

THE SUPERVENIENCE OF POWERS: A PARADIGMATIC INTERVENTION OF OFO IN THE EXERCISE OF DEMOCRATIC POWER IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: Nigeria’s democratic experience has been characterized by persistent challenges including corruption, electoral malpractices, abuse of power, and legitimacy deficits that undermine effective governance. The inappropriate exercise of democratic power reveals a fundamental disconnection between imported democratic institutions and indigenous spiritual foundations that command genuine reverence from the Nigerian people. This paper examines how democratic power can achieve legitimacy and effectiveness by supervening upon indigenous religious power systems, specifically the *ofo* religious symbol of the Ukwuani culture. Using philosophical analysis and hermeneutics, the paper demonstrates that the religious power of *ofo*, embodying truth, justice, ancestral wisdom, and cosmic accountability, provides the moral foundation necessary for authentic democratic governance. The supervenience relationship establishes spiritual accountability mechanisms that transcend human institutional limitations, ensures democratic power reflects moral principles, and creates collective acceptance. The paper concludes that integrating *ofo* religious ceremonies and principles into key moments of democratic governance—

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including oath-taking, policy-making, judicial proceedings, and electoral processes—offers Nigeria a paradigmatic pathway toward legitimate, accountable, and effective democratic governance that synthesizes universal democratic principles with particular African spiritual realities.

Keywords: *Collective Acceptance, Democratic Power, Legitimacy, Nigeria, Ofo Symbolism, Religious Power, Supervenience.*

1. Introduction

Nigeria as the giant of Africa, as she is popularly called, has undoubtedly struggled to show herself as the exemplar model of democratic governance in Africa and, perhaps, among the black nations of the world. This she has been demonstrating since the return to democracy in 1999 by conducting general elections periodically into the executive and legislative arms. These periodic elections are to further demonstrate that power belongs to the people, as democracy is supposed to be described and practiced. At the judiciary, successive Nigerian governments have also been attempting to establish strong institutions for the purpose of strengthening democracy. In spite of these developments, the exercise of democratic power as presently practiced in Nigeria raises more questions than answers in terms of how much the holders of democratic power and occupants of political positions consider the people as the source and the end of legitimate authority (Njoku 178).

The problem with Nigeria's democratic experience is not merely the absence of democratic structures but the inappropriate exercise of democratic power that undermines the very foundations upon which legitimate governance should rest. Politicians, policy makers, economists and scholars as well as other stakeholders are interested in the re-examination of the exercise of democratic power in the face of corruption, electoral malpractices, nepotism, undue restriction of freedom, brutality and unrestricted use of force, abuse of power, disregard for human rights, acute individualism and unhealthy competitive market, and other activities that are antithetical to the legitimate exercise of democratic authority. Having experienced the actual

exercise of democratic power in Nigeria to the point that the antidemocratic activities mentioned above are beginning to replace the known, albeit imported, democratic ideals, it becomes imperative to look inwards into the possibility of our endogenous cultures and traditions providing the foundational basis upon which democratic power can legitimately supervene.

It is this drive to establish a paradigmatic foundation for the legitimate exercise of democratic power in Nigeria that this research introduces the *ofò* religious symbolism of the Ukwuani culture as a step towards the establishment of traditional African spiritual authority as the supervenient base for democratic power. The central thesis of this work is that democratic power, to be legitimately exercised in Nigeria, must supervene upon the religious power embodied in indigenous symbols like *ofò*. This supervenience relationship suggests that the properties and legitimacy of democratic power are grounded in and depend upon the moral and spiritual authority that *ofò* represents, without reducing democratic power to religious power.

A major objective of this research is to provide a novel paradigm that demonstrates how democratic power can achieve legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness by supervening upon indigenous religious power systems. This approach to addressing the myriad challenges encountered in the exercise of democratic power in Nigeria becomes important to both the rulers and the ruled as it establishes a foundational basis for accountability, harmony, social cohesion, transparency, justice and fairness rooted in African spiritual realities.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theory of collective acceptance is adopted in this paper as a guide to understanding how democratic power can legitimately supervene upon religious power systems like *ofò*. This theoretical framework, developed by philosophers such as John Searle and refined by various scholars, explains how social realities and institutional facts come into existence through collective recognition and acceptance by members of a society.

