

Transcending Traps and Obstacles to Democracy and Development in the Society of the Iteso

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Abstract

When you listen to the conversations of the Iteso, you will notice a tendency to articulate what ‘the Iteso call the republican character of the Iteso’. In this article I have attempted to trace this axiom in the context of the democracy and development of the Iteso with a focus on the traps and obstacles to the democracy and development in Teso society, and on attempts to transcend the identified traps and obstacles.

Keywords: Democracy, Transcending Traps, Development, Iteso

1. Introduction

The first constitution of the Iteso was promulgated in 1995 and in 1996 the first *Emorimor*, the unifier, was elected. This happened more than 90 years after the colonial establishment destroyed the pre-colonial political organisation of the Iteso. Since its promulgation, the constitution of the Iteso has been amended twice, in 1998 and in 2003. In these amendments, the debate has been between maintaining the ideal referred to as the republican character of the Iteso and its practice. The question that motivated this article is: How far back in the past can this debate be traced? In an attempt to answer this question, I have examined in the first section of the article democracy and development in the pre-colonial society of the Iteso and, in the second section, have reviewed the obstacles and traps to democracy and development in Teso society. In the final section, I have made attempts to transcend the traps and obstacles to democracy and development in Teso.

2. Democracy and Development in the Pre-Colonial Society of the Iteso

Societies have been distinguished by the way they are organised. While some have referred to pre-colonial societies like Teso as ‘stateless’ as

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opposed to 'state' (Amadiume, 1995; Mamdani, 1996), others have referred to them as 'non-stratified' as opposed to 'stratified' (Kasozi, 1994). Visibly, the othering of the society that is organised differently dominates these conceptualisations. The logic here goes like this: Since my society is organised as a state, a society that is organised differently is stateless; since my society is stratified, a society that is structured differently is non-stratified. Thus, 'the other/the different' is defined not by what it is, but by what it is not: 'stateless', 'non-stratified'. This way of thinking does two things: 1) it makes the item that is defined by 'what it is' pronounced; and 2) it makes the item that is defined by 'what it is not' obscure. In order to address the problem of obscurity that has been perpetuated by conceptualisations based on one's vantage point, societies like pre-colonial Teso have been conceptualised as segmentary (Emudong, 1974; Okalany, 1980; Karp, 1978; Clastres, 1987; Opak, 2010). The question is: What were the segments of these societies? In Opak's view, the clans were the segments of the pre-colonial Teso society in that they were autonomous (Opak, 2010). While citing David Okalany, Opak said that the clans were the pillars of unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state machinery. Each clan usually occupied a particular territory in the land and was like an independent state. Each clan had its own *etem* (shrine) usually at a prominent tree, rock or grove in which an altar (*etut*) was constructed. The *etem* not only served as a parliament (*Ajeenit*) but was also a court (*Adieket*) and the place of worship (*Airiget*) (Opak, 2010: 34).

There are two key issues here that Opak has mentioned: the issue of the governance of the Iteso, and the issue of the political organisation of the Iteso. The place called *etem* seems to be central in the governance and political organisation of the Iteso because it served as a parliament, a court and an altar. What is conspicuously missing is the state house, as a place of the executive power in the contemporary political governance of a state, or a palace as a place of the executive power in the pre-colonial stratified societies. While for the Iteso worship was not separate from governance, in the contemporary state arrangement, worship is an alternative non-political part of the governance of the state.

According to Okalany, the *etem* and *ateker* concepts are key to understanding the governance and political organisation of pre-colonial Teso and had various meanings. In line with this view, Lawrance observes that *etem* meant 'the fire-place situated outside in the courtyard, where on special ceremonial occasions a beast might be roasted' (Lawrance, 1957: 68). Okalany is in agreement with Lawrance's observation and adds that '*etem* was a morning fireplace situated outside the main gate of a big

home called *Egiro*' (Okalany, 1980: 85). Also, Okalany agrees that at the *etem*, many functions took place, including the judicial services. Okalany further observes that elders from *Igiroi* (the plural of *Egiro*) 'often met to discuss issues concerning the relations between different *Igiroi*' (Okalany, 1980: 86). This view is in agreement with Lawrance's that *etem* is 'the ceremonial meeting-place of the people of one locality, where important matters concerning their relationship with each other and with people of neighbouring localities were discussed' (Lawrance, 1957: 68).

The other meaning of *etem* is a territorial group. As Lawrance put it, a 'man might be born, marry, and die in his *etem* area' (Lawrance, 1957: 68). Emudong is in agreement with this view; as he put it, 'often large groups of young men, jealous of the control which their elders held over them, and inconvenienced by the close proximity of their mothers-in-law, would move en bloc to occupy a new area' (Emudong, 1974:23). Okalany also holds a similar view that *etem* was 'most important to the process of migration' where 'a group of clans within a certain locality' whose young men had been initiated into manhood together, migrated as a group (Okalany, 1980:86). From the above inputs, *etem* has four meanings: 1) the morning fire lit outside the gate; 2) the place where elders met and held discussions; 3) an age set of men from different clans initiated together into adulthood; and 4) a territory.

