

Social Justice, Democracy and Cultural Renewal in Nigeria

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Abstract

Globally, democracy is at the heart of social justice. This is because it represents a vehicle for the actualization of the principles of fairness, equality of opportunity, liberty, and social rights and the absence of social and class barriers. In the Third World, social justice is largely constrained by the failed attempts to deepen and consolidate their budding and fledgling democracy, due to poor governance, economic mismanagement, political instability, social dislocation and cultural decay. In Nigeria, the problem of social injustice is accentuated by the crisis of the democratization process. This paper therefore examines the factors that inhibit the democratic experimentation and consolidation process in Nigeria and explores the feasibility of social justice through democratic re-engineering and cultural change. This paper, which also derived its data from valuable secondary sources, concluded with useful recommendations including the creation of a genial democratic climate that will facilitate the reconstruction of cultural values and enhance the enthronement of social justice in Nigeria.

Introduction

Democracy as an institutional arrangement that guarantees the preservation of individual rights is not only predicated on the principles of liberty, equality, justice, representation, consensus and peace building, it equally provides a fertile ground that is germane for the initiation and consolidation of development efforts and aspirations. At the heart of the realization of democratic reality, is, social justice through cultural renewal in Nigeria. And social justice ordinarily engenders a climate that upholds and ensures the enthronement of the responsiveness, transparency and accountability of the state and the true empowerment of the people that enables them to lead a live that they value and actualize their potentials. Despite this arguable link between democracy and social justice, the Nigerian democratic experimentation and assumed consolidation process is not really on course. The major problem is the negative predisposition and poor commitment by the Nigerian leadership to enthrone true democracy in the face of the sundry political, economic and social conditions that had and still constrain democratic governance and sustenance in Nigeria. The democratic illusion, notwithstanding, social justice through democratic engineering and cultural change is feasible and workable in Nigeria. Democratic reality in Nigeria must however demand and necessitate the creation of a genial democratic climate that has the potency of and will actually facilitate the reconstruction of cultural values and enhance the enthronement of social justice in Nigeria. In this canvassed climate, there must exist on a sustainable basis, a re-focusing of the state to serve the macro interests of its citizenry, rather than the micro interest of the privileged few. This paper

therefore examines the sundry factors that inhibit the democratic experimentation and consolidation process in Nigeria and explores the feasibility of social justice through democratic re-engineering and cultural change.

Social Justice: A Conceptual Discourse

The term 'justice' implies the quality of being 'just', 'right' or 'reasonable'. It is opposed to what is 'unjust', 'wrong' or 'unreasonable'. It embodies an ideal that is akin to the 'absolute truth' yet it is a dynamic idea because our realization of the idea and our comprehension of that absolute truth is a continuous process. Progress in this direction depends upon the development of social consciousness, so that what was regarded as just some centuries ago may not be so regarded today. Barker (1961) has shown that justice represents a synthesis of the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Justice is the thread which runs through all these values and makes them parts of an integrated whole. It reconciles their conflicts and contradictions and gives them the shape of universal principles of governance. Obviously, it is our sense of justice that impels us to postulate that human relations in society should be regulated by 'reason' and justice recognizes the dignity of the human beings as such. It is the rational nature of man that clothes him with this dignity. It demands that each individual should be treated as an end-in-itself not a means to an end. In this respect, all individuals should be treated as equal to each other. The principle of justice requires that the deprived and underprivileged groups should be given special protection in order to save them from the excess of the dominant groups.

It is important to note that the modern concept of justice is different from the traditional concept. The traditional concept of justice focused on the 'just man' and was primarily concerned with the virtues befitting a man for enhancing his moral worth. It also consisted in the performance of his duties attached to his status determined by the prevalent law, social customs and mode of thought. The modern concept of justice, on the other hand, is marked by a shift of emphasis, from the idea of a just or virtuous man to that of a just society. In other words, the traditional view of justice embodied a conservative idea; while the modern view embodies a progressive idea. The traditional view insisted on the individual conforming to a pre-conceived image of society; but the modern view of justice seeks to transform society itself for the realization of certain human values. To be sure, the traditional view of justice has given way to the modern idea of 'social justice' and the term 'social justice' tends to issue from the mouths of reformers and to be regarded with suspicion by those who are satisfied with the existing order" (Raphael 1976:12).