The theory of collective acceptance posits that certain social phenomena exist only because members of a society collectively accept them as existing. Democratic power, for instance, exists not as a brute physical fact but as an institutional fact that depends on collective acceptance. However, this research introduces a variation of collective acceptance theory that moves beyond mere consensus to incorporate spiritual and moral foundations as the basis for such acceptance. Traditional collective acceptance theory often assumes that consensus alone is sufficient for the creation and maintenance of institutional facts like political authority. This research argues for an enhanced understanding that recognizes the need for collective acceptance to be grounded in deeper spiritual and moral realities. In the context of Nigeria's democratic experience, collective acceptance of democratic power has remained shallow and vulnerable to manipulation because it lacks grounding in indigenous spiritual authorities that command genuine reverence and moral commitment. The enhanced collective acceptance framework suggests that sustainable democratic power emerges when citizens collectively accept democratic authority not merely as a practical arrangement but as a legitimate expression of deeper spiritual and moral principles embodied in traditional religious symbols. When democratic power engages the religious power of *ofò*, it gains legitimacy through collective acceptance that is rooted in spiritual conviction rather than mere pragmatic consent. This spiritual grounding provides the moral foundation necessary for sustained collective acceptance even in times of political crisis or disagreement.

Unlike conventional collective acceptance that can be withdrawn as easily as it is given, collective acceptance grounded in spiritual authority creates more stable and enduring institutional facts. The religious power of *ofò* represents ancestral wisdom, moral truth, and cosmic justice that transcend the immediate interests of political actors, providing a foundation for collective acceptance that is not easily manipulated or undermined by temporary political considerations.

3. Discourses on Concepts

a. Power

Power, in its most fundamental sense, refers to the capacity to influence, control or direct the behaviour of others or the course of events. It manifests in various forms across different spheres of human existence - physical, psychological, economic, social, political, and spiritual. The concept of power has been extensively analyzed by scholars such as Max Weber, Michel Foucault, Steven Lukes, and others who have identified different sources and types of power ranging from coercive force to legitimate authority (Weber 78; Foucault 194; Lukes 16).

Weber's tripartite classification of authority - traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational - provides a foundational understanding of how power achieves legitimacy through different sources (Weber 215). Traditional authority derives from established customs and practices, charismatic authority from the exceptional qualities of individuals, while legal-rational authority stems from impersonal rules and procedures. This classification is particularly relevant for understanding how religious power (traditional/charismatic) can serve as a foundation for democratic power (legal-rational) through supervening relationships.

In the context of this paper, power is understood as a relational phenomenon that exists within networks of social interaction and is constantly being negotiated, contested, and redefined (Giddens 283). Power is not merely about domination or control but involves the capacity to create meaning, establish legitimacy, and generate voluntary compliance. As Arendt argues, power emerges from collective action and shared understanding rather than from individual force or coercion (Arendt 44). This understanding is crucial for examining how different types of power interact and how one form of power can serve as the foundation for another through supervening relationships.

The exercise of power involves both the capacity to act and the recognition of that capacity by others. Without collective recognition, power remains merely potential force rather than legitimate authority. This recognition is what transforms raw

power into legitimate authority that can command voluntary obedience rather than mere compliance through fear or coercion (Beetham 16).

b. Political and Democratic Power

Political power represents the capacity to make binding decisions for a community and to mobilize resources for collective action. It operates within the sphere of governance and involves the ability to create, interpret, and enforce laws and policies that affect the lives of citizens. Political power derives its legitimacy from various sources including tradition, charisma, legal-rational authority, or democratic mandate (Weber 124; Dahl 89).

Democratic power, as a specific form of political power, derives its legitimacy from the consent of the governed and operates through representative institutions, periodic elections, and constitutional frameworks that ensure accountability to the people. Democratic power is characterized by its emphasis on equality, participation, transparency, and respect for individual rights. As Oladipo observes, representative democracy "involves the participation of the people in governance through elected representatives who are accountable to the electorate" (123). The legitimacy of democratic power depends on its ability to reflect the will of the people while protecting minority rights and maintaining institutional frameworks that prevent the abuse of authority.

