

# Deliberation, Dependence, and Freedom

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## Abstract

This chapter focuses on two prominent scholars— Kwasi Wiredu and Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze —the interlocution between whose work has sparked renewed and refocused enquiries into questions of democracy and deliberation within contemporary African Political Thought. The chapter proposes that, despite their disagreements, a normative understanding of communal rationality, and of dependency, lies at the heart of both Wiredu’s and Eze’s arguments concerning the consensual possibilities for democracy’s practice. The nature of the democratic freedom that both Wiredu and Eze envisage for African countries, and for the no-less post-colonial societies beyond the continent’s borders, depends on taking seriously the major challenge both these scholars pose— What if there are more morally agreeable ways of thinking about the things that order our politically-determinant interactions with each other?

**Keywords:** Wiredu, Eze, Deliberation, Dependence, Freedom, Rationality

## Introduction

Kwasi Wiredu’s central problem is simple: the majoritarian form of democracy that structures the political practices of most modern industrialized societies is unsustainable and morally hazardous. For Wiredu, the majoritarian archetype of democracy— found in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom —undermines the very notions of fairness and participation, by which such systems are supposedly defined. It is not merely the practical problem of representation in large, complex modern societies that concerns Wiredu. While the modern operation of representation seems to confuse the arm-wringing of groups and individuals through manipulative finance and manic electioneering for the voluntary consent

of politically persuaded populations,<sup>1</sup> the fundamental problem should not be conceived as only a modern phenomenon.

Indeed, for Wiredu, the Athenian format to which this widespread model of representation traces should be thought no less problematic for having been direct— since no less was Athenian democracy based on decision-making by majority vote. Never mind the pre-exclusion of women and slaves, Athenian democracy kept intact the problem that ‘a substantial part of the citizenry suffered veritable disenfranchisement *in the matter of decision-making*.’<sup>2</sup> One of the consequences of this sort of democracy is it ‘does not necessarily ensure that the decisions of the governing body reflect the consent of ... even a large proportion of the citizens.’<sup>3</sup> Against majoritarianism, Wiredu therefore questions: ‘is it not possible ... for human wit to devise a kinder, gentler, and more rational system of governance?’<sup>4</sup>

Wiredu proposes a reconstruction of the traditional governance practices of various precolonial African societies, including his own Ashanti— part of the Akan. The distinctive socio-political feature of such societies was decision-making by consensual deliberation.<sup>5</sup> African deliberative practice was, according to Wiredu, further distinguished by certain moral structures that made possible its consensual outcomes. The kind of democratic deliberation that made genuine reconciliation possible on political matters depended on an underlying rationality of communality and discourse, and not on voting numbers. This also made feasible the possibility of inclusive agreement on action regarding even those matters where moral accord was unattainable.<sup>6</sup>

A similar estimation of numerous precolonial African histories seems to have inspired the political ideologies of several of Africa’s post-Independence leaders— for instance, Leopold Senghor,<sup>7</sup> Kwame Nkrumah,<sup>8</sup> Ahmed Sekou Touré,<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Kaunda,<sup>10</sup> and Julius Nyerere. Indeed, the latter’s socialist programme was not, to his mind, grounded in any specifically

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<sup>1</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, “Democracy by Consensus, Some Conceptual Clarifications,” *Philosophical Papers* 30, no. 3, (2001): 228-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-3.

<sup>5</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, “Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional Politics: A Plea for a Non-party Polity,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 303-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 304-5.

<sup>7</sup> Leopold Sedar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, trans. Mercer Cook (New York: Praeger, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization* (London: Panaf, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> Ahmed Sekou Touré, *Strategy and Tactics of the Revolution* (Conakry, Guinea: National Printing Press, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Kaunda, *A Humanist in Africa* (London: Longman, 1966).

Marxist philosophy but rather in Nyerere's own understanding that 'the organisation of traditional African society ... was such that there was hardly any room for [the] parasitism [capable of producing] 'a leisured class...In traditional African society everybody was a worker.'<sup>11</sup> Despite his repeated admirations<sup>12</sup> for such post-Independence figures, however, the analytical motivations for Wiredu's own political theorising are not ideological.<sup>13</sup>

Wiredu is, further, distinguished from other scholars like Kwame Gyekye,<sup>14</sup> Mogobe Ramose,<sup>15</sup> Edward Wamala,<sup>16</sup> and Joe Teffo<sup>17</sup>— whose work also explores the nature of consensus— because Wiredu's analysis is not motivated by the notion that the ideal of consensus, of radical democratic representation, is unique to Africa's historical experiences. He recognises it could not be.<sup>18</sup> He recognises also, however, that the normative value contained in such ideals are most certainly contextualizable by, at least, a deep set of historical experiences rooted in a not insignificant African geography. Should our imaginations permit the ideational influence from Africa's examples to other parts of the world, then we would do well to pay closer, more positive, analytical attention to Africa's historical geographies.<sup>19</sup> The somewhat derogatory classification of Wiredu's democratic theorising as part of a romantically rear-faced 'return to the source'<sup>20</sup> mode is, I think, therefore, unjustified, and simplistic.<sup>21</sup>

Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's intellectual agenda is equally morally urgent. For Eze, as for Wiredu, the practical difficulties of political life in many modern African countries requires solutions rooted in a specific kind of normative enquiry— one shorn of the inadequacies and

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<sup>11</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>12</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, "Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa: Some Preliminaries Concerning Communalism and Communitarianism," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. 4 (2008), 332-3; Wiredu, "A Plea for a Non-party Polity," 303; Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 145-6.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Wiredu is despondent with what he deems to be the lack of progress of politics and philosophy in African societies that has resulted from having left the 'propagation' of political philosophies in the hands of, however well-intentioned, ideologically based party machines. *Cultural Universals*, 146.

<sup>14</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Ch. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Mogobe B. Ramose, "African Democratic Tradition: Oneness, Consensus and Openness: A Reply to Wamba dia Wamba," *Quest* 6, no. 2 (1992): 62–81.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Wamala, "Government by Consensus: An Analysis of a Traditional Form of Democracy," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Joe Teffo, "Democracy, Kingship, and Consensus: A South African Perspective," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals*, 190.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>20</sup> Amílcar Cabral, *Return to the Source* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973).

<sup>21</sup> Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani, "On Traditional African Consensual Rationality," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 22, no. 3 (2014): 346-7; Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "Democracy or Consensus? A Response to Wiredu," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 313.

assumptions of the kind of political theorising that has failed to make itself familiar with other worlds beyond narrow European histories and geographies. Eze adds another requirement—that of engaging the histories of African countries as continuously-evolving parts, themselves rooted in modernities of their own making.<sup>22</sup> For Eze, the anthropological reification of past African “traditions” should have no part in envisioning Africa’s political futures— futures as connected to everything that has gone before as they will be to all that comes after.

