersubjective rationality can make communication possible. The rationality of actions undertaken by participants through a process of such argumentative communication can be assessed by the extent to which they fulfill these criteria. Communicative action is action that results from such a deliberative process of interaction and common agreement of interpretations of situations.

Habermas’ theory of communication has been criticised for being hyperrationalistic, to the neglect of emotions (Neblo 2007: pp. 531–532), rhetoric (Young 1996), greeting/testimony/story-telling (Young 1996, Sanders 1997) and struggles for recognition (Neblo 2007: 534). The conclusion of some of these critiques is that Habermas’ theory overlooks ‘reality’, and the argument is that we should seek the ‘real’ modes of communication such as storytelling, testimony and rhetoric.⁶ However, two things can be said about these critiques. First of all, though Habermas does not really develop his writing on emotions, he regards emotions as not just compatible with, but also indispensable to, his theory of practical reason.⁷ Second is that the emphasis on ‘realism’ does not sufficiently prove itself to be different from complacency with the status quo.

Mercier and Landemore (2012: p. 10) try to distinguish between what can count as deliberation and what cannot, in the course of which they distinguish deliberation from mere reasoning, and also distinguish between private or ‘internal’ and public or ‘external’ deliberation. Private deliberation happens when a person internally simulates several opinions and uses reasoning to find arguments for and against those opinions. Even at this personal level, if the person finds reasons supporting only her opinion, then she will still be reasoning, but deliberation will not have taken place. Deliberation also fails if reasoning is used to produce, but not evaluate, arguments. Arguments become genuinely deliberative only when they are evaluated by co-participants, meaning that they are given a genuine chance to influence the listener. And if the listener merely uses the arguments as a springboard for building counter-arguments, and thus does not really evaluate them, she does not truly partake in deliberation. If an opinion is held by someone taking part in a discussion but not expressed, or if arguments for this opinion are expressed but not evaluated by others, or if arguments are evaluated

6 Also see Neblo (2007: pp. 532, 534) and Young (1996).

7 Neblo (2007: pp. 531–532) develops this defence much more elaborately.

but not addressed, then this opinion will not genuinely be part of the deliberation (ibid.). From this, we see that reason is a necessary but not sufficient condition for deliberation. The primary characteristic of deliberation is mutual justification (Thompson 2008: p. 504), which is, in my view, likely to compel reason to function at its best.

Deliberative democracy

The term ‘deliberative democracy’ was coined by Joseph M. Bessette in his 1980 work *Deliberative Democracy: the Majority Principle in Republican Government*. The central thesis of this term is that deliberation, beyond mere voting, should be central to decision-making. So for a democratic decision to be legitimate, it must be preceded by deliberation, not merely the aggregation of preferences that occurs in voting. Deliberative democracy could be made compatible with both representative democracy and direct democracy. Some scholars⁸ employ the term in relation to bodies whose members deliberate on roughly equal power basis (governmental bodies such as parliament, committees and boards), and this can be seen as *elitist* deliberative theory, whereas some other scholars⁹ apply the term to deliberative forums organised for and involving lay citizens, as in *direct* or *populist* democracy.

The idea of populist deliberative democracy has two alternative purposes. The first is to use deliberation among a group of lay citizens to distill a ‘more authentic’ public opinion about societal issues but not directly create binding law. An example of this is the deliberative opinion polls organised by media agents in some democratic countries, which sample popular opinion about an issue at hand, or even on the popularity ratings and continued desirability of a public leader regarding specific public tasks. Another example is the constitutionally created Indian village deliberative forums set up to argue, contest and determine who is poor and eligible for government assistance in the Indian economic redistribution system.¹⁰ In these forums, the popular opinion is able to question government and elite assumptions about the definition of poverty and who should be more eligible than whom for this assistance. Popular opinion is also able to unearth and question the inclusion of politically powerful and economically well-off villagers whose names find their way into the list. In these two examples, however, government representatives are free to accept or reject popular views, but they have to nevertheless realise that they are in an account-giving, electoral democracy instead of a dictatorship.

