

DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Democracy has gained global recognition as the best form of government. It is a political institution that is rooted in politico-moral grounds of citizens' participation, freedom, and equality of all. Its credibility depends to a large extent on how political institutions work in practice, thus understandable why in some climes there are no tangible or material values or benefits of democratic governments. In some civilized countries, there is this claim that development is occasioned by the democratization of politics. But this appears not to be the case with authoritarian states like Asia, where the economic prominence of countries like China, Japan, and even India does not represent any democratic politics or governance. China to be specific has emerged the fastest growing economy in the world not with democracy, but with a blend or combination of communist politics and market economics. It seems therefore that the thought that democratic nations are more developed than the undemocratic nations is a mere exaggeration. Gleaned from this, this paper philosophically analyses the concepts of democracy and development. It examines the correlation between democracy and development and the expectations that democracy serves as an economic vehicle for development as well as good governance, which has remained a persistent puzzle among political philosophers. In the final analysis, the paper concludes that while democracy can aid development, both are not synonymous in the sense that democracy has no direct effect on economic growth.

Keywords: *Democracy, Development, Good governance, Philosophy, Politics.*

Introduction

Democracy has enjoyed the acceptance of the majority of the global population and countries of the world as the best practicable form of government. It has become so fashionable in contemporary times to the extent that it weaves strong appeal even among the common or ordinary people on the street, who believe in the 'democratic faith' of participation and the capacity to govern themselves which are considered as the basis of democracy. Among the leaders, there is hardly anyone who does not wish to be seen or described as a democrat and his regime as democratic. Within the international level, there is however a strong pressure mounted on nations to return to democracy or democratic rule. Consequently, it has virtually become a contemporary doctrine, if not an article of faith and or mantra that "to develop, nations must

democratize".¹ The global community sees democracy as a civilized value as well as a principle upon which the New World Order can be built.²

The difficulty is not in the new idea of a Just World Order, but that the political leaders of powerful countries are finding it difficult to escape from the old ones. [They] have been politically committed to conservative ideology and it would, therefore, be naïve to believe that they can usher the dawn of a New World Order without dismantling their conservative political structures. What is 'therefore urgently required of the US Western powers is that they correct their policy to suit the demands of new world realities, instead of forcing the world to suit their outdated ideological perspectives.'³

There is a move to universalized democracy, a move that has led to high expectations from democratic countries in terms of development as if democracy is synonymous with development. This explains why powerful nations of the world that are practicing democratic rule like the United States of America, are insisting that "undemocratic nations" should return to democracy. It is said that democracy rules the world.

What is more, those nations in the front line of this advocacy go out their way to support almost every insurgency against existing authorities of nations deemed by them as undemocratic with all at their disposal including military supports, armaments, and necessary logistics in combat, all in attempt to democratize sovereign nations.⁴

According to Eboh, the issue of uneven development of the nations of the world as well as material inequality must first and foremost be addressed by the global community before the quest by Western powers to universalize democracy.⁵ As to whether democracy should be imposed from outside by another country, Eboh has the answer. According to her,

If by common definition, democracy is "government of the people, by the people, and for the people", how

¹ Elechi Maraizu, "Aristotle on Constitutionalism and Citizenship: A Critical Appraisal of the Nigeria Situation", *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, vol. 5 (1), March 2019. p. 167.

² Eboh, Marie Pauline, *Philosophical Essays: Critique of Social Praxis*, Port Harcourt: Paragraphics, 1996, p.37.

³ Sharma, D. "America's New World Order", *Philosophy and Social Action*, vol.17, No. 1-2, 1991, p.8.

⁴ Elechi, Maraizu, "Aristotle on Constitutionalism and Citizenship: A Critical Appraisal of the Nigeria Situation", *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, p. 167.