For Eze, then, the promise of Wiredu’s ideas is let down by two things. First, they appear rooted in too uncritical a view of Africa’s precolonial past.<sup>23</sup> Second, they take too little from that past what is known to have been degraded by those parts of the “enlightenment” philosophies responsible for giving colonial imposition its moral justification. It is, for instance, unlikely to Eze that precolonial African political systems were able to sustain such thorough-going deliberative practices simply, as Wiredu seems to say, due to the ‘persuasiveness’ of their ‘rational’ discourse.<sup>24</sup> What could be supposed responsible for making the “rationality” of Akan public discourse so intrinsic to that community as apart from the perhaps not-at-all “rational” features that tied together communal life in most precolonial African spaces?

Further, while the ancestral mythologies that united communities in traditional African societies might have their modern equivalents in many countries today— ‘the flag, ...the Motherland... God,’<sup>25</sup> and so on, most African countries suffered from a double-sided issue. Their postcolonial condition made them no longer intimately connected to the ancestral mythologies that sustained their forefathers at the same time as being forced into state structures the flags of which continue to mean even less. If we agree that consensual democracy is, for its own sake, a better form of democratic governance than its majoritarian alternative, then Africa, and indeed everyone else, will need something different from what obtained in traditional African societies to sustain, in modernity, the forms of political governance and association those societies appear to offer us as examples.<sup>26</sup>

Over the intervening twenty years, the interlocution between Eze and Wiredu has inspired fresh scholarship on numerous topics— the nature of the public sphere,<sup>27</sup> the role of disagreement in

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<sup>22</sup> Eze, “A Response,” 313-4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 316.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 317.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 317.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 317-8.

<sup>27</sup> See Uchenna Okeja, “Palavar and Consensus as Metaphors for the Public Sphere,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Leigh K. Jenco, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

democratic practice,<sup>28</sup> and of rationality in deliberation. In the latter area, Eze's arguments have generated debate about the influence of so-called "non-rational" factors in deliberative settings and the extent to which these should be prevailed upon by "reason" and "rationality."

In this chapter, I wonder, however, the extent to which the latter discourse has been sustained largely by Eze's interpretations, and others', of rationality as contextualizable primarily, or only in an individualised sense.<sup>29</sup> And whether such an interpretation has served to stifle developments towards an understanding of the communal rationality on which Wiredu's thesis most surely relies, and to which some of Eze's own ideas point. I hope some of the developments made here will be as useful for intervening into some of those debates as they are for reassessing our understandings of the points at which Wiredu's and Eze's ideas meet.

This chapter will be divided into three further sections. In the next section, I propose that Wiredu's ideas about consensual democracy challenge us to think about deliberation in ways that ought to reframe some of our understandings about rationality. I argue that the normative understanding of communal rationality Wiredu offers is capable not only of sustaining the type of deliberative practice he envisages but, also, of providing the wider moral foundations that recommend such practice. But perhaps Wiredu does not, himself, go far enough in his arguments to secure the moral foundations of the communal rationality by which his thesis is, most assuredly, structured. Eze's critique is instrumental to increasing understanding about the communal rationality that not only grounds Wiredu's thesis but, also, leads us to a better reckoning of Eze's own ideas about the requirements of a "true" democracy. In section three, I outline a notion of communal and consensual dependency that I suggest is at the normative root of the kind of democratic practice capable of offering the solution that both Wiredu and Eze fundamentally seek. Finally, I conclude by outlining a view regarding the universal value of the type of political theorising that is serious in its critical and normative examinations of specifically African geographies and histories. I want to suggest that any disconcertment elicited by some of the ideas currently occupying African political theory and philosophy may simply be the correct result of an intellectual agenda deeply invested in coming to less narrow understandings of those political phenomena of concern to us all.

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<sup>28</sup> Uchenna Okeja, "Justice through Deliberation and the Problem of Otherness," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 24, no. 2 (2019); Bernard Matolino, "The Nature of Opposition in Kwasi Wiredu's Democracy by Consensus," *African Studies* 72, no. 1 (2013); Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani, "On Agreed Actions Without Agreed Notions," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 33, no. 3 (2014).

<sup>29</sup> Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 82-9.

## Rationality and a Radically Consensual Politics

In the specified African context of both Wiredu's and Eze's concern, the majoritarian model of democracy— first exported, now adopted by many African countries —has been especially calamitous. As Eze describes, in numerous African countries, the appeal to and demand for 'democratic ideals ... whose historical examples are rooted in the modern European traditions,'<sup>30</sup> have enabled the maintenance of a democratic façade. These are fabrications in which the political class and organs of state are more substantiated by foreign governments than they are by the will of those they claim to serve.

Such is the global draw of multiparty electoral politics that simply the pretence to it in countries like 'Nigeria, ...Liberia, Rwanda' has allowed dictators and popular politicians alike, regardless of the substance or sanctity of their local support, to maintain 'untransformed the mechanisms of autocratic, dictatorial, and terroristic ...state power'— with the stable, if not always unwavering, political, and military support of external governments.<sup>31</sup> It was against the destructive effects on Africa's societies of reducing real participation to the outsized and illegitimate influence of 'World Bank officials, Western NGOs [and]... the African elite' that those such as Claude Ake had, long ago, pleaded.<sup>32</sup>

What has made the effect of majoritarian electoral politics appear uniquely problematic in Africa's political contexts is the fact that throughout most of the continent, there has been a bifurcation between indigenous ethnic communities and the post-colonial structures of modern states and governments.<sup>33</sup> 'The ethnic stratification of nearly all contemporary African states has ensured that [under multi-party electoral democracy,] many ethnic groups will be politically marginalized.'<sup>34</sup> The effect of which has been, as Richard Joseph had already theorised within the first three decades of Independence, that many 'are compelled to pursue [electoral] democracy for the very reason they are unable to rely on' its ability to directly and effectively represent 'their particular subgroup of the population.' Multiparty electoral politics, in many African states was now a means to subvert state resources, through "democratic"

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<sup>30</sup> Eze, "A Response," 313.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 313-5; Wiredu, "A Plea for a Non-party Polity," 309; Said Adejumobi, "Elections in Africa: A Fading Show of Democracy?" in *Government and Politics in Africa*, ed. Okwudiba Nnoli (Harare: AAPS Books, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Claude Ake, "The Unique Case of African Democracy," *International Affairs* 69, no. 2 (April 1993): 239-40.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Ekeh, "Colonialism and the two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 1 (Jan. 1975), 92.