The second (alternative) purpose of populist deliberative democracy can be for it to serve as a form of direct democracy, where deliberation among a group of lay citizens forms a ‘public will’ that can directly create binding law (Leib 2006: p. 8). This alternative arises as a response to the problem of inadequate representation that can be attributed to elitist deliberation. However, this particular option (direct and binding legislation or governance by the masses) will, to my mind, be less feasible and much more chaotic in large polities. Moreover, it is incompatible with representative democracy. In the first place, inadequate representation arises, in my view, if the amount of deliberation between representatives and represented is inadequate.

I would argue for the first (non-binding) purpose of populist deliberative democracy. My reason is that non-binding popular deliberation can have serious enough effects on representative governance without resorting to direct governance by the masses. We could choose to envisage the representative (elitist) and (non-binding) populist democracy as capable of working hand in hand and complementing each other rather than as mutually exclusive. By this I mean that democracy is simplified by popular representation, and simultaneously receives insightful but non-binding contributions from the represented masses. It should still be left for popular representatives to accept or reject popular contributions, but the mechanism of popular representation confers considerable pressure on the parts of representatives to be fair and accountable, to seriously consider various contributions, for they have to be popularly elected and re-elected. Although this kind of popular deliberative contribution has no official binding force, its real force can be nonetheless

⁸ Such as Steiner et al. (2004).

⁹ Such as Fishkin (2011: pp. 1–256).

¹⁰ For more details, see Rao and Sanyal (2009: pp. 2–39).

substantial. In other words, the officially non-binding nature of popular contributions will not take away from their effectiveness, because representatives are elected officials who are compelled by the exigencies of popular (re)election to take popular contributions seriously.

A more general purpose of deliberative democracy is democratic legitimacy. Regarding the issue of legitimacy, James Fishkin (2011: pp. 2–3) outlined five basic features of deliberative democracy: (1) information: accurate and relevant data is made available to all participants; (2) substantive balance: different positions are compared based on their supporting evidence; (3) diversity: all major positions relevant to the matter at hand and held by the public are considered; (4) conscientiousness: participants sincerely weigh all arguments; and (5) equal consideration: views are weighed based on evidence, not on who is advocating a particular view. According to Joshua Cohen (1989: pp. 17–34), citizens in a deliberative democracy will have to structure their institutions such that deliberation becomes the deciding factor in decision-making and the creation of institutions. In this case, the deliberative procedure constructed will have to become the source of legitimacy for political organisation. Each member must recognise the other member's deliberative capacity, and the idea is that: we 'owe' one another reasons for our proposals. Though I might disagree with the framing of the call for deliberation as necessarily the call for consensus, I think that Wiredu's (1996: pp. 182–190, 2010: pp. 1055–1066) call for democracy by consensus is equally driven by the concern for justification, and thus for the value of legitimacy. I would, for the most part, see the concept of legitimacy as most desirable if it is to rest on rational justification.

Apart from legitimacy, other purposes of deliberation (which can also be seen as virtues or benefits) are that it leads to change of opinion/mind (Linderman 2002: p. 199, Mackie 2006: p. 295), better-informed judgments/voting/political decisions,¹¹ broadens perspectives (Chambers 2003: p. 307), reduces opinion extremities (Himmelroos and Christensen 2012: p. 13), induces transition from extremist attitudes to more other-regarding behaviour (Himmelroos and Christensen 2012: p. 3), increases tolerance (Gutman and Thompson 1996: p. 96), increases faith in democratic processes (Fishkin (1995: pp. 2–256), increases community's social capital (ibid.), and increases legitimacy of the constitutional order because people have a say in and an understanding of that order.¹² These outcomes are enhanced through deliberation's capacity to update people's opinions, leading to dynamic evolution/transformation of interests (Karpowitz and Mansbridge 2005: p. 356). The common denominator is that deliberation and publicity associated with deliberation can have a salutary effect on people's opinions (Chambers 2003: p. 318).

