Genuine Democratic Practice: A Panacea for Resolving the Multi-Dimensional Conflicts in the Nigerian State

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ABSTRACT
Nigeria, on 1ˢᵗ October, 1960 officially joined the comity of nations. This marked a turning point in the political history of the country as her independence was granted by her erstwhile colonial master. Suffice to say that, Nigeria was bequeathed with a democratic parliamentary form of government at independence but this was truncated by the military interregnum which lasted for more than a decade. The democratic practice that re-surfaced on May 29, 1999 however raised the hopes of Nigerians who had long been expecting a return to democracy. Democracy is often adjudged as a form of government that promotes the principle of equality of all citizens and as such reduces the proclivity for conflicting relationships between and among the various categories of people that dwell in a democratic setting. Sadly, rather than the experimentation with democratic practice in Nigeria mitigating the incidence of conflicts, ironically speaking, it has indeed increased the tendency for further conflicts between and among groups that compete for powers. The paper, through a content-analysis of the extant but relevant literature revealed that, democracy, as it is being currently practised in Nigeria, is replete with several abnormalities hence, the result it currently yields in the country. The paper nevertheless, recommended the need to adopt and practice democracy in its real form for such would help address the myriad of challenges confronting Nigeria.
KEYWORDS: Democracy, Conflict, Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution
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I. INTRODUCTION
Conflict resolution and management have continued to dominate the academic literature particularly in the field of international relations, political science and social sciences generally. This is borne out of the imperativeness of peaceful co-existence. Nigeria has had to grapple with conflicts of different dimensions both in the pre- and post-independent periods. Although, conflict is often seen as inevitable in any social relations as it is present almost everywhere and Nigeria is not an exception. Conflict has indeed remained an important feature in the Nigerian state.Considering the danger it pretends for Nigeria, scholars in the field of political science, sociology, psychology, among others, continue to be pre-occupied with developing further empirical and theoretical studies on how best to manage conflicting situations. Nigeria, caught in the web of global call fordemocratization and, as an attempt to resolve many constitutional issues, the country returned to democratic governance in May 1999. However, the restoration of democracy in Nigeria appeared to have thrown up some new wave of worrisome conflicts (Ajayi, 2014).

An avalanche of both theoretical and empirical studies conducted in the field of social sciences and particularly political science have showed that the democratic practice limits the tendency for the emanation of conflict. Prominent among such studies is the one conducted by Doyle (1986) who compiled a list of democratic liberal societies to determine the propensity of inter-state wars between the 19ᵗʰ and 20ᵗʰ centuries. The author averred that no two democracies had engaged in a full or large scale war between themselves. Related to the above is the submission of Kinsella and Rousseau (2009) who noted that democratic states are more peaceful in their relations with all states no matter how they govern themselves.

This is not to suggest that, in a democracy, conflicts do not occur however, just as Kinsella and Roussaeau (2009) observed, such competitions when they occur, are better resolved through peaceful institutions of democracy. The institutions and processes of resolving conflict in a democracy according to them include; existence of an independent judiciary, negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, among others.

Democracy,where truly practiced, helps to minimize unnecessary tension that relates to who controls what, when and how. Indeed, it is a form of government that helps to install a legitimate government whose emergence is determined by the majority of the people in the state. It is a form of government where the majority dominates and as well guarantees the right and privileges of the minority groups. Democracy is a promising form of government and as such a potent weapon or strategy for managing and resolving conflict.

This is because its principle, institutions and rules usually aspire to manage inevitable social tension in sharply divided societies (Ezirim, 2009).

Corroborating the foregoing, Omilusi (2010) observed that democracy is a form of governmental system that offers a feasible solution to the very important political problems of arriving at joint decisions through peaceful means. Democracy, for the fact that it allows people to actively engage themselves in political decisions, it promotes peaceful coexistence between and among the people in the state and as well helps to install institutions that enable peaceful resolution of conflicts that might emanate in a political system.

It is instructive to note that since the return of democracy in the Nigerian state particularly in May 1999, rather than the country benefiting largely from the democratic practice by making sure that democratic institutions in the state help to manage incidence of conflict, ironically speaking, there havefurther emerged and perhaps continue to emerge conflicts of different dimensions or proportions. This ranges from ethno-religious, electoral, tribal, and communal to herdsmen-farmers conflict, among others.