The term "social justice" was coined by the Jesuit Luigi Taparelli in the 1840s, based on the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. His basic premise was that the rival economic theories, based on subjective Cartesian thinking, undermined the unity of society. The concept of social justice could be nebulous when broadly defined (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1994:124). As a consequence, any attempt at conceptualizing it may confront the problems of exactitude, accuracy and precision. All the same, it is the promotion and application of basic human rights, basic human needs and the means of impartially protecting and enforcing them legally in any

society. Although the above functions can be executed by democracies as well as other forms of government, democracy has an additional merit in that it stimulates people to self-education because participation by the people in government activities opens wider horizons for the individual and tends to broaden his interests (Gaubá 2007:423). The idea of social justice comprises a force behind social change. This is because it is precisely when people find fault with the existing social order, involving oppressive and exploitative social conditions, that they raise the demand for social justice, seeking suitable changes in social policy for determining an 'authoritative allocation of values'. Essentially, the ideas of liberty and equality derive their substance from the idea of social justice when these principles seek a transformation of the existing social conditions to eliminate injustice in society. In a nutshell, 'social justice' is the voice of the oppressed and the underprivileged against the excesses of the social system. It is an expression of what is due to the individual from society, especially to the individual who is condemned to a wretch and subhuman living because of a defective system of distribution of advantages accruing from the organized social life. The main problem of social justice is to decide an appropriate allocation of the benefits that are available or that can be secured through the instrumentality of the social organization. When the modern idea of justice is applied to the various aspects of social life, we get legal, political and socio-economic notions of justice. These are by no means watertight compartments, for they constitute a continuum within the general scheme of social justice.

Democracy: A Conceptual Understanding

Democracy was derived from the Greek word 'Demos' meaning people and 'Kratos' implying rule or power refers to government or rule by the people or masses (1994: 13). According to George Orwell (cited in Mahajan 2008: 793), democracy does not have an agreed definition and the attempt to provide one is resisted from all sides. Democracy could be defined as a high-flown name for something that does not exist. In a similar vein, Lucas (1976:29) opined that democracy is a noun but should be an adjective. It therefore implies that democracy is nothing but different doctrines in different people's minds or perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs and it could be everybody's mistress. Burns (1935: 32) equally asserted that democracy is a word with many meanings and some emotional colour, for it is not an algebraic symbol, but a flag or the call of a trumpet for some; and for others an obsolete mythology which has undesirable connections with capitalism and imperialism, and to Finer (1949:15) democracy has come to mean different things, some very hostile to each other, that it needs careful analysis if misunderstanding and idle controversies are to be avoided. Attempting a comprehensive definition of democracy appears elusive and a mirage. This is because it is confounded by a wooliness of thought and usage that is characteristic of the social sciences. And as Eliot (1914:17) rightly posited, when a word acquires a universally sacred character as the word democracy has, one wonders whether it still means anything at all. Expanding the frontiers of the argument, De Jourenel (1949: 276) noted that all discussions about democracy, all arguments whether for it or against it, are stricken with intellectual futility because the thing at issue is indefinite.

Therefore efforts by scholars and political theorists across age, discipline and society to define democracy have always founded on the rock of ambiguity and antinomy (Williams 1999: 65). The complexity in defining democracy may be due to the fact that political systems are in a continual state of evolution and ideas regarding what ought to be the scope of governmental intervention in the lives of individuals have also changed and are continually changing. No wonder, the complexity in providing a concise and precise definition of democracy is compounded by the fact that historically the concept itself has been a locus or terrain of prolonged intellectual and ideological contestations.

