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Democratic Process and Social Justice: a Key to Sustainable Peace and Conflict Prevention in Nigeria

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Abstract

Democracy is a principle of governance that ensures equity, supremacy of the law and welfare of all citizens of a state using social justice as an apparatus through which it realizes these tenets. In a plural society like Nigeria, democratic governance cum social justice is the obiter dictum of peace and conflicts prevention. Our general aim in this paper is to unravel the paramount of democratic process and social justice to sustainable peace and conflicts prevention in Nigeria. The paper made use of secondary data source for data collection, made use of social identity theory as the model of analysis and historical descriptive approach to analyse the phenomenon understudy. One of the most worrisome challenges of Nigeria's peace and conflicts prevention is embedded in the country's democratic experiments and lack of social justice in the polity. Based on our findings, it was realized that leadership character of the person in government goes a long way to determine the place of democracy and social justice which determines whether or not, sustainable peace and conflicts prevention can be realized in Nigeria. Therefore, among other policy implications, the need for Nigerians to vote a person with a profile of law-abiding attitude and, the need for the judiciary to ensure that social justice is guaranteed by ensuring that all irrespective of social class so involved in a court process are treated in the spirit of equity and fairness hence, sustainable peace and conflicts prevention in Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict Prevention, Democratic Process, Nigeria, Peace, Social Justice.

A: Introduction

Contemporary global relations especially in third world countries like Nigeria, the general concern has moved past which political system is appropriate, but rather when will the polity become democratized or fully democratic. Perhaps, this is because democracy goes beyond forming political parties, contesting general elections and having a civilian government in power and to profoundly embrace a system of government pre-eminently anchored on equality and social justice. It stand to reason, that democracy is based on the ability of a nation to provide channels for discussions, consultations, mobilizations and the responsiveness of the government to the needs and aspirations of the citizens; for it is only when the interests of the people are equitably represented, with their needs and aspirations satisfactorily furnished that meaningful development is made. This underscores the quintessence of equality and social justice as the life-blood and heartbeat for sustainable peace and conflict management. That was why Enuke argues that:

Nigeria's democratized fourth republic is infested with obscene social injustice and inequality in power sharing; government decisions on citing of industries, infrastructural development, with lopsidedness in the recruitment/appointment of public office holders which has been exclusively Northern region skewed....the "Federal Character Principle" etched into the 1999 Constitution to address inherent cleavages of inequalities has been thrown overboard, as a particular ethnic group

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has seized power at the peril of development of all others. The implications of an abused democracy and social justice system are not just deleterious to the citizens today, but more so for generations to come in terms of sustainable development (Enuke, 2019).

It can be innocuously argued from the foregoing that good governance forms the philosophical groundwork upon which democracy and social justice are built. This would then imply that social justice is the surest foundation upon which good and successful government in Nigeria can be realised. Accordingly, social justice is generally defined as the fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, and obligations in society to all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, age, gender, ability, status, sexual orientation and religion (Ayala, Hage, & Wilcox, 2016).

Upon the predication of national leadership is germane to democratic governance and social justice that, Nnani (2022) asserted “it was the great emperor Alexander De Great as we learned from history that asserted that he is not afraid of thousands of lion led by a ship rather he’s afraid of thousands of sheep’s led by a lion. No wonder that in our contemporary time, no day passes-by without one form of leadership Summit and Workshop being organized in one place or the other across organisations and society in our globalizing world and this is due and foremost because, the success or failure, collapse or survival, progress or retrogress of a business, organization and a society depends largely on the Leadership of such places” (Nnani, 2022, p. 491-520). The dialectics of the Nigerian federation is premised and predicated upon the Marxian conception of ‘all hitherto existed human society is a history of class struggle’ (Muoneke, 2023). That had been argued by scholars such Nzimiro (1975), Nnoli (1981), Nnani (2022) and host others, that the discovery of oil in the minority areas of the Nigeria’s Niger Delta and vis-a-vis Igbos of the south east Nigeria led to the restructuring of the country from strong regional arrangement to strong central government replete with weak federating units. “One could also see this from neglect of the region from any tangible economic and development infrastructures from the central unit in comparison with other federating units in the country” (Muoneke, 2023). There is a connection between this challenge and the diversities associated with the state as recorded by political class, the general society and scholars. This paper seeks to interrogate the importance of social justice as a tool for peace-building and conflict prevention, intercepting the impacts of its absence on democratic process in the Nigerian state.