<sup>34</sup> Wiredu, "Democracy by Consensus," 233.

contestation, for the political and economic interests of ethno-linguistic groups, each of whose adequate representation that same democracy was incapable of guaranteeing.<sup>35</sup>

It is unsurprising that the addition of a governance model uniquely reliant on electoral contestation by majority vote should be negatively explosive to externally constructed political entities housing newly stratified ethnic communities most of which are minimally, if at all, connected to the governing structures claiming to represent them.<sup>36</sup> It might be more noteworthy that the efforts of the present period which ought, as Wiredu states, to be dedicated to rectifying the problem of modern African states not yet the creations of their inhabitants,<sup>37</sup> have instead, in many cases, been put to devising ever greater pretences to majoritarian democracy—the beneficiaries of which are not the local population.<sup>38</sup>

The problems of majoritarianism seem to have most acutely lent themselves to Africa's political contexts, and this has made finding its replacement, across much of Africa, a matter of 'life-and-death.'<sup>39</sup> However, the problem of majoritarian democracy is not, so far as Wiredu is concerned, solely traceable to the modern particularities of African countries. For political societies with different stories of state formation, perhaps the problems of adversarial politics will manifest themselves decades after they have in African countries, and perhaps for different reasons, but majoritarianism presents fundamentally deleterious moral consequences regardless of the society in question. As such, the 'valid' possibilities for its solution 'ought to be a concern for our whole species,'<sup>40</sup> and envisaging the historical possibilities of a radically consensual politics has become morally necessary.<sup>41</sup>

But what exactly does Wiredu mean by a consensual politics? And precisely what could be radical about it? If securing and maintaining the power of distinct (or distinguishable enough) political parties using electoral mechanisms determines the political ordering of majoritarian systems, what Wiredu calls a system of decisional consensus would be a means of ensuring, through deliberative procedure, that *all* parties (that is, the rightful associations of groups and individuals expressing concern or interest on any given issue) agree to the decisions made under that system. By such a procedure, the notion of political majorities and minorities would

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Wiredu, "Democracy by Consensus," 233-4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 233-4.

<sup>38</sup> Eze, "A Response," 315; Ake, "The Unique Case."

<sup>39</sup> Wiredu, "Democracy by Consensus," 233.

<sup>40</sup> Wiredu, *Cultural Universals*, 190.

<sup>41</sup> Wiredu, "Democracy by Consensus," 233.

become temporary states, manifest only during the deliberative process and disappearing once a decision is made.<sup>42</sup> By consensual democracy then, Wiredu means a form of political organization in which the persistent notion of “winners” and “losers” is eradicated, along with the organization of political parties for the sole purpose of ‘appropriating’ governmental power.<sup>43</sup>

By consensus, Wiredu does not simply mean cooperation. Though consensual politics relies on political cooperation, the latter is a feature of many sites of political organization including of the very majoritarian form of Wiredu’s normative opposition.<sup>44</sup> The difference between consensus and cooperation is not simply that one takes in the other while the latter does not, necessarily, contain the former in its definition. There is also a temporal difference. Where cooperation under many forms of political organization will be specific to a certain time and matter, cooperation under a consensual democracy will be sustained not only by concrete political mechanisms but, also, by a permanent—or potentially permanent—mode of *being* with one another.<sup>45</sup> It is why, as Martin Odei Ajei’s explains, ‘a liberal majoritarian system that employs deliberation and arrives at consensus in decision-making will not be characterised as a consensual democratic system, for the phenomenon of consensus will not be ... *intrinsic* to it [emphasis added].’<sup>46</sup>

Wiredu’s organizational reference for a system of consensual democracy are the varied precolonial political systems of numerous African societies— in particular, that of the Ashanti.<sup>47</sup> In the Ashanti political system, Wiredu says, there ‘is never an act of formal voting.’<sup>48</sup> The election to the head of the political unit (lineage) was by extensive ‘consultations and discussions’ such that once a person had been elected it was not so much that they had been voted for than that they had been agreed to. The ‘pursuit of consensus [as] a deliberate effort to go beyond decision by majority opinion,’<sup>49</sup> Wiredu states, was applied throughout all areas of the Ashanti political process where a decision had to be made. In council or municipal matters, for example, after the selection of representatives by consensual agreement, it was the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 237.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 238-9.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Odei Ajei, “Kwasi Wiredu’s Consensual Democracy: Prospects for Practice in Africa,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 15, no. 4 (2016): 448.

<sup>47</sup> Wiredu, “A Plea for a Non-party Polity,” 303-5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 305.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 307.

responsibility of those representatives to engage the adult members of the town in extensive consultations over all matters requiring a decision that would be agreeable to every member.<sup>50</sup>

If the problem of majoritarianism is that it takes the voting consent of the majority for the right to represent all adult persons in all political matters (including even on those matters where the opinion of the voting majority does not accord with that of the party they have, nevertheless, voted to power) for so long as the winning party is in office,<sup>51</sup> then the nature of representation under the Ashanti political system would seem to be radical in its ability to secure substantive representation in all matters of political decision-making for every adult member. This, Wiredu explains, was achieved by the fact that, as a rule, consensus was the mode of electing all members of the political councils, including the council heads, and ‘the king of the Ashantis, at the highest level of traditional government.’<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the content of decisions carried out by council were not only achieved by consensus in council but, further, by the consensus and approval of the population through consultations with ‘the young people’s association’ that was constituted in every Ashanti town.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps more radical was the absence of a party structure. If Wiredu’s descriptions are accurate, the institutional feasibility of the Ashanti system relied on the fact that such parties as did exist were not organised solely to secure political power, and to keep it to the exclusion of all others. Under the Ashanti system all existing parties were ‘partners in power’ and, as such, there could be no party “out” of power.<sup>54</sup>

I do not believe Wiredu aims to paint a falsely utopian picture of precolonial African history, since that history is not set apart from the rest of the world’s by a paucity of wars and conflicts.<sup>55</sup> Wiredu’s point, however, is that there are other ways— besides multiparty majoritarianism — of organising political life that better meet society’s representative needs and democracy’s own moral ambitions.