⁵ Eboh, Marie Pauline, *Philosophical Essays: Critique of Social Praxis*, p. 37.

authentic is it when dictated from outside? A democracy that is practiced under the huge legs of the colossus cannot but be preposterous. It is a sham... for a democracy to be authentic, the political process must be free and fair; freedom must not be shackled either overtly or covertly.⁶

It is undemocratic for nations to interfere in the internal affairs of other sovereign nations. This smacks of freedom, which is an essential variable or indices of both democracy and development. Development, however, is mostly conceived in terms of material well-being rather than freedom, consent and participation, which defines democracy. In other words, there appears to be a wide gap between democracy and development because development is commonly seen as material-centred, while democracy as people-centred. The nexus between democracy and development, therefore, demands clarification as we shall attempt to do in this paper.

Democracy and Development: A Conceptual Analysis

Democracy is about liberty and freedom, equality before the law, enjoyment of fundamental human rights, an independent judiciary, and a multi-party system. Democracy flourishes in an enlightened society where people are educated and liberated both in reason and action. There cannot be an ideal democratic practice when the people are not reasonably free and self-determined. More importantly, the indices of democracy lie in the consent and participation of the people, not necessarily in material expectations. According to Elechi,

The term “democracy” is etymologically derived from the Greek words “demos” and “kratos”, the former meaning “the people” and the later “power”. Democracy, therefore, means... the eligible people in a polity or society participate actively not only in determining the kind of people that govern them but also in shaping the policy out-put of the government. This means that democracy anchors its authority on the express will of the people. Consent and participation of the governed are therefore essential in a democracy, its understanding, and practice.⁷

In furtherance of the understanding of democracy, it is pertinent we state that the original meaning of democracy is the capacity to do things, not majority rule.⁸ Richard

⁶ Eboh, Marie Pauline, *Philosophical Essays: Critique of Social Praxis*, p. 30.

⁷ Elechi, Maraizu, “Aristotle on Constitutionalism and Citizenship: A Critical Appraisal of the Nigeria Situation”, *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, p. 166.

⁸ <https://www.icermediation.org/news-media/meeting-coverage/ethno-religious-conflicts-and-the-dilemma-of-democratic-sustainability-in-nigeria/> Ethno-Religious Conflicts and the Dilemma of Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria, (accessed in September 2, 2020).

Wollheim in his work titled *On the Theory of Democracy*⁹ also echoed the view that an ideal democracy has to do with involvement of the people who greater in number. Hence, from the etymological derivative of democracy, as we can see above, democracy is the manifestation of the power of the people to make things happen; the authority or dominance of the people in the polis. Aristotle equates democracy to the poor in governance, according to him,

The real difference between democracy and oligarchy is poverty and wealth. Wherever men rule because of their wealth, whether they be few or many, that is an oligarchy, and where the poor rule, that is a democracy... equality is above all things their aim, and therefore they ostracize and banish from the city for a time those who seem to predominate too much through their wealth, or the number of their friends, or through any other political influence.¹⁰

It is worthy to note that Aristotle did not consider oligarchy and democracy as inherently bad. Even though they govern in the interest of those who hold the power, they are capable of producing a modest society that is devoid of inequality and a compromised rule of law.¹¹ Since we have looked at what democracy is, it is appropriate we also take a look at what development is all about. Our emphasis is on material development. The concern of development has been with us from antiquity. It is fundamentally about improving the human condition. At the crux of development is the concatenation of the concern of the existence of poverty within society as well as the quest to understand and shape how society changes over time. In this respect, development studies have deep historical roots that stretch across time connecting different thinkers and epochs. Development is conceived as the desire and capacity to do things differently to improve upon past performance and realise a better future.¹² Rodney notes that development implies increased skill, capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being.¹³ The view that development implies freedom is also accentuated by Ellah; according to him,

No development can occur in the absence of freedom, because without freedom we are in bondage, and bondage is slavery, which is the lowest degradation to which human nature can fall, which is the very opposite of development. There can be no development if men

⁹ Richard Wollheim. "On the Theory of Democracy", in Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (eds.) *British Analytical Philosophy*, 1967, Pp. 201-207.

¹⁰ Aristotle, trans. by P. J. Rhodes. *The Athenian Constitution*, Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1984, Pp.34-51

¹¹ Ober, J. and C. W. Hedrick. *Dēmokratia: a conversation on democracies, ancient and modern*, Princeton: Princeton University Press., 1996, Pp. 12-13

¹² Alatas, S. F. *Ibn Khaldun*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013, Pp.56-78.