Within an *etem*, there were a number of *atekerin* (the plural of *ateker*, clan). According to Okalany, the term *ateker* has three meanings. First, it refers 'to the family of the peoples who speak an understandable dialect of the same language': the 'Iteso, Jie, Karimojong, Turkana, Dodoth and Toposa' (Okalany, 1980:87). Second, 'it connotes the whole "tribe" of the people today known as the Iteso' (Okalany, 1980: 87). Third, it means a clan. As a clan, *ikekia* (the plural of *ekek*) compose it. According to Lawrance, *ekek* 'means 'door' and the members of the extended family are those who come from one door' (Lawrance, 1957: 51). Okalany is in support of this view that '*ikekia* ... which usually consist of families, heads of which are descendants of a common ancestor, for example, a common grandfather' (Okalany, 1980:87). In every *ekek* there was a household, *ekale* (in plural, *ikalia*). During the pre-colonial period, *asonya*, 'having a big home, *ere* (in plural, *ireria*), normally meant being in possession of many cattle and wives. Each woman was in charge of her children and household' (Okalany, 1980:88).

From the above input, the biggest socio-political unit was *etem* and *ateker* was within it. The households, *ikalia*, were the smallest units of this organisation. However, when it comes to the process of getting *the*

leadership of this organisation, there are two opposing views. The first view is presented by Lawrance: 'Each extended family has a recognised head (*loepolokit*) elected by the adult male members of the extended family' (Lawrance, 1957:51). However, when it comes to *apolonkaateker* 'translated as clan leader', Lawrance says that this 'position was to some extent hereditary although dependent on the assent of the clan members' (Lawrance, 1957:67). Similarly, Lawrance says that 'the *etem* community had a recognised head, *apolonkaetem*, whose position was hereditary and whose functions were largely ceremonial' (Lawrance, 1957:69).

In a contrary view, Okalany says that 'the *ekek* ... was headed by *apolonkaekek* (head of the *ekek*) who was the eldest and possibly the founder of the *ekek*' (Okalany, 1980:87). Okalany adds that '*Apolonkaateker* (head of the *ateker*) was appointed by the elders of the *ikekia* that constituted the *ateker*, and this election was by consensus. Under him were the *Apolokkaikekia* (the heads of lineages)' (Okalany, 1980: 108). Further, Okalany observes that 'One pronounced and outspoken elder among the *Apolokkaatekerin* was appointed by consensus to become *Apolonkaeitela* [head of the territory]' (Okalany, 1980:108). The head of the territory 'was also the man to manage the matters concerning the *etem* institution' (Okalany, 1980:108).

Visibly, there is a contradiction between the views of Lawrance and Okalany. The emerging question is: Were the leadership positions of pre-colonial Teso inherited or appointed/elected by consensus? In Webster's view, 'When a supreme commander became old or died, his successor was recognised rather than chosen by an assembly of warriors.... *Emuron* [a foreteller] too, was recognised rather than formally chosen' (Webster *et al.*, 1973: 68). The question is: What does Webster mean by recognition of a leader rather than being formerly chosen? Webster gives an example of the Toroma military confederacy of the 1890s whose commander was Abonya. In the event that Abonya had died in 1890s, Webster says that his successor would have been determined by their proven competence in doing what Abonya had been doing (Webster, 1973). Thus, recognition was based on demonstrated performance of the required task.

Emudong is in agreement with Webster. As he puts it, Teso pre-colonial leaders were 'of influence but with little power; power tends to have come exclusively from consensus among the people' (Emudong, 1974: 40). He adds that the Iteso 'favour independent recognition – not choice or election – of leaders, that is, people could recognise the leadership of one man today and feel utterly free to shift their recognition to another man the following day' (Emudong, 1974: 41). Emudong gives an illustration. He says that

‘even as late as 1913 ... an Etesot chief called Okanya was deserted by a large number of his subjects and he did nothing to recover them’ (Emudong, 1974:276). To Emudong, this way of making leaders in pre-colonial Teso is a pointer to two things: 1) the segmentary nature of the pre-colonial Teso society; and 2) the egalitarian character of the Iteso.

The question that emerges from the above input is; If leaders in pre-colonial Teso were made through recognition and not by formal choice, what was the place of discussions that were held every morning around *etem*? As Emudong puts it, it was not ‘normal for the leaders of a particular *ateker* to force the individual members of that *ateker* to conform to their decisions. Very often decisions among the pre-colonial Iteso were arrived at not by the orders of the leaders but by discussion among adult males until consensus was reached’ (Emudong, 1974:36). None of the intellectuals of Teso appear to respond to this question. However, a response may be derived from the above input. If decisions were made by recognition, then discussions were meant to prepare the decision-makers to recognise the right choice.