B: The Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory was propounded by Henri Tagfel (1971). The theory explains in-group favoritism and in-group bias, and it can help people analyse the differences and similarities between groups. Social beliefs and social structures are essential tools in developing a cultural perspective on intergroup relations. Henri Tagfel indicated that in-group members might feel pride and self-esteem. People can feel good about themselves by enhancing group values and ideology. They might share similar hobbies, values, and interests which make people have a sense of belonging within their groups (Tagfel & Turner, 1979).

Social identity attributes the cause of in-group favouritism to the need for a positive distinctiveness and perceived group status, legitimacy, stability, and permeability (Tagfel & Turner, 1979). However, the in-group might discriminate and exclude out-group and hold prejudice or racism against other groups. The social comparison means after individuals categorize themselves within group and identify themselves as being members of that group, they might tend to compare themselves with another group and against another group (Global Journal of Agricultural Research, 2018). For instances such as the cases of the Niger Delta Militancy and Conflicts, the Nigeria–Biafra War, the Boko Haram Islamic terrorists, and Farmers – herder’s conflicts, if they identifies as a distinct groups, they will most likely behave within the norms of that group. Fulani herdsmen have their tradition and culture which might be different from other cultures. Farmers might also consider themselves’ vulnerable and believe in their rights of protecting their property and safely living in their communities without out-group disturbances. They

would have the same goals to protect their social identity and might act aggressively to prevent other groups from trespassing on their lands (Gordon, 2000).

The centrifugal forces generated by the diversities in Nigeria's ethnic groupings and social injustices along these lines have continued to ignite separatist agitations by the disadvantaged ethnic group in the country (Adangor, 2017:1). That entails the existence of socio-economic inequalities and social justice system inherent in the Nigeria political space. This ugly development may not be surprising, considering the way and manner the British scandalously amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914, with utter disregard to the historical and cultural diversities of these distinct nations. The amalgamation was more or less a marriage between two strange bedfellows, with the British colonialists as the officiating priests. Aptly capturing such ugly scenario of European partition of Africa without the consent of Africans, Arthur Nwankwo stated thus:

...in that Conference pencils controlled by white fingers cut selfishly back and forth on the map of the African continent, balkanizing it, brutally, tearing kinsmen apart and brutally bundling peoples together with utter disregard for historical, political, cultural or sociological bonds (Nwankwo, 1979: 5).

Mutual distrust, acrimony, and the continuous fear of ethnic domination in Nigeria have led to the emergence of several secessionist groups in the country as governance failure, socio-economic inequalities, institutional and structural injustice systems becomes the bane to peace and conflicts management in Nigeria.

C: Empirical Literature

Lamentably, one of the most worrisome challenges of Nigeria's relay-race towards peace and conflicts management has been the inability of its political system to adhere strictly to the norms and principles of social justice in the administration of public affairs. The gross effects of such developments circumvents the Nigerian polity from peace, economic development, and democracy despite its enormous resources and huge potentialities making the country's political economy an enigma which has long been under intense academic debate in Management and Social Sciences parlance. Some scholars, Etim & Ukpere, (2012), Babatunde (2015) argues that the major explanations for the failure of all peace and conflict resolution programmes in Nigeria have been the intermittent military intervention in politics which creates military dictatorship and in-group out-group bias making democratic practice and dispensation of social justice in the face of ethnic bias practically impossible. Others such as, Cheesman & Fisher (2019), Wright (2020) contends that Nigeria had never experienced democracy, neither during colonial rule nor since independence. Nigeria been a democratic country, strove to be a democracy but was never one. Hence, they argued that the problem is and has always been the colonial legacy of falsehood democracy devoid of social justice. They posited that Nigeria like most African states were forced to democratize by the colonial masters then, for imperialism and now, in order to be able to access foreign loans and aid, without further attempt to domesticate western liberal democracies to enhance its benefits for Nigeria and Africa.