Essentially, after centuries of intellectual speculations as to the origin and nature of democracy, the sad conclusion is that it is an ideal towards which many nations strive. By implication, the democratic ideal remains an ideal, a possible explanation for the necessity to see democracy as a continuum where democracies can be placed and gauged in accordance with the extent of their democratization or conformity with acceptable democratic norms and values. One may simply argue that any given nation, or a method or institution is democratic which means that it is in the process of achieving the ideal or that it adopts some principles or processes which may be called democratic (Ijomah 1988:65). In fact, as far back as 1849, Guizot (1949:11) observed that such is the power of the word "Democracy" that no government or party dares to raise its head or believes its own existence possible, if it does not bear that word inscribed on the burner. The difficulties of capturing the essence of democracy and of high listing its often contradictory activities made scholars and researchers to

resort to various devices and stratagems for coming to terms with the above reality (William 1999: 65-66). One of the most celebrated and influential attempts in this direction are the concept of polyarchy formulated by Dahl (1971:39). He classified political regimes according to two criteria: the degree of contestation of political power and the extent of popular participation in such contestation. The two-dimensional framework proposed by Dahl has become widely adopted by political scientists to measure the extent to which various states approximate the democratic ideal (Tremblay et al 2004).

It therefore follows that in a democracy, government should not only be responsible to the demos (people), political power should also emanate from the popular will of the people and the state should be guided by and bound by the same will. Diamond (1999:19) approached democracy as a developing process and added that consolidation is a critical step in building democracies. He further argued that the consolidation process involves three components namely: decentralization that enhances the efficiency, quality and legitimacy of democracy, political culture which is a precondition for democracy to take root, especially as democratic values, beliefs, attitudes, norms and means must be embodied in a democracy and the creation of a civil society that facilitates and enhances public participation in the democratic process and prevents abusive power from becoming concentrated at the centre of society. Democracy is a way of life that permits freedom to make choices pertaining to every area of human endeavor and safeguards the liberty of individuals and protects them against unnecessary constraints

on their actions because it is a governance system based on popular will.

At a more theoretical level, democracy is a political system in which the eligible people in any country participate actively not only in determining the kind of people that govern them, but also actually participate actively in shaping the policy output of the government (1994:197). Bryce (cited in Mahajan 2008: 794) equally asserted that democracy has been used ever since the time of Herodotus to denote that form of government in which the ruling power of a state is legally vested not in any particular class or classes, but in the members of the community as a whole, while Mahajan (2008: 794) stressed that democracy is not a particular kind of civilization, it is rather a civilized way of taking political action. A parsimonious definition of democracy that captured the important notion of the uncertainty of political competition is that of Przeworski (cited in Tremblay et al 2004: 335) who contended that democracy is quintessentially characterized by the fact that the winners of political competition do not have a guaranteed control over the power that they have won. Therefore, if the losers of political game know that they have a reasonable chance to win in the future then they have an incentive to stay within the rules of the game and accept their long status. When losers think this way then democracy becomes equilibrium because neither the winning nor the losing side of the competition has an incentive to depart from it unilaterally. In line with this perspective, democracy is an organized uncertainty, a political contrivance that is aimed at reconciling freedom with the need for law and its enforcement and a political method by which every citizen has the opportunity of

participating through discussion in an attempt to reach voluntary agreement as to what shall be done for the good of the community as a whole.

Mill (cited in Mahajan 2008: 794) also viewed democracy as that form of government in which the whole people or a numerous portion of them exercise the governing power through deputies periodically elected by themselves, while Seeley opined that democracy is a government in which everybody has a share. According to Hall (cited in Mahajan 2008: 794), democracy is that form of political organization in which public opinion has control and Mayo (cited in Mahajan 2008: 794) noted that democracy is one in which public policies are made on a majority basis by representatives subject to effective popular control at periodic elections which are conducted on the principle of political equality and under conditions of political freedom. Kpanneh (cited in Mbah 2003: 151) equally argued that democracy is a complex process of institution building, development of a liberal political culture and traditions, an uninhibited growth of free speech, an unfettered development of the press and respect for not only the rule, but the due process of the law. It can be safely stated therefore that democracy cannot exist in the absence of fundamental human rights, whether individually or collectively, which is in consonance with Nnoli's (2003: 143) notion that democracy is a system of government usually involving freedom of the individual in many respects of political life, equality among citizens, justice in the relationship between the people and the government and the participation of the people in choosing those in government. It is not only primarily a means through which different groups