In a similar study by Pierre Clastres in the Americas, he observed that the qualification for one to become a chief

is his ‘technical’ competence alone; his oratorical talent, his expertise as a hunter, his ability to coordinate martial activities, both offensive and defensive. And in no circumstance does the tribe allow the chief to go beyond that technical limit; it never allows a technical superiority to change into a political authority. The chief is there to serve society; it is society as such – the real locus of power – that exercises its authority over the chief. That is why it is impossible for the chief to reverse that relationship for his own ends, to put society in his service, to exercise what is termed power over the tribe: primitive society would never tolerate having a chief transform himself into a despot. (Clastres 1987:207)

What is interesting in this citation is Clastres’ failure to locate a structure or an institution in primitive society that embodies or houses coercive power; instead, he leaves this power in the hands of every member of the society. However, as Emudong has shown, power in pre-colonial Teso ‘tends to have come exclusively from consensus among the people’ (Emudong, 1974: 40). The power that emerged from consensus did not rest in the hands of every member of the society. Rather, this power rested in the recognised leadership. As Emudong puts it, ‘the leadership were ... expected to implement the collective decision taken’ (Emudong, 1974: 36). The leadership’s implementation of the collective decision taken transits the practice of democracy to development in pre-colonial Teso.

The memory of the collective decisions that the leadership of pre-colonial

Teso implemented is captured in the ‘assembled and recorded’ traditions of the Iteso (Lawrance, 1937:12). The primary source of this ‘assembled and recorded’ tradition is Amotoi ka Etesot (Lawrance, 1937:12). Lawrance presents this as a tradition of migration and transformation of the ancestors of the Iteso. This migration was ‘from the direction of Abyssinia through Karamoja district’ (Lawrance, 1937:12). However, there are no pieces of evidence to show that this migration was actually from Abyssinia apart from the assertion that it is claimed in this tradition. The transformation of the ancestors of the Iteso, in Lawrance’s view, had ‘six generations or ages’. Ojurata’s tadpoles – ‘men of short stature with large heads’ – was the first generation. This generation ‘lived among swamps and on lake sides’. The second generation was Okori’s. This generation pioneered tilling ‘the ground and growing crops’. Oyangaese’s was the third generation that initiated keeping cattle. From this generation, ‘men take their name from the cattle they own’. The fourth generation was Otikiri’s. It was a generation that learnt ‘crafts, bead-making, tanning and making of music instruments’. Arionga’s was the fifth generation. It was based in Karamoja, and these people were called Iworopom. Lawrance says that due to pressure from the Turkana and the insufficiency of grazing land and water, this generation split into three; the first migrated into the current Teso, the second migrated to Tororo, and the third remained in Karamoja. The sixth generation is Asonya’s. In this generation, a second migration took place westwards, and the Iteso occupied the current Teso (Lawrance, 1937, 1957).

However, with regard to this migration and the changing of the ancestors of the Iteso, Lawrance does not tell us why there were only six generations. In addition, there is a discrepancy between the first four generations and the last two. In the first four generations, the migration is associated with a livelihood or socio-economic occupation of the generations. However, in the last two generations, they are presented as purely migration generations, and Lawrance does not tell us why this discrepancy between the first four and the last two generations exists. Nonetheless, in the last two generations, contrary to the first four generations, reasons for the migration are given.

From this analysis I infer that Lawrance seems to have interpreted the Amotoi ka Etesot tradition in terms of evolutionary (Webster, 1937) or transforming or changing conceptual categories. This interpretation could be explained by the interest of Lawrance as indicated by the title of his book, *The Iteso: Fifty Years of Change of a Nilo-Hamitic Tribe of Uganda*. Thus, it appears that Lawrance conceptualised the Amotoi ka Etesot traditions in the light of his contemporary need: the need to view the tradition of Amotoi ka Etesot using the lens of change. This fits well with Lawrance’s

assumption that not only the migration but also the ancestors of the Iteso have been changing. However, the shortfall of this assumption is that the historical evidence is almost not there to make it plausible.

One of the possible interpretations of Amotoi ka Etesot tradition outside Lawrance's conceptual categories is that maybe the ancestors of the Iteso were trying to explain their previous habitats and preoccupations in a non-linear way. The only challenge to this interpretation is for us to find plausible pieces of evidence to support it. Another possible interpretation is that maybe the ancestors of the Iteso were associating their socio-economic preoccupations with migration as a mnemonic ploy. In order to argue for this possibility, we need to study the use of language and memorialisation cues among the Iteso in order to understand the conceptual categories of the Amotoi ka Etesot. Lawrance does not tell us anything about the conceptual categories of the traditions of Amotoi ka Etesot; all he has given us is his conceptual categories, assumptions and the world outlook (Bala Usman 2006). In my view, Lawrance did not take the golden opportunity available to him of engaging the Ateso terminology: what do these terms mean – Ojurata, Okori, Oyangaese, Otikir, Arionga, Asonya? What is their history? Are they attached to particular values; if they are, how did this come about? If Lawrance had engaged these and similar questions, he would have been in a position to understand the conceptual categories of the Amotoi ka Etesot traditions. In reference to these questions, it appears that Lawrance did not access the 'historical processes' (Bala Usman, 2006) of the Amotoi ka Etesot traditions because he did not attempt to comprehend their conceptual categories.