Maeve Cooke (2000: p. 947) has summarised the purposes of deliberation into five (broad categories of) arguments in favour of deliberative democracy. These are (1) its educative power, (2) its community-generating power, (3) the fairness of the procedure of deliberation, (4) the epistemic quality of its outcomes, and (5) its congruence with 'whom we are'. Cooke argues that the first four arguments (which are benefits of deliberation) are insufficient without the support of the last 'congruence with whom we are'. However, I find her view of 'whom we are' to be a bit surprising. By 'whom we are' she means the descendants of modern (Western) history and traditions that have roots in ancient Greece. According to her, the people that emerge from this tradition and history value autonomous reasoning, desacralisation of knowledge, rational accountability, objectivity of judgment, mutual respect, and the recognition of no authoritative standards independent of history and cultural context that could adjudicate claims to epistemic validity (Cooke 2000: p. 955). However, the exclusive manner of Cooke's ascription of these qualities to descendants of Western history is contestable. We recall that claims to a culture of deliberation have been made by Africans regarding traditional Africa, in particular, Kenneth Kaunda's comment that 'In our original societies we operated by consensus. An issue was talked out in solemn conclave until such time as agreement could be achieved' (Mutiso and Rohio 1975: p. 476), or Nyerere's reference to Guy Clutton-Brock's testimony that 'The elders would sit under the big trees, and talk until they agree' (ibid.) and Wiredu's call for a sort of radical consensus that

11 See Mercier and Landemore (2012: pp. 14–15), Delli Carpini and Cook (2004: p. 317) and Chambers (1996).

12 See Chambers (1996: p. 199) and Gutman and Thompson (1996: p. 96).

will mimic some traditional African deliberative practices (Wiredu 1996: p. 184, 2010: p. 1063). So deliberation as ‘whom we are’ should rather be a human (rather than a specifically Western or African) property.

However, deliberation will not work if certain attitudes are not possessed by the participants. In other words, deliberation requires certain attitudes and dispositions such as public spiritedness, equal respect, accommodation and equal participation (Thompson 2008: p. 504). Actors should be ready to justify their positions with reasons, refer to public interest, respect the position of other actors and be willing to yield to the force of the better argument (Steiner 2012: p. 1). They should observe reciprocity and publicity (Wesoloska 2007: p. 665). Barabas (2004: p. 699) observes that crucial to deliberation is open mind (to criticism and cross-evaluation), as this can distinguish deliberation from mere discussion. I find Barabas’ point to be quite insightful. This point (open mind) is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing deliberation in a pluralistic and multiethnic society, but adopting this attribute (or attitude) offers one of the greatest prospects of deliberative democracy, because an open mind is ready to evaluate divergent opinions on their individual merits, rather than on the basis of who these opinions come from. In an open-minded environment, we would, thus, expect to reap the benefits of, not just more inclusive value (or inclusivity), but arrive at decisions of better epistemic value. The opposite possibility—a scenario in which participants come to deliberation with minds closed by predeliberative cleavages and decisions—will not, in my estimation, amount to deliberation.

Cohen (1989: p. 74) argues that participants in a deliberative forum are free from any authority of prior norms or requirements, and consider themselves bound solely by the results and preconditions of the deliberation. They should also suppose that they can act on decisions resulting from such a process: the deliberative process should be a sufficient reason to comply with a decision reached. In addition, Cohen presents two types of equality that are meant to work hand in hand: the formal and the substantive. The formal is that anyone can put forth proposals, criticise and support measures. There is no substantive hierarchy. The substantive equality is that the participants should not be constrained by certain distributions of power, resources or pre-existing norms. However, Cohen’s substantive equality, as desirable as it is to deliberation, is absent in the real world, which is filled with all kinds of economic, social, political and even deliberative inequalities. We can come close to achieving substantive equality in some deliberative forums such as a legislative house that is made of legislators with roughly the same levels of educational advancements, and who might belong to roughly the same socioeconomic class. However, even then, some will clearly have more deliberative capacity than others, which is still some form of inequality. And deliberative capacity is not synonymous with correctness, as it may be bent toward rhetoric. So equality is never guaranteed, and thus we must think of ways in which Cohen’s ‘formal’ equality can be used to tackle what I see as the ever-present ‘substantive’ inequalities. Let me briefly highlight one possible way to do this.

