Challenges of Democratic Governance in Nigeria
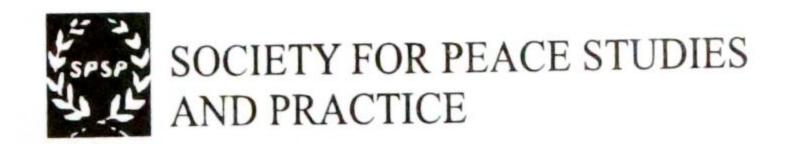
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Political Violence and the Attainment of Democratic Culture in Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

CULTURE is approached differently being by different scholars at different times. Thus, through their scholastic efforts, we have come to the understanding that culture varied from one community to another and that it is dynamic. It is also what man lends himself to that becomes part and parcel of him. His influences on physical and social environments, and vice versa make up his culture. Thus, as man is known to be dynamic, so all his activities, hence the changing nature of culture in communities. Without prejudice to the technical definitions of scholars of cultural studies, culture could simply be seen as the totality of man in his physical and social environments, and vice versa.

One of the most prominent activities of man after subsistence is politics and it has the capacity to make or mar a society as history has proven of ancient great nations. It is with this background that this paper examines the place of political violence in the attainment of democratic culture in Nigeria.

Nigerians, particularly the elites, fought tooth and nails to exterminate colonialism in Nigeria and consequently, independence was gained from the British colonial masters in 1960. With the losses of Nigerians before independence, one would expect that such a hard earn freedom is jealously guarded and sustained but this is not to be. What then is responsible for the inability of Nigerians to sustain and continuously maintain this freedom? A number of factors have been advanced by scholars of Nigeria politics which included, among others, effects of colonialism, long military rule, greediness of Nigerian leaders, etc. According to Sambo, (2004:190):

> Various factors can be attributed to the state of violence and instability the country was plunged into. The major ones among others, include the emergence of ethnic militias as liberators, representatives, protectors and pursuers of the interests and identities of regions and groups they represent, the furore that trailed the adoption of Shar'iah legal system by some states in the northern part of the country; the incessant agitation of the Niger Deltans and their state governments' demand for the control of oil found in their area; the high spate of thriving and unchecked armed robbery and other related crimes which claimed many lives and undermined the performance of the Nigeria Police and finally, the inter-and-intra-party conflicts that swept across the nation like harmattan fire.

In another perspective, Akinwumi (2004:138) observes that:

> . . . the existence of militia groups as a response to the growing dissatisfaction to governance in Nigeria, the existence of a large army of unemployed youths and miscreants to which government failed to pay attention, the increasing militarisation of the society, 'the release' of large and sophisticated arms from Sierra Leone and Liberian adventures and above all, the rise of a new corps of political elites comprising young and rich(possibly from shady deals and drug traffic persons) without adequate political education, having no 'home base' and therefore depending on the large group of miscreants for political mobilisation.

On the effects of military rule in Nigeria, Fasehun observes:

> . . . and we had a type of military government that made itself repressive and malevolently coercive. However, the long exposure to coercion and repression so successfully bastardised our psyche and destroy our vital values that Nigerians even protested when soldiers were temporarily withdrawn to the barracks, with

traditional rulers leading delegations to military administrators to beg for the restoration of military presence in our streets. We no longer felt safe without this undue militarisation. Yet the military personnel delighted in brutalising the 'bloody civilian' populace, seizing traders' goods, confiscating their wares and destroying people's property and dwellings. Each successive military government created a terror squad by which it became known and remembered. And such squads did nothing but help their founders perpetrate corruption, militarisation and repression. Akinwumi (2004:141)

From the observations of the above scholars, one is tend to believe that the chief of these factors and probably the most encompassing factor which have continue to bedevil the attainment of democratic culture in Nigeria since independence is political violence.

Political violence has been the bane of the Nigerian democracy since independence. The ships of the Nigerian first, second and third republics were drawn by uncontrollable political violence. Now the Fourth Republic is being threatened by day, by political violence of various shades. What then is this notorious political violence, how does it occur, what are its manifestations, is it preventable, controllable, how, when and by who? How is it a threat to democratic culture in Nigeria?