The understanding of democratic power must encompass various democratic values that characterize its proper exercise. Equality is an indispensable concept in both the understanding and practice of democratic power. It is a value that shows non-discrimination against any citizen on the basis of economic, political, religious or social status (Aderibigbe 212). In terms of governance, policies should not be initiated and implemented for the advantage of individuals or any group of individuals to avoid a situation where some individuals will have political advantage over others (Kastning 10).

Freedom represents another fundamental dimension of democratic power. From the existentialist perspective, as

Agidigbi notes, "freedom is not a property of man which is acquisitive but it is rather the very structure of man" (18). Democratic power should facilitate various forms of freedom including political freedom, economic freedom, personal freedom, religious freedom, and civil liberties. Political freedom entails political participation; civil liberties explain how individuals freely get involved in public affairs; personal freedom means the capacity of the individual to make personal decisions without interference; and religious freedom involves individuals making choices about their spiritual commitments (Foner 16-21).

Justice as a dimension of democratic power ensures equal and fair treatment of individuals. As Opaola illustrates:

Suppose two persons in a place of work are qualified for promotion to the next rank. If one is promoted and other is not, then an injustice has been done to the latter because the treatment is unequal... Justice demands that the two personnel should be promoted at the same time. (122)

This clearly implies that democratic power exercised justly has no place for favouritism of one individual or group over another. The Aristotelian division of justice into particular and universal justice explicates the difference between justice as associated with the individual and justice as associated with the State (Aristotle 172-173).

However, democratic power faces unique challenges in post-colonial contexts like Nigeria where imported democratic institutions often lack deep cultural roots and may conflict with traditional forms of authority. The exercise of democratic power in such contexts often suffers from legitimacy deficits because it is perceived as alien or disconnected from indigenous value systems and spiritual foundations (Wiredu 35; Gyekye 97). Democratic power, to be effectively exercised, must command not only legal authority but also moral authority that resonates with the cultural and spiritual sensibilities of the people. This is where the concept of supervenience becomes crucial - democratic power must be grounded in deeper spiritual and moral realities that provide the foundation for genuine collective acceptance and voluntary compliance.

c. Religious Power

Religious power operates in the spiritual sphere and derives its authority from connection to transcendent realities, ancestral wisdom, and cosmic order. Unlike political power that relies on institutional structures and legal frameworks, religious power draws its legitimacy from spiritual sources that are believed to transcend human manipulation and self-interest. Religious power encompasses moral authority that shapes ethical behavior, provides frameworks for justice, and establishes legitimacy based on spiritual principles (Mbiti 213; Tempels 51; Wiredu 87).

As Azenabor observes, the ontology of African metaphysics is characterized by the interaction of spiritual and material realities:

The ontology of African metaphysics is replete with the idea of Beings- both Spiritual and ancestral, and *forces*- visible and invisible, concrete and abstract. The material has meaning and purpose only through the lenses of the spiritual. In fact, the idea of "Spiritual Empiricism" is the beginning of African metaphysics. With this idea, even nothing becomes something, when the right spiritual apparatus is utilized. The gods, the spirits, the ancestors and vital forces are theoretical schemes and explanatory models in an African metaphysical reality (84).

Moral authority represents the capacity to influence behaviour through ethical persuasion rather than coercion. It emerges from the recognition that certain individuals, institutions, or symbols embody moral principles that deserve respect and voluntary obedience. In traditional African societies, religious symbols like *ofo* embody moral authority because they represent ancestral wisdom, cosmic justice, and spiritual truth that transcend individual interests (Ikenga-Metuh 89; Uchendu 94). Justice, as a dimension of religious power, involves the establishment of moral equilibrium and the restoration of cosmic balance when it has been disrupted by wrongdoing. Religious concepts of justice often emphasize retribution, restoration, and the maintenance of harmony between the spiritual and material realms (Gyekye 132; Achebe 78). This differs from purely legal concepts of justice that focus on procedural fairness and legal compliance. As Ekei notes, "the history of philosophy is marked by different attempts to pin

down the actual meaning of justice, especially, the type that satisfies various interest groups in the State” (171).