can attain their ends or seek the good of society; it is the good society itself in operation (Gaubá 2007:22). Rather than a mode of governance, democracy represents a bold and rigorous attempt to conceptualize the democratic process as a function of several features that include freedom of speech, and association, the supremacy of the will of the electorate, regular elections and accountability. These features constitute the clustering of practice and countries can be placed on the democracy continuum in line with the presence or absence of all or some of the features.

The Redistribution and Recognition Dimensions of Social Justice

In today's world, claims for social justice seem increasingly to divide into two types. The two divides are the redistributive claims that seek a more just distribution of resources and benefits and the recognition type that has not only attracted the interest of political philosophers, but equally seeks to develop a new paradigm of justice that puts recognition at the centre (Fraser 2006:27). Evidently, the discourse of social justice, once centred on redistribution, is now increasingly divided between claims for redistribution on one hand, and claims for recognition, on the other. In this new constellation, the two kinds of justice claims are often dissociated from one another-both theoretically and pragmatically. In some cases, however, the dissociation has become a polarization. Some proponents of distribution reject the politics of recognition outright, casting claims for the recognition of difference as 'false consciousness, a hindrance to the pursuit of social justice. Conversely some proponents of recognition approve the relative eclipse of the politics of redistribution, construing

the latter as an obtruded materialism, simultaneously blind to and complicit with many injustices (Fraser 2006:29). All the same, both redistribution and recognition paradigms are useful aspects or elements of social justice, especially as none is in itself sufficient. The ultimate task is thus to collapse and combine both paradigms into an integrated whole or comprehensive framework. Theoretically, the task is to devise a two-way dimensional conception of justice that can accommodate both defensible claims for the recognition of differences and the redistribution of opportunities and benefits. The task will entail devising a pragmatic political orientation that integrates the best of the politics of redistribution with the best of the politics of recognition.

The paradigm of redistribution and the paradigm of recognition can however be contrasted in several key respects. First, both paradigms assume different conceptions of injustice; while the redistribution paradigm focuses on injustices it defines as socio-economic and presumes to be rooted in the political economy such as exploitation, economic marginalization, and deprivation, the recognition paradigm, in contrast, targets injustices understood as cultural, which it presumes to be rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication like cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect. Secondly, the two paradigms propose different sorts of remedies for injustice. In the redistribution paradigm, the remedy for injustice is political-economic restructuring involving redistributing income, recognizing the division of labour or transforming other basic economic structures, but in the light of the recognition

paradigm, the remedy for injustice is cultural or symbolic change.

The above reality would involve upwardly revaluing disrespected identities, positively valorising cultural diversity or the wholesale transformation of social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication in ways that would change everyone's social identity. Thirdly, the two approaches assume different understandings of group differences. The redistribution paradigm treats such differences as unjust differentials that should be abolished, while the recognition paradigm treats differences either as cultural variations that should be celebrated or as discursively constructed hierarchical oppositions that should be deconstructed. A middle-of-the-way approach will ultimately entail a shift away from these extremes and tackle the two-way dimensional problem of social injustice that is rooted in the economic structure and the status order of society and traceable to both political economy and culture simultaneously,