The next author who has interpreted the Amotoi ka Etesot traditions is Webster. Lawrance's work is the primary source for Webster. Webster interpreted these traditions in terms of economic conceptual categories. As he puts it, 'It is interesting that the Iteso themselves see their history largely in terms of periods of economic change' (Webster, 1973: 20). Webster acknowledges the difficulty of getting pieces of evidence to back up the Ojurata and Okori periods, but he endeavours to provide evidence to support the other periods. He marshals pieces of evidence from the migration traditions, encounter between people, and occurrences of some disasters such as famine, outbreak of animal diseases and their implications.

It is interesting to note that Webster is using the term 'periods' instead of Lawrance's 'generations or ages'. In addition, Lawrance's Amotoi ka Etesot has become in Webster's work Amoti Ka Etesot Association (Webster, 1973: xiii). What explains this difference? Could this difference be due to different sources? The source for Lawrance's Amotoi ka Etesot

is Ateso MS, while the source for Webster's Amooti Ka Etesot is SDA XMIS/6/66/35. Even though Webster says that '[t]he authors are grateful to Dr. M. Twaddle for passing over the SDA material for our use' (Webster, 1973: xiii), he remains silent on what SDA means. There is no key for interpreting Webster's 'SDA XMIS/6/66/35' and Lawrance's 'Ateso MS'. The title of Lawrance's Amooti ka Etesot is *The Findings of Amooti ka Etesot Society*. The title of Webster's Amooti Ka Etesot Association is Typescript Notes (mostly age sets). While Lawrance says that 'about 1948' is the probable year when his Amooti ka Etesot was published, Webster gives 'n.d.' for the year of the publication of his Amooti Ka Etesot Association. However, even with these details about the sources of the historical development of the Iteso identity traditions, something is still lacking. Both Lawrance and Webster do not tell us what exactly Amooti ka Etesot or Amooti Ka Etesot Association is. If it is truly an association, who started it, what are its goals and mission; who were its members; what were their activities? Engaging these and similar questions may help us to access the 'historical processes' of the subject under study.

The other scholar who interprets the traditions of the historical development of the Iteso is Joan Vincent. The work of Webster is the primary source for Vincent. As Vincent put it,

three eras are delineated: 1) the Arionga, a phase of not very detailed, stylised origins and journeys; 2) Asonya, a phase of clan differentiation, characterised by the telescoping of genealogies; and 3) the colonial period, a phase of remembered genealogical history which, in Teso, can be deemed to have begun with Kakungulu's authorisation to collect taxes on the Serere peninsula in 1899. (Vincent 1982: 78)

In this interpretation, Webster's 'periods of economic change' become Vincent's phases of 'no detailed origins and journeys', of 'clan differentiation' and of 'colonial conquest'. It is interesting that just like Webster, Vincent is non-committal to engaging the first two generations of Lawrance: Ojurata and Okori; and in her self-defence, she says that 'contemporary historians of Teso seem unwittingly to reproduce the mythic charter common to so many African societies in their attempts to come to terms with it' (Vincent, 1982: 78). Why are these scholars shying away from confronting traditions that do not have detailed written or oral information? In Samir Amin's view, 'The great confusion which arises in any discussion of traditional African society is due to a number of reasons, especially: ... the scarcity of documents and remains of the past' (Amin, 1972:504). Amin is partly right. Indeed, as Webster has shown above, there is no evidence to back up the first

two generations of Lawrance. However, the tradition is there. The question then is: Why have these scholars failed to engage the oral tradition in order to generate pieces of evidence to support the first two generations/ages of Lawrance? Could it be because of their conceptual categories, assumptions, and world outlook that have disabled them from accessing the historical processes of these generations/ages?

From the above analysis, I infer that when the scholars' imagination runs bankrupt, they either become defensive as Vincent has done above, or they start the blame game. For instance, Okalany says:

According to J. B. Webster, the Paraniotic Iteso are probably the most extreme example in the interlacustrine region of a people whose ethnic identity and community depend upon the art of forgetting. Indeed, most of the Iteso informants when interviewed, could not be able to even recall their great grandfather's names. In this regard, periodisation becomes difficult and the researcher has to resort to or rely upon traditions collected by researchers of disciplines whose concern with time was only marginal. (Okalany 1980: xviii)

The question is: Is it the studied people who are a problem or the conceptual categories that are a problem, or the researcher that is the problem, or all?