The traditional African understanding of justice encompasses both commutative and distributive dimensions, but always within a framework of cosmic accountability. Whether it is the traditional distinction of commutative or distributive justice, individuals are not supposed to take undue advantage over other individuals and the society (Zialcita 3). A democratic state should equitably distribute resources and other social amenities to her citizens without any form of discrimination, but in African religious thought, this obligation extends beyond human accountability to cosmic responsibility.

Legitimacy in the religious sphere derives from alignment with spiritual principles and cosmic order rather than from popular consent or legal authorization. Religious legitimacy is often seen as more fundamental and enduring than political legitimacy because it is grounded in transcendent realities that cannot be changed by human decision (Bell 89; Mudimbe 124). This spiritual legitimacy provides stability and continuity that purely human institutions often lack. Authority in religious contexts represents the recognized right to interpret spiritual principles, mediate between the spiritual and material realms, and enforce moral standards. Religious authority is typically vested in individuals, institutions, or symbols that are believed to have special connection to transcendent realities (Evans-Pritchard 156; Turner 78; Van Gennepe 134). In the case of *ofò*, religious authority derives from its connection to ancestral spirits and cosmic forces that monitor moral behaviour and enforce spiritual accountability.

4. The Exercise of Democratic Power in Nigeria

The exercise of democratic power in Nigeria since 1999 reveals a consistent pattern of failure to promote the core values of moral authority, justice, legitimacy, and authentic authority that should characterize genuine democratic governance. Rather than demonstrating how democratic power can serve as a vehicle for promoting moral principles and spiritual values, Nigeria's

democratic experience has often showcased the exercise of power divorced from moral foundations and spiritual accountability.

One of the basic principles that determines whether democratic power is legitimately exercised in a State that claims to practice democracy is the principle of participation. The exercise of democratic power through political participation during elections has also failed to demonstrate the values of justice, legitimacy, and authentic authority. Political participation during elections, which is regarded as majority decision, should involve engaging the citizens in meaningful ways that reflect spiritual and moral principles. However, the reality in Nigeria shows that the mobilization of voters often occurs through manifestoes, promise of political appointments, financial inducements and coercion/threats (Adesanmi 25). This approach to exercising democratic power demonstrates how disconnected it has become from religious power that would emphasize moral persuasion, spiritual conviction, and authentic commitment to collective welfare.

The exercise of democratic power in policy formulation and implementation has consistently failed to demonstrate accountability to higher spiritual and moral principles. After elections, government policies are often conceived and given birth to by government itself without recourse to the people for the purpose of ascertaining their spiritual and moral alignment with community values (Adelusi 133). This portrays the exercise of democratic power in Nigeria as depicting self-centredness and unaccountability to both the people and to higher spiritual authorities that should provide moral guidance.

The issue of corruption which has undermined the legitimate exercise of democratic power is perhaps the clearest indication of how democratic power in Nigeria operates without supervenience upon religious power systems that would provide moral accountability. Despite the establishment of agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT), the exercise of democratic power continues to be characterized by

corruption because these institutions operate without grounding in spiritual authorities that command genuine reverence and fear of cosmic retribution. According to Jamo, from 2016-2019, there were no data to show how much corruption cases the EFCC had investigated and prosecuted. In 2020, out the 10, 152 petitions received, 7, 340 were investigated while a paltry 865 were prosecuted. A greater percentage of even the prosecuted ones were low profile cases while the high profile ones were ignored (190). This demonstrates how the exercise of democratic power fails when it is not grounded in religious power systems that would ensure cosmic justice regardless of political influence or social status.

The dispensation of justice as an exercise of democratic power has also failed to demonstrate the values that should characterize power that supervenes upon spiritual authority. In Nigeria, there is a popular aphorism: 'go to court' which is used to deride the Nigerian judiciary and reflects how the exercise of democratic power in the judicial sphere lacks moral authority and spiritual legitimacy. The aphorism means that as long as one is in power or has a deep pocket, he or she can buy judgment, demonstrating how democratic power operates without the moral constraints that would exist if it were grounded in religious power systems. The infamous removal of Walter Onnoghen as the Chief Justice of Nigeria by Muhammadu Buhari in 2019 on allegations of non-declaration of assets exemplifies how democratic power can be exercised without regard for spiritual principles of justice and moral authority. Against constitutional provisions, the Chairman of the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) recommended his suspension without trial and the then President swiftly acted out the script. Only recently, the Court of Appeal discharged and acquitted him of any wrong doing, demonstrating how the exercise of democratic power without spiritual grounding can lead to injustice and the violation of moral principles.