Commenting on the democratic practice in Nigeria, Attaihru Jega(2007) noted that;"in the Nigerian context, democracy is something much talked about, greatly aspired yet, strenuously struggled for. Explainingfurther, he added, democracy is a set of objectives presumed with apparent vigor but not yet attained. Indeed, it is worth noting that democratic practice in Nigeria has turned out to be a nightmare.The question to ask is whether the dividends of democracy are being enjoyed in Nigeria or not and if not, what factors often combine to make democratic gains elude Nigeria? Hence, the thrust of this paper was investigating the relationship between genuine democratic practice and multi-dimensional conflicts ravaging the Nigerian state.

TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATION
Democracy, Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Conflict Management are terminologies clarified in this work.

DEMOCRACY
In fact, this concept is one of the most disputed concepts particularly in field of political science as the concept has been subjected to so many interpretations and adaptations in various parts of the world that over time, it has become value-laden (Nnamdi, 2009).The word democracy has a Greek origin. It is a concept derived from the two Greek words i.e. Demo, demoting "people" and Kratia demoting "government" or to rule. It therefore refers to the popular rule in the Greek city-state (Nnamdi, 2009). It is a form of government in which supreme power in a state resides or is vested in the people.

Hassan (2010) opined that democracy is the participation of people particularly as it affects the running of a government through their leaders who are elected periodically and are made accountable for actions taken on their behalf. This definition accentuates the existence of a bond between the people and their leaders.

In the words of Chizoba (2019), democracy is defined as a system of government in which the exercise of political power is conferred on the people exercised either by themselves or through their periodically elected representatives. The system requires that each individual in a typical democratic setting be free to participate in the political decisions affecting the state. Related to the above is the submission of Agarwal (2009)who averred that democracy is that form of government in which the sovereign power of the state is in the hands of the people and as such, they remain the tributary of the state power for they take an active part in the government directly or through their representatives chosen or elected in a seemingly free and fair credible election.

Among the definitions of democracy given above, important or common in them in that democracy is that form of government that gives unfettered freedom to individuals in the state to be fully engaged in the art of governing the state. This is done by either presenting themselves as candidates under one political party or the other or at best, exercises their franchise by casting their ballots whenever opportunity presents itself to do so.

Appraising the Core Characteristics of Democracy
Linda Bore (n.d) identifies the following as constituting the core characteristics of governing by democracy;

An important key feature of democracy is the existence of very strong organs of government which operate in line with the principle of separation of power as propounded by Baron de Montesquieu. A democratic society clearly specifies the functions of each arm of government and as such, there is absence of role conflict between and among the various institutions of government. These institutions of government include; Executive, Legislative and Judiciary.

Democracy is run by freely elected representatives of the people who exercise power and civic responsibility either directly or indirectly. This means that democracy is a form of governmental system wherein people are either directly involved in the art of governance or exercise such governing right through their periodically elected but most preferred candidates. In essence, democracy discourages imposition of candidates.

It is based on the rule of majority while also guaranteeing and protecting the right and liberty of the minorities in the state. Albeit, the majority decisions supersede those held by the minority, but the right of the minority groups is well-safeguarded in a typical democratic environment.

Free and independent media – the media is very critical to democratic practice for it performs two important functions; one is to educate the people on public policies while the second is serving as a watchdog over government activities and other important institutions in the state. A free press helps to foster objective reporting and exposes the veracity behind the claims of government and as well holds public office holders accountable for their actions and inactions.

Another key characteristic of democracy is the establishment of government through periodic elections. For, instance, elections are conducted at a regular interval which may range from four to five years depending on the constitutional stipulation. The system does not encourage dictatorship in governance.

Democratic societies are committed to such democratic values as tolerance, cooperation and compromise. All these virtues indeed help to reduce conflict. Democracy preaches tolerance of dissenting views on issues of public concern, promotes cooperation between and among various groups and as well nurtures the virtue of compromise on the part of concerned groups believing that no victor, no vanquished. It promotes such other virtues as accommodation, accountability and transparency in the conduct of those at the corridor of power.

Similarly, democracy ensures the promotion of individual's rightto life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. It further includes freedom of expression, the right to assemble and opportunities to fully participate in political life. Not only does democracy promote right and liberty of individuals but also gives certain responsibilities to them. This involves either standing as a candidate at an election or voting for candidate of their choice, among others.

Conflict

The term 'conflict' is equally a victim of definitional pluralism. This is due to the fact that scholars do not owe any allegiance to a particular definition of the concept as representing the general opinion of all hence; the term is often conceptualized differently by different scholars. Nevertheless, scholars tend to agree that the term 'conflict' is analogous to such other terms as disharmony, friction, strife, discord, among others.