At least two difficulties arise from Wiredu's attempts to secure the consensual possibilities for our democratic futures in the example of Africa’s deliberative past, and Emmanuel Eze articulates them well. First, Wiredu acknowledges that ‘the conditions of traditional political life were surely less complicated than those of the present. The kinship networks that provided

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 305.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 307-8.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 306-8.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 306, 308.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 308.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 303-5, 309.

the mainstay of the consensual politics of traditional times are simply incapable of serving the same purposes in modern Africa', and in most other places.<sup>56</sup> Yet, as Eze correctly assesses, in his own analysis Wiredu undervalues the role of such ancestral and kinship ties in supporting the picture he paints of consensual practice among the Ashanti, and perhaps elsewhere in precolonial Africa.<sup>57</sup> Eze suggests that this, also, causes Wiredu to overestimate the role of "rationality", that it was—as Wiredu states—by 'logical persuasiveness [and] 'simply rational discussion'<sup>58</sup> that consensus was had in the Ashanti political system.<sup>59</sup> Both analytical issues present Eze with a normative dilemma: if we determine that consensual politics holds radical possibilities for our democratic futures but the ties that secured the foundations of its practiced past no longer exist or are too different to be relied upon, then by what should the future of a radical consensual democracy be organised?<sup>60</sup>

For Eze, Wiredu's ideas that individuals can achieve decision-making consensus (that is, consensus about what is to be done)<sup>61</sup> even when they have no moral or normative substance tying them together, that there can be 'agreed actions without necessarily agreed notions'<sup>62</sup> simply by 'rational dialogue,' is not only an inadequate representation of Ashanti 'social conditions,'<sup>63</sup> it is further a misunderstanding of what is to be considered "rational" where 'the possibility of absolute justice' cannot be guaranteed.<sup>64</sup> Competition and conflict must be perceived as "rational" in a world where people first experience themselves as individuals—and where, as a result, even 'agreed notions do not necessarily produce agreed actions.'<sup>65</sup> Those things, therefore, that we may perceive as "irrational" or as without 'reason'—non dialogic mythologies of communal belonging, for example— may be of the utmost significance.<sup>66</sup>

If, for the present purpose, we understand rationality to mean, simply, the grounds on which we structure, and the reasons by which we explain the orders of our societies<sup>67</sup> then, perhaps inadvertently, Eze's critique identifies what we may call a communal rationality, capable of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 309.

<sup>57</sup> Eze, "A Response," 316-8.

<sup>58</sup> Wiredu, "A Plea for a Non-party Polity," 305-6.

<sup>59</sup> Eze, "A Response," 317-9

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 318.

<sup>61</sup> Wiredu, "Democracy by Consensus."

<sup>62</sup> Wiredu, "A Plea for a Non-party Polity," 304.

<sup>63</sup> Eze, "A Response," 318.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 319-320.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, Note 12, 323.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 317-8.

<sup>67</sup> The fundamental question, and meaning, of rationality is nearly endless in the various canons of philosophy across the globe and will not be dealt with here. My modest aim is to mark out the ways in which the term has been used in, and which most appropriately relates to, the theory of consensual democracy.

grounding his and Wiredu's arguments about the nature of human interaction and the character of reason in a consensual conception of deliberative democratic practice. I want to suggest that what those such as Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani have called 'extraneous factors,'<sup>68</sup> and what Eze himself describes as criteria beyond the realm of "reason" do, indeed, come under a morally defensible rationality of their own. It may seem 'extreme'<sup>69</sup> for Eze to understand that the legitimation and 'exercise of public power relies heavily on mythologies and symbols' of communal belonging whose authority over us is often more profound than the legitimacy we imagine accordable to dialogue made reasonable by other criteria.<sup>70</sup> Such a position seems absurd, however, only if we imagine it irrational for people to consider more seriously, with greater faith, the ideas and arguments of those they are capable of proving equipped, if only to themselves, with a communal affection—and, in particular, on those decisions capable of affecting some of the most personal, intimate, and paramount areas of our individual and communal lives.

Eze might be mistaken to suggest that the bonds of community achieve legitimating effects for 'little or no "reason".'<sup>71</sup> In truth, what he really seems to mean is that the character or nature of reason by which those things we achieve only through communal engagement are substantiated—such as deliberation and the kind of democracy that could be its outcome—cannot be grounded in purely 'ordinary,' or individualised bases of rationality.<sup>72</sup> Eze's mistake then, is to unduly uphold "reason" and "rationality" to special status, when they belong as concretely to his and Wiredu's normative tasks as they have been wielded by the differing philosophical agendas of others.<sup>73</sup>

There is a communally-based understanding of society's organizing principle capable of securing the challenge that Emmanuel Eze sets out for Wiredu—that many modern, secular, culturally pluralistic societies, no longer held together by precolonial traditions (I believe this applies as much to non-African countries as it does to societies on the Continent) must find new ties of social and communal attachment untethered to the dominance of state power.<sup>74</sup> This

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<sup>68</sup> Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani, "On Traditional African Consensual Rationality," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 22, no. 3 (2014): 351-2.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 347-8.

<sup>70</sup> Eze, "A Response," 317.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Eze, *On Reason*, 82-9.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* Chapter 5, 250.

<sup>74</sup> Eze, "A Response", 318

communally-based rationality is outlined by Wiredu himself though he does not, I think, sufficiently defend it in his arguments regarding consensual democracy.

A communal rationality informs a certain kind of behavioural ethics that guides how we interact with one another in any given society. It is an ethics that ‘if all the members of any community were to run completely short of due regard for the interests of other people in their behaviour, that community would regress into brutish chaos. Conduct cognizant of that constraint is what morality is.’<sup>75</sup> A communal rationality, therefore, positively accepts our moral dependencies on each other. Its major normative prescription is that we ought to consider ‘the interests of others’ in our outward actions.<sup>76</sup> That those to whom we have been considerate in our actions are, in their own actions, more likely to consider us with greater care in turn.

For a thorough understanding of the operations of a consensual democracy, this notion of communal rationality is not to be brought under a purely individualised explanation of deliberative reasoning.<sup>77</sup> Rather, a communal rationality is what makes Wiredu’s use of individual reason and rationality sensible. Take, for instance, what Wiredu describes about the importance of compromise and reciprocity to decisional consensus—this is where deliberative participants come to unified acceptance of a decision even where what Wiredu calls ‘normative consensus’—that is, agreement as to moral beliefs— cannot be reached.<sup>78</sup> Decisional consensus, Wiredu states, depends on ‘the willingness on the part of all concerned ... to contemplate with equanimity the prospect of not getting ones way all the time. Interpersonally, such a frame of mind... translates into a reciprocity that can have far reaching consequences.’ Wiredu goes on, ‘[t]he point, now, is that the right compromises are made not by virtue of any additional inquiries into facts and values but out of a certain kind of commitment to the general good. Such compromises are not irrational on this account, but their rationality is a rationality of attitude.’<sup>79</sup> Wiredu also states, ‘rational dialogue is a necessary condition of consensus. But it does not of itself yield consensus.’<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, “On the Idea of a Global Ethic,” *Journal of Global Ethics* 1, no.1 (2005): 45.

