Plural Society and the Challenge of Democratic Practice in Nigeria

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Abstract

Against the backdrop that democracy is a near impossibility in a plural or multi-racial nation, this work sets to examine the place of democratic consolidation in a plural society like Nigeria. It reveals that though more desirable than other types of government, democracy is exclusivist in nature and promotes diversity; thus, it can either encourage or discourage ethnic violence and mistrust depending on how certain factors are handled. This work concludes that despite the problems facing Nigeria's attempt at democracy, the system, if properly modified and harnessed, has high hopes of ensuring a more peaceful environment. Hence, the study recommends that Nigeria needs to fast-trade concrete solutions to the country's crises through political restructuring and democratic consolidation.

Keywords: Plural Society, Democracy, Minority Consideration, Majority Power, Nigeria's Democracy, Democratic Consolidation.

Introduction

For about five decades after the 'flag independence', Nigeria still totters on as a toddler, often pulled down by issues and questions of power sharing, integration, peaceful coexistence, etc. In other words, the major problem which the post-independent Nigeria has been trying to grapple with is that of inclusive government in a society that is made up of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural groups. Obviously, previous experiments with the unitary system and the military governments never met the expectations of the people. Thus, the expectation soon shifted to a system seen to be working wonderfully in other advanced nations like the United States of America (USA), Germany, Canada, etc. Many have attributed this development largely to the successive administrations' aversion towards adhering strictly to the concept of justice and equity, fairness and good governance.

Nigeria, apart from the foregoing, is assailed by a curious and depressing distribution crisis triggered most often by a dubious and unacceptable formula for the sharing of the somehow elusive national wealth, which many prefer to regard as the "national cake''. The result has made the post-independent Nigeria, over the years, to witness friction and tension among the over 250 ethnic nationalities. This explains why Oladesu (2002:15) submits that the cultivation of national outlook by many has inadvertently given way to a continued lukewarm attitude towards nation-building by the frustrated groups within Nigeria. Such emotions are stirred by the clandestine tribal organizations, which inaudibly has culminated in the hot race for relevance within the nation's political and socio-economic equations. In more succinct terms, the problem is that since the independence era of the 1960s to the beginning of the Civil War on July 01, 1967, Nigeria had witnessed a low degree of national cohesion. Its diverse ethnic nationalities, in response to this low level of integration, have decided to look inwards (among themselves) for political succour and survival in an incoherent polity. The Niger-Delta insurgency and its attendant crisis, the uproar by the O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC); the outrage by the Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and the recent terrorism masterminded by the Boko Haram sect in parts of Northern Nigeria, are all form of expression of anger, frustration and incoherent nature of the political integration of Nigeria.

It should be noted that each of Nigeria's regions has at one time or another expressed the said frustration in different ways and at different times. The situation, which is largely blamed on lack of cohesion and integration, is further being fuelled by the lack of meaningful and accepted symbols of common heritage and common historical past which could have bound the diverse ethnic nationalities together. For a sense of belonging, therefore, many expected that a system of government like democracy would provide the needed umbrella for all. After experimenting with the civil war, military rule, etc, Nigeria had high hopes of establishing bedrock of democratic consolidation for the benefit of her enormous size and bewildering diversities. The question of whether those hopes were well founded and whether they have been met is what we set out to examine in this work as their failure is seen as one of the reasons for violence and disharmony, or as an innate reason for the impossibility of democracy in a strictly plural society.

The difficulty that confronts Nigeria as it concerns integration lies clearly in the nature of her geographical composition. As argued by Ogundowole (76), Nigeria cannot make progress in any direction because she was found on a shaky base of plurality. Consequently, the problem arises on how to achieve solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities. So far, very few countries have evolved a political system that can cope with this gigantic problem of hyper-ethnic instability syndrome. The USA and Canada happen to be two of such countries, although some scholars like Ogundowole argue otherwise. Ogundowole (79) insists that USA's experience should not be compared to that of Nigeria because the two countries have different structures. The USA, according to him, has "plural features but not a plural society in the strictest sense of the world" and that "even if (USA) could be described as plural, she is certainly not a deeply heterogeneous society as Nigeria is". Ogundowole's view clearly supports our belief that Nigeria's political problems stem first from its plural nature. It accounts for the reason every person sees himself first as a member of his tribe before being a Nigerian.

According to Ojo (2009: 385), in an attempt to manage her disparate ethno-religious and linguistic entities, Nigeria opted for federalism in 1954. But with the dominant central control, a lot of questions still remained unanswered; and insatiable agitations led to the quest for democracy. The attraction was perhaps more in the popular definition of democracy than in the actual understanding of it in practice. It is doubtful if the model of democracy in USA, seen across the world as a standard for democracy and adopted by Nigeria, was carefully studied to understand why it works there. So, the question at this point is: has democracy, which Nigeria gleefully copied from USA and other developed countries met her expectations? In clearer terms, has democracy in a plural society like Nigeria lived to its billing? Are the principles and ethos of democracy practicable in a plural society? Is plural nature of Nigeria a problem of proper functioning of democracy? If yes, what should one do? And how would the minority groups in Nigeria survive in such a democracy? We would at attempt to answer the above question. But first, it might be expedient to understand the context under which we apply some of the key concepts like "plural society", "democracy", "democratic practice", etc.