¹³ Rodney, Walter, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Washington D.C. Howard University Press, 1982, p. 3.

are ignorant, intimidated, poor, and sick in body and mind... there is no development if man himself, is not developed in his body and his mind.¹⁴

Athenian Conception of Democracy: Plato and Aristotle in Perspective

Around the fifth and eighth centuries B.C., in the Greek city-states, remarkable changes occurred in the conception of politics and governance, with Athens the capital city of Greece standing out as a strong political structure of the Greek City-state. During this period, Greek politics and modes of governance were not worth the name. The socio-political structure of the polis did not guarantee its members equal legal protection, equal opportunities, and respect for human life. Politics was characterized by greed, injustice, egocentricism, favouritism, nepotism, and other political vices among the rulers.¹⁵ "Consequently, there was a strong need for crafting a suitable form of government that would engender the emergence of a well-ordered society and bring about good governance."¹⁶ According to Appadorai, "They tried monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, tyranny and democracy; they tried the unitary state and the federal. After all, there is no new type of government left to invent..."¹⁷ The Athenians established what is generally held as the first democracy in 508–507 BC. According to Elechi,

Democracy, it might not be argued, is the most popular institution or form of government in modern times. It is not a new form of government, but one that was known even to ancient Greek Philosophers. It originated from the attempts by the Greek City-state of Athens to reform, organize, and manage its political community (polis) about two thousand five hundred years ago. This orderly and amazing reform gave rise to "a system of participatory democracy" in which the demos (people) participated actively in conducting the affairs of the polis. The contexts and pre-conditions for this were the economic and socio-political reforms introduced by Solon which tended to move the emphasis away from the household or family and towards the polis or community.¹⁸

Plato adopts what he called the "democratic man" to represent democracy. He believes that the democratic man is more or less concerned about how to make money at the expense of the people. The life of this democratic man has no order or

¹⁴ Ellah, Francis, *Nigerian Society and Governance*. Port Harcourt: Chief J. Ellah Sons and Company, 1987, p. 45.

¹⁵ Elechi, Maraizu, "A Critical Evaluation of Aristotle's the Politics", *Port Harcourt Journal of History and Diplomatic Studies*, vo. 4(1), 2017, p. 493.

¹⁶ Elechi, Maraizu, "A Critical Evaluation of Aristotle's the Politics", *Port Harcourt Journal of History and Diplomatic Studies*, p. 494.

¹⁷ Appadorai, *The Substance of Politics*, Medras: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 194.

¹⁸ Elechi, Maraizu, "Aristotle on Constitutionalism and Citizenship: A Critical Appraisal of the Nigeria Situation", *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, Pp. 166.

priority rather than the accumulation of the common patrimony of the people. Hence, he rejected democracy on the basis that it more or less an anarchical society without internal unity and tranquillity.

Even within the Athenian context, democracy was purely participatory involving all legally defined citizens in that very small, self-regulating city-state and its surrounding territory. Only the freeborn male citizen in the city-state collectively participated in the management of the common affairs. They meet from time to time, deliberate, and vote in regular assembly meetings. Subsequently, political theories and philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle emerged in an attempt to grapple with the challenges and realities of democratic existence or governance. Hence, they were unequivocal in their discontent for democracy as a form of government and governance.¹⁹

Sequel to the above, Plato compares the state (Democratic State) to an elaborate and expensive ship. For a well-trained Captain to sail a ship, he or she needs to be acquainted with the capacity of the vessel, geographical location or contour, meteorological analysis, water currents, nautical science, supply chain, and other related matters. An ignorant and untrained person at the helm of a ship would endanger the vessel, lives, and safety of the crew. Similarly, Plato suggests that the ship of state needs a well-educated person at the helm of affairs. That is to say that people who are well informed about such things as law, economics, sociology, military strategy, history, and other relevant subjects should be at the helm of affairs²⁰. He concludes that democratic government cannot work, because people who do not understand how to run the ship of state are always at the helm of affairs. Aristotle on his part sees democracy as the rule by the multitude; it is a government by a poor majority. His disapproval of democracy is according to him that it defines freedom badly, which leads to slavery. The defining principle of democracy is the claim that justice is equality based on numbers rather than merit.