The exercise of democratic power in relation to freedom and human rights has also consistently failed to promote the values that should characterize power grounded in spiritual authority. Cases in which citizens attempt to express themselves

have been met with numerous acts of rights violation by the government through the actions of security agencies. The #Endsars protest in October 2020 across major cities in Nigeria was met with alleged killing of innocent, armless and defenceless protesters at the popular Lekki Toll gate (Uwazuruike 2-5; Dami 173). The August 1-10, 2024 #EndBadGovernance protest also saw security agents killing many persons while 76 minors were incarcerated and arraigned in court for treasonable felony.

All these accounts demonstrate how the exercise of democratic power in Nigeria has consistently failed to promote the values of moral authority, justice, legitimacy, and authentic authority that should characterize governance. The failures reveal the urgent need for democratic power to supervene upon religious power systems that would provide the spiritual and moral foundations necessary for legitimate governance.

5. The Religious Power of *Ofo*: An Expository Discourse

Among the Igbo, *Ofo* is generally referred to as the symbol of justice as well as that of authority and has spiritual, social and political functions (Ajaebili et al 105; Asigbo & Ogbonna 11). In this paper, the role of *ofo* among the Ukwuani people, regarded as the Western Igbo people (Opone 376) of Nigeria but are generally called the Delta Igbo, is going to be specifically discussed from their cultural perspective. The *ofo* as a religious symbol is a stick carved from a sacred tree known as *detarium elastica* whose invisible and cosmic forces depict truth, justice and authority. In many Ukwuani communities, the *ofo* also comes from another sacred tree called *ogilishi* (*Newbouldia Laevis*) which normally stands tall at the centre of family compounds, streets and communities. There are two major types of *ofo*: the visible (physical) and the invisible. The visible is the carved stick with red piece of cloth and cowries tied to one end while the invisible constitutes the cosmic or vital forces that inhabit the *ofo* stick prepared to represent each ancestor at the various levels of the family, street and community. Ritual activities meant to manifest the *ofo* are performed so that the spirit of the dead, who is always someone that lived an upright live, is kept active. From the *ofo* tree

to the *ofò* itself at various levels, there is interaction of forces which promote the values that are fundamental to entrenching democratic attitudes in the individuals. Ogbenika justifies this when he asserts that “... forces do not exist in isolation. All the forces are connected and because they are related, they influence one another. Forces are also hierarchically arranged, making it possible for a higher force to influence a lower force” (26). Each *ofò* symbolizes an ancestor within the family for the family *ofò*; the street *ofò* is a combination of the *ofò* of every ancestor in each of the families that make up the street while the community *ofò* is the combination of the *ofò* of every ancestor in the entire streets or quarters that make up the community.

Ofò is crucial in this study because of the social, political and religious roles it plays in human lives. As a symbol of truth, justice and authority that it represents in Igbo communities (whether in South-Eastern Nigeria or among the Ukwuani of Nigeria’s South-South), it is significant in the promotion of the democratic values. It is importantly meant to organize societies for a peaceful, harmonious, egalitarian and co-existent living. It encourages participation in decision making without supporting the liberal democratic approach of majoritarianism. When the *ofò* is presented before a meeting at various levels, the participants are conscious of the fact that no one is out to undo others by the reason of numbers where democracy deals with simple or two-third majority. This is because *ofò* is a symbol of covenant with some invisible forces as the spiritual anchor behind covenant. Decisions therefore are about the welfare of the people and everyone talks with a family bond in mind. Njoku thus opines:

Through covenant or a socio-religious pact, persons or families who are not in any way related by blood come to establish a blood relationship or something like it in which they commit themselves to the pursuit of their well-being as members of the same blood-related family (232).

This mindset can be extended to the practice of democracy in Nigeria which has seen much of the politics of exclusivism. When people sit together for deliberations in a gathering, everyone is expected to make his contribution without a feeling of being intimidated or of conceiving the plan to intimidate others.