<sup>76</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, “Society and Democracy in Africa,” *New Political Science* 21, no. 1 (1999): 34-5; Wiredu, “Preliminaries Concerning Communalism,” 33.

<sup>77</sup> As Ani attempts, “African Consensual Rationality.”

<sup>78</sup> Wiredu, “Democracy by Consensus,” 235-7.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 237-8.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 237.

Underlying Wiredu's ability to speak of decisional consensus as the 'prize' to 'rational discussion'<sup>81</sup> and 'dialogue'<sup>82</sup> is the logic that structures of consensual deliberative practice sustain, and are sustained by, a different kind of rationality to the purely individualised one that is at least partially necessary at the point of deliberating. A behavioural communal ethics that enables any given society to approach not only the politically-determinant interactions of its inhabitants, but all sub-political social interactions, with an aim to consensus is of the utmost importance to Wiredu's understanding of consensual democracy.<sup>83</sup> It is only this communal rationality, which must underpin the human interactive function within society,<sup>84</sup> that is capable of making possible the procedural operation of governing structures by which political decisions are reached and agreed to by all through individually reasoned discussion.<sup>85</sup>

Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani has noted the problem in Wiredu's attempt to dislocate decisional consensus about what *is* to be done—which Wiredu states relates most directly to consensual democracy—from a 'cognitive' or 'normative consensus' about what *ought* to be done.<sup>86</sup> With Ani, I do not think most stable-minded people agree to *do* a thing they also believe is *not* the right thing to do—not without those reservations that permanently threaten an agreement's undoing.<sup>87</sup> Note that this is not equivalent to a person agreeing to an action with others though they do not necessarily align with all the normative points leading to that agreement, and as such being capable of reaching a compromise on a political decision though they are not especially wedded to some of the normative ideals behind them. The mistake that I think surrounds some of Wiredu's conceptions is the idea that the latter situation is the one that defines the majority of politically-determinant interactions in which we find ourselves.<sup>88</sup> Rather, in a not-small number of instances, most of us do not simply hold an opinion on a matter, we hold a *belief* that as much influences our decisions about what to do on a matter as it may relate to a normative ideal.<sup>89</sup> Our ability to come to decisional consensus will, therefore, in many cases depend on being persuaded into normative consensus with others. As Wiredu himself notes, 'there is no such thing as compromise as to beliefs regarding what ought to be

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<sup>81</sup> Wiredu, "A Plea for a Non-party Polity," 306-7.

<sup>82</sup> Wiredu, "Democracy by Consensus," 236-7.

<sup>83</sup> Wiredu, "A Plea for a Non-party Polity," 303; Wiredu, "Society and Democracy," 36.

<sup>84</sup> Ajei, "Prospects for Practice," 445-451, 457.

<sup>85</sup> Wiredu, "Democracy by Consensus," 237.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 235-8.

<sup>87</sup> Ani, "On Agreed Actions," 316.

<sup>88</sup> Wiredu, "Democracy by Consensus," 236.

<sup>89</sup> Ani, "On Agreed Actions," 313-6.

done. One cannot say with any degree of propriety something like “I believe that we ought to do A, but, in the interests of the community, I am going to believe that we ought to do B.”<sup>90</sup>

Wiredu’s argument that the two kinds of consensus he identifies can be agreeably separated leads him to the further point that it is by “rational” dialogue and discussion that people are persuaded to decisional consensus even where such a mechanism may be insufficient to normative consensus.<sup>91</sup> I want to suggest that Wiredu is able to make this separation between decisional and normative consensus, and further to foreground the importance of individually-reasoned dialogue in attaining the former because the society Wiredu imagines capable of supporting his ideas is operated by a communal rationality that makes possible high degrees of communal trust,<sup>92</sup> ‘reciprocity’, and ‘compromise’ among participants who though they may not have the same normative beliefs in all relevant things, are yet able to, as Wiredu says, willingly suspend any ‘disbelief’<sup>93</sup> that on matters of political concern, each fellow inhabitant will deliberate with reciprocity and with the interests of the others in mind, just as she will have proved herself to behave in all other areas of social engagement. Individualised reason, and the explicability it is capable of giving the deliberative dialogue of Wiredu’s understanding, is mediated through a communally based rationality.

The reason of communal interdependency, of what Wiredu calls ‘communalism’<sup>94</sup>— what Gyekye has called ‘moderate communitarianism’<sup>95</sup>—and which lies at the unifying heart of Wiredu’s deliberative thought is, further, what explains the latter’s ability to speak of human beings as having a ‘rock bottom identity of interests.’<sup>96</sup> The understanding is not, as some seem to have taken it, that even within morally tight-knit communities the specified material interests of its individuals will be identical.<sup>97</sup> It is, rather, a normative prescription— that the nature of our communal dependencies on one another, in any given society, makes it desirable, morally advisable, that we find ways of making compatible those among our material interests that

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<sup>90</sup> Wiredu, “Democracy by Consensus,” 236-7

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 236-7.

<sup>92</sup> It is perhaps not too dissimilar a notion underlying Robert D. Putnam’s notion of social capital. See *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>93</sup> Wiredu, “Democracy by Consensus,” 236-7.

<sup>94</sup> Wiredu, “Society and Democracy,” 33-44; Wiredu, “Preliminaries Concerning Communalism,” 333-4.

<sup>95</sup> Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, Ch. 2. For further discussion: Ifeanyi Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,” in *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. Richard A. Wright (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); Segun Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

<sup>96</sup> Wiredu, “A Plea for a Non-party Polity,” 306; Ajei, “Prospects for Practice,” 451.

<sup>97</sup> See Eze, “A Response,” 318-20; Bernard Matolino, “A Response to Eze’s Critique of Wiredu’s Consensual Democracy,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 1 (2009): 39-40.

accord with an ethics of communal reciprocity. For even within such an ethical remit, there will be wide room for divergencies of particularistic concern.<sup>98</sup>

Eze's challenge is that 'the interests of some members... of a society may be to dominate the rest, for the sheer morbid enjoyment of power... how is such ... "interest" of the dictator reconcilable with that of the dominated? [For example] ... How do the commercial interests of a Texan oil company, or the Anglo-Dutch Shell... to get oil out of the soil as quickly... as possible, coincide with the ... survival interests of ... the Ogonis?'<sup>99</sup> But this is, I think, Wiredu's precise point. Where, as in Eze's Ogoni example, the presented material interests of one group seeks to threaten the very existence of another, we do not, on at least one side, have the presentation of a true or ethical interest, nor indeed a set of persons mutually engaged in a communal rationality they could be equipped, by deliberative consensus, to sustaining.