Democracy as a Vehicle for the Actualization of Social Justice

Democracy and social justice are related to the extent that the former facilitates and enhances public participation and prevents abusive power from becoming concentrated at the centre of society. Moreover, democracy is at the heart of social justice in so far as it is an instrument that permits freedom to make choices pertaining to every area of human endeavour and safeguards the liberty of individuals and protects them against unnecessary constraints on their actions because it is a

governance system based on popular will. Its relevance to social justice is evident in the vital role it plays in the administration of common affairs and the bestowal of aid to individuals in their quest to lead a life that they value and cherish. Democracy is, in fact, a political contrivance that is aimed at reconciling freedom with the need for law and its enforcement and it is a political method by which every citizen has the opportunity of participating through discussion in an attempt to reach voluntary agreement as to what should be done for the collective good of society. Arguably, since democracy can not exist in the absence of fundamental human rights, whether individually or collectively, a stand-point that is in consonance with Nnoli's (2003:143) notion that democracy is a system of government usually involving freedom of the individual in many respects of political life, equality among citizens, justice in the relationship between the people and the government. Despite the potentially strong nexus between democracy and social justice, It is not sufficient for a people or a society to claim to practice a democratic form of government except there is clear and unambiguous evidence of popular participation. Ordinarily, functional democracy creates an environment that is conducive for social and economic development and resultantly critical to the enthrone and sustenance of justice in any society or polity. And democracy embodies the will of the governed and the consent of the ruled will not only endorse and enhance legitimacy, it will also unleash the energy of the people for the great transformation that is needed (Ajibewa 2006:263-264).

At its core, democracy is a state of mind, a set of attitudinal dispositions woven into the fabric of society, the concrete

expression of which is the social institutions and undemocratic social institutions cannot therefore sire or sustain democratic governments, no matter how often the ballot box ritual is enacted (Agozimo 2005). Democracy that can affect and impact on social justice, by implication, encapsulates liberty, equality, fraternity, effective citizenship control over policy, responsible and responsive government, honesty and openness in politics, informed and rational deliberation, equal participation, power and virtues (Huntington 1991:6). In a similar vein, Dahl underscored that effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understanding, control of agenda and inclusion of adult are necessary conditions for democracy (Dahl 1971). Thus democracy as a veritable tool and instrument for the actualization of social justice, notwithstanding, there must exist a facilitating rather than a constraining climate. After all, if justice and democracy are to take firm root and thrive, there must be a sure and solid foundation in certain shared beliefs, traditions, attitudes, moral sense, transcendental spirit and sentiments that bind a society to respect human rights and to behave democratically.

Social Justice and the Crisis of Democratization in Nigeria

Despite the arguable fact that after centuries of intellectual speculations as to the origin and nature of democracy, there seem to be the sad conclusion that democracy is an ideal towards which many nations strive (Ijomah 1988:45), in the Nigerian context, democracy is something much talked about, greatly aspired and strenuously struggled for, because it is an aspiration dearly cherished by many, but far from being realized (Jega 2007:22). In fact, democracy has almost become an illusion in the face of the plethora of constitutional reforms

and transition programmes and efforts supposedly aimed at democratic experimentation and consolidation in Nigeria. Although a number of former European colonies in Africa including Nigeria became independent states adopting democratic constitutions (Tremblay et al 2004:336) and the pre-occupation of many of the third world countries in the 1990s was democratic consolidation, Nigeria was primarily concerned with how to terminate military rule and ensure credible civilian democratic rule and she is yet caught up in web between democratic experimentation and actual democratization. Fascinating theoretical discourses have, in fact, attributed the Nigerian socio-economic, political and democratic crisis to prebendalism, predation, and patrimonialism, the rough state, the dynamics of global capital expansion and class formation in the periphery and so on (Joseph 1995, Diamond 1999, Ibrahim 1989 and Graf 1988).

While it is evident that Africa requires more than the crude variety of liberal democracy that has been foisted on it and even more than the impoverished liberal democracy that prevails in the industrialized countries, the crisis of democratization in Nigeria smacks off the fact that the problem is multi-dimensional. As Ake (2003:130) rightly articulated, liberal democracy is inimical to the idea of the people having effective decision-making power and as it evolved, liberal democracy got less democratic as its democratic elements such as the consent of the governed, the accountability of power to the governed and popular participation came under pressure from political elites all over the world. The primary issue therefore is not whether democracy is desirable in Nigeria, but how its feasibility has