For Aristotle, democracy is the rule by the multitude. Elsewhere in the text, he defines democracy as government by a poor majority. He, therefore, sees democracy as the worst or pervert form of government. As already pointed out elsewhere above, Aristotle sees the problem with democracy as having to do with the fact that it defines freedom wrongly or badly, which leads to slavery. The defining principle of democracy is the claim that justice is equality based on numbers rather than merit. Because the democrats think that all men are equally free, they believe that all men should

¹⁹ Elechi, Maraizu, "Aristotle on Constitutionalism and Citizenship: A Critical Appraisal of the Nigeria Situation", *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, Pp. 166- 167.

²⁰ Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey. "Plato," *History of Political Philosophy*, Chicago: Chicago, 1987, p.15.

be equal. Hence, besides having the desire for equality, the poor majority also desire for effective superiority since they constitute the majority in terms of numbers. Aristotle claims that this can lead to instability or crisis in the polity, and thus, his discontent for democracy.²¹

Given the above somewhat slight variegated views between Plato and Aristotle, we will slightly agree with Aristotle's position and disagree with Plato's conclusive remarks that democracy cannot work because those who are always in positions of governance are always not inclined to acquire such knowledge as demonstrated above. Plato did not put into cognisance that no individual has the monopoly of such knowledge, nor do such knowledge originated from the trainer. The democratic man requires concerted effort and self-discipline for serious study on leadership. Plato did not also put into cognisance that any government in whatever guise is doomed to fail if it is in contradistinction with the manifested power of the people to make things happen. If we relate all the variegated positions to the Nigerian democratic system, for instance, we may be apt to say that democracy here is a mob rule where the bourgeoisie appropriate the rights of the silent majority who are disenfranchised to augment their few mandates. Not because they are ignorant of those pieces of training, nor do not acquire such training, but they beguile the people with appearances, such as money and nebulous manifestos.²²

Democracy and Development: Any Correlation?

Is democracy the answer to development? Why is democracy so highly valued or desirable? Is there true and genuine democracy and democratic practice anywhere in the world? These reconciliations are vital to make democratic development sustainable. Democracy has been presented as one of the key predictors to development, especially in the United States of America and other states that practice it. Meanwhile, development is conceived as 'freedom' that incorporates not only economic indicators but also human freedom and political rights, social opportunities, transparency, and protective security. If this is accepted, then by definition democracy leads to development.²³ Is democracy inherently a good thing? It appears reasonable to answer this question affirmatively. Democracy is a good thing because it facilitates free human choice and furthers the good of political participation.²⁴ But it appears it is more or less utopian that exists only in the *intellectu* or the mind for ideal practical possibility. Thus, the claim that no country in the world genuinely practices ideal democracy, including the United States of America, is not an insinuation. It is equally true that democratic states are not more developed than some undemocratic ones.

The promises of democracy for progressive development follows from a very simple argument. The fact that the poor are more in number. Their number reflects

²¹ Elechi, Maraizu, "Aristotle on Constitutionalism and Citizenship: A Critical Appraisal of the Nigeria Situation", *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, p. 167.

²² Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey. "Plato," *History of Political Philosophy*, p. 17.

²³ Larry Diamond. "Developing Democracies, Towards Consolidation", The John Hopkins University Press, 1994, p.18

²⁴ Brian-Vincent Ikejiakwu. "The Relationship between Poverty, Conflict and Development" *Journal of Sustainable Development* Vol. 2 (1), 2009, p. 19.

through electoral significance, therefore they must also benefit maximally in the allocation of resources of a nation. Thus, we should expect that government policy will be accordingly tilted back in the direction towards the down-trodden and the less privileged of the society. It must ensure that it accommodates the interests of the poor and to begin to redress the anti-poor policies. These considerations suggest that progressive development strategists and democrats in Nigeria have a lot to do for the wellbeing of the poor and vulnerable in the country. Any government that considers the interest of the poor will freely pursue and implement programmes and policies that will have direct impact in the lives. The existence of such programmes within democracies provides a plausible basis for mobilizing further mass support for the progressive development.²⁵