Wiredu is not engaging us simply to think about how we may better practice deliberation as a means of securing practicably tolerable negotiations to morally intolerable concerns,<sup>100</sup> or for the benefit of deliberative decisions whose major epistemic value is not the moral sustenance of a communal rationality.<sup>101</sup> He is asking that we envisage the kinds of communities even capable of supporting a thorough-going consensual deliberative practice and requiring, in turn, of being morally maintained by the formalised political structuring of such engagements.

In this case, our conceptualizations of deliberation cannot be about the supposedly "objective" quality of decisions arrived at in settings under which participants are forced to accept each other's assumed equalities, moral or otherwise.<sup>102</sup> Nor can our ideas about deliberation be merely about the procedural justification conferred through its mechanics.<sup>103</sup> Rather, where

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<sup>98</sup> Wiredu, "Society and Democracy," 34.

<sup>99</sup> Eze, "A Response," 318.

<sup>100</sup> As might be part of Matolino's concern "A Response to Eze's Critique," 40.

<sup>101</sup> This seems to me the task taken on, for example, by Ani, "African Consensual Rationality." See Wiredu, "Society and Democracy," 33-36.

<sup>102</sup> For such arguments, see Joshua Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in *The Good Polity: Normative Analysis of the State*, eds. Alan Hamlin and Philip Petit (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 17-34; Joshua Cohen, "Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 95-119; Joshua Cohen, "Reflections on Rousseau: Autonomy and Democracy," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 15 (1986): 275-295.

<sup>103</sup> For such arguments, see Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1996); Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson *Why Deliberative Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996); Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975); Jurgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979); Simone Chambers, "Democratic Deliberative Theory," *American Review of Political Science* 6 (2003): 307-327; David Estlund, "Beyond Fairness and Deliberation: The Epistemic Dimension of Democratic Authority," in *Deliberative Democracy*:

(consensual) deliberation is made sense of as an operational support for, and outcome of, a communally oriented rationality, then deliberative settings become capable, as Wiredu notes, of presupposing and coping with ‘original position[s] of diversity.’<sup>104</sup> They become sites in which our equalities, freedoms, and interests are not assumed but, persistently— communally—interrogated and, if needs be, reciprocally recalibrated.<sup>105</sup> By a communal rationality does deliberation become a means of assessing, regenerating, and sustaining the ties by which modern communities, through their own agencies, come to reimagine and remake themselves.

## Freedom and the Reason of Consensual Dependency

Perhaps the most intriguing part of Eze’s challenge to Wiredu is Eze’s understanding that the impetus to append consensus to an ideal of democracy may not save us from the fact that democracy, ‘truly’ speaking, is not really defined by the mode of its operation. It is, rather, ‘a political culture’ capable— depending on time and space — of being continuously moulded by the society that operates it, to the needs of that society.<sup>106</sup> It is difficult to disagree. But the question Wiredu is forcing us to answer is whether there are mechanisms for operating democracy which would seem more seamlessly compatible with that very spirit or “culture” Eze suggests as belonging to a “true” democracy. Indeed, he is forcing us to question the very moral grounds that seem to uphold now the most popular operation of democracy, and to query whether there are no preferable others.

Possibly in answer, Emmanuel Eze writes,

It seems to me that a society opts for [a democratic] form for political life for the reasons Wiredu tells us the Ashantis had: “Two heads are better than one,” or, as the Igbos say *Onwe gi onye bu Omada Omachara*: No one individual is Mother Wisdom. Political Wisdom comes in many forms and democracy becomes, in deed, a market place of *competing* — not just consenting or consensing — ideas. The only “consensus” primary to democracy ... if any— is the initial, formal agreement to play by a set of rules... Thus we cannot reduce democracy to one moment of its [possible] outcomes, decisional representation or consensus.<sup>107</sup>

Eze notes that this transformation of democracy into ‘a market place’ of competition results from the fact that human beings are, by the nature of our existences within society, incapable

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*Essays on Reason and Politics*, ed. James Bohman and William Rehg (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997), 173-204; Ani, “African Consensual Rationality.”

<sup>104</sup> Wiredu, “A Plea for a Non-party Polity,” 304; Wiredu, “Democracy by Consensus,” 235-6.

<sup>105</sup> For such examinations, see Okeja, “Justice through Deliberation.”

<sup>106</sup> Eze, “A Response,” 321.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 321.

of achieving an ‘absolute’ form of justice.<sup>108</sup> We live in a ‘condition of relativized desires’ and democracy ‘is one of the several sorts of social framework that a people adopt in order to mediate the struggles and the conflicts that *necessarily* arise from the necessarily competitive nature of individuated identities and desires.’<sup>109</sup>

There is another way of interpreting the underlying truth behind Eze’s arguments. Certainly, the relative condition of our existences would seem to provide the justifiable basis of our conflictual relations in society and the justification, therefore, of an adversarial operation to democratic politics. More fundamentally, however, our inability to attain absolute justice—that is, a form of justice that seeks no reflection against any interests or desires outside those that can be determined to belong, singularly, to any single one of us—is, positively, the product of the fact that we live, for better or worse, under a condition of human dependency. The ‘guarantee ... of absolute justice’ is,<sup>110</sup> *rightly*, unavailable to beings who are, also, not free absolutely. We depend on one another precisely for the reason of Eze’s concern—our ‘individuated identities and desires’ do not occupy spaces of absolute freedom.

Such a relativised understanding of freedom denotes not simply that each person is free up to the limit that others are not.<sup>111</sup> It is, further, that each of us depends on the active aid of others if we are to attain many of the ends in pursuit of which each of us seeks to exercise the sphere of freedom in which we are, at minimum, free from the constraint of others. The operational condition here is dependency. This is not a dependency to be secured simply as a matter of logical necessity and exclusively upon the power of the political state for the false promise of moral independence from every other.<sup>112</sup> It is, rather, nearly the opposite.