Scholars Ogundiya (2010), Asaju (2016), Onuoha & Nwachukwu (2016) and, Yagboyaju (2019) rather took a nuanced stand between both sides of the argument. They posit that it's not a hyperbole to contend that Nigeria's return to electoral democracy in 1999 has not made significant impact on the economic and social well-being of the people. Their argument is that the colonial epoch and even the record of the military is a bit better than that of civilian dispensation; arguing that the periods of civil rule (1960-1966, 1979-1983 and 1999 to date) failed to produce any positive or better results. They opine that the problem is inherent and a causality of our own making (both the leadership and the led). That instead of the ideal democracy hinging on equity and social justice; what we have is political assassinations, ethno-religious conflicts, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment and general economic and political decay which have been the major dividends of democracy since 1999 when the country returned to democracy. Thus,

the nuanced opinions converged that democracy as it is currently practised in Nigeria has yielded foul-tasting effects, associated with the nature of the Nigerian state and the character of its leaders. Nevertheless, one of the major weaknesses of these existing studies is that most of them were unable to properly scrutinize and address in concrete terms ‘why Nigeria’s democracy miscarried in engendering equity and social justice in its governance system’.

D: Democratic Process and Social Justice

It may be difficult to grasp the concept of democratization without prior clarification of the substance of democracy. From its introduction by the ancient Greeks, democracy implies the rule by the people, political equality under the law, and the possibility of an alternative government (Appadorai, 1974:138). As Macridis (1983:9) observed, liberty or individual freedom is indispensable in the practice of democracy. The Oxford English Dictionary defined it as “that form of government in which the sovereign resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised directly by them” (as in the small Greek republics) or “by officers elected by them”. It was the 19th American president, Abraham Lincoln that gave it a meaning that has continued to arouse hope and inspiration in the masses – government of the people by the people and for the people. These definitions and explanations converge on governance through the will of the people in which all have equal rights, regardless of heredity, special rank or privilege. As sweet as they sound, these definitions render the field wide open and portray the feeling that as long as something is done in the name of the people it could be termed democratic. The fact that a country has adopted democracy does not mean that political liberalization will be guaranteed. The masses (people) could still be oppressed by the system or excluded from the decision-making process. Unfortunately, the donor countries and organizations hardly look beyond structures and into local situations and peculiar imperatives. By virtue of its importance as an ‘acceptable’ system of governance coupled with its fluid meaning, it became common for people to adopt or attach different meanings to it, all in a bid to accommodate certain local situations, and sometimes, to rationalize even atrocious policies.

According to Scruton (1982:115), democracy refers to “government by the people as a whole rather than by any section, class or interest within it”. To Raymond (1978:155), it is a “rule by the majority with respect and due consideration to the interests and rights of the minority” and “whereby the rights of the individual person are respected and protected by the forces of government to whom they grant a mandate to rule”. Without getting deeply involved in the dialectics of its various inscriptive attributes and meaning, and in support of adaptation, the success of democracy in any country rests on the morality of its citizens and the unwritten rules of honesty, accountability and integrity. These can hardly be attained without delving into the past of the people. In some parts of Africa, and Nigeria in particular, the idea and practice of democracy existed before the colonial period and the two major features were accountability and direct representation. These were highly adhered to because leadership was exercised within readily recognizable political segments or communities, unlike now, and which made it easier for these features to be “defined less in terms of selection procedures and more in terms of affinity of the ruler to the ruled (Democracy in Nigeria, 2001:4). In addition, as has been observed,

Religion and mythical ancestry also played a pervasive role and were invoked to counter abuse of power by rulers ... there were important checks on the exercise of power, reinforced by such social structures as councils of chiefs, age-grade associations, warrior, secret societies, and religious injunction (Democracy in Nigeria, 2001:4).

Another important feature of traditional democracy was dialogue or discussion, which was an important mode of participation in public policy-making, especially, among the Igbo and the Tiv. Though the entire traditional setting cannot be easily reconstructed, the ‘people’ still thirst for its richness of democratic values. It is in view of the need to adapt the new idea of democracy to the old values of the people that a writer described democracy as “basically a set of ideas and principles about freedom but also consists of a set of practices and procedures modelled over time through a long and often tortuous history” (Jagha, 1998:6). This description also aptly captures the procedural requirement in the establishment of democracy. It is not born over-night or transplanted but a continuing process, hence the word

‘democratization’. This gist of social justice coincides with the meaning of governance as the manner in which power is exercised by governments in the management and distribution of a country’s social and economic resources. Avail to say that the nature and manner of this distribution makes governance a bad or a good one which underpins a polity of sustainable peace and conflicts management or the contrary. More so, the ability or failure of the Nigerian state to enforce the rule of law and control over corruption and ethnic cleavages are the major actors for the effective or ineffective democratic experiment and distilling of social justice and equity (O’Donnell, 2004; Warren, 2006; Rose, 2009).

