



**NIGERIAN
COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT
JOURNAL**

**Volume 4
ISSN 2360-7432
June, 2016**

NIGERIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT JOURNAL

VOLUME 4

ISSN 2360-7432

JUNE, 2016

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**Published by:
Community Development Association
of Nigeria (CDAN)**

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THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF ANCIENT GREEK PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY FOR CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Most scholarship on system of rule in ancient communities generally emphasized monarchic, aristocratic, and oligarchic forms of governments. Least accentuated is the system of participatory democracy whose provenance and prevalence has also been situated more in relative parts of contemporary Europe, America, Africa, and Asia. This gives the impression that communal participatory democracy was not very deep in the remote ancient world. The concept of participatory democracy underscores the principles of direct inclusive participation of citizens in political decisions and socio-economic policies that affect their lives in their communities, as opposed to contemporary representative participation. In classical antiquity however, the Greeks extolled the idea of communal participatory democracy by their establishment of communities (the polis, city-state), whose very existence thrived on certain fundamentals such as equality, freedom, rule of law, accountability and full citizens' participation in communal affairs. Using the ancient city-state of Athens as a case study, this paper discusses the fundamental principles of Greek participatory democracy with a view to highlighting its implications for the development of contemporary Nigerian communities. Its main contention is that a simple revisit to the basic vital principles of Athenian democracy may positively fast-track the socio-economic and political development of many communities in contemporary Nigeria.

Key Words: Ancient Athens, Participatory Democracy, Fundamental Principles, Community Development

Introduction: The Concept of Participatory Democracy

Participation has been used synonymously with terms such as 'community participation', 'people's participation', 'public participation', and 'popular participation'ⁱ. This is because participation directly or indirectly involves the activities and actions of community members – politically, socio-culturally or economically, in their quest to improve their lives, environment and communities. Where there are no citizens, there can be no participation. The concept of participatory democracy therefore, refers to a system of inclusive participation of citizens in the direction and operation of political, social and economic systems. Unlike the contemporary representative government, participatory democracy tends to advocate more involved forms of citizen participation and greater political representation. The philosophy of communal *participatory democracy*, also known as *associative democracy* or *strong democracy*, puts great importance on the maximization of the citizens' participation in the public decisions and policies that affect their lives and their communities. Active engagement and deliberation in communal politics is regarded as beneficial both for the citizen as an individual and for the system as a whole. In other words, participation of citizens in socio-political activities is not only expected periodically during elections, but is continuous. Participatory democracy stresses that citizens formulate and defend both their own and communal interests through various civic methods, forms and organizations, such as interests groups, clubs, political parties, civic associations, and grassroots lobbies. Thus, active participation in communal life transforms individuals into public citizens as political interest, preferences and abilities for

judging public issues emerge in the process of public deliberation.

In participatory democracy, the public space strives to create equal opportunities and freedom for all members of a community to make meaningful contributions to decision-making and seeks to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities. Oftentimes, adequate deliberation, resulting in apposite information, is required for the overall decision-making process to succeed. Thus, it is vital that in the accretion of knowledge for political and socio-political decisions, the importance of face-to-face meetings – where citizens get to one another – cannot be over-emphasisedⁱⁱ. Participatory democracy evolved as a result of empowering common people to decision-making, through motivation, education and information, and by reducing the obstacles to political participation (e.g. overwork, administrative stress, illiteracy, ignorance and poverty).

Historically, the concept of participatory democracy has a long and interesting development. Between the 8th and 7th centuries B.C in the archaic period of the Greece, political power was tenaciously held by few royal families; it was exclusive and informal, and unevenly distributed across various structures of the villages and minor communities. But this, soon, began to be displaced with collectives of oligarchs and nobles, who seized power as the villages and communities merged into city-states (*poleis*). The new oligarchs who took the reins of government in respective city-states soon created unfriendly socio-economic and political atmospheres, rife of tensions. There were much hardship and discontent among the common people, and many had to

mortgage their land due to debts and poverty. By 600 B.C. Solon, a great Athenian lawgiver was appointed as the leader. He later initiated certain reforms that not only limited the power of oligarchs, but also established a government which partially reflected form of participatory democracy – a democracy which allowed certain decisions to be taken by a popular assembly composed of all free male citizens. By 500 B.C, the Solonic reforms were further enhanced by Cleisthenes to embrace more direct participation of free adult male citizens in governmentⁱⁱⁱ. Following the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Athenian Greek participatory government came to an end in 322BC. By the time participatory democracy was reawakened as a political system about 2000 years later, after the Middle Ages, decisions were made by representatives rather than by the people themselves. It was in the 20th century that practical implementations of participatory democracy, once again, began to take centre place, albeit mostly on a small scale but, attracting considerable academic attention by the 1980s^{iv}. Since then, new variants of participatory democracy in numerous states have been evolved and these include: anticipatory democracy, associative democracy, consensus democracy, deliberative democracy, grassroots democracy, representative democracy etc.