The visible *ofò* may not be in the gathering but the invisible is always in the midst of the people. The following expressions show the inclusivity which the *ofò* acknowledges:

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| (1) <i>Ofo eji onu mmalu</i> | <i>Ofo</i> does not gag the individual (Freedom of Expression) |
| (2) <i>Ofo eji ije ukui</i> | <i>Ofo</i> does not stop you from taking steps (Freedom of Movement) |
| (3) <i>Ofo egbo ndu</i> | <i>Ofo</i> does not prevent life (Right to Life) |
| (4) <i>Ofo choni nzuko</i> | <i>Ofo</i> encourages togetherness (Freedom of Association) |

All of the above are similar to the freedoms mentioned in the Chapter four of the Nigerian Constitution. But these freedoms are not limitless and come with repercussions when breached. There is freedom of expression but the *ofò* would not condone guiles and lies; it also permits movement but not when an individual goes to places where evil is perpetuated. Life is sacred and must be protected by persons. Individuals who cut people's life short must have theirs cut short as well by *ofò*. *Ofo na so egba ojo* (*Ofo* forbids bad company). Any association that undermines the integrity of one's lineage must be avoided.

The religious power of *ofò* operates through two major dimensions: the visible (physical) and the invisible (spiritual). The visible is the carved stick with red piece of cloth and cowries tied to one end while the invisible constitutes the cosmic or vital forces that inhabit the *ofò* stick prepared to represent each ancestor at the various levels of the family, street and community. The religious power of *ofò* is hierarchically organized, creating a network of spiritual authority that extends from the family level through the street level to the community level. Each *ofò* symbolizes an ancestor within the family for the family *ofò*; the street *ofò* is a combination of the *ofò* of every ancestor in each of the families that make up the street while the community *ofò* is the combination of the *ofò* of every ancestor in the entire streets or quarters that make

up the community. This hierarchical organization of religious power provides a model for how democratic power could be organized to reflect spiritual principles and moral accountability at every level of governance.

The religious power of *ofò* operates through principles that directly address the deficits observed in Nigeria's exercise of democratic power. As a symbol of truth, the religious power of *ofò* demands absolute honesty in all dealings and creates cosmic consequences for deception and falsehood. This stands in stark contrast to the culture of lies and deception that characterizes much of Nigeria's political discourse. As a symbol of justice, the religious power of *ofò* ensures that moral equilibrium is maintained and that wrongdoing receives appropriate cosmic retribution regardless of the social or political status of the perpetrator. The religious power of *ofò* also embodies authentic authority that derives from spiritual legitimacy rather than political manipulation. Unlike democratic power that can be acquired through electoral manipulation or political maneuvering, the authority represented by *ofò* is grounded in ancestral wisdom and cosmic order that cannot be manipulated by human ambition or self-interest. This authentic authority provides a foundation for legitimate governance that transcends the temporary interests of political actors.

6. Implications of *Ofo* for Democratic Governance

The religious power of *ofò* has profound implications for democratic governance that address the fundamental challenges observed in Nigeria's democratic experience. First, the spiritual accountability embodied in *ofò* provides a mechanism for ensuring that those who exercise democratic power remain accountable not only to the people but also to higher spiritual principles that transcend political calculation. When democratic power supervenes upon the religious power of *ofò*, political leaders become aware that their actions have cosmic consequences that cannot be escaped through political influence or legal manipulation.

Second, the emphasis on truth and honesty in the religious power of *ofò* provides a foundation for transparency in democratic governance that goes beyond procedural requirements to encompass spiritual commitment to truthfulness. Political leaders operating under the influence of *ofò* religious power would be compelled by spiritual conviction rather than merely legal obligation to maintain transparency in their dealings.

Third, the justice principles embodied in *ofò* religious power provide a framework for ensuring that democratic power is exercised in ways that promote moral equilibrium and cosmic balance rather than merely serving the interests of those in power. This spiritual conception of justice complements legal frameworks by providing moral motivation for just behavior that transcends fear of legal consequences.