Democracy, the most preferred system of government (for its perceived ability to comfort all and sundry) is bedeviled in Nigeria by political violence occasioned according to some scholars by bad governance. Democracy, expectedly, is a government of the people by the people for the people. However, this applies in the developed world where democracy is already a product. In Nigeria and other third world countries, democracy is still a process and in deed a means to an end and not yet an end in itself. For these reactions, scholars of democracy the world over differ in opinion about what democracy represents. Consequently, there are two major groups: the first group sees Democracy as a 'cherished ideal' while the second group sees it as mere instrument of oppression.

The positivists, looking at democracy from the point of view of the practice in the developed world argues that democracy implies the rule by the people, the triumph of the will of the people, rule of law, egalitarianism, utilitarianism, costitutionism, civil liberties and universal franchise (worker, 1980; Ryan, 1983:39) On the other hand, the leftists believe that democracy is poised to destroying order, stability, discipline and moral rectitude which aristocracy and oligarchy have always maintained. Through democracy man commits the following offences against one another and the society at large: The majority's ambivalence to a comprehensive social justice; political instability, often tending to war and tyranny; the lack of moral virtues, promoted by a politics of ambition popular rhetoric, majoritarianism and general licentiousness; the entrenchment of a few in long

possession of offices; the injustices occasioned by a superficial and selfish ethic of egalitarianism; the wide spread pursuit of indolent pleasures; the absence of genuine social or moral aims (Corcoran, 1983:17).

However, democracy has begun in Nigeria and Nigeria must strive to consolidate the democratic culture because of its inherent advantages: - freedom to form and join association, freedom of expression, universal adult suffrage, the eligibility of citizens to seek political office, the right of political leaders to complete freely for votes and support, the existence of alternative sources of information, free and fair election and accountable government (Herbeson, 1979:40).

THE PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Politics is synonymous to power and this is why politics is often defined as activities concerned with power relationship and government of a country (Longman, 2001:408). It is in an attempt to seek or use this power that some inhuman activities are perpetrated which amount to violence. Violence is the use of great force to hurt someone. Therefore, political violence could be regarded as a forceful way of seeking or using power and rebelling against authority without regards for laws, lives and properties. However, for further understanding of what political violence is, Anifowose (1982:4) has this to say; to him, political violence is the use or threat of physical act carried out by an individual or individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals and/or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction to property; and whose objective, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation, and effects have political significance, that is tend to modify the behaviour of others in the existing arrangement of power structure that has some consequences for the political system.

It is important to stress at this juncture that as comprehensive as this definition appears, time and event have made it deficient. Today, political violence as transcended the border of physical attacks to include spiritual or broadly speaking psychological and structural attacks. Today people are attacked, injured, and killed through passive scientific and non scientific means for political reasons.

CAUSES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Political violence is perpetrated by people of different backgrounds in different ways either to fight oppressions or for subversion. However, the over all objective is always political; either for a change of government or to get government attention. The under listed are among factors of political violence in Nigeria.

(1)   Politics or democracy has been conceived as a system concerned with sharing of national resources among the various competing groups in Nigeria, and being part of it 'guarantees control of the allocation of scarce economic resources'.

(2)   To many, 'the shortest cut to affluence and influence is through politics'. Politics means money and money means politics'.

(3)   Membership of the ruling parties means open avenue to government patronage, contract deals' but outside of it means rejection, dejection and abject poverty.

(4)   Failure of the ruling parties to 'accept open political competition, and to relinquish power upon electoral defeat'.

(5)   Failure of the opposition parties to tolerate parties in government by engaging in unconstitutional activities to discredit the government or gain power.

(6)   Civil action against political opponents, legal restrictions on their activities, manipulation of electoral machinery and regulations, mass arrests and arbitrary imprisonment.

(7)   Government snail-speed in poverty reduction, job creation and security of Nigeria citizens compounded by regular retrenchment of workers at both government and private sectors.

(8)   The dependency of the successive Nigerian electoral bodies and the judiciary on the ruling parties.

(9)   The undemocratic attitude of the Nigeria security agents towards the citizens.

(10)   Preference of the Nigerian traditional rulers for undemocratic regimes for selfish interest

(11)   Recourse to primordial identities—regionalism, tribalism and ethnicism at the expense of national unity due to politics of exclusion from the socio-political and economic activities by the ruling parties.

(12)   Inadequate or lack of proper political education of the masses by the political stakeholders before, during and after transitions.