Explication of Concepts
For proper understanding of what follows, it is important to elucidate on some of the concepts that we employ in this paper. Hence, we would specifically focus on two concepts: "plural society" and "democracy".

Plural Society
A common notion from the term "plural society" is that of a compound word that suggests complexity in operation and nature. It also demotes an organized group of person associated together for religious, economic, benevolent, cultural, scientific, political, patriotic or other diverse purposes. This further entails different people in general, thought of living together in organized communities with shared laws, traditions, and values. Plural society also stands for or defines a community of people with diverse values, cultures, languages, religions, traditions, origins, etc. Furnivall, (2009:2), sees a plural society as comparing two or more distinct social orders, living in parallel within one political entity, without much intermingling. Furnivall also sees plural society as: "Exploitative of the individual and destructive of group values found in traditional society, while at the same time falling far short of those believed to be ideally distinctive of modern democratic societies … characterized by some overriding moral or political principles that alone could transcend the divisive forces of material self-seeking inevitably generated in the plural society and that would command the common allegiance of all its sub-divisions" (Fortes, 1970:10).

For Furnivall, therefore, a plural society is in the strictest sense a medley of peoples, who "mix but do not combine". Each group "holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its ideas and ways" (1984:27). The image one develops from the above is that of a "salad bowl" as against the idealized notion of the American "melting pot" in practical terms, while Nigeria can be represented by the "salad bowl", the "melting pot" effectively illustrates the American society and its democracy. Plural society in the Nigerian context is found in the multi-cultural and multi-linguistic nature of the society. As mentioned earlier, Nigeria with her 250 ethnic groups fits the traditional concept of a plural society. What it means is that apart from sharing the common geographical expression or entity called Nigeria, each ethnic group is distinct in culture and social make-up. In another sense, Nigeria's secular notion harbours adherents of diverse religious views. According to Rabushka and Shepsle: "A society is plural if it is culturally diverse and if its cultural sections are organized into cohesive political sections. The identification of a plural society, then, becomes a matter of observation. Politically organized cultural sections, communally based political parties, the partitioning of major social groups (for example, labour unions) into culturally homogeneous subgroups, and political appeals emphasizing primordial sentiments serve as unambiguous indicators of a plural society" (1972:21).

However, Furnivall hardly had Nigeria in mind when he observed "a medley of people" among Europeans, Chinese, Indians and natives. Yet, his view that those people "mix but do not combine" aptly describes the Nigerian situation. Hence, we see Nigeria as a plural society where there is intermingling of cultures in subjugated political environment, in which the politically powerful groups take all and the weaker groups live in penury and frustration. Before long, as in the Nigerian experience, cleavages foist stronger bounds and the experience results in group or ethnic loyalty. Each group in Nigeria's plural society holds to its own religion; or its culture and language; or its own ideas and ways of life.

Democracy in Nigeria: Myth or Reality?
The first question at this point is: what is democracy? For, with the understanding of the concept of democracy, one stands a better chance of perceptively evaluating its values and achievements. The popular notion of democracy today is drawn from Abraham Lincoln address of 1863, where he made reference to "government of the people, by the people, for the people". That is why Elijah John (68) holds that democracy implies a method of government in which everyone takes part in the process of governance either fully as a member of the majority, or partially as part of the minority. The reality from all this is that democracy has been generally accepted to mean the rule of government of the people. In this paper, we shall accept democracy simple as a form of government in which all eligible citizens participate equally - either directly or indirectly through elected representatives. Theoretically, it encompasses social, religious, cultural, ethnic and racial equality, justice, liberty and fraternity.

It should be noted here that like any philosophical concept, democracy does not have a single definition. In fact, its definitions of democracy are as varied as there are political scientists, philosophers, etc the various definitions are also influenced by the particular discipline under which the concept of democracy is viewed from. And it should also be noted that no particular definition of democracy is adequate, because of the ever evolving realities. Be that as it may, democracy, according to Appadorai (1968:137), "is a system of government under which the people exercise the power to govern either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves". In other words, a state is operating a democracy if it ensures that the citizens express themselves without fear and their views are taken into consideration in the running of government. Elijah John (2009:68), sees democracy as one embodies the essence of the concept of 'the rule of the people'. Specially, Elijah John (2009:69) defines democracy as a method of government in which everyone takes part in the process of governance either fully as a member of the majority, or partially as part of the minority. For Obafemi Awolowo, democracy is the best form of government. In clear terms, he sees democracy as that form of government which: "Posits the ultimate principle that political power or sovereignty belongs to the entire people of a state rather than to the few or the one, and that it is the entire people of the state who are entitled to exercise this power for their own benefit" (1968:93).