been constrained by sundry factors such that democratic consolidation or put more pungently, true democracy has proved impracticable or practically a mirage. Ordinarily, Diamond, Lipset and Linz contended that for democracy to be sustained, certain broad factors or conditions must exist. These factors include some history of democratic politics, broad legitimacy, existing political culture that is tolerant of political freedom, opposition and competition, positive correlation between socio-economic development and democratic government, the existence and functioning of mediating and autonomous associational groups (civic society) that are based on variable categories like class, region, ethnicity, occupation and religion, the formation of institutions that will act to check the concentration of power in the state and the existence of state structures that can produce economic growth, meet distributive demands and maintain order without quashing liberties (Held 2000). The underlying supposition that lies embedded in the above contention is the nexus between social justice and democracy, for while social justice is critical to and germane for democratization and democratic consolidation, democracy is an instrument of institutional structure for the actualization of the ideas and principles of social justice. As the World Bank (1997) also patently put it, democracies conversely could make reform more feasible in several ways and political checks and balances, a free press and open debates on the costs and benefits of government policy could give a wider public a stake in reform. The absence of the above factors may suffice as a reasonable explanation for the crisis that has characterized the democratization process in Nigeria. Also, despite the acknowledged fact that the decade of the 1990s will go down in Africa as the period of renewed struggle

for democracy or at least a governance system based on popular will as Olowu (1999:15) clearly underscored, the journey toward democratic governance in Nigeria has been tortuous and plagued with a myriad of problems that are constitutional, structural, institutional and attitudinal in dimensions. Olowu (1999:13) for instance, posited that the effort to democratize involves matters of constitutional choice that transcend multi-party elections or the replacement of one group by another in government. He noted further that a governmental regime should evolve that provides the opportunity for all to make input into the governing processes without compromising the integrity and effectiveness of the processes. Such regimes must involve multiple or concurrent constitutional order rather than one single centre of authority and power or centralization of power that has been fashionable in Africa, particularly Nigeria that is the focus of this study. Without tackling the problem of constituting multiple centres of power, the search for stable and acceptable governing structures is bound to be a mirage (Olowu 1999:16). It is instructive to note, at this stage, that the conduct of elections and the emergence of other structural trappings associated with western democracy in a country like Nigeria are not tantamount to the existence of actual democracy. The need for governmental structures to be fully institutionalized with appropriate and true democratic culture embedded has therefore become a desideratum in Nigeria. This is because for democracy to recognize the plural nature of politics and the diversity of social forces in any political community that presupposes and accommodates free participation and competition, civil and political liberties, collaboration and co-operation, the relationship between the governed and the

government must be truly service-based. In fact, democracy exists when the relationship between the governed and the government abides by the principle that the state is at the service of the citizens and not the citizens at the service of the state; that the government exists for the people not vice versa. The situation in Nigeria is evidently and arguably opposite.

It therefore implies that for true democracy to be achieved in Nigeria, the citizens must not only be secured from external attacks, but more importantly, they should be relatively free from the devastating consequences of internal upheavals, unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution and all imaginable shades of socio-economic injustices, especially as true democracy and real development are inextricably linked together, yet not without intervening variables. And it is when the above are in place that democratic nurturing can begin meaningfully because a hungry and angry populace are under the yoke of bad government (Nnoli 2006:352). Thus, a society is democratic when it progressively develops its capacity to nurture and consolidate democratic culture and democratic governance. The above stand-point explains the desirability and inevitability of social justice as a veritable tool for facilitating democratic consolidation and governance through cultural transformation and renewal.