3. Traps and Obstacles to Democracy and Development in the Society of the Iteso

While demonstrating Karl Marx's method of critique and crisis, Michael A. Lebowitz (2009:132) observes that 'a crisis revealed the existence of a barrier to capital.' This observation is based on the view that capital expands in nature 'as self-expanding value' and, therefore, any 'manifestation of an inherent check on' capital's growth, means that 'capital has come up against barriers which thwart its impulse, which negate its essence' (Lebowitz, 2009: 132). The negation or thwarting of capital's impulse manifests as a crisis. The barrier that negates or thwarts capital's essence is meant not 'to establish contingency, but necessity', which is 'manifested in a decline in the rate of profit'. As such, the profit of capital has a tendency to fall due to the necessity of barriers. By implication, capital never abolishes barriers, but tends to transcend them (Lebowitz, 2009: 133). What interests me is Lebowitz's understanding of a barrier as something that thwarts the impulse or negates the essence of a given thing. I would like to employ this understanding of a barrier in understanding barriers to democracy and development in the society of the Iteso.

As shown in the above section, the Iteso knew their history as of 'men

and women on the move' and Laban Erapu (1969) captured it in his novel, *Restelss Feet*. Apart from the environmental factors such as drought and famine and man-made factors such as invasions that Okalany (1980) has attributed to the migration of the pre-colonial Iteso, their pre-colonial political organisation fuelled the migration of the young. As Emudong observes, 'one had to become an elder – *Apolon* – before he could enjoy the "egalitarianism" of the Iteso' (Emudong, 1974: 44). The political organisation had restricted the rights and privileges of equality to a group of men who had attained elderhood. As such, this restriction privileged only a few Iteso in pre-colonial Teso with the enjoyment of democracy

The pre-colonial public space of the Iteso somewhat resembled the public space of ancient Greece where only equals were in the *polis*. Thus, the *polis* was distinguished from the household in that it knew only 'equals', whereas the household was the centre of the strictest inequality. To be free meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or to the command of another and not to be in command oneself. It meant neither to rule nor to be ruled (Arendt, 1958:32).

This sense of equality 'meant to live among and to have to deal only with one's peers, and it presupposed the existence of "equals" who, as a matter of fact, were always the majority of the population in a city-state' (Arendt, 1958: 32). This sense of equality 'was the very essence of freedom: to be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed' (Arendt, 1958: 33). However, as Emudong (1974: 44) observes, 'to the extent that the society did not accord young men similar opportunities, status and prestige, it was despotic.' I will not hesitate to add that a society remains despotic as long as a part of it (young men and women) is not allowed to enjoy opportunities, privileges and status enjoyed by others.

Another barrier to democracy in the society of the Iteso was the colonial pacification, which involved the termination and prohibition of the age-set rituals (Karp, 1978:39). When these rituals were terminated and prohibited, by implication, the pre-colonial political organisation of the Iteso could not be perpetuated. This trap killed the political institution of pre-colonial Iteso, which was replaced by the hierarchised colonial administrative system spearheaded by three men on behalf of the British: 1) Semei Kakungulu in Teso district; 2) Oguti Ipaade in Tororo; and 3) Murunga, the half-brother of Mumia the king of the Wanga, in Kenya (Karp, 1978).

The other obstacle and trap to democracy in the society of the Iteso was the 2003 amendment to the constitution of the Iteso Cultural Union (ICU) – a traditional institution of the Iteso that elected its first *Emorimor* (the

unifier) in 1996. This amendment did a number of things: 1) it removed the five-year term limit of the bearer of the office of *Emorimor*; 2) it abolished the election of the prime minister by the delegates conference (it is also the delegates conference that elects the bearer of the office of *Emorimor*); and 3) it restricted the bearer of the office of *Emorimor* to an Etesot (male) of 60 years and above (meeting on views of Iteso in Kampala, 15 November 2016).

Thus, in the spirit of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, and the 2011 Act that operationalised Article 246 and Article 37 that recognise the right to culture and similar rights, the Iteso founded their cultural institution. As Opak puts it:

the concept of having a leader may seem so obvious that one is not expected to question it. But not so for the Iteso people who inhabit the Eastern part of Uganda and the Western part of Kenya, and who had for centuries lived without centralising power. To them all people are equal. Never mind that some are richer or stronger than others. They therefore found it strange that other people could pay homage to a fellow man or woman without embarrassment, as was the case in societies which prostrated before a king or queen with apparent relish. A poor man is often heard to remind his wealthy neighbour that ‘I do not eat at your home’ even when he has just shared a rich man’s meal. This individualism or independence, if you like, was so deep-seated in the Iteso psyche that nobody expected them to embrace the concept of one leader, let alone that of a king in the 1990s. (Opak 2001: 2)