Folarin (n.d) conceptualized conflict as a situation where two or more parties do not have an accordor fail to reach an agreement and as such are on two different parallels on the same matter. It denotes being on a collision course and opposition to an existing view, stand or position.

Emily and Thomas (2007) positioned that conflict results from a struggle or contest occurring between or among people holding very antagonistic or opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, goals in that the relationship between the people holding divergent views threatens the peaceful existence between them. Conflict arises as a result of man's desire to create for himself an ideal environment where he could have unfettered access to his desires and live a comfortable life without his freedom being circumscribed.

Conflict according to Johnson (2015) is an interaction involving humans whereas such does not include the struggle of individuals against their physical environment but a mere competition. Explaining further, he added, people may compete for something that is short in supply without being conscious of whether or not such is being competed for by others and or without seeking to prevent the competitors from achieving their objective.

Conflict may emanate between individuals, small or large or even between countries. The areas of conflicting interests usually include issues of inaccessibility to and/or poor distribution of common but scare resources such as territory, money, energy, food, men and women, among others, inability to control political power and lack of participation in political decision-making, loss of cultural, social, or communal or identity; or values such as those inherent in a systems of government, religion or ideology (Payson Conflict Study Group, 2001).

The reviewed literatures on conflict show that conflict arises and as such inevitable in any human community whenever two individuals lay claims to something for which they both possess the required capacities and capabilities to acquire. It is a situation that occurs as result of the disagreement over certain values cherished by different groups in which one group tries to frustrate, neutralize or even eliminate rival groups.

Understanding Conflict Resolution and Conflict Management

Conflict resolution and management are essential elements of the contemporary academic discourse. This is necessitated by the burning desire of academics and scholars alike to find intellect-driven cure to the menace of conflict in which Nigeria is enmeshed and again, because the menace is inevitable in the day-to-day interactions of people hence, the need to resolve or least manage these conflicting situations.

Conflict resolution involves the reduction, elimination or termination of all forms and types of conflict. In the discourse of conflict resolution, such terms as negotiation, bargaining, mediation, arbitration, adjudication and other third party and alternative dispute resolution are often used (Osabiya, 2015). Conflict resolution is the term frequently used in an attempt to resolving or lessening the intensity of a conflict such that the parties to it

recognize the existence of a conflict which has threatened and perhaps continues to threaten a harmonious relationship in society.

Conflict management in the words of Paul Mckinney is taken to mean the exercise of being able to spot and as well handle conflicts methodically and effectively in order that it does not escalate beyond control. Since conflict is often inescapable in human societies it therefore follows logically that we design strategies for managing it. He,therefore, added that conflict handling styles involve; accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, competing and compromising.Conflict management further implies the institutionalization of various techniques and methods that can help lessen the destructive effect of conflict such that the conflicting parties mutually benefit positively from an existing conflict.

The foregoing suggests that conflict management is a goal-directed adventure in which the parties to a conflict sincerely recognize the existence of a conflict which threatens or tends to threaten their harmonious and peaceful co-existence hence, their resolve to manage it.

Theoretical Underpinning

The study considers *democratic peace theory*. This theory as noted by Bakker(2018), is a liberal approach that has gathered momentum in the post-cold world. Earliest proponents associated with this theory were Immanuel Kant, Thomas Paine and Alexis de Tocqueville. Kant in his famous essay "Perpetual peace: A philosophical sketch" developed in 1795 submitted that constitutional republics which can be interpreted to mean democracies were essential prerequisites for ensuring perpetual peace. He therefore, concluded that, majority of the people would never go into war save in self-defense. Similarly, Paine, in his work "Common Sense" popularized in 1776 averred that republics i.e constitutional democracy would not declare war on fellow republics whereas, the kings may do out of pride while Tocqueville in his work, Democracy in America, was of the opinion that democratic countries are less likely to wage war on others democratic nations.

However, it is instructive to note that democratic peace theory has been further developed by such scholars as Micheal Doyle (1996), Bruce Russet (1997), among others. For Doyle, democracy promotes such principles as human rights, transnational interdependence, openness transparency, accountability, conflict management and resolution mechanisms and that without these democratic values and ethos, there would always be in incidence of violent conflict. This theory is apt for this study as it maintains that democracy remains the best form of government with conflict resolution and management mechanisms inherent in it.