2. Early Greek Political Experience

In antiquity, the Greeks developed structures for classification and evaluation of different forms of governments. Some of the modern political terms such as monarchy (*mono*, one, and *archein*, rule), oligarchy (*oligos*, few, and *archein*, rule), tyranny (*tyrannis*), democracy (*demos*, many, and *archein*, rule), and aristocracy (*aristos*, best,

and *archein*, rule) were invented by the ancient Greeks. To arrive at such classifications, they concerned themselves with vital questions such as, who and how many should rule and how? Should sovereign power lie in the rule of law (*nomoi*), the constitution (*politea*), or the citizens (*polites*)? It is no surprise that then that the Greeks, at different times, demonstrated their unusual innovativeness by practicing diverse forms of government across different city-states^v. Early Greek political thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle assert that the political evolution of ancient Greece followed a somewhat general sequence or pattern, Monarchy-Aristocracy-Oligarchy-Dictatorship-Democracy, the last of which was developed in the fifth century B.C. Modern scholars know that this submission, arguably, is merely a schematic oversimplification of the facts of the matter since it did not apply to all city-states (*poleis*). Kingship, which flourished throughout the Greek Heroic Age and early Archaic period (c. 2000-1000 B.C.) never entirely disappeared from all parts of Greece even when dictatorship (*tyrannis*) began as from the 7th century B.C. It was not every city-state that witnessed the rise of a dictator (*tyrannos*); by Aristotle's time, when the city-states were in decline, there were several areas which had not even known democracy.

Notwithstanding the above, the generalization of Greek thinkers contains a considerable amount of truth. The earliest surviving Greek literature – *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer – painted a picture of traditional societies under the rule of kings or tribal chiefs, whose absolutism was tempered only by the existence of advisory councils of princely or aristocratic elders. The people (*demos*) were convened as an

army in times of war, and as an assembly in period of peace. As an assembly, at those early periods, the people were undemocratic for they had no the right to speak or vote on any issue. Homer^{vi} records how Thersites, a commoner, tried to bare his mind at a meeting of the Greeks' general assembly in the stirring times of the Trojan War, but ended up being humiliated by King Odysseus. Odysseus, supporting a fellow aristocrat-king and commander-in-chief of the Greek army, Agamemnon, would not allow Thersites, the people's spokesman, to air his (and by inference, the people's) view about the plague which was devastating the Greeks – a plague which Agamemnon, by his brash and greedy acts, had brought into the Greeks' army. In fact, the practice of taking and counting votes had not yet begun among the Greeks^{vii}. The assembly was merely a community of people who came to listen to what their 'betters' – kings, princes, and nobles, had to say and they expressed their feelings either by applause or silence. The picture which Homer painted in this kingship era in the *Iliad* reveals that the assembly seemed needed when, sometimes, there was a difference of opinion among their 'betters'. And when two or more of these superiors put forward differing views, the one whose speech received the loudest and longest applause from the people won the day. In some states, indeed, the people met in assembly only to come and watch the 'show' of their superiors.^{viii}

Although the kingship/monarchic system prevailed throughout the Heroic Age and in the early Archaic period,^{ix} it was in the same age that was observed what may rightly be considered the first manifestation, in Greek history, of that claim to self-respect and human dignity on the part of the common man which true democracy

recognizes. As noted above, Thersites, one of the commoners of Greek *voiceless* assembly had actually dared to make a speech, – a speech that was indeed contemptuously directed against his superiors. Although Homer tells us that he was physically manhandled and scornfully humiliated, nonetheless, his attempt to speak signified that it was not everyone in the early Greek *voiceless* assembly that was content with the existing state of political affairs^x.

The Archaic period of the ancient Greeks (from c.850 B.C) witnessed the disappearance of kingship system in almost all the parts of the then Greek world through a process of evolution, and sometimes revolution. Through a synoecism of neighbouring villages, many kingships were either absorbed or gradually replaced with another system of government which the Greek theorists called 'Aristocracy'. As against one man rule, aristocracy was a central system of government by annually elected magistrates and aristocratic councils of elders. It was a method which enabled the people in a *polis* to meet in their assembly to elect state-officials from within the ranks of the nobles/aristocracy. Voting had now become a practice, and the theory of government was that the aristocrats had to rule by the consent of the people. This was clearly a significant development in the political history of the people, for the taking and counting of votes, as well as the extension of the right to vote, was now given to the people. This is essential to any form of constitutional government, both ancient and modern.

According to the schematic oversimplification noted above, oligarchy was represented as a sort of 'third stage' in the Greek political experience. In this

connection, Greek theorists thought of oligarchy as a degenerate and corrupt form of aristocratic rule, particularly, when aristocracy became irresponsible and oppressive, and was no longer based on the consent of the people. This is only partly true, from our point of view. It is known that all Greek aristocratic governments, from the beginning, featured as oligarchies in varying degrees. There were, at least to our knowledge, three famous examples of states where the 'Aristocracy', which had absorbed its monarchy, became a single family^{xi} – the erstwhile royal family. And such governments in theory also reigned and ruled by the consent of the people. It meant then that the people only elected their magistrates from a single family instead of from a single class – the nobility in general. It meant also that the ruling council was probably no more than about 200 relatives above the age of 50. With time, for the most part of the Greek *poleis*, there were bitter complaints of "the crooked judgments of the corrupt lords" in the administration of justice, and of the general tyranny of oligarchic regimes, which survive in the literature of Archaic Greece^{xiii}.