Far away from the sarcasm of the poor man, I think Opak is pointing out something that defined the political organisation of the Iteso, on one hand, and, on the other, the difference between the political organisation of the Iteso and the political organisation of those he refers to as ‘societies which prostrated before a king or queen with apparent relish.’ Thus, Opak is telling us that the political organisation of the Iteso did not have a centralising power structure. In this sense, the political structure of the Iteso is different from the political structure of societies with centralising power. However, Opak is presenting this aspect of the culture of Iteso as if the Iteso have always had this political structure when he says that ‘nobody expected them to embrace the concept of one leader, let alone that of a king in the 1990s.’ As Karp (1978: 33) shows, ‘by 1905’ the pre-colonial political institution of the Iteso in Kenya had disappeared and by 1902 this institution had disappeared in Uganda (Lawrance, 1957). Therefore, the foundation of the Iteso Cultural Union in 1996 (after a period that was not less than 90 years since the colonial suppression of the pre-colonial political

institution) using the pre-colonial terminology and a modern hierarchical structure is bound to meet with democratic challenges. As the 21 October 2011 ICU Council meeting indicated, the republican character of the Iteso, which is in opposition to the monarchical character, seems to be slipping away from the constitution and has to be put back. This echoes the 2011 clarification in the meeting at Eneku village in Soroti that *Emorimor* is not a king but a cultural leader whose role is that of *Papa* (Father).

With the above barriers and traps to democracy in the society of the Iteso come the barriers and traps to development. The major development barrier and trap is the uncertainty of the source of revenue. In fact, as paragraph (d) of Article 246(3) of the Constitution, 1995, puts it, ‘no person shall be compelled to pay allegiance or contribute to the cost of maintaining a traditional leader or cultural leader’ (Government of Uganda, 1995: 153). The bigger problem is that the state has reduced traditional institutions to traditional leaders. As Frederick puts it, ‘the state through legal institutions focuses on individuals, not on institutions. The six million monthly grant, for instance, does not go to the institutions, but to individuals’ (interview of 7 November 2016). This attitude of the state goes back to the 1993 Traditional Rulers Act on the restitution of assets and property of the 1966 banned traditional institutions. This Act seems to show that it was not much related to the constitutional arrangement to open up public space for traditional /cultural institutions, but rather to restore assets and property of the colonially recognised kingdoms. As Frederick puts it, ‘it is not clear whether the government wanted to restore all cultural institutions or it wanted to restore only Buganda. However, after Buganda was restored, the colonially recognised kingdoms demanded to be recognised’ as well (interview of 7 November 2016).

The idea of opening up public space for all cultural/tradition institutions, however, is captured in the 1995 constitution under the rubric of cultural rights as shown in Article 37 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, but not as a demand by cultural institutions for recognition. In this sense, the Ugandans who organised themselves under the rubric of cultural organisations were only taking advantage of the provided opportunity in the constitution. As Jimmy Spire Ssentongo puts it, ‘not all people but the elites mobilise or construct an organisation of the people alongside group identity and take advantage of the available opportunity’ (interview of 9 November 2016).

From the above inputs, it appears that the state of Uganda has managed to camouflage itself in cultural institutions so that (1) cultural institutions do its job of developing the peoples’ cultures and (2) a conflict that led to the

banning of traditional institutions in 1966 does not recur. If this position is disputed, the question I ask is: Why would the government, as indicated in Article 246 of the constitution and elaborated in the 2011 Act, say, on one hand, that the sustenance of the cultural leaders is dependent on its cultural community, and at the same time, prohibit this institution from coercing its subjects to support the institution in case they fail to do it willingly; on the other hand, pay the bearers of the office of the cultural institutions from the consolidated fund through grants? My answer is simple: Because of the two reasons given above.

The state seems to have achieved its goal, but the traditional/cultural institutions do not have revenue to develop their subjects. For instance, Mr Anukur observed that in 2005, the proposal for the palace, museum, and hotel were presented to *Papa Emorimor*. The late Gadafi was ready to sponsor the construction of these projects in a manner similar to the way he had helped the Toro kingdom. However, to-date, nothing has happened (meeting on views of Iteso in Kampala, 15 November 2016). This view echoed Mr Source Opak's observation that 'the Ministry of Gender has promised to give 250 million shillings to ICU for building a palace, but the Iteso have failed to meet the requirements, for instance, securing a land title deed' (interview of 17 March 2016). The absence of ICU in development has not missed the critical eye. As a youth, Judith Ekiring, put it, '*Papa Emorimor* only appears when his roof is leaking and he needs help to mend it' (interview of 15 March 2016).

Underlying the above observations is the question of the absence of assets. Unlike the colonially recognised traditional institutions that the colonial government gave miles of land, the contemporary traditional/cultural institutions such as ICU do not have land. In Mr Source Opak's view, the current offices of ICU are a property of Soroti Municipality (interview of 17 July 2016). This means that ICU depends on the goodwill of its subjects. As such, ICU is trapped in poverty and yet its subjects expect ICU to act as an alternative to the state.

The other barrier that traps the development of the Iteso society is the tendency to take the Iteso tradition as if it is static. This problem is coupled with the failure to historicise the past in order to access the past historical processes that explain the emergence of given traditions. This failure has trapped some intellectuals of Iteso into blaming the Iteso for being forgetful and, in turn, the Iteso are stuck in some of the past rituals that may not cohere with their current aspirations.