The greatest challenge to deliberative democracy seems to be inequality. Participants are not materially or socially equal, neither do they have the same levels of deliberative capacity. Thus, unless measures are taken, these inequalities could be very significant in determining the outcome of deliberation. There is no guarantee that the opinion that commands the consent of the majority of participants is the better opinion. The majority might well be biased, prejudiced, ignorant or unduly influenced by dominant players. However, it is often the majority opinion that becomes the group decision. For this reason, it is the role of the minority opinion to question the assumptions of the majority opinion. This questioning can often pick up holes in the views of the majority, and majorities can often revise their positions in the light of this development.¹³

We might not imagine that deliberation will always result in opinion transformation. However, this, I think, is when we consider deliberation as a single-conversation event that immediately transforms people’s opinions. Opinion transformations are often delayed since individuals are not often very good at promptly admitting the weaknesses of their opinions and publicly accepting change. Chambers (1995: p. 249) suggests stepping back from the model of single conversation, arguing that actors re-evaluate their positions between conversations rather than within them, and

13 For detailed reading of this proposal, see Ani (2013).

that they re-evaluate their world-views fragmentally rather than entirely. Also, preference change is not likely to include fundamental normative and ontological beliefs ('deep core'), but will at the most affect the 'policy core' of participants, that is, basic political positions.¹⁴

It is now reasonable to talk of a deliberative turn in democratic theory (Chambers 2003: p. 307), as there is an increasing need to deepen the role of deliberation in politics and social affairs. In addition, public deliberation is gaining increasing desirability in television talk shows, radio discussions and internet social sites. Admittedly, a reason for this is the advancement of media and internet technology, but this advancement, in my estimation, will not be enough without advancing/systematising a culture of deliberation. Media and internet technology might as well drive the politics of ethnicity, racism and prejudice. It will be more desirable, in my view, for this extracurricular upsurge to coincide (or perhaps correlate) with a rising academic interest on the subject.

Some scholars have proposed consensus as a goal for deliberation.¹⁵ However, let me clarify that not every deliberation aims at common agreement. Some deliberative engagements are meant to produce more information to help participants in reaching their respective decisions and conclusions. There are situations in which these decisions are not meant to converge on a central point, but to choose between constitutionally recognised alternatives, especially where political pluralism such as the multiparty system is institutionalised. In this regard, I delineate two kinds of deliberation: deliberation with the aim of reaching common agreement (as applicable in trying to settle disputes or deciding a common course of action), and deliberation aimed at enlightening participants through the information produced in the course of arguments (as applicable in pre-electoral exchange of arguments and opinions regarding the suitability of candidates for electoral positions). In particular, the second kind of deliberation aims simply to more thoroughly inform voting. Thus, the difference between the two is that the first not only imparts information but aims at common agreement/consensus, whereas the second simply imparts information for the purpose of more informed judgments on the part of each participant, whatever these judgments will be. With regard to the first kind, intractabilities exist and not every deliberation aimed at common agreement can reach consensus. A sequel to this is that aiming doggedly at consensus can result in ignoring critical dissensions and reaching perceived as well as genuine unanimities. Interestingly, Habermas (1992, pp. 138–139, 371) advocates consensus as a value that corresponds to the 'non-coercive coercion of the better argument', but I consider the alternative possibility that consensus can also stand in opposition to 'the better argument' if the consensus happens to be a consensus of the majority opinion and the 'better argument' just happens to be held by the minority. Thus, a radical consensus requirement or task order could primarily serve to foster group cohesion at the possible price of the epistemic quality of decisions, and could even undermine the envisaged group cohesion or inclusivity if the minority concedes to consensus of majority opinion but resents decision in private.¹⁶

However, if deliberation must not always result in consensus or common agreement, participants can at least end up with more informed judgments. So what is the common denominator between these kinds of deliberation? This common denominator, in my view, is that deliberation is capable of transforming opinion. Here, I agree with Linderman and Mackie as cited above. This position is also corroborated by the synchronising of two seemingly opposing arguments to reflect a two-way influence between deliberation and opinions/beliefs/values of a participant: the dominant values one holds will influence how one interacts with information (Elster 1983: p. 19), and the converse will also hold: information an individual possesses will affect his or her confidence in beliefs, playing a role in the activation of values (Palfrey and Poole 1987) or their evolution (in my opinion). To begin with the first kind of deliberation, deliberation aimed at common agreement (or consensus) is capable of evolving the opinions of participants toward a central position, and the convergence of opinions on a central position is often (though not always) achieved. Elsewhere, I propose a three-step model of deliberation to address the difficulties involved in aiming at this

14 See Sabatier (1998: pp. 104, 122).

15 Proponents of consensus include Habermas (1992, pp. 138–139) and Wiredu (1996, p. 182, 2010, pp. 1055–1066).

16 This is elucidated in Ani (2013).

goal in a pluralist context.¹⁷ Regarding the second kind of deliberation, information generated from exchange of arguments is capable of transforming people's choices. As an example, information generated from pre-electoral exchange of arguments is capable of transforming people's electoral choices. It is this capacity (or quality) of deliberation that informs this article, and I proceed to show its potentials in the African sociopolitical situation.