Similarly, Nnamdi Azikiwe defines democracy as: "The rule of a people by its majority inhabitants and includes a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation, usually involving periodically held free and fair elections" (1974:2,3). In all the definitions above, it is obvious that the people's right of participation in governance is emphasized. Democracy is therefore principally people-focused and the political power resides with the people. For us, therefore, democracy is that system of governance in which the citizens have access to power and the opportunity to be involved directly or indirectly in decisions as it concerns their well-being.

In practice, however, democracy has never merited the attributes it has been so loaded with. It has always shied from the marks of justice and equity, said to be its hallmarks. It should also be noted here that never in the history of democracy was there ever a time that everybody participated in ruling, as erroneously portrayed in the concept of direct democracy. For instance, in the Greek city of Athens, where the whole democratic experiment started, democratic citizenship was only granted to an elite class of free men. Women and slaves were excluded from political participation, thus forming the minority within the 'plural society'. It is doubtful then, how a claim of justice and equally can fit into such a society. For any insistence of the existence of justice in such a setting, where certain people are excluded from a supposed government of the "people" would mean subjective justice. That would clearly amount to a society of double standards, where different rulers are applied to different sets of people based on their political, economic and societal status. To Furnivall (1984:36), the originator of the concept of "plural society", such a society, whether in a democracy or not, is exploitative and destructive.

In Nigeria, according to Fadahunsi and Babawale (1996:173), the founding fathers of the Nigeria multinational state, taking cognizance of the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity of the Nigerian people, opted for a federal system of government. That decision was based on recommendations from series of constitutional

conferences in 1948, 1950, 1953/1954, 1958, and 1963. Democracy, being a concept formulated for the convenience of the society, is based on certain principles. According to Appadorai (1968:138), for democracy to succeed in a given political environment there must be guaranteed opportunity of political participation as well as political equality. The concept of political equality, in practice is vague and unattainable. It is simply a myth, like Voltaire would say. And on the issue of political participation, it is only accepted that Appadorai is here referring to the opportunity for all sectors of the society to be involved in governance. Appadorai insists that: "In order, however, that democracy may work successfully, certain additional conditions are necessary. Foremost among these are the widespread habits of tolerance and compromise among the members of a community, a sense of 'give and take'. This is necessary because democracy involves the conception of majority rule and the acquiescence of minority in the decision of the majority" (1868:138,139).

In practice, as observed earlier, democratic conditions are rarely fulfilled (Appadorai, 1968:141); right from the ancient Greece to contemporary times. Perhaps, in the future, such may be possible but in today's reality, democracy has never been able to accommodate, incorporate or integrate all segments of the society. The concepts of tolerance and compromise are never achieved; for everyone seems to think of his position as the only right one, especially in a plural society like Nigeria. The result is what we experience in contemporary Nigeria in form of violent conflicts, marginalization, ethnicity, political subjugation, economic emasculation, religious intolerance, etc.

Ethnicity and Multi-Racial Effects in Nigeria
While there are those who argue that tribal cleavages or group loyalty can never augur well for a nation, Obiagwu (2001:6), contends that "we hurt ourselves when we deny that tribalism is actually the foundation upon which our concept of federalism is built". The force of his argument is that in reality today, political positions in Nigeria are shared along ethnic divides. Similarly, intakes into tertiary institutions, employment opportunities, etc are also dictated by tribal sentiments. "The negative attention we pay to our tribal yearnings and passion confuses and misdirects our sense of patriotism (Obiagwu, 2001:6). What we have today in Nigeria is a melting pot of self-serving principles dressed in the euphemism of national interest. It goes without saying that the tribal colouration of our politics has always been seen as an element of retrogression in our development. Yet, despite pretenses, Nigeria public officials are judged based on what they embezzle for themselves and also take home to their people. That is why every group or region in Nigeria strives to produce the next prominent leader in the hope that more tangible benefits would come their way. Thus, Obiagwu declares: "The Igbos are still finding it difficult to forgive the late Owelle of Onitsha, Rt Hon. Nnamdi Azikiwe, for the nationalistic politics he played against the tribal interest of the Igbos. It is thought in some circle that if Zik had played the tribal politics that some of his contemporaries played, the Igbos might have had a better deal today. The late Chief Obafemi Awolowo despite his failure to raise his politics to a national level is revered for his tribal charities. If Awo had had the privilege to becoming president, anyone today can imagine what that would have meant for the Yoruba" (2001:6).

In any plural society, democracy cannot successful thrive except in a true federalism or confederalism. This position is born out of the fact that mankind in a plural society always come to politics with additional equipment such as: scheming, planning, rigging, negative propaganda, buying and bribery, outmaneuvering, thuggery and so on, which their reason as well as emotion and peculiar circumstances provide or dictate for them (John, 2009:302). Perhaps, a war veteran, Frederick Forsyth has a more and better understanding of the impossibility of a true democracy in a plural society like Nigeria when he reports *inter alia:* "In Africa as elsewhere, political power means success and prosperity, not only for the man who holds it, but also for his family, his birth place and even his whole region of origin. As a result there are many who will go to any lengths to get it and having gotten it, will surpass themselves in order to keep it "(1977:25).