4. Transcending Obstacles and Traps to Democracy and Development in the Society of the Iteso

During the pre-colonial period, the young Iteso transcended the obstacle of despotism of elders through migration. As Emudong (1974: 43) puts it, 'it was the desire for personal independence and freedom from the control of society that forced most of the Iteso young men to be in the forefront of the pioneering saga during the era of migration.' Since the migrants were moving in groups, as Okalany (1980) has observed, after securing a new area, the new settlers began their own institutions.

What puzzles me is the question: After the young Iteso had migrated to a new area, why didn't they start a system of leadership that differed from the one of their elders? Had they detested being under the elders or they just wanted to be in leadership? Maybe they did not abhor the age-set system of elders; maybe it was the only system they knew. The question, however, remains open. From the accessed literature, the Iteso who had migrated to Kenya had contact with the Wanga kingdom. As Karp (1978: 34) puts it, the Wanga kingdom '... allied with the Iteso.' However, the duration of this alliance is not clear. What is clear is the emergence of the British-imposed administration, which dealt the political organisation of the Iteso a fatal blow. In the view of Emudong (1974: 44), 'the major effect of colonial rule was probably to make the Iteso society more egalitarian than it had ever been before.' However, the sense of egalitarianism that resulted from colonialism is rather more negative than positive in that the elders were stripped of their privileges and status. Nonetheless, when some of the Iteso were appointed into the colonial hierarchical structure, inequalities started to emerge.

After the 1987-1992 five-year war, commonly known as the Teso insurgency, the Iteso engaged in a debate. This debate on the future of Teso took place on the editorial page of *Etop* newspaper between 1992 and 1994. As Opak puts it:

The issue of unity or lack of it attracted much editorial comment. Editorial after editorial in the *Etop* newspaper observed that societies which had kings like the Baganda tended to be more united than those without leaders such as the Iteso. Centralised leadership was seen as a prerequisite for success in any organisation or community. The editorials argued that countries could not operate without their presidents, premiers or kings nor corporations without their managing directors. Newspapers could not operate without their editors-in-chief. Even drunkards of the traditional finger millet brew like *ajon* had their group chairmen in Teso and elsewhere. How then did the Iteso expect to survive as a community without a known unifying leader? (Opak, 2001:7)

It was decided that their organisation be called Iteso Cultural Union (ICU). In 1995 the constitution was written and in 1996 the Iteso elected their leader, *Emorimor*. In my view the 1995 constitution of ICU was quite progressive in that 1) the position of *Emorimor* was gender-sensitive because it was open to whoever was elected, either an Etesot (male) or an Atesot (female); and 2) it had a term limit of five years. This view echoes a similar view shared during the constitution review consultative meeting (meeting on views of Iteso in Kampala, 15 November 2016). This constitution had transcended the limited egalitarianism barrier to democracy in that women were brought to the table of leadership.

However, owing to the limitations of the first *Emorimor* who was accused of behaving like a king, the constitution was amended in 1998 and the bearer of the office of *Emorimor* was 1) stripped of the powers of appointing the cabinet; thus, 2) the *Emorimor* was made a figurehead; and 3) the prime minister, just like the *Emorimor*, was elected by the delegates conference. This amendment of the constitution brought new problems. Power wrangles and disagreements emerged between the *Emorimor* and the prime minister and the cabinet started taking sides. The side of *Emorimor* became more powerful than the prime minister's, which led to the resignation of the prime minister. This led to the second amendment of the constitution in 2003 where the *Emorimor* was given the power to appoint the cabinet. In addition, the five-year term limit on the tenure of the bearer of the office of *Emorimor* was lifted. The office of *Emorimor* became gender-insensitive. As such, there was no term limit on the tenure of the *Emorimor* provided he met the requirements. The reason for the office of *Emorimor* to have no term limit was that the *Emorimor* should have the same standing with other monarchs. However, the constitution review consultative meeting was informed that the Bagisu, for instance, had term limits and that they had been successfully changing those in leadership positions and that this arrangement seemed to be working. It was noted that not changing leadership may make the leader complacent and start acting like a monarch (meeting on views of Iteso in Kampala, 15 November 2016).

The Kampala constitution review consultative meeting came up with very progressive recommendations to be considered by the council during the review of the constitution. The recommendations included the following:

- 1) The scope of the electorate needs to be widened beyond the heads of the clans, the burial associations, and the parishes to include Iteso in the diaspora such as Iteso in Kampala, and all other Iteso social formations and organisations. In turn, this will widen the funds catchment scope since all Iteso would be recognised irrespective of their geographical location.

2) If there is no English word equivalent to *Akaliait* (the wife of the *Emorimor*), then the council leaves it that way and with time it will be adopted into the English vocabulary. By doing this, the council will be keeping off the tendency to think and behave in a monarchical way (that is, of calling the wife of *Emorimor*, the queen), which is contrary to the character of the Iteso.

3) The first constitution be revisited and the gender sensitivity and the term limit be upheld.

4) The clan be the custodian of clan land and the council, through the secretariat, be the custodian of the records; ICU, through the council, protects Iteso and their property because the council is a decision-making body.