Africa and the prospects of deliberative democracy

The project of the modern state in Africa is, in my view, dependent upon the crucial subproject of transferring the primary allegiance of the average African from her ethnic/primordial origins to the civic state. Given the reality of ethnic diversities/divisions, the crucial nature of this subproject cannot be overemphasised. However, current preoccupation with aggregative democracy only ends in producing a mere aggregation of the relative strengths of these ethnic components. This is not surprising in a democracy that is characterised by the following: (1) deep ethnic divisions, (2) often too little information and discussion about the antecedents and profiles of public officers, especially as significant to leadership, (3) the dominant role of money in politics, (4) insufficient discussions regarding national interests or the actions of leaders and (5) lack of public pressure on leaders to justify their policies/decisions or lack thereof. These are symptomatic, not of the absence of media structures, but (of my concern) that public deliberation is not yet fully institutionalised at state national levels. Let me explore how a political culture of deliberation could mitigate each of the listed challenges in Africa.

Challenges (1) and (2) are not only correlated, but derive this correlatedness from a collision between the psychology of perceived difference and the weaknesses of politics: if we do not acquire the habit of critically discussing our political office candidates' (private and public) past activities, then there are possibilities that ethnic sentiments (usually fanned by some politicians) could gain more ground. Thus, a culture of political and public deliberation could have a gradual withering effect on tribal and regional politics. It is not only that public deliberation needs a fair amount of information, but the activity of public deliberation also yields lots of information regarding issues and persons. The kinds of information that we hope to derive from a culture of public deliberation are the kinds that are bound to actively engage the attention of citizens. Deep insistence on issue-based politics and deep attachment to tribal politics cannot go hand in hand. It is expected that the former will retain an effective constraint upon the latter, especially when deliberation with and between candidates can force issues of national interest to the fore. In extreme situations, some citizens hardly know anything about their candidates except *where they hail from*. There can be no worse-case scenario than this, especially given that the existence of active local community deliberations can often strengthen ethnic mobilisation while the low level of public deliberation at national levels does not effectively transform this kind of cohesion into national unity or at least check its ethnic configuration. Surely, public deliberation should begin at the local and village level, representing the grassroots, but if this practice is not replicated at the national level, it is a recipe for unabridged ethnic politics.

The project of mitigating ethnicity and increasing state patriotism through deliberative democracy should derive confidence from the fact that ethnicity is not as biological as it seems. Scholars have shown that generations of movements of peoples from place to place in the wake of wars, conflict, conquests, commercial intercourse and search for better economic lives have equally led to generations of ethnic interpenetrations resulting from intermarriages and cohabitation, thus establishing that the concept of ethnicity, understood as grouping by common ancestry or genealogy, is a myth.¹⁸ However, this myth has for many decades been fanned into consuming flames by many politicians who, for want of integrity, succumb to playing cheap ethnic cards when it can work to their favour. The case can be made that ethnicity in many parts of Africa is an invented concept. If the notion of ethnic purity is false, and the average African can trace her genealogy across generations to a multiplicity of ethnic groups, then it makes a more confident

17 See my article 'Deliberation in Three Steps' (forthcoming).

18 Confer Gyekye (1997: pp. 96–101).

case for a politics of deliberation. This does not mean that confirmed ethnic purity (if any such thing exists) is completely impervious to a politics of deliberation and inter-inclusion. In any case, more public deliberation among citizens about candidates and policies, more information on profile and character of candidates, more debates among candidates, more deliberation between candidates and citizens, more debates among citizens, more opinion transformation and more evolution of preferences are envisaged effects of a discursive politics that can mitigate this psychologically orchestrated tribal politics in Africa.