Finally, the communal orientation of *ofò* religious power provides a foundation for democratic governance that prioritizes collective welfare over individual ambition. When democratic power supervenes upon *ofò* religious power, political decision-making becomes guided by spiritual principles that emphasize the interconnectedness of all community members and the obligation to promote collective well-being.

7. The Supervenience of Democratic Power on *Ofo*

The concept of supervenience, borrowed from philosophy of mind, provides a framework for understanding how democratic power in Nigeria can be legitimately grounded in the religious power of *ofò*. Supervenience involves a dependency relationship where "the mental supervenes on the physical" such that there can be no mental difference without a corresponding physical difference. Applied to political theory, supervenience involves a dependency relationship where the properties of one phenomenon (democratic power) depend upon and are determined by the properties of another phenomenon (*ofò* religious power) without being reducible to it (Davidson 214). When democratic power supervenes upon *ofò* religious power, the legitimacy, effectiveness, and moral authority of democratic

governance become dependent upon and determined by the spiritual principles and cosmic forces embodied in *ofò*.

This relationship of supervenience addresses the fundamental legitimacy deficit that characterizes Nigeria's democratic experience. As Beetham argues, political power suffers from legitimacy deficits when it lacks grounding in the beliefs and values of those subject to it (46). Currently, democratic power in Nigeria operates without adequate grounding in spiritual and moral foundations that command genuine reverence and voluntary obedience from the people. Citizens often comply with democratic authority out of fear of legal consequences or hope of personal benefit rather than out of genuine recognition of its moral legitimacy (Oladipo 87). When democratic power supervenes upon *ofò* religious power, it gains what Weber calls "traditional authority" that transcends mere legal authorization or electoral mandate (Weber 341).

The supervenience of democratic power on *ofò* religious symbol would transform the exercise of political authority in several fundamental ways. First, it would establish spiritual accountability mechanisms that operate independently of human institutions and cannot be manipulated by political influence. As Ogbenika observes, "forces do not exist in isolation. All the forces are connected and because they are related, they influence one another. Forces are also hierarchically arranged, making it possible for a higher force to influence a lower force" (26). Political leaders operating under democratic power that supervenes upon *ofò* would be aware that their actions have cosmic consequences enforced by spiritual forces rather than merely human institutions that can be compromised or corrupted.

Second, the supervenience relationship would ensure that democratic power reflects the moral principles and spiritual values embodied in *ofò* rather than being divorced from moral considerations. As Wiredu argues, indigenous African political systems were characterized by their grounding in moral principles that transcended immediate political calculations (154). The truth, justice, and authentic authority represented by *ofò* would become essential properties of democratic power, making

it impossible for political leaders to exercise authority in ways that contradict these fundamental spiritual principles.

Third, the supervenience of democratic power on *ofò* would create a foundation for collective acceptance that is grounded in spiritual conviction rather than mere pragmatic consent. As Gyekye notes, traditional African authority structures commanded obedience because they were seen as expressions of cosmic order rather than mere human arrangements (89). Citizens would accept democratic authority not simply as a practical necessity but as a legitimate expression of spiritual principles that they genuinely revere and voluntarily obey.

The implementation of this paradigm would require the integration of *ofò* religious ceremonies and spiritual principles into key moments of democratic governance, as suggested by scholars who advocate for the incorporation of indigenous institutions into modern governance systems (Wiredu 201; Gyekye 143). Political leaders assuming office would take oaths not merely before religious books that may be foreign to their cultural experience but before *ofò* symbols that embody ancestral wisdom and cosmic justice specific to their communities. As Njoku explains, covenant-making through traditional symbols creates binding spiritual relationships that transcend political expedience:

Through covenant or a socio-religious pact, persons or families who are not in any way related by blood come to establish a blood relationship or something like it in which they commit themselves to the pursuit of their well-being as members of the same blood-related family (232).

Policy-making processes would incorporate *ofò* consultation mechanisms that ensure decision-making reflects not only immediate political considerations but also spiritual principles of truth, justice, and collective welfare. The presence of *ofò* in deliberative processes would create awareness that decisions have cosmic consequences and must align with ancestral wisdom and moral principles rather than merely serving temporary political interests (Ogbenika 45; Ikenga-Metuh 156).