Constraining and Inhibiting factors to Democratic Experimentation and Consolidation Process in Nigeria

In what has become the classic piece on democratization in the modernization school, Lipset (cited in Tremblay et al 2004:338) argued that the more well to do a nation, the greater the

chances it will sustain democracy. In Nigeria, several factors have worked to constrain the workability and consolidation of democracy. The factors include lack of appropriate and entrenched political culture and representation, electoral fraud, injustice and political instability, elite manoeuvrings and manipulation, corruption and economic mismanagement, social dislocation, military regime and militarization, alien democratic system, poor social, political and economic liberty and cultural decay. Democracy must embody and uphold principles that are central to its consolidation and sustenance and the bottom line is that democracy guarantee true liberty that allows people to lead a life that they value and realize their potentials as human beings. Dahl and McClosky (cited in Protro and Grigg), for instance, contended that democratic stability requires commitment to democratic values or rules which is arguably apparently lacking in Nigeria. Notably, democracy cannot be entrenched where there is prevalence of dysfunctional political culture and political instability, economic mismanagement, social dislocation and cultural decay and general injustice. In the same vein, Aristotle emphasized that freedom and equality are best realized in a democracy and for any democratic arrangement to be nourished and rooted, the twin values are critical. The above enumerated factors that have constrained democratic consolidation and governance in Nigeria can be subsumed under the following subheads:

Political Conditions: Political conditions are necessary for establishment, entrenchment, consolidation and sustenance of democracy in any society including Nigeria. The absence of such conditions does not only constrain and make democratic

experimentation and consolidation a mirage; it also cripples or renders non-existent the potential and veritable instrument of social justice that is in tandem with democratic reality. In the Nigerian context, entrenched dysfunctional political culture and representation, electoral fraud, injustice and political instability, as well as military regime and militarization and elite manoeuvrings and manipulation have intervened in the democratic experimentation and consolidation process, so much so, that democracy is still very fledging and at best a failed system. Nigeria has, for instance, had over 30 years of military rule when juxtaposed with the period of civilian governance.

The military system of authoritarianism, centralization and recklessness had so permeated the governance environment such that there is conflict between the entrenched command system and the emerging democratic values. The above conflict is a plausible explanation for the armed politics, thuggery, assassination, oppression, electoral fraud, violence and injustice, high-handedness and brazen arrogance by successive Nigerian governments in the face of poor governance and disservice to the Nigerian citizenry. Essentially, the damaging role of military presence and manipulation of the political and cultural environment of governance in Nigeria had greatly constrained democratic consolidation and sustenance, especially given the fact that the military command system and the associated oppression mentality undermines democracy in any society due to lack of accountability, disdain for human rights and political freedom and the erosion of the institutions of democratization. In sum,

the Nigerian situation is so perturbing that it can arguably be dubbed a non-starter or no democracy at all

Economic Conditions: Economic conditions, especially corruption and mismanagement, have also produced devastating effects on the democratic experimentation and consolidation process in Nigeria. In fact, the twin evils are not only the gateway to bad governance, they have become so systemic, institutionalized and structural that they have a holistic impact on democratic governance in Nigeria principally because they pollute politics, undermine economy, bias government spending away from socially valuable benefits that social justice guarantees and divert public resources from infrastructure investments that are critical to the actualization of government social programmes and activities. In sum, corruption and economic mismanagement is Nigeria's greatest problem in its quest for a sound and solid democracy. The vices are so pervasive and rooted in Nigeria that the important benefits accruable from a democratic environment are largely non-existent.

Social Conditions: Social conditions have the potency of affecting democratic experimentation and consolidation. The truism of the above assertion is evident in the fact that the level of socio-economic development of any society makes it possible or difficult for it to guarantee democracy (Mbachu 1994:17). The low level of development of the material conditions in Africa, for example, has largely hindered the emergence and consolidation of democracy despite the quantum of democratization programmes. In fact, Lipset asserted that certain social and economic background

conditions such as high per capital income, widespread literacy and prevalent urban residence are necessary for democratic consolidation and stability, while Ake stressed that considering the social and economic realities of Africa, such as Africa's social pluralism, poverty, low level of literacy and the emphasis in rural communities on solidarity and cooperation, the democracy that is germane for Africa, is the one in which the people have real decision making power over and above the formal consent of electoral choice.