E: Contending Issues on Nigeria’s Peace and Conflict Prevention

More questionable and repugnant is why a refinery has not been established in Port-Harcourt or any other South-southern States from where all the crude oil is extracted, but refined and outrightly expended in Northern Nigeria? The reality is that proceeds accruing from the resources of the South are for the development of the North, while the entire South-south is underdeveloped in terms of infrastructural development. This has not been swallowed hook-line-and-sinker by the people of South, particularly South-south with spiked level of militias in the region whose oil well are tapped and environment grossly contaminated, only for the proceeds to be invested in the development of the North, to the detriment of others.

Trovalla and Trovalla (2015) posit that the imbalance in infrastructural development in Nigeria has murdered the humaneness of democracy and social justice. In response, so many ethnic groups have developed some level of Militias with threats of secession, such as the Biafra-induced IPOB, clamouring for settlement of their grievances through a referendum in the Nigerian states that were part of the old Eastern Region. Likewise, the Niger Delta Militias, the Odua People Congress (OPC), Bakassi Boys, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Egbesu boys, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) Arewa People’s Congress (APC), the Shiites, etc. are all metamorphoses of inequality in distributive and redistributive outcome and power sharing in Nigeria. That entails the height of political economic injustices, structural and systemic social injustice embedded in the Nigeria political democracy of classical dialectics of historical materialism as Karl Marx and Engels had argued.

It is therefore the focus of this paper to critically posit that the injection of democratic governance and social justice in its proper contest would bringing about the much-craved people-oriented policy for peace, economic development, conflicts resolution and prevention in the Nigeria’s fourth republic, while intercepting the factors that has undermined social equity and justice in our purported democratic dispensation. From the above illuminations, we intend to critically establish that democratization, structural and institutionalization of social justice system would permanently halt the socio-economic inequalities, crisis, conflicts, agitation for secession, poverty, structural injustice, poor leadership and governance, ethnicity, nepotism and favouritism, lopsided federal appointments and citing of industries and the rest vices in Nigeria. These are our point of departure from the extant literature.

This paper employed secondary data to establish the impacts of democratic process (governance) and social justice on sustainable peace and conflict prevention in Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive case study to examine these phenomena. This approach provides us the opportunity to examine the facts on governance, social crisis and conflicts in Nigeria stating the policy implications of the problems highlighted. It also availed the researchers the opportunity to assess the impact of ethnic cleavages on the nature of democracy and social justice in Nigeria. Using a descriptive case also helped to focus on key concepts relevant to democratic experiment and social justice in Nigeria.

F: Democratic Process and Social Justice as Yardstick for Sustainable Peace and Conflict Prevention in Nigeria

Several commentaries have been passed by individuals, national and international organizations about the possible causes of the peaking crime and violence in Nigeria, but none seem as strong as “social injustice” as the major cause among others, in spite of the complexities and confusion surrounding this pressing issue. Even though, social injustice might exist in other societies at various levels, the situation in Nigeria is apparently different from what might be obtainable in any side of the world; ranging from the nation’s economy and resource management, to her political and leadership profile, education and human development- the sounds of the themes of justice and equity are long dead. Over the years, there has been structural violence inflicted by the Nigerian government which touch the very foundation of living of average Nigerians, unsustainable and tough economic policies that harden survival in the country, public lies and unfriendly national responses to issues which anger human discretion-and these among many other immoral actions by the government have forced reprisal responses from Nigerians against the failing leadership. In the same way, if Nigeria is fairly ruled, the rule of law is carefully followed and implemented to the fullest, economic reforms relaxes the grievance of the masses, quality education and health care can be accessed, youths are empowered and employment opportunities are practically created, accountability and genuine transparency become a culture, competence and intelligence override ethnic and religious identities in political appointments etc, crime and violence will be reduced to the minimum.