In this period, popular socio-economic and political grievances (*stasis*-strife, as the Greeks called it) often led to revolution, apparently always led by dissidents, or even merely power-hungry, aristocrats. This led to the emergence of popular dictators (*tyrannoi*) who rose to power as champions of the discontented people against aristocratic oppression. Thus, at inception, a tyrant from the perspective of the Greeks was a usurper, an upstart monarch who, riding on popular support, seized power unconstitutionally. He was a dictator with sovereign power, who made his subjects the victims of his passions and unjust desires, which he substituted for

laws^{xiii}. The regimes of the dictators (tyrants) tended to be sustained hereditarily or through marriage alliance, use of mercenary soldiers and exertion personal prowess; though it was rare for the dynasties they had established to last beyond the third generation. The dictators concentrated all political and judicial power into the hands of themselves and their families. In general, they made serious efforts to remedy the social and economic challenges of their people, especially by such measures as land reforms – through redistribution of the lands of those aristocratic families whom they had banished. They also expanded trade and industry and put an end to the crooked judgments of the corrupt nobles in the administration of justice – at least in so far as the lower classes were concerned. The general testimony of the ancient authorities enables us to consider these dictators as, on the whole, benevolent and beneficent. For instance, it was Polycrates of Samos who was responsible for three of the greatest constructions for which the Greeks were known^{xiv}. Nonetheless, most Greek writers on the subject emphasized the dictum of Lord Acton that 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely', and suggested that the sons and grandsons of the first-generation dictators were usually harsh and cruel in their rule. Hence, Herodotus submitted that 'a tyrant is a proud and envious ruler, capable of committing all crimes'. Plato and Aristotle also concluded that a tyrant is 'one who rules without law, and uses extreme and cruel tactics - against his own people as well as others'^{xv}.

From the scattered remarks of Greek writers from Herodotus to Aristotle, a modern theory has been developed to explain the eventual disappearance of dictators (tyrants) from the main city-states

of Greece. As remarked above, when the dictator had accomplished his much needed task of reforms, he was considered to have outlived his welcome. The masses, with their economic ills mended, began to seek the dictators' down fall; if the first-generation dictators escaped expulsion or assassination, then their sons or grandsons experienced this unhappy fate, especially, as the latter tended to be more tyrannical rulers than their fathers had been. At the same time, the dictators were the darlings of the poor citizens, who had chiefly benefitted from their rule. It was the upper classes, rather than the poor and the peasantry, who suffered the loss of political power and political freedom under the dictatorship. It was the aristocrats, whether in exile or at home, who organized, with the aid of the invincible military power of Sparta, the several counter-revolutions which eventually led to the fall of many dictators in the course of the sixth century.^{xvi} It was for this reason that the people (*demos*), in many city-states concerned, became a more important political factor than before: either their political rights were consolidated as a guarantee against the return of the dictator (as in Athens through the reforms of Cleisthenes) or class war followed (as at Megara) leading to a liberalization of the constitution. The only exceptions were Corinth and the western states of Leontini and Megara Hyblaea, where the dethronement of the dictators was followed by oligarchic regimes of the pre-dictatorship pattern.^{xvii} Thus, the restored aristocrats normally found it impossible to pull back the hands of the political clock: the form of constitutional government which emerged subsequently in most of these states was tagged *isonomia*.

Isonomia did not appear with any prominence in the writings of the later Greek

theorists of the fourth century B.C, and from their philosophical perspectives what had been referred to as *isonomia* in the sixth and fifth centuries came to be considered *moderate democracy* or *moderate oligarchy*. Although the system of *demokratia* was birthed in 508 B.C at Athens, the fact, however, is that the word did not come into use until around the middle of the fifth century B.C. And when it did, it was applied to what later writers termed *radical democracy*, and which contemporary politics simply styled *democracy*^{xviii}. This contemporary term applied to the constitutional systems (*isonomia*) which Solon and Cleisthenes introduced at Athens. The term, *isonomia* meant really, not *democracy*, and indeed, not *equal rights under the law*, but *equal obligation to obey the law*. It was a term which embodied the concepts which we today express by the terms *the rule of law* and *responsible government*. It also embodied the principle that *sovereignty* is in the hands of the *people*. In constitutional matters, it meant that the people in a given city-state elected the executive and participated in the deliberative and judiciary aspects of government. But the executive was limited to members of the highest social classes, and an aristocratic council.