The above sums up what plays out in Nigeria's plural society. Every group wants to be represented in the leadership cadre in the fervent hope of huge benefits. In the ensuring struggles for political power, what often results is confusion, compromise, anger, frustration and violence In Africa most tribal-induced violence commonly called extreme ethnic loyalty are therefore as a result of marginalization. The situation gets even worse with the adoption of certain forms and principles of government which on the surface appears to hold the magic wand for the economic integration, political accommodation, justice and equity for the people. Nigeria's experience with democracy, for instance, has left more questions than answers; more dissatisfaction than contentment. The immediate effects of multi-racial influence in Nigeria are clearly manifested in two key areas: politics and economy. Politically, a multi-racial Nigeria has experienced bastardisation of policies, in order to favour some officials from certain areas of the country. In the words of Obiagwu (2001:6), in practical terms, Nigerians, whom he described as "tribalists at heart", would at all cost prefer members of their ethnic

nationalities to other tribes in positions of authority. Moreover, every political decision or appointment or establishment of project is first evaluated on the bases of who stands to benefit more, who is being appointed or where it is sited, why it should be located there, etc. Rightly or wrongly, certain ethnic groups in Nigeria feel cheated once a leader in power is not from their ethnic origin. We believe that this is as a result of widespread mistrust, apathy and arrogance by some ethnic groups towards the less favoured groups. Some groups present themselves as better than others hence should be the only ones to rule (Ogundowole, 1994:19).

 Prior to May 1999, the Yoruba ethnic group wanted power and accused the Hausa-Fulani of being unfair to every other group in the country. As multi-racial nation, they argued, Nigerian political power should be rotated. Soon after, their kin, Olusegun Obasanjo, ascended the throne, cries of marginalization ensued from other parts of the country. Many ethnic groups accused Obasanjo of favouring his Yoruba ethnic group in appointments and policies to the detriment of others. President Musa Yar'Adua's tenure witnessed similar claims. Till his death, some of Yar'Adua's kin's men were accused of holding the nation to ransom. Currently, with Ebele Johnathan on the saddle, complains of neglect from some parts of the country have assumed a frightened dimension. Jonathan, an Ijaw man from South-South, has been accused of situating major projects in his state of origin, Bayelsa. The perceived neglect and marginalization, some swear, are responsible for the current spate of terrorism experience in some parts of the North, apparently to attract government attention.

 The problem of plural society is best understood from the background of what Asofo (1999:4) calls "motivations for human behavior". Asafo has further shown that human actions, whether political, religious, economical, social, etc are greatly influenced by their social groupings. This trend occasioned by cleavages can be traced back to the 1951 election (Eme Ekekwe, 1986:73). Ekekwe is not done yet, he points out that in order to gain votes, the petty *bourgeoisie* political class had to resort to ethnic and religious sentiments. Till date: "People in many parts of Nigeria still regard political leaders, members of the intelligentsia, army or police officers, or civil servants, who hail from their village or clan, simply as one of them. Such a person is seen as 'our' son or daughter, his or her position in the society is hardly correlated with their exploitations. On the contrary, such a person is expected to share his or her wealth and prestige with the local community either through his or her extended family and/or through periodic distribution of largeness" (Ekekwe, 1986:70).

In the words of Otite (1975:119), political relations also tend to become economic relations. He also adds that: "Political positions are thus economic resources exploited in the context of an ethnically stratified society". In other words, those who are fortunate to assume key political positions make sure they exploit the economy in favour of their individual self and that of their groups. Such exploitation leaves the less privilege groups groping for survival by any means. This manifests in dubious quest for jobs, contracts and other forms of economic empowerment. The eventual frustrations that ensue often end in violent expression of pent up anger. Otite (1975:120) argues that Nigeria's plural society is influenced by "unequal access to the source and opportunities for economic survival". In effect, money concentrates in a few hands of the elite class; to the detriment of the neglected societies. In a situation of abject neglect and poverty, the disadvantaged groups have two options: to "go along with whatever the major ethnic groups" do (Odetola, 1974:164); or to fight for recognition and survival.

The Challenge of Democratic Practice in Nigeria
For easy appraisal of how democracy works in a plural society, it is important to recall the principles on which democracy itself operates. As rightly observed by Appadorai (1968:138-139), "democracy involves the conception of majority and the acquiescence of the minority in the decision of the majority". As it is commonly said, the minority always has its say but the majority would always have its way, anyway. The import of all this is that, in a society like Nigeria with its plural features, no matter what the minority thinks; no matter her sentiments or sensibilities, she will never be given a chance. The opinion of the minority is never taken into consideration in a plural society. This is because democracy is the rule of the majority and ethnic cum religious sentiments are highly popularized. There is another subtle way of reminding the minority groups of their ethnic, religious, cultural, political, etc inconsequentialities in decision-makings in a democracy. As the saying goes, "majority carries the vote". The issue here is never whether the majority could be wrong or not; but what matters is the sheer accident of being a majority. In fact, anyone trying to contest against a faulty decision of the majority is reminded that "democracy is a game of numbers" – meaning that because the other people were more in numbers their decision overrides those of the minority. Again, no consideration is ever given to the merits or otherwise of whatever views the minority may have. When all these play out in a democratic society like Nigeria with its multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-political, etc persuasions, the result is usually unpalatable. In other words, there is no room for the toleration of opposing views.