Challenges (3) and (4) are equally correlated. If society does not deliberate on the actions of their leaders and how these actions impact on national interests, then citizens could be more amenable to financial inducement and money politics. This is worsened by a conception of public office as a place to do more ‘eating’ than serving, belying some sort of rent-seeking behaviour.¹⁹ However, a culture of public deliberation practically drives us toward more urgent and relevant debates. It promises to shift the weight of electoral choice from being the outcome of money politics to being the effect of deliberative activities such as media, presidential and social internet debates. The people need to deliberate much more thoroughly with (and about) their leadership candidates (and leaders who are seeking return to office) in order to more properly ‘compare notes’ on electoral choices and political decisions. And the multiconversation model of deliberation (which I see as more effective in transforming opinions and preferences) suggests that there is the need for as many public forums and debates as possible. Importantly, such a practice will be best coupled with the emergence of voluntary fact-checking organisations (to be made up of a coalition of journalists) that seek to verify claims made by political aspirants, as well as recall promises made by leaders seeking return to office. This is because it is possible that public deliberation can degenerate into mere semantic wars to the extent that can make us concerned about the balance between claims, criticisms, promises and reality.

Politics in many African countries is presently dominated by incredibly wealthy beneficiaries of past military regimes who take advantage of the lack of deliberative institutions to influence the most important issues of state. They often do this by financing candidates to the point of victory and subsequently subjecting the public officer (and the state) to personal financial servitude. Public debate forums and other forms of discursive politics have not only a potential to play more decisive role in citizens’ electoral and political choices, but will also expectedly have mitigating/anticlimactic effects on money politics. This point is also particularly crucial in the light of the deployment of colossal state funds in the bid to return to office, and the great waste of private personal savings in the bid to defeat the incumbent or take the office in the first instance.

Money politics harbours the tendency to relegate the more urgent issue of the character of candidates for public office to the background, especially where the capacity to win is roughly correlative with financial capacity. This point should be quite worrisome if we consider that there are many illegitimate ways to make money. The objective of culprits in this regard is to attempt, as much as possible, to relegate ‘reason’ or ‘rational justification’ to the background by means of superior and robust funding. However, among all animals, the human is the only being that is capable of elevating rational consideration above (1) sentiment and (2) immediate desires for self-preservation, and (critical) deliberation is the pre-eminent social tool for this. It is my argument that the effectiveness of these extraneous and sentimental pressures on the citizen derives from the fact that they have usually, up until now, been ‘the only serious kinds of pressure at hand’, and that there has not been enough deliberative or informative ‘pressure’ to balance or at least mitigate these various sociological influences. It has often been remarked that ‘information is power’. Public deliberation with the support of fact-checking contains the potential of throwing up more insightful information about the desirability/undesirability of candidates for public office, and the gravity of such insight can be a great restraint on extraneous influences.²⁰

19 See Adetula (2008: p. 28). Rent seeking refers to the attempt to seek economic rent rather than create new wealth, or to seek to obtain already created wealth rather than generate new wealth, and to accomplish this with as little productive behaviour as possible.

20 Deeper revelations about the notoriety of a candidate might not enable a citizen to reject her financial overtures, but might lead to a decision to accept money and still vote for someone else.

Lastly, challenge (5) invites us to one of the greatest benefits of public deliberation: *publicity*. By publicity, here, I simply mean ‘the attention of the public’. If our leaders are not subjected to serious public pressure to give account of their stewardship, it is largely due to our historical experiences. In many parts of Africa, traditional deliberative institutions could not reach the modern state level because of (1) colonial rule, (2) the obey-the-last-order deliberative poverty of military governance and (3) replacement of military governance with a democracy of mere aggregation of numbers. All of these translate to generations of governmental secrecy and esoterism, which, in my opinion, can account for the absence of a culture of account-giving by African political leaders. The desired alternative to this is *publicity*, and a particularly compelling argument for public deliberation is that it will gravitate toward increasingly better ‘common good’ decisions. It is much more difficult in public debates to make self-serving arguments or justify one’s claims on self-interested grounds. Even by assuming that many arguments within a debate which are based upon principles of the common good (instead of principles of self-interest) are hypocritical, the presence of such arguments can lead to an increased readiness to make concessions to the other side (Spöndli 2003: p. 6). This could, in turn, enable decisions that increase the common good. According to this theory, over time, a mechanism of dissonance reduction might induce such actors to actually adopt ‘reasonable’ positions to which they earlier only referred to rhetorically (ibid.).

Such a position has been opposed by arguments that deliberative outputs will be skewed to the advantage of the privileged, because the deliberative procedure favours their speech culture.²¹ However, in response to this opposition, I may point out that even the pursuit of private interest by dominant or privileged participants in a public forum cannot be entirely successful without inevitably making common-good concessions in the process.