Democracy in the real sense of it thrives better in mobilizing groups in defense of their political interests, and the results bear the mark of the process of development. Therefore, democracy is endogenous to the process of political, economic, and social development, which is a simple linear progression that tilts towards modernisation, will ultimately culminate in democratisation. In other words, once a non-democratic system acquires a certain level or 'threshold' of material achievement and advancement, it can be said to be democratic in nature or perspective. This is a very wrong understanding of the tenets of democracy and a democratic governance. As much as the guiding principle of any democracy is the common good of the people, the common good cannot bring itself about. It must be brought about and protected through good governance, which is not an exclusive reserve of a democratic rule.

However, democracy varies across time and space, thus, it will be contended that democracy does not correlate with development. Development is either exogenous or endogenous. The defining attribute of democracy may not necessarily bring about development and social transformation. The content and structure of democracy, its rule and practices must not just be about elections; it is about what happens after elections are contested and won. This means that what happens after elections goes a long way to determine whether the governor or leader will or will not be able to usher in such development and transformation that are required of a democratic dispensation²⁶. The logic here is that the success or failure of any form of government depends mainly on the leaders and then the people who are supposed to keep a constant check on their leaders. However, the ideas of democracy and development have dissimilar characters. Democracy cannot justify development or material considerations. Tocqueville states,

Nor do I think that genuine love of freedom is ever quickened by the prospect of material rewards: indeed, that prospect is often dubious, anyhow as regards the immediate future. True, in the long run, freedom always brings to those who know how to retain its comfort and well-being, and often great prosperity. Nevertheless, for the moment it sometimes tells against amenities of

²⁵ Adam Przeworski, and Fernando Limongi. "Modernization Theories and Facts" *World Politics*, 1997, Vol.49, p.155.

²⁶ Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, Profile Books Limited, 2012, Pp.361-369.

this nature, and there are times, indeed, when despotism can best ensure a brief enjoyment of them. Those who prize freedom only for the material benefits it offers have never kept it long.²⁷

Nevertheless, the ultimate essence or purpose of material development is the realization of human potentials and the liberation of man from poverty. In other words, true development at the individual level must seek to realize the creative capacities or potentials of man, enabling him to improve his material conditions of living, through the use of the resources available to him. The Report of the South Commission will lend strong credence to the nexus between democracy and development when it states that:

But a nation is its people. Development has, therefore, to be an effort of, by and for the people. True development has to be people-oriented. It has to be directed at the fulfilment of human potentials and the improvement of the social and economic well-being of the people. And it has to be designed to secure what the people themselves perceive to be their social and economic interests.²⁸

Tocqueville is very correct when he places special emphasis on freedom or personal autonomy. However, to justify democracy, we need to add another assumption; that of intrinsic equality. If the good or interests of everyone should be weighed equally, and if each adult person is, in general, the best judge of his or her good or interests, then every adult member of an association is sufficiently well qualified, taken all around, to participate in making binding collective decisions that affect his or her good or interests, that is, to be a full citizen of the demos.²⁹ Dahl Robert's view lends credence to the above assumption on human equality which he considers should also reflect the apportioning of the good of the state.³⁰ This is a little different from John Stuart Mill's utilitarian justification for representative democracy. Mill also pointed out that "each is the only safe guardian of his rights and interests"³¹ but the thrust of his arguments is closer to the justification of democracy on economic development. Mill holds that the criterion of a good form of government is "by the goodness or badness of the work it performs for [the people]"³² and he believes that happiness is the supreme good. So it will be a far stretch for us to assume that these imply the instrumental justification of democracy that democracy is desirable because it can bring about the material well-being of the people, which is instrumental to people's

²⁷ Elster, Jon, "The Necessity and Impossibility of Simultaneous Economic and Political Reform", in Greenberg, Douglas, Tocqueville et al ed., *Constitutionalism and Democracy: Transitions in the Contemporary World*, New York: Oxford University Press 1993, p. 269

²⁸ *The Report of the South Commission*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1993, p. 11.