It is worthy of mention, that democracy breeds harmonious and peaceful co-existence for it provides the mechanisms such as an independent and impartial judiciary, free press, while also guaranteeing fair hearing for the people, inter alia. The multi-dimensional conflicts being witnessed in the Nigerian state which act as catalyst or impediment to genuine democratic in Nigeria according to Odisu (2015)include; poor justice delivery,corruption, high cost of governance , insecurity, poverty, illiteracy, electoral violence, partisan security agencies and electoral umpire and frequent defection among politicians due to lack of clear ideological orientation, among others.

Scholars have pointed out several conflicts bedeviling the Nigerian state which tend to threaten the corporate existence of the people of Nigeria to include but not limited to leadership crisis, ethno-religious crises, and electoral crises stemming from lack of party internal democracy, unemployment and poverty, farmers and herders clashes, terrorism and insurgency, pipeline vandalizing, thievery and robbery and the endemic corruption. The above and many related imbalances, it can be concluded to be are fallout from the failure of genuine or lack of true democratic practice.

Wherever democracy is being practiced, it is usually assumed that the system is capable of easing tension. This is because it is a form of government that has an inbuilt mechanism for management and resolution of conflict whenever such occurs.   Suffice to say that, since the beginning of the experimentation of Nigeria with democracy, the country seems not to be practicing it in its genuine form hencedemocratic dividends have eluded and perhaps continue to elude the country.

Democratic Practice in the Contemporary Nigerian State: A Myth or Reality?

There is no denying the truism that the current democratic practice in Nigeria has the hallmark of democracy but the questions people have asked and perhaps continue to ask is; why is Nigeria experimentation with democracy not yielding true dividends? Giving an insight into the democratic practice in the contemporary Nigerian state,Hassan (2010) maintains that;

''*The current democratic experience in Nigeria is such that, "the relationship between the executive and the legislature has not been cordial. In fact, there have been accusations and counter-accusations of unfaithful implementation of budgets between the executive and legislature. On the part of the executive, the parliament has a penchant for corruption. Whereas the executive seems to be in a hurry to transform the nation along its own vision, while the parliament gives the impression that it does not share its haste.*"

He added that the frosty relationship that usually characterized the executive and legislative conduct has resulted in widespread corruption, high cost of governance, and militarization of elections as witnessed in the recent conduct of Bayelsa and Kogi states 2019 governorship elections and many others conducted in the past,all of which are indeed antithetical to the democracy practice.

Prior to1999, the military had governed Nigeria for decades whereas Nigerians had condemned and campaigned unstoppably, for a return to democracy, with a firm belief that the system is capable of remedying the multi-dimensional challenges confronting the country which include endemic corruption, chronic unemployment, abject poverty, absence of critical infrastructure as roads, power and the deeply rooted ethnicity and religious intolerance (Saharareporters.com).

It needs be pointed out that, Nigerians were highly elated following the inauguration in 1999 of the democratic regime which ended the protracted military junta as this opened the door to further agitation and expectation. However, the struggle for democracy in Nigeria is still unresolved. This is due not only to the fact that democracy is adjudged the best form of government or at best works in progress as opposed to final destinations but also because some democracies appear to be farther from their destination (Amaechi, 2010).

Instructive to note therefore is that there are claims in some quarters that Nigeria has attained full democracy while for others, Nigeria is far from practicing democracy and that the country is only mimicking democratic principles. The former justified their position in the fact that the country has survived six (6) presidential elections since 1999 while that latter based its argument on the several human rights infractions and the flagrant disregard for the rule of law which serves as the major yardstick for the operation of democracy, among others (Amaechi, 2010).

A senior fellow at the Centre for Democracy Development (CCD), Prof. Jibrin Ibrahim, once lamented that the greatest challenge facing Nigerian democracy is weak institutions. Explaining further he noted, political parties are one of the weak democratic institutions in Nigeria as some of them do not practice internal democracy, which according to him weakened internal coherence and as well created a situation where the judiciary became the arbiter of who the candidates are rather than delegates (pmnews.nigeria.com published on January 29, 2018). In sum, the contemporary Nigerian state is replete with such practices which are inimical to democracy. These include; violation of judicial independence, muzzling of media and civil society groups, corruption, apathy, and at times, non-participation of the citizens in matters of public concern.