In this social context, poor social, political and economic liberty, alien democratic system, social dislocation and cultural decay have been anachronistic and detrimental to democratic reality in Nigeria. The democratic system in Nigeria, for example, is alien because of its western orientation and culture and any tendency to adopt the above democratic arrangement hook line and sinker or stock and barrel requires a critical examination. Like Ake (2003:129) apparently noted, Africa requires somewhat more than the crude variety of liberal democracy that is being foisted on it and even more than the crude variety of liberal democracy that prevails in the industrialized countries. And the essence of democracy should be its capacity to guarantee freedom, equality, self development and participation, but the Nigerian social environment is prone to engender contradictions that tend to derail or trivialize democratization processes. The Nigerian democratic dream can therefore be appropriately described as a failed one, for democratization is a term used retroactively, after certain democratic thresholds have been crossed (Nwankwo 1999:162) and an assessment of democratization in Africa shows that there exists the tendency to centralize power

to the detriment of good governance, a situation that represents the Nigerian environment and reality.

The Feasibility of Social Justice through Democratic Re-engineering and Cultural Change

Social justice and democracy are mutually supportive and complementary in so far as they facilitate each other. This is because while social justice is critical to and therefore a potential vehicle for the enthronement of democracy, democracy encourages social justice and provides a clement atmosphere for its principles to thrive and flourish. All the same, the feasibility of social justice in Nigeria depends largely on democratic re-engineering and cultural change that will require a successful and transparent fight against corruption and bad governance, poverty reduction, sound economic management, citizen participation in the governance process, a culture of democracy that is based on mutual respect, equality and freedom as well as re-orientation that will occasion a culture shift and promote principles of social justice so that democratic dividends to all and sundry can be feasible. Unfortunately, but arguably, the Nigerian state is yet to negotiate the route towards clear-cut democratic consolidation partly because there is no discernible commitment to the creation of a democratic regime that is founded on true principles and ideals of responsibility, accountability and service. Such democratic ideals will undoubtedly demand building institutions, reforming institutions and in some cases dismantling institutions, managing the economy and dealing with some of the majority problems that society confronts and establishing proper institutional framework for economic growth and governmental effectiveness as Diamond, Linz and

Lipset (2000:55) rightly opined. Also, there has to be synergy of genuine efforts and partnering by the state, the political class, particularly the elite and civil society organizations to reconstruct and re-engineer a true democratic polity where the principles of equality, freedom, responsibility, transparency and accountability, that are central to and underlie social justice will be established and prevail.

Concluding Remarks

That social justice represents a vehicle for the actualization of the principles of fairness; equality of opportunity, liberty and social rights is arguably incontrovertible. All the same, the Nigerian leadership class, on a general basis, is not favourably predisposed towards democratic consolidation and sustenance in Nigeria. As a consequence, there is little psychological readiness and willingness on their part. Their blatant negative predisposition has not only stifled democratization plans and efforts; there is a low level of commitment to and support for the democratic project in Nigeria. Thus the leadership class do not truly believe in democracy and as a result are not ready for it. And it is through a favourable predisposition by the Nigerian leadership towards the democratic venture or project that true democracy can be entrenched. At least, readiness and willingness engenders support and commitment in any democratization process. There is, in fact, no genuine self-awareness and realization of the value and potential benefits of democracy and the critical role of social justice as a veritable tool for democratic governance, hence their penchant for all shades and manifestations of social injustice. The opportunity to build a society where social justice, human dignity and civil liberties abound through democratic re-engineering and

cultural change is yet feasible in Nigeria. However, there is the desirability and inevitability of the creation of a genial democratic climate that will facilitate the reconstruction of cultural values and enhance the enthronement of social justice in Nigeria. The above climate that has several dimensions constitutes a threat to democratic experimentation and fulfilment if it is not favourable. Additionally, since democratic governance and sustenance demands steadfast leadership, unwavering commitment, accountability, transparency and sense of justice and equity, it behoves the Nigerian leadership to build confidence and trust so that the Nigerian citizenry can believe in the Nigerian government and the democratic project. Both social justice and democracy are thus mutually supportive and reinforcing.

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