Our position in this paper is not to argue against the merits of democracy but simply to point out its areas of inconsideration especially in a plural society and, perhaps, to help it work better. That is why we consider that in a plural society like Nigeria, democracy has left some flanks uncovered and the result has been regrettable. Thus, like Fortes (1970:11) has noted, the central problem thrown up by Furnivall's theory still remains opened. The question then is: can we ever achieve what Fortes (1970:11, 12) calls "moral consensus and the political integration" that are supposed to characterize a free, democratic society? For now, there is nothing in sight to suggest a quick fix for the problem. The origin of the problem, ironically, seems to be the general lack of cohesion found in the democratic society. Whereas in Nigeria, it was hoped that democracy would ensure peace, harmony, justice, fairness, equity, etc; but the reverse seems to be case. Pre-independence Nigeria, like every plural society, enjoyed cooperation among the diverse groups. They were hardly in competition as the colonialists were seen as the common enemy. However, as independence became imminent; with the eventual exit of the colonial masters, the cohesion became strained. Today, the Nigerian plural society has become an atomistic society, perpetually at war with itself. The resultant conflicts arise from the various aspects that make up the plural society; thus further threatening any chance of democratic amendments. This is where real democracy becomes near impossible in a plural society.

As argued by Obiagwu (2001:2), tribalism and ethnicity cannot be wished away in Nigerian politics. A detribalized Nigerian, he says, is a lost soul, in fact, without nationality. The sane option then is to embrace tribalism and make the best out of the situation. Failure to harness it properly however leads to conflicts. And, Rabushka and Shepsle (1972:6), note that ethnic conflict illustrates the difficulties that pluralism poses for orderliness and democratic government. They however add that the problems of ethnic diversity and political instability are not peculiar to developing countries. Accordingly Rabushka and Shepsle state thus: "If they were (peculiar to developing countries), we might expect that economic development and urbanization would eliminate ethnic tensions and facilitate stable government. However, a growing expression of ethnic sentiments in the political processes of several industrialized nations during the 1960s and early 1970s belies this expectation; thus ethnic politics is indeed not a unique product of the so-called underdeveloped world" (1972:7). Worthy of note here is the fact that,"ethnic conflict is constrained neither by time nor space. This means that the history of plural societies is replete with tragedies of civil strife dating over centuries and located in nearly every region of the globe" (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972:7).

In the Nigerian experience, we observe that the current spat of violence in some Northern parts of the country has been attributed to the ineffectiveness of democracy in integrating the minority of that sector. It is noted that the major characters in the *Boko-Haram* violence are from the Fulani-North, who claim fundamentally that they have been marginalized. A similar claim emanated from the Niger Delta in the south-South region of Nigeria a few years back. Although the cries of marginalization have not ceased completely, they only abated with the federal Government promise to and who actually initiated programmes seen under the Musa Yar'adua regime as a concrete response to the yearnings of the people. With the eventual ascension to the presidential throne by Jonathan, Niger Deltans seem to have been pacified. Before then, however, a lot of lives had been lost; hordes of properties had been damaged and hundreds of billions of Naira worth of oil revenue lost. In effect, the economic fortune of the country has been dragged backwards each time such violence is unleashed. Fortes have also observed that at the center of all the violent struggles within the plural society is the question of ethnic loyalty. It should be noted that such ethnic or tribal loyalties arise from the quest for people from communal alliance in the face of seeming or actual neglects from the federal government. According to Fortes: "The political instability that resulted is plain from the recent history of military coups and counter coups, assassinations and expulsions, and finally the ghastly civil wars in the Congo, Nigeria and elsewhere. And what is most significant about these intestine struggles and conflicts is the way in which tribal, cultural, and regional divisions, animosities and particularized loyalties have been mobilized in them. They are not examples of class conflict, in any sense, but of inter-tribal conflict on pluralist societies. A pathetic testimony to this is the present (1968) "Biafran" patriotism of a man like Nnamdi Azikiwe, whose life was dedicated to the ideal of Nigeria national independence and unity" (1970:17).