Looking critically at the above presented causes of political violence, they reveal that both the governors and the governed are involved in the dirty act christened political violence. While all political stakeholders use it in seeking power, the governors

use it in addition, to assert their authorities, perpetrate themselves in office and cover up their corrupt practices. On the part of the governed, they use political violence to destabilise, distract, slow down activities, or probably close down a government as a response to bad governance. Thus, as the governors oppress the governed subvert. Hence, political violence will always lead to the reversal of political gains.

Political violence has rendered a number of havoc on the national security, be it political, economic, social or religious. In response to oppression, suppression, intimidation, hunger, poverty, unemployment engendered by bad governance the citizens most especially the youth under their patrons have constituted themselves into different militant groups who fend for themselves through nefarious means such as oil bunkering, hostage taking, assassination and a host of other embarrassing acts. These groups include the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO), Anambra Vigilante Service (AVS) Ijaw Youth Movement (IYC) The Youth Democratic Movement (YDM) and a host of other unnamed but active groups. The government at all levels responded by cajoling intimidating, injuring or even eliminating members of the opposition. Consequently, the evils perpetrated by the governors and the governed have resulted in the violation of human rights, the rule of law and undermined the democratic project in Nigeria.

Through political violence, thousand of able bodies, talented and selfless citizens, who would have contributed to the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria, have been killed. They include persons like Dele Giwa, Rear Admiral Olu Omotehinwa, Dr. Sola Omotosho, (the security manager of the Federal Aviation Authority of Nigeria). Ahmed Patigi (Kwara State Chairman of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Mr. Dele Arojo, PDP gubernatorial candidate in Ogun State, and Harry Marshal, National vice-Chairman of the All Nigerian Peoples party, (ANPP) (Roberts and Obioha, 2005: 405, Ogundiya and Baba, 2005: 380). Jesse Arukwu, a governorship aspirant of Alliance Congress of Democrats in Plateau State, Funsho Williams, a Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) governorship aspirant in Lagos State, Ayo Daramola, a PDP governorship aspirant in Ekiti State, Chief Bola Ige, (former Minister for Justice and Anthony General of the nation) and Hajia Kudirat Abiola suffered political killing (Yinousa and Adeoye, 2008:294-4).

Political violence has slowed down the pace of oil exploration in Nigeria and consequently reduced the nation's earning. In the Niger Delta, fighting between the Ijaw gangs and the army claimed about 9,000 lives a year and the gun men managed briefly to shut down 40 per cent of Nigeria's oil production in 2003 (ibid, 307).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE ATTAINMENT OF DEMOCRATIC CULTURE IN NIGERIA.

Political conflict is part and parcel of democracy and is better resolved through dialogue and negotiation. However, political violence is in contrast with democracy and in deed an obstacle to democratic consolidation. For any democracy to thrive, according to Larry, (who spoke the minds of most scholars of Nigerian politics) there must be, among many other things, the presence of a meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups, especially political parties for effective position of governmental powers at regular intervals, excluding the use of force. Secondly, a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies at least through regular free, fair, credible and peaceful elections and thirdly, a high level of civil and political liberties (1988: xvi).

In other words in a true democracy, there must be established, some fundamental structures on which democracy is built world over. These include registered political parties, electoral body, electoral laws, organised interest groups, law enforcement agents and a host of others. In the Nigerian democracy, all the aforementioned institutions are present but impotent. They are all victims of political violence, which has rendered them ineffective to contribute meaningfully to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

Democratic institutions and structures in the country are partially developed and so are still very weak. Political parties and CSOs have little or no link with the electorate which would have empower them to shape the electoral process in tune with modern democracy. The political parties and the CSOs depended largely on government grants and donations (which often come at late hour) at the expense of internal dynamism and self-drive.

In addition, militarism and the militarisation of politics in Nigeria stifled and weakened political parties and civil societies in Nigeria (Adetula, 2008:33). Thus, political parties do not represent the ideals, the aspiration and hopes of the people. Holders of public offices openly demonstrated autocratic traits in the course of their assignments.

Many time, successive Nigerian electoral bodies were faced with the problem of inadequate funding. In the 2007 elections, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was said to have witnessed late release of funds which fell short of the approved budget. Thus, planning and implementation were grossly affected. The disputations on election results in Nigeria speak volumes about the effectiveness of the INEC. Nigerians have expressed lack of confidence in successive electoral bodies and systems because elections are carried out by governments to test the efficacy of their 'maneuvering skills on the opponents', i.e. the use of physical violence, stuffing of ballot boxes, intimidation and so on. Thus, election instead of its

rightful purposes, it is being used to punish and intimidate perceived opponents and old enemies in particular and to withhold the rights and welfare of citizens in general (Ibeanu, 2008:49 and Chom 2008:66). Because of the shady objectives of elections in Nigeria, the processes also were shady. On the sham conduct of elections in Nigeria chom observed that some people unduly influenced the process of election particularly in its decision-making. They included top officials of the presidency, states and local governments, selected security officials, who had a role to play in rigging of the elections, political leaders of the ruling parties. They all connived with INEC to rig elections in favour of their parties (2008:66).