The dependency, here, is on one another, in voluntary acknowledgement of the fact that freedom, justice, in an absolute sense, unqualified and without reference to any others, is infeasible, meaningless, and with little to morally recommend it. The moral substance of our dependencies comes from choosing to beneficially regard their nature and choosing also, by deliberation, to structurally sustain these dependencies. It is this recognition of communal dependency, which is — perhaps ironically — illuminated through Eze’s reservations about

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>111</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>112</sup> See Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, trans. Judith R. Masters (New York: St Martin's Press, 1978), 77; Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1979). See also, Arthur Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 98-99.

the import of consensus to a fundamental view of democracy, that also sustains Wiredu's thesis about the significance of reciprocity and compromise to decisional consensus.<sup>113</sup>

Additionally, it is the protection of the very individual of Eze's considerations that is sought by a consensual form of democracy and the logic of communal dependency that underpins it. 'All persons,' Wiredu says, 'have the moral right not to have their interests and concerns affected by actions or forbearances that do not enjoy their consent.'<sup>114</sup> The right, Wiredu says, amounts to 'a fundamental human right.'<sup>115</sup> Such a view supremely recognises the intolerableness of a political arrangement that could claim to formally structure our communal dependencies to the discount of any one among our number. In such a case, by which others will that person's share of free action be unjustly absorbed? And upon the just share of which others will the wrongful gain eventually encroach? If it is possible that a consensual form of democracy is that under which the interests of every individual, if not every individual interest, is most credibly protected, precisely because of the notion of communal dependency that upholds it,<sup>116</sup> then perhaps we should consider consensus— despite Eze's suspicions, and upon his own suppositions— constitutive of a fundamental conception of democracy.

We may interpret Wiredu's arguments in favour of consensual democracy as, also, an appeal that we make a particular kind of moral choice regarding deliberation— that it become not a means of assuming shared equalities, but of structuring the possibilities for their persistent regulation. And that we choose to accept the promise of deliberation's mechanics so long as we are, also, convinced by the reasons capable of sustaining and rationalising its operation.

In defence of what he calls an 'ordinary' philosophical— what I have been calling an "individualised" —notion of reason, Eze writes: if 'I could not know that *this* is a tree if there were no tree in existence, neither could I cognitively recognise the existing object for what it is without my capacity to form its concept, such as *tree*.'<sup>117</sup> "Reason," and all the features of humanity that arise from its function must, therefore, be understood to take its most fundamental meaning from the autonomous mental activity of each individual human being.<sup>118</sup> It seems true that because we are all individually capable of conceptualising the object of a tree, for example, that the seat of reason must also be located in the individual mind. I do not

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<sup>113</sup> Wiredu, "Democracy by Consensus."

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 231.

<sup>115</sup> Wiredu, "A Plea for a Non-party Polity," 307.

<sup>116</sup> Wiredu, "Society and Democracy," 34-5; Ajei, "Prospects for Practice," 448, 451.

<sup>117</sup> Eze, *On Reason*, 86.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 84-5

aim to deny this. Simply to add, that the subjective interest each person may have in observing a tree and calling it one does not seem unrelated to the fact that numerous others are similarly subjectively interested in the nature of trees, their elements, uses, the reasons for their unqualified being. This, in no way, amounts to the conclusion that a tree is not a tree (or whatever name we might give it) unless we all agree it is. It is, however, to say that in a great number of cases, our interests are given both practical and intellectual outline by the fact that we are, gratefully, rarely ever the only ones productively interested in a subject, nor engaged by any object capable of being brought under subjectivity.

My concern here is not simply one of language, nor of the socialising agencies that make communicative action possible.<sup>119</sup> I, also, do not wish to be misinterpreted as suggesting that communal interests are what *determine* individual ones. I am suggesting, however, that regardless of the multi-various factors that may determine the active interests and goals of any given individual, those interests would seem to also be given substantive meaning (not least to the individual holder of that interest), by the fact that they can usually be identified with by a rarely insignificant number of others (who may, again, have come to those interests for their own equally incalculable reasons). This applies even to those interests in which we might imagine ourselves solitarily engaged, for there are few ideas held in a single mind alone or sustained entirely by the efforts of any one individual's reason, no matter how great that individual seat may seem.

If the moral and intellectual substance given by the community to the individual is not, at least, unequal to that the individual may give to the community, then the reason of communal dependency would seem to provide necessary and sufficient grounds for the proposal that in those matters of social and political life that seek the regulation of our actions, and which threaten always the balance of our freedoms in relation to those of all others, that we order our communal interdependencies by the consensus and agreement of all. By doing so, we give our dependencies a moral substance. The resulting *consensual* dependency will be in no way a subordination of the 'interests of the individual to those of the community,' or vice versa. It will be simply a moral understanding voluntarily recognising and accepting the 'symmetrical' and mutually substantiating relationship between the two.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> For such examinations, see Wiredu, *Cultural Universals*, Chapters 7 and 8; Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984); Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 2*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

<sup>120</sup> Wiredu, "Preliminaries Concerning Communalism," 334; Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 36-41.

In the recent literature that has proceeded from the communication between Emmanuel Eze's and Kwasi Wiredu's intellectual ideas, there has been a tendency to follow a line of thinking that sees an individualised rationality as rationality's "pure" form and as, therefore, logically exclusionary to any communally based structure of reason capable of ordering political society. In fact, this line of examination has rendered unintelligible, beyond "rationality's" bounds, what it calls those 'scaffolding elements' which may, in any given society, be the structural source of a communalised mode of behaviour.<sup>121</sup> Even according to those arguments where the latter is deemed of some significance— in particular, to the structure of "epistemically sound" deliberations —the apparent disparity of 'factors' capable of being subsumed by the notion of communality has seemed enough to defeat the latter's consideration as a form of rationality and, therefore, as a sustainable, dependable, means by which we may validly structure our political societies.<sup>122</sup>

But there is no necessary concession in the understanding that if, 'for the individual, community life is not optional'— with the latter understood as more than merely political association— it is justly the result of the primacy of each individual capacity, which the community both supports and utilises in its definitions of itself.<sup>123</sup> Nor do developments in such normative understandings warrant the claim that our individual capacities are "supplied" by the community. It suffices simply to acknowledge that most of us, in significant areas of our lives, benefit from the moral and intellectual assistance of others, regardless of the "ultimate" source of these.<sup>124</sup> The morality of a radically consensual politics is, therefore, furnished by the understanding that we are all, *individually*, capable of considering —as much as we are of ignoring— the fact that there are few of our outward actions not consequential to the needs and interests of numerous others whose deeds affect, also, the manner of each of our own lives.

On the strength of Wiredu's plea, the especial concern of this chapter has been to not take for granted what Eze says he 'assumes,' that 'society and history are constructed, made by individuals or groups of individuals acting... within and out of relationships to nature, to self,

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<sup>121</sup> Bernard Matolino, "Rationality and Consensus in Kwasi Wiredu's Traditional African Politics," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 63, no. 146 (March 2016): 36-55.

<sup>122</sup> Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani, "Some Implications of Arguing that Deliberation is Purely Rational," *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, 37: 303-313.

<sup>123</sup> Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 42-4; also, D.A. Masolo, "Western and African Communitarianism: A Comparison," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 495-6.