Nkrumah (1970), Nzimiro (1975), Nwosu (2017) submitted that the decolonisation epoch and the urge for development in the face of dwindling agriculture and the increase on oil production in the Niger Delta marked the journey of Nigeria to a neo-colony when Multinational Oil Corporations became the machinery of capitalist development. It stands to reason that this was why, Adewale (1989), Nwosu (2017) surmised that Nigerian State withholding the oil rich lands from the people and by the same process denying them access to critical means of material survival and sustenance is one of the major factors of conflicts arising from the Niger Delta, asserting that the existing legal framework offer little hope for succour as the villagers are usually ignorant of the law and lacks the technical means to prove the extent of environmental damage, while the oil companies can afford the best lawyers and sustain long litigation. Nwosu (2017, p. 109) added that even if compensation are paid, it is often inadequate to commensurate the damaged caused the people and as a result competing claims have therefore, become more strident in the epoch of growing poverty and economic inequalities in the oil communities. This situation reveals the existence of structural and systemic social injustice instituted against the minority groups of the peoples of Niger Delta region and this is akin to the failure of democratic process (good governance), rule of law and cleavage-based political system.

Owugah (2001), Nwosu (2017), observed that with the rise in production of oil and continued environmental pollution and degradation of the environment intensified the classical struggle between the oil host communities and the multinational oil companies, the state responded with a combination of intimidatory political and economic repression against the people of the Niger Delta inter alia the Rivers State Government created a Special International Security Task Force which terrorised, burnt down entire villages, killed, raped and looted in Ogoniland. Ake (1996), Nwosu (2017) and host of other dependency scholars had established their audacity of disenchantment with the multinational oil companies role in Africa and Nigerian political economies and had noted the frequent oil spills, blow-out and seismic blast gas flaring that had subjected the people of Niger Delta to a life threatening pollution and degradation of their environment especially in the Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States. Ibeanu (2000) added that probing much deeper viewing oil pollution as a tremendous damage to the environment of the Niger Delta, argued that disagreement with the state officials and petro-business over monetary compensation do not necessarily propel local communities into a conflict trajectory rather conflict arise out of a contradiction of securities with the Nigerian state because its character has proved to be beyond its ability to manage and reconcile. This entails that the absence of good governance, political economic equity and social

justice system are the major precursors and harbingers of social crisis, peace-building questions and conflicts in Nigeria. Until social justice and good governance is assured in Nigerian democratic process and experiment, peace and peace-building will remain an elusive concept and social crisis, conflicts and antagonisms becomes the replete of the Nigerian political system.

G: The Place of Judiciary in Democratic Governance and Social Justice in Nigeria

The judiciary saddled with the role of interpretation, is not mechanical, bearing in mind the need to do justice and/or equity. The Judge therefore modifies or purifies legislation to produce another form of law known as ‘case law or Judge’s made law’ or better still judicial precedence. The concept of justice and equity could also be seen as one of the reasons and need to originate case laws. And for very obvious reasons, however, it can be said that these trends have had very profound socio-political consequences for Nigeria’s quest for peace, progress and sustainability (Erunke & Uchem, nd; Nnani, 2022). “For democracy to thrive, a nation must be imbued with a national leadership whose politics reflects and operates within the confines of the rule of law and constitutionalism as that remain the major attributes that would guarantee her democratic governance, development of peace and prevention of conflicts in the state. Until law-abiding citizens emerge electoral candidates within the politics of Nigeria’s national leadership, the consolidation of the country’s political democracy remains a mirage” (Nnani, 2022). That was why Oputa (2014) posited that:

The subjection of all is to the law and not to the whims and caprices of a tin god or any empty tyrant...the essence of government is to manage the affairs of the state for the peace and development of all...government continues in being, to make life better (Oputa, 2014).

“Politics of a nation determines the trajectory of her democratic consolidation. This is because politics determines policies, programmes vis-a-vis actions and inactions of nation-states” (Nnani, 2022). However, for society’s view to be established and concrete, it must stem from a just law, which is that generally accepted by the society or justified by the people. This form of justice conforms to the moral principle that all people are equal. It has its foundation at all times in a moral root. It is also known as justice *in rem* (Black Dictionary, 1990). It is the introduction of this form of justice that highlights the similarity between equity and justice. The rule generally is that justice be administered formally and equally hence social justice. There are more than 300 different tribal groups in Nigeria, all of which belong to the political definition Nigeria, but are distinct from one another in terms of cultural practices. Added to this, are economic disparities among the various groups as well as potential for conflict on religious grounds. “Politics involves the gamut of processes associated with the seizure of state power with the aim of possessing the legitimate authority to decide the faith of others regarding the distribution of tangible and intangible political and economic resources within the state” (Nnani, 2022). It follows that politics of national leadership determines the patterns and processes involved in the allocation of political power within a sovereign political state and in this in Nigeria has made political economy of the nation skewed to serve the interests of ethnic cleavages privileged to be in power at any given epoch in the country’s national leadership (Nnani, 2022). This creates ethnic and social groups prejudice in Nigeria and the judiciary remains the obiter dictum that could oil the wheels of the Nigerian political economy to reflect democratic governance and social justice. In that, Ndubisi (1991) was provoked to submit some questions from the attitudes of politics of national leadership in Nigeria:

Is it not a shocking and zoological prototype behaviour that the very Constitution which installed Nigerian leaders and which bound them to ‘abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power’ was trampled upon, discarded, and in its place planned, developmental and endemic corruption and systematic abuse of power were gloriously installed with all imaginable contemptuous and disdainful disregard of the feelings and wishes of Nigerians who elected them to serve them? Is it not arrogant nonsense for any governor, legislator or judicator to pretend that Nigeria is making political progress with such treatment of the Nigerian constitution? Is not retrogressive to promote statism, ethnicity and sectionalism in contravention of section 15 (political objectives) of the Nigerian constitution (Ndubisi, 1991, p. 91).

Disunity and ethnic cleavages have maximally dealt with Nigeria's democratic and judicial experiments because lopsided political leadership truncates social justice system and functionality (Nnani, 2022). In this direction, Oputa (2014) noted that, "lack of national unity and national consciousness constituted and still constitutes Nigeria's major distress". "It is not out of place to posit that the greedy political and judicial parasites, passengers and vampires in the name of national cum judicial leadership and democratization had placed Nigeria in a shameful economic condition, and so the economic sad stories have continued to impede the country's democratic progress and social justice engineering, resulting to the contentious peace and conflicts in the country (Nnani, 2022). Oputa in this regard submits that:

The standard of discipline and the general moral tone of a society can very well depend on who is at the helm – a saint or a villain. The history of our immediate past is still fresh in our minds. Assailed on all fronts by the abject corruption of our erstwhile leaders, the Nigerian society gradually yielded to the new morality of greed and to the need of religious mammon. The proper role of a leader is to lead; and in leading the life of the leader should be a model for the society. What his works preach and teach, his actions ought to show, just as the distress diagrams drawn by a geometry teacher illustrates his proofs... the economic distress in our country calls for a daring and creative resolve from our leaders (Oputa, 2014).

However, Nnaemeka-Agu, JSC (rtd.) in his work, *The Position and the Role of a Judge in a Democratic State*, Ogbodo (1980) noted that very few persons have time to consider the position of a Judge (a good judge) in a democratic State like Nigeria. He went further to add that for a number of reasons, one can say without fear of contradiction that without Judges (good Judges), there can be no democratic State. He in addition buttressed this statement as having been recognized by a number of jurist and experts, that in a democracy, good governance is a government according to law. Judges who make up the Body of Benchers are in the context of this work taken to mean a good Judge, that is a Judge who by good general and professional education, experience and expertise exhibits on continuing basis, a sound exposition of the law; one who has such high index of character that he is always capable of, and seen as, resolving the issues in controversy coming before him with absolute sense of justice, impartiality and uninfluenced by bias or prejudice or any extraneous considerations. The existence of such judicial officers strengthens the country's democratic process and social justice system and institutions in Nigeria. Judges, as Honourable Thurgood Marshall put it: "... *sit astride the crucial nexus where the citizen meets his government ...*" (Allen, 1973).

The courts, nay the Judges it is, which deals with people and their individual problems on a case, day to day basis. In doing this, they are to act as guardian of constitutionality where the case involves the exercise of powers by any of the arms of government or their functionaries. They are also expected to act as the ultimate protectors of rights in disputes involving threats to human rights. Thurgood Marshall in addition noted that if the system is working inequality, he is likely to be the first to know since he is the one called upon to send innocent Defendants to prison or deny legal claims, which in justice should be granted. In such a scenario, he is the one who has the final say. He can in so doing preserve or mar the stability of society by his decision. That is to say, his judicial dispositions determine democratic consolidation and social justice which produces peace and prevents conflicts in the state. A good judge conscious of this as well as his judicial oath to be a mirror of unalloyed justice must therefore handle disputes in such a manner that he renders to every man according to his dues. The Judge's performance of this arduous task has most times been difficult to appreciate due to the weakness of his method and weapon exposition (Hamilton, 1904). His weakness is in the sense that the only power it has is the power of judgment and even these judgments cannot be executed without the aid of the executive personnel's (police). Jacob (1972) suggests as a panacea, a real and effective separation of powers by giving the judiciary the powers to fully take control and charge of its processes and execution of its decision. This brings out another important role of a Judge. This he must do in instances where his decisions run contrary to the powers-that-be, or some powerful vested interest.