5) The bearer of the office of *Emorimor* should not have power but authority. As such, the distinction between power and authority should be made. Authority belongs to the bearer of the office of *Emorimor*, but power belongs to the Iteso, the delegates conference, and the council. The difference between power and authority lies in the coercive and respect elements: while power has the coercive element, authority has the respect element. In addition, while power invites resistance, authority does not. On the basis of this distinction, since the bearer of the office of *Emorimor* is a unifier, s/he should not be open to situations that endanger his role, which is promoting the unity of the Iteso. Since power is coercive, it is always divisive and, as such, the bearer of the office of *Emorimor* should not have it.

On blaming the Iteso as forgetful and the tendency to take the tradition of the Iteso as static, which was presented above as the problem encountered by Webster and Vincent, Okalany transcended this problem by reinterpreting the entire traditions that capture the development of the Iteso using the conceptual categories, assumptions and world outlook of a common language/dialect, migration, settlement and environmental factors that influenced migration and settlement.

On the category of common language/dialect, Okalany uses the term *Ateker*, which is in line with Webster, Egimu-Okuda, Emudong and Okalany's view that *Ateker* is less vague compared to the term *Itunga* in referring to the 'people who understand a dialect of the same language' (Okalany, 1980: 76). Okalany observes that *Ateker* as 'a family of people' were 'recently referred to as Central Paraniotes and in earlier literature, Central Nilo-Hamites' (Okalany, 1980:76). *Ateker* is a unit of Paraniotes. With the use of this *Ateker* category, Okalany managed to map and link the historical interactions of the *Ateker* family and the Luo and the Galla. He

shows, for example, that the Ilogir clan is found both among the Iteso and Bari peoples of the Sudan, while the Iminito clan is found among both the Iteso and Lotuko of Sudan (Okalany, 1980: 3). Therefore, the use of the term *Ateker* is productive in mobilising resources for development purposes from all the people that identify with it.

With regard to the migration category, Okalany manages to shed some light on Lawrance's first generation/age by showing that the cradle land of *Ateker* is Lake Rudolf, which, in my view, somewhat throws some light on Lawrance's first generation that lived near water bodies. With this category, Okalany shows the invasions that took place between the Iteso, Luo and Galla, which provoked the migration, and the sharing of cultures and livelihood technologies. The settlement category is also linked to the migration and environmental factors such as drought and famine, diseases, and the availability of water and grass for the cattle that influenced the migration and settlement of the Iteso. This understanding of the past connections is beneficial in forging present and future alliances with the descendants of the people who had interacted with the ancestors of the Iteso in terms of shared heritage.

From this recap, it is interesting how Okalany through his conceptual categories, assumptions and world outlook managed to create a space that produced fertile ground for enhancing the imaginative generation of evidence to support the traditions of the pre-colonial development of the Iteso. Even though Okalany does not directly refer to the Amotoi/Amooti ka/Ka Etesot Association traditions, his work actually somewhat addresses some of the difficulties that Webster and Vincent faced, just as the above example of situating the cradle land of *Ateker* seemed to do. The uniqueness of Okalany's work is that he had cast his net over a wider area; this wider area enabled him to assemble ample pieces of evidence that the other scholars did not. As such, Okalany's work has made the historical processes of the traditions of the past development of Iteso accessible for consideration in the current attempts to transcend the development barriers and traps. This reinforces the argument that development is the implementation of the collective decisions to improve livelihoods and realize aspirations of the people.

5. Conclusion

This article has argued that the Iteso have endeavoured to be democratic since the pre-colonial period. The central trait of the variant of democracy practised by the Iteso is characterised by collective decisions. In the pre-colonial society of the Iteso, it was only the elders who enjoyed the prestige,

status and opportunity of practising collective decision-making. Currently, this element of collective decision-making is referred to as the republican character of the Iteso. However, owing to increased numbers, the pre-colonial decision by recognition has been transformed into the current decision by election. In both of these modes of democratic decision-making, discussion is a preparation stage.

Since pre-colonial democratic decision-making was limited to elders, the young men transcended its despotic tendency by migrating to new settlements. For the more than 90 years that the Iteso did not have a political organisation since the colonial establishment destroyed and prohibited the reproduction of the age-set system, the Iteso did not make collective decisions till 1996 when they elected their first *Emorimor*, the unifier. This move was motivated by the 1987-1992 Teso insurgency that was brought to a stop through mediation. Since the election of the first *Emorimor*, the debate on the democracy of the Iteso has been focused on the amendments of the Iteso Cultural Union constitution. The debate is between the ideal and the practice, whereby the practice is always checked by what is referred to as the Iteso republican character.

In this article, the implementation of the collective decisions is referred to as development. The memory of the past development of the Iteso has been captured in the traditions of the Iteso. However, there has been a problem of presenting these traditions with minimal interpretation, which has portrayed the traditions as static as if they did not have historical processes that informed their formation. The rectification of this problem has made the past historical processes available for present and future purposes.

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