The other alternative—private or closed-door deliberation—can be argued as leading to easier and smoother compromises without straining the personal ego of participants in public. Specifically, it can be argued that private deliberation will offer more candid arguments, recognition of complexities, and more concessions. However, I may object to this argument, with the reason that the ‘ease of concession’ that private deliberation provides seems to equally be a breeding ground for compromises that are more beneficial to direct actors than to the common good. In this regard, deliberative publicity is more effective because it puts more constraints of account giving on public officers. I agree with some deliberative theorists²² that, although it is difficult to imagine that all political deliberation could take place in public, the second-order decision to deliberate in private should be subject to public deliberation at some stage.

In the above regard, and excepting security and diplomatic matters, governmental secrecy rooted in unrestricted formal private deliberation seems a breeding ground for private collective corruption. It seems, usually, that reports of government hostility to publicity and freedom of information, heavy censorship on media and the internet, and crackdown on journalists is roughly correlative with increasing reports of corruption. This was evident in African military regimes and is evident in the fundamental structure of communism.²³ The rising corruption in communist governance (which is seen as the greatest threat to the future of China, for instance²⁴) is attributable to its culture of secrecy, mystery and private deliberation. The establishment of the Ghana Public Accounts Committee (for publicly televised cross-examination of financial account-giving by government agencies) and the enactment of the Nigeria Freedom of Information Bill (after 12 years of bitter struggle) are welcome developments in public deliberation, because deliberative democracy requires institutions such as these. It is, however, obvious that deliberative democracy in Africa needs a lot more regarding institutional superstructures. Public deliberation is conceivably more difficult and time consuming in the light of the challenge of changing opinions in

21 See Young (1996: p. 126) and Sanders (1997: pp. 3–5).

22 Such as Thompson (2008: p. 511).

23 See pp. 4–5 of Philips Brey’s ‘Global Information Ethics and the Challenge of Cultural Relativism’, available at http://portal.unesco.org/pv_obj_cache/pv_obj_id_823A7F7408F760CF5C19E45BD398C6EC37A00200/filename/Brey-Philip.pdf.

24 See Pei (2007).

public, but it offers more moral accountability in return, and thus seems preferable to the moral fluidity and reduced account-giving that endangers private deliberation.

This brings me back to the issue of deliberative platforms, where details will need to be worked out. For example, it will be ideal if internet-based deliberation for the wider public becomes a countermeasure to the representative shortcomings (and oligarchic nature of) parliamentary deliberation. Furthermore, the shortcomings in internet infrastructure (as well as its informal nature) can be supplemented by deliberation in the traditional public media. In this regard, traditional public media can be particularly made (maybe through legislation) to tilt more toward active and diverse public deliberation, instead of simply being one-way advertisement outlets for whoever can pay the bill. Additional institutions for public accountability and questioning can be considered, and it will be best if these institutions could become bastions of account-giving and open/public inquiry. These measures will represent the boldest gravitations to the much desired ideal of direct democracy that has for long been perceived as beyond reach in larger polities. However, the issue of a deliberative platform deserves detailed and extensive discussions, which will have to be prosecuted in another paper and taken up by social scholars, whereas I have limited my objective in this paper to arguing for merits of a deliberative turn in the practice of democracy.

Conclusion

I have argued that deliberative democracy, in acting as a supplement to aggregative democracy, can potentially increase preoccupation with issues of national importance at the possible expense of extraneous factors such as tribal/ethnic sentiments and lesser allegiances. This is due to deliberation's potential to lend more urgency to issues of national interest, to change or transform opinion, and to enable democracy to transcend the mere aggregation of pre-existing, fixed preferences. The activity of public deliberation does not only thrive on information, but is likewise able to produce information regarding the profiles of candidates for public office. It also helps in formulating public opinion about issues of national importance and job approval ratings of public officers. It is increasingly difficult for people (including leaders) to make self-serving arguments in public, a point in favour of common good. Certain issues, when extensively debated publicly, can acquire more urgency than temptations to ethnic sentiments or financial intrigues. These prospects will be appreciated more if we consider that the notion of ethnicity as common ancestry is fluid, and that perhaps the only common ancestry that is certain is that of being African.

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