**APLS Conference**

**The Practice of Constitutional Democracy in Africa: Corruption and Civic Responsibility.**

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**Abstract**

In the last fifty years, all the countries on the African continent attained independence from their various colonial regimes and established a constitutional democracy except a few countries like Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, and Libya which would later embrace some form of democracy. The euphoric attempt to become like their former colonial administrators drove many of the newly independent countries to establish the practice of democracy in their respective countries. Between 1957 and 1969, almost all the sub-Saharan countries had put in place either a representative democratic form of government, a direct form of democracy, or a parliamentary form of democracy. In 1957, the then Gold Coast which came to be known as present-day Ghana on the West coast of Africa was the first to attain independence from imperial Britain. The President, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah established a parliamentary democratic form of government. This system of government became an envy for many of the sub-Saharan countries that Nkrumah petitioned to champion the independence of the other countries. Guinea, a francophone country followed in October 1958 followed by Cameroun (January 1, 1960), Senegal (April 4, 1960), Togo (April 27, 1960), Mali (September 22, 1960), Madagascar (June 26, 1960), Congo (present-day DRC, June 30, 1960), and so on. (For a complete chronological order of African countries and their attainment of independence, see the website: <http://africanhistory.about.com/library/timelines/blIndependenceTime.htm>). All these countries wished to practice democracy, however, the problem was what form of democracy would be appropriate for the various countries. While, for instance, Ghana opted for parliamentary democracy in 1957, Nigeria chose to practice a federal form of democracy with a parliamentary system of governance. By the late 70s, almost all the sub-Saharan countries had attained independence and practiced some form of democratic government. The problem of the newly borrowed form of government came with its demands─ civic responsibilities.

With the Cold War ranging, many of these sub-Saharan countries were pulled asunder or were co-opted by either the East or the West as an ally to do political business. The Cold War facilitated the divisions of the newly independent countries as some were enticed with businesses, bilateral and multi-lateral loans, and contracts by both the East and the West. It can be argued that the Cold War exacerbated the struggle for stable nationhood, however, it cannot be disputed that Africa’s plights date back to the partitioning of the continent by the colonial regimes. With artificial boundaries drawn to create new countries, the colonial regimes created polytechnic entities where tribalism became a potent force of ethnic wars and struggle for political power after the colonial regimes left. Until now, many Africans consider their tribe as their nation and claim their identity from their ethnicity (see Godfrey Mwakikagile, *Africa 1960 – 1970: Chronicle and Analysis* (2009). With this background, I argue that the practice of any form of democracy on the continent of Africa cannot gain any momentum because of the struggle for tribal power. Further, the blatant institutionalization of corruption must be traced to the claim of ethnic identity which invariably demands nepotism and questionable payments to foster and promote ethnic identification.

Thus, while the new African leaders endeavored to hold the different tribes together after the attainment of independence, it was proving difficult for them to maintain a central power to advance a constitutional government because of ethnic identification. Many of the new African leaders attempted to inculcate political education in their citizens but such attempts failed leading many of them to resort to a consolidation of power that they termed a “unitary form of government” through dictatorial policies. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana noted in one of his speeches in 1957:

Even a system based on social justice and a democratic constitution

may need backing up, during the period following independence, by

emergency measures of a totalitarian kind. Without discipline, true

freedom cannot survive. (See Justice Kludze’s article on “Take on

Nkrumah’s Dictatorship.” Part Four. Feature Article of Tuesday 21,

2015). <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?ID=355107>

Nkrumah was not alone in appropriating power to himself. Many of the African leaders followed his form of governance. A proper analysis of African traditional history demonstrates that the current corruption that permeates the political fabric in Africa emanates from the lack of civic education which proved to be difficult for the new African leaders of the sixties and has perpetuated itself until now. With no proper foundational civic education to propel democratic institutions, the resultant effect is corruption and a lack of collective interest by citizens.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that the present struggle for a particular form of democracy on the African continent the lack of civic education and the institutionalization of corruption in various government sectors can be tackled through an intensive education and propagation of civic education for a different form of democracy.

*Keywords: democracy, civic education, corruption, Africa*