At this time, one important concern of the Greeks at large was with the distinction between *responsible government* (*isonomia*) and *irresponsible government* (*oligarchia* or *tyrannis*)^{xix}. Political speculation centered on the question: What is the best and fairest form of government? Recent Greek experience had revealed the demerits of both oligarchy/aristocracy and dictatorship/tyranny; for in spite of his popularity as the champion of the poorer classes, the dictator (tyrant) was essentially

an irresponsible ruler, arbitrary, above and outside the laws. The well-being of every citizen depended, in a dictatorship, on the whims and caprices of a single individual. Thus, there arose the emphasis on *isonomia* which contrasted with oligarchy and dictatorship that were visibly evident in both Thucydides and Herodotus^{xx}.

The emphasis on responsible government up to the theory of democracy was but a short step in the political journey of the Greeks until democracy finally arose in the Greek world towards the middle of the fifth century B.C. The resounding defeat of monarchic Persia by the Greeks in the early fifth century (550-479 B.C.) intensified the Greeks' emphasis on freedom and contrasted political freedom with political slavery^{xxi}. This was more propagated given the fact that the state (Athens), which had made the greatest contribution to the Greeks' victory, was the one in which responsible government eventually made the greatest advance. And the main input to the Athenian contribution came, neither from Athens' middle-class foot-soldiers nor from her upper-class cavalrymen, but from the naval mob – the lowest class, who manned its fleet. In the years following the Persian war, the importance which the state began to give this “naval rabble” became more and more obvious; their spokesmen all along agitated for political power proportionate to their contributions to the community at large. The result was the creation of *demokratia* through the suppression of all checks on the sovereignty of the *demos* (the whole people) except the check of the laws. Athens, from this time, became an “education to Greece” in more ways than one. Of all Greek communities, she politically became real and active focus for democratic idea, and in no time, her system spread (copied more or less

closely) to all parts of the Aegean and to several areas of continental Greece, surviving even into the contemporary times. Democracy then, was responsible government and something more. It was a system where all adult male citizens, irrespective of class, birth or wealth, had the right to sit in assembly and participate in all discussions and decisions on public policy, and to sit as judges in the highest court of the state. In many communities, it was the *people* at large and not executive officials or committees, who had the last word in government. In Greek democracy, the people did not elect their government, they were their own government!

3. Ancient Greek Communal Participatory Democracy: Fundamental Principles

Our government is called a democracy because its administration is in the hands, not of the few, but of the many. Yet, although all men are equal in the sight of the law, they are rewarded by the community on the basis of their merit; neither social position nor wealth, but ability alone, determines the service that a man renders. As we are liberally minded in our public life, so in our personal relations with one another we are generous... In public matters we acknowledge the restraint of reverence, we are obedient to those who are in authority and to the laws, especially those laws which protect the less privileged and those unwritten ones whose

transgression is admittedly shameful. But our city goes further than this. We have provided education and recreation for the spirit: athletic and religious festival throughout the year, and beauty in our public buildings, which delight our hearts day by day and banish sadness. ...wealth we regard as an opportunity for public service rather than a cause for boasting, and poverty as not a shameful thing to acknowledge but a disgrace only if one does not try to overcome it.

Our citizens are interested in both private and public affairs; concern over personal matters does not keep them from devoting themselves also to the community. In fact, we regard the man who does no public service, not as one who minds his own business, but as worthless. *All of us share in considering and deciding public policy, in the belief that debate is no hindrance to action, but that action is sure to fail when it is undertaken without full preliminary discussion...* To sum it up, I claim that our city is an education to all Greece, and that every man is an example of independence of mind, versatility of accomplishment and richly developed personality^{xxii}. (Italics ours)

The fundamental principles of Greek *demokratia* were *equality, freedom, and the rule of law*^{xxiii}. The equality of all free adult male citizens (the *demos* – the many – who had the sovereign power) in formulating and deciding public policy was a cardinal feature of democratic theory. By this equality, firstly, we mean all the free adult male citizens had the fundamental right to speak and vote in the assembly (*ecclesia*), irrespective of birth, class, occupation, education, wealth, or anything else. Secondly, equality was secured by the composition of the executive Council (*boule*), which was the most fundamental of all Greek democratic constitutions, and, in effect, the principal committee of the assembly of the people. Thirdly, the principle of equality was enshrined in the composition of the panels of judges in the jury courts (the courts of the people-*demos*). The members of the Council were annually selected by lot from the whole adult male population of citizens irrespective of background or social status; the judges for the jury (supreme) courts were also appointed annually from the same adult male citizens who made up the assembly, though in this regard, they volunteered to serve.

Theoretically and practically, the fundamental principles of *equality, freedom, and the rule of law* in *demokratia* were within the purviews of *free adult male citizens*. Certain groups were excluded, namely the women, children, resident foreigners and slaves. In contemporary times, the exclusion of children and foreigners would, of course, seem quite natural. The denial, however, of the *equality, freedom, and the rule of law* to women and slaves, which in modern times is strange, has led to the argument that the Greek *demokratia* could not have been very

democratic after all. The exclusion of slaves can easily be handled. The Greeks, like many societies that, in the past, institutionalized slavery, held that democracy (synonymous, as seen above, with freedom) was for free men, and slaves were not free men. The question of slavery is a non-debatable standard of societies in the ancient world and it is certainly needless in the context of *demokratia*.