On his own part, FrankKokori, in an interview with the Guardian newspaper, declared that democracy in Nigeria is a failure to the extent that none of those who struggled and laid their lives for it would ever be happy to discuss. He added, Nigeria is gradually becoming synonymous with crime, terrorism and all manner of insecurity.Similarly, conduct of elections in Nigerian state has been so problematic and such characterized by monumental irregularities and malpractices whose magnitude portends greater danger for the country (Ajayi, 2014). The pre- and post-electoral crises witnessed in the country arose out of the failure of democratic institutions as legislature, executive and judiciary, INEC, police, etc. to carry out their constitutionally assigned roles in the political process in the past and present contemporary Nigerian State are another ugly democratic experience in the country and this situation inevitably culminated in the military takeover of government from the civilian authority (Gberevbie, 2014).

Genuine Democratic Practice: Panacea for Resolving the Multi-dimensional conflicts in the Nigerian State

A genuine democracy practice occurs when a country conducts the business of governance based on the core the principles of democracy which include but not limited to; constitutionalism, rule of law, separation of powers, and regular and periodic elections, among others (Ngozi, 2016).

A constitution refers to a body of doctrines and practices that form the fundamental organizing principles of a nation state. The constitution, according to Agarwal (2009) may be evolved and enacted, legal and real, written and unwritten, flexible and rigid but contains a set of established rules specifying the practice of government. It is the major bedrock of every democracy for it allows for the codification of functions of each arm of government and as well provides for ways of resolving the probable conflicts that might arise between and among the various structures of government. In essence, for Nigeria to achieve full dividends of democracy it follows that; there should be observance of law by both the government and the governed.

There is the need to always emphasize the principle of separation of powers between the existing arms of government as enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The French philosopher who devoted much attention to the study of U.S constitution, Baron de Montesquieu, in his book entitled "The Spirit of Laws" warned that in order that the rights, liberty and equality of all persons be guaranteed on the one hand, and the need to preclude monopoly, tyranny and dictatorship in governanceon the other hand, then powers and functions of each of these organs of government must be separated and as such be in the hands of different authorities and persons. Accordingly, the king representing the executive should be separated from the parliament and that latter should continue to be the seat of the legislature.However, a watertight separation of

powers may seem impracticable but of importance is the need to ensure power checks power for power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely(Akomolede, 2010).

Ensuring an unhindered and all-inclusive citizen's participation in governance is another passport for securing a genuine democratic practice in the Nigerian state. The quality of democracy is usually premised on the extent to which citizens freely participate in the art of governance. The citizens must be provided with an equal access to make inputs into the policies and programmes meant to have direct and indirect impact on their lives (Akomolede, 2010).

Accountability and transparency are important democratic principles that help to foster genuine democratic practice. The ruling elites need to give account of stewardship and ensure that the people are adequately carried along in the art governance. Since popular sovereignty resides with the people in democracies, it follows that government needs to ensure it is accountable to them as unaccountable candidates and parties tend to be sanctioned during subsequent elections.

Ensuring proper conduct of elections. Elections constitute an essential ingredient of democracy. They are indeed very viable means of ensuring an orderly process of succession and change and as well act as an instrument of determining political authority and legitimacy. It is pertinent to note that the precepts, structures and processes of electoral conduct in Nigeria have been characterized by reckless manipulations. Election rigging and brigandage, violence and election annulment are common practices. In fact, the conduct of election in Nigeria can be likened to be a fading shadow of democracy (Adejumobi, 2000).Therefore, there is need to ensure proper conduct of elections whose outcome would satisfy all parties as this would stem the tide of needless election related court cases. This can be achieved by guaranteeing the independence of electoral commission, providing adequate political education, adhering to internal democracy within political parties, among others.

II. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper appraised the nexus between genuine democratic practice and the multidimensional conflicts that characterised the Nigerian state. To say the obvious and just as the study revealed, democracy, where truly and genuinely practised, has every tendency to prevent the probable incidence of conflict for it has an in-built mechanism that ensures the resolution of conflicts whenever such occur. It is pertinent to note that the democratic practice in Nigerian is yet to yield genuine dividends and this can be blamed partly on the way it is being practised in Nigeria. The paper, therefore maintains that since democracy is capable of easing tension especially if its basic principles such as respect for the rule of law, accountability and transparency in governance, separation of powers between the various organs of government, conduct of free and credible elections at regular interval, internal democracy within each of the duly registered political parties, among others, then, it follows that efforts should be geared towards ensuring that all the principles which serve as the bedrock of democracy must be emphasized at all times, otherwise, attaining genuine democratic dividends which in this instance, include; effective management and resolution of multi-dimensional conflictsravaging the Nigerian state would continue to remain a mirage.

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