It must be added that it is also a mark of courage for a judge to dissent in the court of last resort in the judicial hierarchy. Although (Nnaemeka-Agu et al., 1996) is of the view that dissent in an intermediate appellate court is that which demands the greatest courage. He states that in Anglo-America jurisprudence, dissenting at the intermediate Court is an appeal to the depth sensitivities and careful considerations of the apex court in a particular field of law, while dissents at the apex court is an appeal on the court itself to reconsider its stand in an area of law. In all, the role of dissenting judgments serves as initiating change and growth of the law. This is because it requires the Judges in depth knowledge of the law, his analytical mind, solid reasoning, beauty of linguistic expression and courage. Suffice to say, that the courage of a judge to dish out doses of justice to the individuals and the state regulates the character of the government which in turn determines the ability of its politics to operate within the confines of the rule of law and social justice in Nigeria lays the men of the Bench.

H: Summary and Conclusion

As we have from the above, the premature state of democracy and conflicts in Nigeria is as result of leadership ineffectiveness, endemic corruption and several impositions ranging from political to religion. To summarise the argument in line with the definition of Abraham Lincoln, “government of the people, by the people, for the people” indicates that democracy is effective to the extent to which leadership is right and ensure the institutionalization and upholding of social justice structure and systems. When the leader does right, the other elements fall in place, and this explains the concept of effectiveness in leadership. As argued by Prasad (2017), intelligence, purposefulness, and public interest is the key to successful leadership in democracy and that guarantees social justice. Firmness of purpose will ensure that the leader is focused on the good of the state alone which eliminates bias and any form of unjust impositions as mentioned earlier. Although corruption seems undefeatable, the leader is the chief executor of the will of the people and the constitution. Purposefulness will see deliberate effort to do right at all times while also enforcing it on other public office holders and making them accountable (Arodoye, Izevbigie, & Omo-Ikirodah, 2017).

The symptoms and causes of dishonest, biased, partial and unjust governance are obviously corruption, ethnic and religious impositions, to mention but a few. However, among these anomalies in the matter of governance, the most critical issue of all is political leadership and the judiciary. The findings of this paper, leaves nobody in doubt that the entrenchment of democratic process nay social justice would guarantee peace and prevent social crisis and conflicts in Nigeria. This is because the breach to democratic process produces lopsided governance and social justice system which in turn hurts peace and creates social crisis and conflicts. Needless to say, the Nigerian state still has a very long way to go for the polity to significantly reap the much-desired dividends of democracy and social justice which are peace, conflicts prevention and progress. However, this is not to say that there is no semblance of democratization, particularly as there is much noise in the fight against corruption and legislative oversight. But that those universal principles of justice, equity, freedom, liberty, transparency and accountability in government, public participation, the rule of law, etc. on the basis of which ideal democracy is built, is still non-existent. The implications of an abused democracy and social justice system are not just deleterious to the citizens today, but more so for generations to come in terms of sustainable peace and conflict prevention.

I: Policy Implications

1. Urgent concerted measures should be taken to address the identified quagmires to Nigeria’s democratic process and the need to ensure functional social justice system is entrenched is fundamental to ensure peace and prevention of conflicts in the country as the sayings goes, that prevention is better than cure.
2. Proper application would go a long way in eschewing social inequality, ethnicity, tribalism, economic marginalization, poverty and most significantly corruption and bad leadership in Nigeria which are products of democratic failure and challenges to structural social justice system in Nigeria. It is not enough to rave about constitutional reforms and restructuring, as we must concomitantly cure both the

symptoms and the sickness. Nigeria can get it right if she learns to embrace and practice the intrinsic operational principles of an ideal democracy that seeks to promote justice, equity, accountability and respect for fundamental human rights, rule of law and other good governance values that would usher Nigeria into a higher a peaceful and conflicts-free society.

3. The Judiciary need to brace up to its social responsibility of ensuring justice and equity in the state by making sure that judges protects the established political norms and democratic ethos of the state nay social justice in Nigeria. Fearless, greedy-free and courageous judges in Nigeria will help to curtail national leadership from bridging the country's democratic process and social justice hence peace-building and conflicts prevention in Nigeria.

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