As for the exclusion women, they largely accepted their *silence* a norm, being true to what nature had ordained. According to the ancient Greek tradition, the position of women was generally low except for the Spartan women. The Greek woman was confined to the home and her life was greatly restricted. This was considered as a great honour given the remark of the Athenian statesman, Pericles^{xxiv}: 'great is your glory if men do not speak about you either in praise or blame'. Nonetheless, they, depending on the particular women, could sometimes wield some their influence behind the scenes^{xxv}. But according to the ethos of the ancient Greeks, public life was a man's world, just as warfare also was a man's affair, and it is no surprise that the right to participate in government was woven often around participation in the military. In *demokratia*, it should be understood that the idea of equality of the sexes had no provenance in antiquity. It is not so long ago that the fair sex was admitted to the various fields of public activity even in the western world. For the Greeks then, the place of a woman was essentially in the home and in private life. For them also, *demos*, in practical terms, *the whole free adult male citizens – the many* – just like the Greek army and navy was considered entirely male concerns. Bearing this in mind then, *demokratia* is the control of government by

the many – the people, a government of the people directly by the people and for the people.

Before the advent of the Greek *demokratia*, the variety of forms of government seemed to have been regimes by and for only a part the community: monarchy, oligarchy or aristocracy, dictatorship or tyranny. Even *isonomia* did not rule out the preponderance of filial, ethnic, or other sectional sentiments or interests. *Demokratia* alone was the government by and for the whole *demos*^{xxvi}. Thus, the fundamental principle of Greek democracy held that the collective judgment of the whole *demos* meeting in assembly (*ecclesia*), debating, and finally making decisions by majority vote, was superior to the judgment of any select hand of experts. It was, of course, recognized that the advice of certain professional or individual expert, within the particular field of his expertise, was superior in ability and judgment to the individual non-expert; but according to the theory of democracy, what was best for the community was the collective judgment of men of all classes, occupations, educational and wealth backgrounds.

This important aspect of the fundamental theory of communal *demokratia* emphasised that the Greeks had great faith in the reasoning faculty of the common man. They had a profound belief in his critical wisdom and ability to deliberate and execute the ordinary business of public life. This idea, which clearly emerged from a passage of Plato's *Protagoras* sums up the Greek fundamentals. Socrates conversed with his interlocutor, Protagoras:^{xxvii}

Socrates: When the Athenian people gather for assembly, if

the city has something to do about buildings, the advice of building-specialists is sought, if the business is ship-building, the shipwrights are called upon especially for their advice, and so on and so forth with everything that can be taught and learned. And in such cases, if any non-expert tries to interrupt with his own advice, the assembly refuses to listen to him however rich or aristocratic he may be, but jeers and boos the speaker until he either shuts up or is removed by the police. This is how the Athenian people behave on technical questions. But when the debate is on general questions of government, anyone gets up and gives his advice: carpenters, smiths, leather-workers, businessmen, ship-captains, rich or poor, noble or humble; and no one ever complains that the speaker is untrained in the subject under discussion.

Protagoras: The natural gifts and accomplishments of men are varied, but all alike possess a natural sense of decency and fair-play. While decisions on technical questions require the advice of trained men, political decisions depend on justice and fair-play

This takes us to the root of Greek participatory *demokratia*: the Greek

democrat believed in the ability of the ordinary man to make sound decisions whether on political issues, as judges in the law courts, or in matters aesthetic though the place of the expert was fully recognised.^{xxviii} In other words, Greek democratic theory did not embrace the idea of absolute classlessness as, some of theorists, ancient and modern, have tried to make us believe^{xxix}. Thus, on the one hand, the use of lottery to make appointments to annual and routine offices, committees, and boards was well illustrated in the Greek democratic experience and fundamental principle of equality which gave equal opportunity for all free adult males. On the other hand too, *demokratia* recognized the place of merit and ability; all the officers and positions that obviously required expertise were subject, not to lottery but to election by popular vote. Citizens of particular merit or ability, indeed, received their honours, distinctions or general importance in the state, not as a right and a privilege, but as a reward conferred by the community in recognition of their natural gift or service^{xxx}.

Apart from the foregoing, the second fundamental principle of participatory *demokratia* was *freedom*. Indeed, in the language of Greek politics, *demokratia* was often synonymous with freedom^{xxxii}. Participatory democracy did not mean, as Plato and others sometimes suggest, licence, chaos and anarchy where everyone was free to do exactly what he liked. Plato himself must have known that this is nonsense^{xxxii}. *Demokratia*, however, cherished individual freedom of action and of speech subject to the laws. This meant both personal and political freedom for the full citizen and even the resident foreigner, though the latter did not have the freedom to take an active part in government. But he had the liberty to speak

his mind on political affairs^{xxxiii}. And so for the Athenian, talk was the breath of life for he could speak in the assembly meeting if he could get others to listen. Unlike the highly regimented and totalitarian state of Sparta, where no one was allowed to carelessly make statement against its government, democratic Athens, flourished with men - satirists, comedians, philosophers, journalists, and so on - who were at liberty to make public criticisms of fellow Athenians and their institutions.