It appears such tribal loyalty has permeated the system such that even in a democracy, political parties are formed on the basis of regional or ethnic affinity. Again, as expected, the minority groups within the plural society, are left out. Since they have no political might, which in most cases translate into economic muscles, they cannot form their own parties. And even if they do form such parties, there is no guarantee that the parties would be recognized by the majority-dominated political administration. Even if, for the show of it, such parties are recognized, they cannot make any impact. A case in point is when Nigeria had over 50 political parties registered just to make them feel good or perhaps to present the façade of democratic governance. After a few years of inconsequential and inconspicuous existence on the pages of newspapers and closed files in the offices

of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), they were deregistered. The majority again had its way! Even the adoption of the federal system of government has not augured well for Nigeria. Critics say when the center gets too powerful; the actualization of tangible development is forestalled. Hence, Ogundowole (1994:29) observes that, "the grave limitation of the inverted federalism currently in operation in Nigeria is that it effectively alienates majority of the nationalities that make up Nigeria from real state power including even the possibility of ever attaining state political power".

Democracy in Nigeria's plural society is a near impossibility. Its failure to guarantee equitable opportunities for all the segments of the plural society constitutes its major undoing. This is because elementary prerequisites for stable democracy like social homogeneity is lacking in Nigeria. Quoting from Mill, Ogundowole (1994:71), is of the view that democracy is not possible in plural societies of multi-national dimensions as the case is in Nigeria. Another scholar, Elijah John seems to be agreeing with Ogundowole on the difficulty of entrenching democracy in Nigeria's plural society. According to Elijah John (2009:71), "in any plural state, democracy is not only hazardous but it also entails the imposition of the structure necessary for domination by one of the segments, as a vital aspect of the exercise". For Ogundowole (1994:15), democracy is supposed to be built "on what unites men, not what separates them; the similarities of men, not their differences, and what enhances the formation of/and the guarantee of the equitable life of a society". Moreover, democracy has "equity" as the cornerstone of its edifice – "equity in consideration, participation, opportunity, responsibility and legal protection; for, equity of citizenship and ethnicity is the lodestar of democracy" (Ogundowole, 1994:16).

In essence, democracy in plural societies is expected to provide an even playing field for all citizens to equitably utilize power. Ogundowole (1994:16) is emphatic about this when he states: "democracy prevails where the ground on which men stand is even". But while Ogundowole's view holds true in countries like the USA and Canada, the case of Nigeria is different. It therefore follows that employment opportunities, admission into schools, appointment into government offices, promotions, siting of projects, voting, etc are determined based on tribalism and nepotism; thus, real democracy cannot be said to be working in such environments. No wonder the Nigerian experience has faltered over the years. It goes without saying that national injustice delays development. And the oppressed members of small nations are mostly sensitive to the feeling of equality.

To ignore the demands, aspirations, clamour, cries, plights or interest of the minority simply because they are out-numbered is a clear display of injustice. In such a situation, according to Appadorai (1968:139), if the minority insists on its right, then the pretense of democracy becomes apparent. Appadorai however admits that there is a wide-ranging gap in the distribution of national wealth in a democracy and urges that the disparities should be reduced. In his words, "The connection between such a postulate and effective democracy is clear: men languishing in what and living under insecure and deleterious conditions of work can hardly be blamed for not taking intelligent part in the government which democracy demands" (Appadorai, 1968:139). That is to say that it is expected and indeed justifiable in a democracy for members of the ignored group in a plural society to agitate and attract attention through violent means. While not supporting violence, per se, we argue that the operators of democracy do not need to allow the plural society to get to that point of war of each against all. In other words, when it gets to a point where every individual takes up arms in an "I-against-them" battle, the society is destroyed. The essence of any society in such a setting is also defeated. Thus, Ogundowole's view becomes very instructive: "Once all grounds for fear of domination and deprivation are eliminated the question of what type and nature of federalism to operate may have been partially solved … The splitting of Nigeria into more and more states within the federal structure involved. Equality of status will follow equality of opportunity and accomplished" (1984:58).

Although person differs culturally, but Furnivall believes that they are all similar in their basic economic wants - each desires profit. For the sake of this paper, we take the desired profit to be that of democratic profits; that is, the clamour for good things of life as often promised in a democracy. When the term "dividends of democracy" is used, the understanding is that it hands out laudable and desirable amenities that make life worth living. Certainly, there is no individual or human community that would not want such "desired profits". It is no wonder, therefore, that when such "desired profits" are not extended to all the sectors of the society, murmur, agitation and violent protest ensue. By nature, the plural society is heterogeneous, with qualitatively distinct characters from the homogeneous one. By that token, their interests vary and different communities of the plural society can meet only in the political marketplace – where they are to shop with all they have, according to their needs but also according to their means. In a situation where they are left with lean or no resource, they become susceptible to outside influence. Furnivall's admission that external force is then required to maintain order in such a democracy implies that plural societies are inherently prone to violent and/or conflict (1984:12).