The judicial exercise of democratic power would be enhanced by the spiritual authority of *ofò* that provides cosmic

enforcement of justice principles. As traditional African jurisprudence demonstrates, the integration of spiritual accountability into legal proceedings ensures more authentic commitment to justice (Evans-Pritchard 289; Turner 134). Judges operating under democratic power that supervenes upon *ofò* would be motivated not only by legal precedent and professional ethics but also by spiritual conviction that justice must be served regardless of political pressure or personal benefit. Electoral processes would be transformed by the spiritual accountability provided by *ofò* religious power. As Asigbo and Ogbonna observe, *ofò* symbols create awareness of cosmic consequences for moral choices (Asigbo & Ogbonna 14). Candidates and voters alike would be reminded that electoral choices have cosmic consequences and must reflect genuine commitment to collective welfare rather than narrow self-interest or ethnic loyalty.

The supervenience paradigm also addresses the challenge of corruption that has undermined Nigeria's democratic experience. As Transparency International reports, Nigeria consistently ranks poorly on corruption indices, with a score of 25 out of 100 in 2023 (Transparency International n.p). When democratic power supervenes upon *ofò* religious power, the spiritual consequences of corruption become immediate and unavoidable rather than being subject to the delays and uncertainties of human justice systems. The cosmic retribution embodied in *ofò* provides deterrent effects that transcend the calculations of political risk and personal benefit that currently enable widespread corruption (Ajaebili et al 109; Ikegwu 341).

8. Conclusion

This article is motivated by the inappropriate exercise of democratic power in Nigeria's democratic experience. Various scholarly suggestions on democratization as they should apply in Nigeria's democratic situation have not significantly changed the inattention to the abuse of democratic power. Public and government officials, when assuming office, simply take the oath of office with the holy books of their religions and most often jettison the exercise of democratic power that should accompany

such oaths. A major goal of this paper is to contribute towards the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria by refocusing the exercise of democratic power through establishing African realities, in this case through *ofò* with its religious power, as the supervening foundation upon which democratic authority can legitimately rest.

The idea of oath-taking when public servants assume office is, among others, to ensure that they enter into a covenant with their people while keeping to the moral teachings of their belief systems and the laws of the nation. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in Nigeria's political system. The spiritual forces behind the major religions by which oaths of office are taken in Nigeria seem not to be revered by political office holders because the supreme God is generally considered as merciful and forgiving. There is therefore the need to introduce public servants and political office holders to their own traditional realities whose powers are 'ruthless' when covenants are not kept.

The corollaries of *ofò* abound in different Nigerian cultures and ethnic groups. For instance, among the Tiv, it is called *agashidam*, for the Kanuri, it is *gatapo*, it is *taura* for the Hausa while it is *ronkeli* for the Fulani people. Nupe people refer to it as *qunquorochi* while for the Etsako people, it is called *akperiarimi* (Ikegwu 337). All of these are nuances of religious powers which continuously ensure that democratic power promotes ideals of freedom, justice, truth, accountability and transparency, among others. They have equally transformed individuals to become opponents of anti-democratic forces in different spheres of life; social, economic, religious and very importantly, the political sphere.

The significance of the power of *ofò* as a religious symbol to public officials and individuals cannot be overemphasized. It has led and continues to lead them to the reality of interaction of forces in their social contract with the people, exposing them to the dangers of non-adherence to the terms of oath-taking in their official capacities. This culminates in the position that the failures of western democracy as being practiced in Nigeria can be handled by establishing a supervenience relationship where

democratic power depends upon and is grounded in the complementary roles of African religious phenomena, as espoused in the power of *ofò* as a religious symbol.

The supervenience paradigm offers Nigeria a pathway toward authentic democratic governance that is rooted in indigenous spiritual foundations while remaining compatible with modern democratic institutions. Rather than abandoning democracy or returning to purely traditional governance systems, this approach creates a synthesis that grounds democratic power in spiritual authority that commands genuine reverence and voluntary obedience from the people. Through this paradigmatic intervention, Nigeria can develop a form of democratic governance that reflects both universal democratic principles and particular African spiritual realities, creating a more legitimate, accountable, and effective system of governance that serves the authentic needs and aspirations of the Nigerian people.

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