That there was personal and political freedom in Greek participatory *demokratia* is a submission that sounds too well, one may say, but there are serious issues that might question such affirmation. How, for instance, should one defend the state confiscations of properties and land-redistributions at the expense of the wealthier members of the *demos* right from the dictatorship period culminating even into the democratic era? Was this freedom, equality and justice? Was *demokratia* not the government of the *demos*, for the *demos* and by *demos* which included both the upper and lower classes? To figure this out, one there is need to know that, first, in many Greek communities, some measure of property redistribution was found to be necessary for the working of their democracy. The modern democratic parallel that readily comes to mind is, of course, the weapon of the direct progressive tax. But the Greeks never hit upon this weapon, probably because direct tax was rare anyway, and usually limited to war time: all our evidence gave a flat rate of tax, whereby the people who would have been hardest hit were what we would now call the average citizens (middle class), since the poorest were not eligible for direct tax. Thus, one could exonerate the Greeks' democratic freedom much in the same way

as the modern system of progressive taxation could be excused. To be sure, reactionary oligarchic propaganda represented *demokratia* as government by the rabble for the rabble; but this deserves attention only in so far as one becomes intrigued by it as a clever piece of propaganda.^{xxxiv} This did obliterate the fact that the fundamental quality of the Athenian *demokratia* rested on the strength of the concept of freedom of expression among its people.

As emphasised above, freedom, equality, and the rule of law were the fundamental principles of participatory *demokratia*, and this meant, as has been shown, direct government by the people at large. It will be seen, however, that the *demos* could possibly become split in two more or less neat halves over some particular issues, as can be the case with all democratic voting. Where this was allowed to proceed unchecked, the result was civil war and riot (Greek, *stasis*). To avoid this, the Greeks invented the institution known as *ostracism*. Here, when two or more leaders of the people (*demagogoi*) constituted a public threat, or created or helped to create a situation of deadlock, ostracism was enforced. The people would gather in their assembly and each man would write on a piece of pottery (*ostrakon*) the name of the *demagogos* whom he thought should be ostracized. The pieces of pottery were cast in a large jar, just like ballot papers and the ballot box. Provided that the necessary quorum of attendance was satisfied, the man whose name appeared the most had to go into exile for ten years - without loss of citizenship, property, honours or anything else. Except for the greater length of time in exile, the effect was roughly the same as when our modern governments are defeated at the polls. In this way, political tension was

controlled; mischief-makers and rabble-rousers were subjected to rule and order.

For the Greeks, representative democracy, as practiced in modern times, was definitely undemocratic. Participatory but representative government, which is susceptible to manipulation and betrayal of the people's will, is unacceptable. The vast size and populations of our modern states would require that citizens in contemporary times to delegate power and sovereignty to representative and professional administrators; and of course, we can still regard this as democracy. But to the ancient Greek democrat, it goes almost without saying that he would have considered all our modern democracies as oligarchies, or at best, in the phrase of Thucydides, *isonomicoligarchies*. This is not to say that the actual political idea of representative democracy was foreign to the ancient Greek democrat. Just as it is considered, today, that direct democracy, on the principles of the Greek model, is practically impossible given our large and complex socio-political and economic institutions, so also the ancient Greeks saw the need for representation in some aspects of its direct government. For example, the idea of representation lay behind such institutions as the Council (*boule*), the jurymen at the popular courts (*heliaea*), embassies, executive offices, and committees.

As stated above, the Council (*boule*) was normally a body of about 500 men, annually chosen by lot from all free adult male citizens who were over thirty years of age and who volunteered to serve. The assembly (*ecclesia*) was open to all free males of 18 years and above, which constituted over 40,000 in Athens, and from this sovereign body, the *demos* – those who could hold

political offices – was about 6,000 men, 30 years and above. Every member the *ecclesia* could talk at debates; he could vote and decide on proposals of war, peace, taxation, finance, public works, treaties, etc.^{xxxv} Given the large number and free nature of the people (*demos*) when it is constituted as assembly (*ecclesia*), the Council served as the chief executive committee of the assembly/the *demos*. The total number of seats was distributed equally over the geographical or tribal units of the state. In Athens, there were ten tribal units with fifty representatives each, totaling five hundred. The Council in turn had its monthly sub-committee consisting of 50 members (50 people were chosen by lot from each of the 10 tribes monthly). Each sub-committee served in rotation for one of the ten months of the legislative year (50 multiplied by 10, equals 500) after which another round of 500 would be chosen. Furthermore, each of these sub-committees, when it took office in its turn for a month, selected by lot its President (*prytanis*) from among themselves^{xxxvi}. And no one was allowed to serve in the *boule* more than twice – nonconsecutive – in his life time. This was, in essence, participatory and representative democracy, but of a kind which shows that the people were taking no chances with their precious heritage of *demokratia*. Everyone was believed to be qualified to share in government by his attendance at meetings and. For the purpose of emphasis, this system thrived on sound rule of law.