Democracy in the plural society, as seen earlier, in undermined if political parties express purely ethnic sentiments ... But this usually happens in a situation where members of the plural society feel marginalized, neglected, etc. They then reason that should they form a political party that enjoys their tribal loyalty and perchance when it assumes power; the lot of members of the particular section of the plural society maybe better off. Thus, in the plural society competitive politics is characterized by ethnic politics. That is to say, ethnicity is the (only) major basis for the "authoritative allocation of value" (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972: 63). The concept of democracy, in this way, is akin to the utilitarian principle, which caters for the greatest interest or happiness of the greatest number. The question is: what happens to the interest or the greatest happiness of the minority? Rather than the utilitarian principle of greatest happiness for the majority, some philosophers have advocated for the entrenchment of the "common good" to accommodate the minorities too. According to Iwuala and Austin (2013:94), the common good is a term that can refer to several different concepts. In the popular meaning, the common good describes a specific 'good' that is shared and beneficial for all members of a given community". In line with Jacques Maritain's arguments, Iwuala and Austin opine: "The common good is common because it is received in persons, each one of whom is a mirror of the whole. The end of the society is the good of the community, of the social body. But if the good of the social body is not understood to be a common good of human persons, just as the social body itself is a whole of human person, this conception also would lead to other errors of a totalitarian type" (Iwuala and Austin (2013:95).

The idea of common good as espoused here is antithetical to the tenets of democracy because it has "everyone" in view. In arguing against "totalitarianism", Maritain directs his attack on oppression and oppressive forces that militate against the minorities. This is why Iwuala and Austin (2013:97) submit that "common good is to be understood as the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily". In the words of Ukagba, *et al*, (2014:98), the sum total of the said conditions is "the social order that makes possible and protects the good of all, the minority as well as the majority". Democracy in plural societies is a casualty of communal politics. As the majority adopts undemocratic methods to strengthen its hold on power, so does the minority explore and exploit similar undemocratic methods to wrest power. The result then becomes perpetual distrust and eventual chaos.

Since the return of democratic rules in Nigeria (from 1999 to date), it has not been without some obstacles. It would be expected that the attempt at separating functions in terms of tiers of government, as done in a federal system, would take government closer to the people. Alas, the reverse has been the case in Nigeria. Rather than solve the problem, it has compounded the plights of democracy in Nigeria's plural society. The irony being that the central government appears too alienated from the people. Hence, the marginalized people, always in need of benefits of government, place their eternal hopes on and incessantly demand multiplicity of states and local governments. Most scholars agree that from 1954 when Nigeria embraced federalism, the polity has been wallowing from one problem to the other which also affected the practice of democracy and made all efforts at national cohesion a mirage after all.

The Way Forward

As a way out of the socio-political quagmire that Nigeria has found herself, many suggestions have been raised. The latest platform for such views is the recently constituted National Conference. While many have argued in favour of true federalism, others maintain that the country needs a well-structured constitution. Yet another group insists that there is nothing wrong with the Nigerian Constitution as it is. To the latest group, the only problem in Nigeria is the lack of real political will by the leaders to implement the constitutional provisions to the fullest. For instance, the Nigerian Constitution has clearly spelt out the privileges and rights of each individual, irrespective of his/her social status, ethnic origin, religious leanings and political affinity. The implication of such constitutional provisions is that if implemented accordingly and to the letter, people and interests from diverse backgrounds constituting the political society would be accommodated.

Additionally, the National Conference has considered major issues that could shape the country's progress. They include issues of class divide and the resultant mass poverty, inequality in access to wealth, opportunities and basic services based on a comprehensive and enforceable social charter, the question of insecurity and its connection to poverty and alienation, and the question of how to end the dichotomy between citizenship and "indigeneship". But to realize the above, Nigeria does not only need capable leaders but effective leaders filled with the fear of God and good conscience. For us, the issue is not so much about the constitution as in its implementation. Besides, we believe that what Nigeria needs is true federalism. Moreover, we agree with Tola Adeniyi (2014:2), that Nigeria needs a "real fiscal democracy and resource control. Nigerians want real devolution of powers and elimination of the corruption-laden arrogance of the power at the centre".

Similarly, Kekong Bisong (2008:269), believes that for Nigeria to grow, structurally and democratically, the component states should be allowed more independent or sovereign responsibilities. Democracy and federalism being human concepts are certainly not perfect. Their implementations leave much to be desired. However, the fact that it is man-made, hence imperfect, presupposes the fact that they can be tinkered with. We fully subscribe, therefore, to the remodeling of democracy for accommodation of the Nigerian experience. In that wise, we believe that if Nigeria returns to regionalism, over the years, every segment of the plural society would have been touched positively. It is expected that regionalism would restore a sense of belonging to the component parts of Nigeria. However, we are not subscribing for a return to the former four regional structures. Rather, we believe in a federation or confederation of between six and eight geopolitical zones entrenched in the Nigeria Constitution, with near-sovereignty of federating units. According to Adeniyi: "Gross injustice, inequities in the sharing of the commonwealth and arrant mismanagement of national assets must stop. Most of the items on the exclusive list must be removed and Nigeria must practice true federal system. As a matter of fact, most Nigerians want a loose federation as obtained in the United State of America, Canada, Britain, and other multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-lingua communities" (2013:3).