²⁹ <http://home.olemiss.edu/~gg/paperhtm/dmcrec.htm>, Democracy and Economic Development (accessed in September 2, 2020).

³⁰ Dahl, Robert A, *Democracy and Its Critics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 105.

³¹ Mill, John Stuart, *Utilitarianism, Liberty, and Representative Government*, New York: E. P. Dutton and company, Inc. 1951, p. 279

³² Mill, John Stuart, *Utilitarianism, Liberty, and Representative Government*, p. 262

happiness. In this respect, he is quite similar to such a classical utilitarian as his father and Bentham.

From the above, we would aver that democracy as well as non-democracy cannot be justified on the ground of material development. We may prefer democracy to non-democracy, not because both cannot bring about development but because democracy is the only feasible form of government that guarantees us basic freedom and equality, rights and opportunities, and this freedom and equality have their rights. They are ends in themselves, and we do not need to introduce the utilitarian concept of development to justify democracy. Elechi chronicles it thus:

Democracy can aid development, but cannot guarantee it. That the people govern themselves does not imply or guarantee development, since the people can govern themselves and yet remain underdeveloped. The point being made here is that relying on democracy as a form of government no matter how pretty or fashionable it is, cannot guarantee development. Development can only be guaranteed when the people are serious and committed to the demands and requirements of development. Secondly, for those who cherish democracy based on the claim that it gives rise to material considerations or development, it is worth mentioning here that no form of government or regime is an exclusive panacea for aiding development, including democracy, monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, or any kind of regime. The fact is that if we believe that material or economic considerations should justify democracy, then we have to also concede to the fact that these considerations should also justify any kind of regime, provided such a regime also generates economic growth and makes people better and happy.³³

So democracy is desirable not because it can bring about development and make everyone better, which, as we have seen, does not have much distinction. If we believe that development should justify democracy, then we have to also concede that it should also justify any system of government, provided that it also generates development and makes everybody better off. Again, Elechi summarized it thus:

Besides Aristotle's reasons for his discontent for democracy, it (democracy) is seen as one of the best regimes or forms of government with all that it promises the citizenry, it must be clearly stated here that it is not akin to development, for the indices, attributes, and beauty of democracy lies in participation, consent and freedom or liberty, equality before the law, enjoyment of fundamental human rights by the people,

³³ Elechi, Maraizu, "Aristotle on Constitutionalism and Citizenship: A Critical Appraisal of the Nigeria Situation", *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, Pp. 167- 168.

independent judiciary and multi-party system; not in result, utilitarian or material considerations, that is, not in maximizing the satisfaction of wants and better life of the people. When material benefits like food, shelter, health, social amenities and technologies are built or brought into democracy as constituting its meaning, the beauty and essence of democracy are diminished. In simple terms, the distinction is that while democracy is ultimately not about "result", development is ultimately "result-oriented."³⁴

Conclusion

This paper has undertaken a philosophical or theoretical reconciliation of democracy and development. No matter how perfect and promising democracy and its tenets are, it cannot solely guarantee and sustain development. Democracy, when ideally instituted and correctly practiced can only aid or quicken development and its process. Mere institutionalisation of democratic governance without the genuine practice of its norms, cannot bring about development. Development will elude the people when there is no serious and genuine commitment to its demands. Development can be attained when there are an articulate formulation and implementation of development driven policies and programmes. And this can be done and achieved by and through any form of government - monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, tyranny, etc., through the correct utilization of human, natural and or material resources available. A "democratic" state like Nigeria, for instance, that is over-dependent on foreign aids with high illiteracy level, varying health challenges, high rate of unemployment, high inflation and infrastructural deficits, and other socioeconomic catastrophes cannot develop no matter how long it has practiced democracy. Genuine democracy and sustainable development cannot be achieved in a poverty-ridden and morally polluted society. Hence, the need to re-evaluate what constitutes democracy and its correlation to development, which is the central thesis of this research.

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³⁴ Elechi, Maraizu, "Aristotle on Constitutionalism and Citizenship: A Critical Appraisal of the Nigeria Situation", *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, Pp. 167-168.

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