The Greeks' judiciary was no less participatory and representative. In Athens, the highest courts, apart from the Council of the Areopagus^{xxxvii}, was the people's court (*heliaea*), where justice was dispensed by a body of amateurs, normally 501 or 1001 free adult males, selected by lot from among the

demos, as in the case of the Council, from all volunteers over the geographical/tribal units. Jurymen at the courts were not regarded not as *judges*, but were seen as members of the *demos* and this is clearly reflected in the way they were frequently addressed as *Gentlemen* at Athens^{xxxviii}. As for all key elected officials, including the *archons*, generals (*strategoi*) and ambassadors, they were representatives of the *demos*, and the *demos* never allowed them to forget this important fact. For instance, before their tenure of office, the newly selected members of the *boule* must undergo public scrutiny (*dokimasia*) as it is practiced in many modern democracies. Also, at the end of their term of office, they all had to render an account of their stewardship to the people (*euthynai*); and this could really be a frightening prospect; just how frightening, we can appreciate if we imagine the officials of any large modern city having to come before the assembled people or his constituency to face awkward questions from labourers, accountants, traders, mechanics, professors, and so on. Thus, the principles of accountability and transparency in public life were the hallmarks of the Athenian participatory democracy. This is one fundamental principle which must be championed today if we are to continue talking about democracy seriously.

4. Greek Participatory Democracy and Contemporary Nigerian Community Development: Some Conclusions

Although the Athenian Greeks' participatory democracy in its structures, institutions and procedures, was radically different from the contemporary representative democracy, its fundamental features, nevertheless, are essential to and for community development in Nigeria. Their participatory democracy, as we seen above, throve on the hallmarks of

equality, rule of law, and freedom – of choice, vote, speech, association, religion, etc. It also succeeded on the principles of public accountability, transparency, fixed term of office, social justice and, most importantly, inclusive participation in public decisions without need for representative intermediaries. Such a system is good and can be adopted with relatively small number of people as characteristic of many traditional and developing communities in Nigeria.

In the first place, the fundamental hallmarks of participatory democracy generally enhance faith in the collective wisdom of the masses, as they see the destiny of the community as their own destiny. Aristotle, quoted by Thompson, remarked that^{xxxix}:

a large number of men who are not individually good can, nevertheless, be better than few best when they combine, not individually, but as a whole ... for each of the number has a bit of virtue and judgment, and, by combining, the mass, as it were, becomes one man with many hands and feet and senses.

Moreover, the procedures of participatory democracy have the potential to help contemporary Nigerian communities maintain social justice since in such government the majority rule. Citizens, when social justice is guaranteed, are encouraged to embrace an efficient, rich cultural life and feeling of national or communal cohesiveness in order to develop their

immediate society. For instance, Athens developed culturally, intellectually and materially because her citizens worked cohesively to project their common treasure and institutional heritage. She turned out in her flourishing period to be the best producer of artists, writers, scientists, statesmen, and philosophers thereby attaining the status of 'an education to all Hellas' as Pericles had claimed above. Within a space of two centuries (c. 550-350 B.C.), the Athenian cohesiveness had culminated in the creation of masterpieces of public buildings, sculptures, plays, treatises, histories, etc.

Thus, a simple revisit to the tenets of the Greek type of participatory democracy would not only translate into tangible development in the community but would also significantly calm religious, inter-ethnic and other sectarian tensions which are currently bedeviling Nigerian communities. This conclusion is taken because citizens, when entwined to one another by common bonds, values and sentiments, see themselves in relations, who must be devoted to their community project and growth. Equality, freedom, rule of law, transparency, and accountability, therefore, breed a type of communal or national cohesiveness which extols tolerance of other people and their religious beliefs, ethnic/tribal affiliations, socio-cultural associations and socio-economic backgrounds. Beyond all the apparent benefits above, participatory democracy, as successfully tested with a relatively small population of Athens, has the capacity to reduce the poverty level of the poor, augment spirit, guarantee good governance, and improve better living conditions. Thus, it requires meaningful programmes that are tied to the people for self-development. The principles of direct participatory democracy work on the premise that every citizen is gifted and

indispensable. These gifts, in turn, transform into human resources and individual voluntary roles which ultimately result in community development. Through participation, citizens themselves are better developed and are well informed of their socio-economic and political situations. Aristotle is, right after all, by maintaining that man is a *politikon zoon* (political animal) whose full potentials can only be attained by living together and deliberating with his fellow citizens in his *polis* – community, city-state.

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Notes

ⁱOwede, Kosioma E. Evaluation of Beneficiaries Participatory Role in Community Development Programmes in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *Nigerian Community Development Journal*, Vol. 3, June, 2015 pp. 3-4.

ⁱⁱRoss, C. 2011, *The Leaderless Revolution: How Ordinary People Can Take Power and Change Politics in the 21st Century*, Simon & Shuster, chpt. 3

ⁱⁱⁱOsborne, R. 2006. *Civilisation: A New History of the Western World*, Jonathan Cape Ltd, pp. 50-56.

^{iv}Elster, J. (ed.) 1998. *Deliberative Democracy: Cambridge Studies in the Theory of Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, pp.1-3.