The judiciary is never independent even under democratic government. Many politically motivated judgments have been given which point to the fact that the judiciary is still being influenced by the government.

All the aforementioned problems are no doubt inimical to the entrenchment and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The instruments and institutions meant to checkmate the excessive use of power by the executive and the legislature are stifled, shackled and manipulated by the political class to attain their aims of perpetrating themselves in office and parties in power (Saliu 2008:129).

ATTAINMENT OF DEMOCRATIC CULTURE IN NIGERIA

Since the beginning of the fourth republic, the academics and the civil societies have paid serious attention to the practice of democracy in Nigeria and are much mover concerned about its consolidation. However, they have come to the conclusion that sustainable democracy can only be entrenched successfully after successes in the economic and social fields (Salihu, 2008:132-133). How then can Nigeria attain socio-economic headway?

First and foremost, there is the need for genue attitudinal change by Nigerians. Democracy can only thrive on the positive attitudinal disposition of all citizens and stakeholders such as the politicians, the civil societies, the security agents, policy makers, political office holders, the militant groups and more importantly the super powers who are the engineers of world democracies. It is through the determination of stakeholders for a genue change of attitude that some beliefs and attitudes which are inimical to the entrenchment of modern democracy can be reversed.

For instance, if the government imbibes the spirit of genue attitudinal change, it will create enabling environment for democratic institutions and structures (political parties, the INEC, the judiciary and others) to thrive by giving them adequate funds and allowing them to function as independent bodies. Through the same spirit, the government would evolve people oriented empowerment programmes that would truly alleviate poverty in the country. The traditional rulers who are now politicians should go back to their traditional roles which made them fathers to all.

Furthermore, if citizens imbibe the spirit of genue attitudinal change, their perception of democracy as a profit making venture may be changed to a community/humanity service venture. This indeed will reduce the cut-throat competition usually engaged in by office seekers and indeed vandalisation of economic resources of the nation. They may also come to the realisation of the potency of dialogue and negotiation as the best option for resolving political conflicts as against political violence.

Also, if the same spirit of genue attitudinal change is instill in the minds of the nation's security operatives, the much talk about democratic policing will be achieved.

As for the engineers of democracy in Africa, they need to be more genuely involved in Africa development. The mere extension of financial aids to Africa (Nigeria) is not enough for democratic consolidation more African-friendly programmes need to be evolved and strongly supported financially and morally to bring about a lasting result.

How could this spirit of genuine attitudinal change be achieved? As at now, it looks like a dream or an uphill task but with time it will be achieved. One is aware that most of the agencies that are saddled with the responsibility of emotional nurturing and psychological stability have been badly affected and infected by the current wave of political violence but they could still be given a chance.

The home, the school, the church the Mosque, the clubs, political parties, National Orientation Agency (NOA) and a host of other bodies we resort to for succour and acceptance internally and externally (the AU, the ECOWAS) will be useful in instilling the spirits of oneness, brotherhood, unity of purpose, selflessness, and communalism in the minds of Nigerians devoid of force.

CONCLUSION

In this paper attempts have been made to establish some militating factors against the attainment of democratic culture in Nigeria. These factors include effects of colonialism, long military rule, greediness of Nigerian leaders, complexity of Nigeria as a nation, inequitable distribution of national resources, unfair allocation of government projects and social amenities, failure to accept open competition, use of power for personal affluence and influence, lack of tolerance, the undemocratic attitude of the Nigeria security agents, recourse to primordial identities, wrong use of instrument of coercion and suppression, etc. These factors which are veiled under political violence have continue to ruin the nation's economy through destructions of useful and usable lives and properties and consequently increased poverty, disease, death and refuges in Nigeria, thus bedeviling the attainment of a democratic political culture in Nigeria. As gravious as the problems look like, the

author believes that the problems could be overcome through genue attitudinal change by all the stakeholders. The attitudinal change could be carried out by internal and external socialisation agencies.

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