Nigeria is long overdue for restructuring, considering the circumstances that brought about its emergence as a nation. As a union of different ethnic peoples and diverse cultural/religious persuasions, Nigeria was brought into an inconvenient marriage of strange bedfellows through the accident of British colonialism. As Osita Ebiem (2014: 3) has noted, "these different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic divisions are not just merely mutually contradictory; they are mutually antagonistic and irreconcilable". In order to fix the Nigerian problem, this colonial mistake of joining peoples of different ideological and cultural convictions must come completely undone. Nigeria must be divided into separate independent countries along existing ethnic, cultural and religious lines as that may mean over 250 separate countries, we however agree that some restructuring need to be done to give everyone a sense of belonging. If the centre is made weak and the component regional units become stronger, perhaps development would easily reach the nooks and corners of Nigeria. In that way, there would be less rancour and mistrust between the North and the South or between the major ethnic groups and the smaller linguistic groups. Thus, democracy would thrive. But in the present, democracy in Nigerian plural society is not possible.

According to Ojo (2009: 394), federalism is reputed to be an effective political-cum-constitutional design for managing complex governmental problems usually associated with ethnic and cultural diversity. However, he is quick to note Nigeria's unfortunate situation, where federalism has "failed to take firm roots". Yet, despite the poor run of federalism, Ojo holds that Nigeria "has not diminished the perceived utility of the system as evidenced by the clamour for the so-called true federalism in Nigeria". It is because federalism is still relevant that we recommend that it should not be completely thrown overboard in Nigeria. Instead, it should be modified to suit Nigeria's peculiar situation and need for true federalism. In essence, Nigeria needs an entirely different approach to governance which must be based on a different philosophy that will guarantee groups' rights by recognizing the heterogeneity of the polity (Ojo, 2009:394). It is our firm believe that the hope and destiny of Nigeria, like Ogundowole (1994:20), would say, "Depend on how our people resolve the ambiguity of attitude and behavior toward each (sic) other". The said ambiguity of attitude can be resolved through creative, humane and all-inclusive approaches.

Attention must be given to ensure the sustenance of political consistencies rooted in unflinching democratic principles and practices. It should be noted that our problem is not with democracy as a form of government but its method of distributive justice. When the canon of "social utility" is applied, there emerges the opposite of what ought to be – what we may term as "distributive injustice". This is because, according to Lemun and Erinke (2013:226), "the multiplier-effect of such a diverse arrangement is often, the strongest lording it over the most weakest in the society, in which often the minority is at the receiving end". The point to note at this point is that the twin concepts of minority and majority are merely relative and relational. The fact is that the minority exists only in relation to the majority and vice versa. Experience has shown, particularly in Nigeria that the doctrine of democracy does not encourage peace and progress to all the section of the country – especially the minority groups, who feel alienated, neglected and marginalized. Isaiah Berlin, according to Malik (2001:2), explains that: "When you have two people of different origins and cultures, it is difficult for them to live together in peace". Similarly Leburah Ganago (2005:1), argues that achieving harmony in a country like Nigeria would be difficult in the face of injustices, where the minorities are maltreated. He maintains: "There is no way anyone can dream of a multitude of people living in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble entity in the absence of justice. Where is justice in a country where a section of the country is being treated as a conquered territory and its population as slaves in the supposed land of their birth, even as their God-given resources are being expropriated by the slave masters?" (Ganago, 2005:1). Similarly, Arthur Nwankwo, chancellor of the Eastern

Mandate Union (EMU), has noted in a *Newswatch* Interview that "the more the North and the West quarrel over resources that do not belong to them, they ironically succeed in dramatizing the injustice that has been meted to the East (South-East and South-South)".

Conclusion

From the forgoing discussions on the meaning and nature of a plural society with particular reference to Nigeria and its numerous society sets of standard, values, languages, religions, etc one can never be satisfied with a one-sided or one-directional view or style of governance. A democracy, on the other hand, is a government of the majority. What this means is that for the focus of government to be only on the majority means it is one-directional as no attention or consideration whatsoever is given to views of the minority in a democracy. The said minority is then living at the mercy, beck and call of the majority. The minority can go to hell for all the majority cares. This is in complete contrast to the democratic principles of equity and justice. Democratic practice therefore fails in a plural society. It is unjust, unfair and inhuman for a society like Nigeria, operating a democracy with its tenets of majority rule, not to incorporate the feelings and interests of the minority into the scheme of things. The concept of majority rule is akin to the doctrine of utilitarian principle. For us, democracy in a plural society like Nigeria is a faulty and exclusivist system since it does not recognize the existence and plights of the minority; as if minority is not part of the society. If the majority always rules, what real protection is guaranteed for minority rights within a democracy? As a way forward, we suggest an integrative system, where the views of the minority and the majority within the plural society are placed side-by-side and treated on their merits. The point to start is the need to implement the recommendations of the just concluded National Conference, where all the shades of the political, economic, religious, cultural, etc are represented. It should not end as a mere act of convening the conference but there must be an illustration of goodwill in implementing the findings and submissions from the conference. That way, the journey towards integration of the polity; the entrenchment of democratic ideals and practice as well as the demonstration of our willingness to coexist would have begun.

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