<sup>124</sup> I agree with Eze that it is not necessary, for our purposes, to be drawn into the argument between an "internalist" and "externalist" camp about whether man's capacity to reason has a source prior to her existence among other human beings or whether our reason is always mediated by all those socio-historical and material experiences that define what is, at least, perceptible to us about human existence. *On Reason*, 82-3.

and to others.’<sup>125</sup> If an understanding of communal rationality makes consensual democracy practicable, that of a communal dependency— and the possibilities for a *consensual* dependency —morally validate it.

Uchenna Okeja has argued that the kind of consensual deliberative practice envisaged by Wiredu should not be interpreted as itself ‘a form of [traditional] African democracy.’ But as, instead, the ‘practices of deliberation that made genuine democracy possible.’<sup>126</sup> At the core of Wiredu’s arguments, however, is not simply a theoretical reflection on an African traditional past.<sup>127</sup> His arguments are, more importantly, a normative examination of precisely how *true* a democracy is made possible by societies for who consensual deliberation is the reflexive practice of individuals who think of their outward actions always in relation to others’ interests.

It can, surely, not be any kind of democracy, and what is “genuine” about it may be precisely what Eze describes: that the ultimate end of a true democracy’s procedural engagements must be its own internal sustenance, by which all the moral possibilities imagined by the community that defines itself by it are mutually supported.<sup>128</sup> Is it not such a democracy that characterises a form of political representation the fundamental procedure for which is not morally distinguishable from the inner social function that operates the community that operates it?

## Conclusion: African Political Thought and Deliberative Democratic Theory

‘What difference,’ Emmanuel Eze asks, ‘does history make to thoughts of method?’<sup>129</sup> I would like to pose the question another way: what difference does history (and our perceptions of it) make to the method of our thoughts? If the difference is substantive then there are, I think, few other areas of political theory and political philosophy more capable of meeting a present challenge than the one critically specified by the historical (not particularistic)<sup>130</sup> experiences of an African geography.

That “challenge” is a post-colonial world, which is the result of an imperial project whose aim— ‘with an air of normality,’ and ‘with arguments drawn from science, morality, ethics,

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<sup>125</sup> Eze, *On Reason*, 84.

<sup>126</sup> Uchenna Okeja, “Palavar and Consensus,” 573.

<sup>127</sup> Ajei, “Prospects for Practice,” 446-7.

<sup>128</sup> Eze, “A Response,” 320-1

<sup>129</sup> Eze, *On Reason*, 137.

<sup>130</sup> Ajei, “Prospects for Practice,” 458.

and a *general* philosophy [emphasis added]— has been to ‘change the uselessly unoccupied territories of the world into useful new versions of the European metropolitan society.’<sup>131</sup> The ‘past degradations of our humanity, degradations of humanity tout court are [therefore as] fresh... in subjective memories... [as they are deeply embedded in all our] critical public institutions.’<sup>132</sup> There are few other branches of political theory and philosophy that ought to be more unafraid, more critically equipped, and with not so much left to lose in providing some modest, but invaluable contribution to what an honest, genuinely ‘humanist,’ world might look like.<sup>133</sup>

But perhaps the difference of historical perspective to an intellectual agenda is not so great. Perhaps Wiredu is inaccurate in his assessments that the ‘tendency to identify government by the consent of the people, that is, democracy, with government by the consent of the majority is ... born of *excessive* [emphasis added] fixation on Anglo-American models of democracy.’<sup>134</sup> In other words, that there appears an unjustifiable, and ‘politicized’ determination to outline the universalizable structures by which we are all fated to determining our lives on the basis, mostly, of the historical view and experiences of not more than a few—refusing to the majority, the right of intellectual contribution.<sup>135</sup>

Perhaps it is, also, a mistaken assessment that many of the normative presuppositions that foreground the bulk of mainstream theorising on deliberation and deliberative democracy, for instance the often problematically unproblematised assumption of participants’ free equality in the practice of “ideal” deliberations,<sup>136</sup> receive their logical justifications from arguments the historical contexts for which have recently been examined to call into question the intellectual creditability of some among their authors.<sup>137</sup> Even were we to accept, as normative

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<sup>131</sup> Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 77-8.

<sup>132</sup> Eze, *On Reason*, 144

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>134</sup> Wiredu, “Democracy by Consensus,” 233.

<sup>135</sup> Uchenna Okeja, “Palavar and Consensus,” 574.

<sup>136</sup> For further discussion, see Iris Marion Young, “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy,” in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 120-127; Jane Mansbridge, “Using Power/Fighting Power: The Polity,” in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 53-60.

<sup>137</sup> See Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997). On Kant, see Robert Bernasconi, “Kant’s Third Thoughts on Race,” in *Reading Kant’s Geography*, eds. Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: SUNY Press, 2011); Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, “The Colour of Reason: The Idea of “Race” in Kant’s Anthropology,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 103-131. On Locke, see David Armitage, “John Locke, Carolina, and the “Two Treatises of Government”,” *Political Theory* 32 (2004): 602-627; Duncan Ivison, “Locke, Liberalism and Empire,” in *The Philosophy of John Locke: New Perspectives*, ed. Peter R. Anstey (New

prescriptions, an ideal of human freedom and equality as elemental to our notions of deliberation and democracy, we are, at the very least, forced by a post-colonial reality not to assume the elements of their nature, and further to acknowledge the necessity of critically assessing the intellectual methodologies by which we might justify their eventual attainment.

Ani has noted that ‘political paradigms should be examined primarily on their normative potential, much more than on their alleged antecedents in an ancient society that is difficult to access and examine today.’<sup>138</sup> With this we should have little disagreement. But it is, I think, also misguided to believe that our honest assessments about the normative preferability of a thing can or should be divorced from the historical contexts that often situate them, deepen their meaning, and guide their logical extension, critique, and improvement.

The idea that a political theory that takes at least some of its analytical inspirations from an African historical source should be assumed automatically contrary to, or exclusive of, the ambitions of a universalizable political theory and political philosophy is, I suggest, only the result of a current disciplinary predicament in which many of the historically contextualizable assumptions that guide our work have, until far too recently, remained either hidden, inexplicitly stated, or uncritically examined. I do not believe that such a trend has been to the betterment either of our theories or to the societies we intend to be advanced by them.

If African political theory and political philosophy should only succeed in preventing the negation of the ‘historical shapes of our freedoms’<sup>139</sup> and that of every other moral idea we seem to hold dear, then the field will, I think, have proved its universal value, not least to our theories of deliberation and democratic practice.

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<sup>138</sup> Ani, “African Consensual Rationality,” 347.

<sup>139</sup> Eze, *On Reason*, 144.

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