^vCartwright, Mark, Greek Government: Definition, published online 17 March, 2013 via www.ancient.eu/Greek_Government/, assessed on 2 October, 2016

^{vi}Homer, *Iliad*, 2. 211-278

^{vii}Larsen, *Classical Philology*, 44 (1949), pp.164 ff

^{viii}Homer, *Iliad* 1.238; 2.198, 546ff.; 12.212; 13.685; 16.383ff; 18.497; 22.119; 24.420ff; Homer, *Odyssey* 2.6ff; 3.137ff.

^{ix}For this period, see Hammond, N.G.L. *History of Greece*, pp. 60-91

^xHomer, *Iliad* 2.212; 244, 246

^{xi}At Corinth, Mitylene, and Erythrae. Herodotus 5. 92f; Strabo 378; Diodorus, 7.9; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1311, 627, 1305 619.

^{xii}Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 221, 264; Hesiod, *Theogony*, 51.

^{xiii}'Tyrant' in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*. Translated by Thomas Zemanek. Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2009 (Trans. of "Tyran," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 16. Paris, 1765).

^{xiv}Herodotus, 3.60

^{xv}Glad, B. 2002. Why Tyrants Go Too Far: Malignant Narcissism and Absolute Power. *Political Psychology*, Vol. 23, (1), pp.1-37.

^{xvi}Thucydides, 1.18; Herodotus 5.66, 67-74.

^{xvii}Pindar, *Odes*, 13; Aristotle, *Pol.* 1310b 29, 1316a 36

^{xviii}Larsen, *Classical Philology*, Vol. 49 (1954) p.1 and refs.; Ehrenberg, V. Origin of Democracy. *Historia*, 1.(1950) p.534.

^{xix}Thucydides. 3.62; Herodotus 3.80 ff.

^{xx}In a passage of Thucydides, (Thucydides. 3.62), the Thebans speak of 'oligarchic isonomia' (or Isonomic oligarchy) as a form of responsible government in contrast with *dynasteia oligonandron*. They also represent this isonomic oligarchy as akin to democracy rather than to *dynasteia*.

^{xxi}Herodotus is especially fond of this contrast; cf. 7.102 ff.

^{xxii}Thucydides, II. 6. This is a bird's eye view of the communal participatory democracy from the platform of Athenian statesman, Pericles. Thucydides succinctly reported his oration on the occasion of the burial of some soldiers who had died for their state during the first year of the Peloponnesian War.

^{xxiii}Our data relates mostly to Athens; but Athens was the model for Greek democrats generally. There were variations in certain details of institutions and practice, but not in democratic principles.

^{xxiv}Thucydides. 2.45.2

^{xxv}Cf. Plutarch, *Greek Lives: Perikles*, 10.5

^{xxvi}Thucydides. 6. 38-39 (the speech of the Sicilian Athenagoras) clearly this represents democratic theory. Anti-democratic propagandists argued that democracy too was a form of government by and for sectional interests (cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1279). But the claim of democrats that *demokratia* was government by and for the whole *demos* cannot seriously be disputed (cf. Larsen, *Classical Philology*,. 49 (1954) pp. 1-14; and see (even) Plato *Rep.* 8.557, Aristotle, *Pol.* 1290 ab.

^{xxvii}Plato, *Protagoras*. 319b-323a

^{xxviii}Thucydides. 2.36 ff.: the idea of "meritocracy" emerges here.

^{xxix}Plato *Rep.* 8.557 C; Isocrates, 7.21, 3.14.

^{xxxv}Thucydides, 2.37; Plato, *Menexenus*, 238 cd; Pseudo-Xenophon, *Old Oligarch* 1.3. Even slaves, foreigners and women had too much freedom at Athens, Pseudo-Xenophon's *the Old Oligarch* complains (1.10-12). cf. Plato *Rep.* 8, 563b.

^{xxxvi}Cf. Aristotle *Pol.* 1317a.

^{xxxvii}Plato, *Rep.* 8.557 etc; Barker, E. *Greek Political Theory*, 336-7

^{xxxviii}Pseudo-Xenophon (*The Old Oligarch*), *passim*

^{xxxix}Aristotle, *Pol.* 1279b-1280b, 1290ab; *Old Oligarchs*, 1.4-9; Plato, *Rep.* 8.557a.

^{xl}Thompson, L. A. 'Introduction to Greek History and Society', Department of Classics, Ibadan, unpublished lecture note, p.30.

^{xli}Thompson, L. A. 'Introduction to Greek History and Society', Department of Classics, Ibadan, unpublished lecture note, p.29.

^{xlii}Areopagus was the council of elders in a *polis* similar to the Roman Senate with membership restricted to those who had held high public office such as archon. At different times, it functioned as highest judicial body until the establishment of *demokratia*.

^{xliii}Socrates' trial was a classic example, see Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates (The Apology of Socrates)*, 17a-42a.

^{xliiii}Thompson, L.A. 'Ancient An Introduction Greek History, Society and Institutions' unpublished lecture note, Department of Classics, University of Ibadan, p.33