

**FACTORS THAT RETARD THE DEVELOPMENT AND  
PROMOTION OF DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES IN NIGERIA:  
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

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**Abstract**

Available facts on ground have shown to a large extent that all efforts at transforming the Nigerian polity into an ideal democratic society have not yielded the desired result in lieu of the existence of some factors traditionally inherent in the system. Hence, the study sets to appraise those factors which have continued to negate the enthronement of enduring democratic culture in Nigeria which include, lack of patriotism, hypocrisy, tribalism poverty, corruption, godfatherism, illiteracy and rigging of election etc and suggest ways which might help to address the problem under investigation. Thus, the need to believe in one Nigeria and ensure that corruption, godfatherism, illiteracy, poverty and tribalism is eradicate in its totality in the Nigeria body politics.

**Keywords:** Development and Democratic Principles.

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**Introduction**

It has been a widely propagated view that despite the various attempt made by the various government to transform Nigeria into an ideal democratic society. There are obvious facts on ground showing to a large extent that, it has not been possible to transmute Nigeria into an ideal democratic society with its attendant characteristics in lieu of the existence of some factors, which have continued to deter the growth, development and promotion of democratic principles in Nigeria.

It might be right to recall that, before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria, there existed nation states in the Conglomerate called Nigeria today with various forms of government which, to a great extent, practiced democracy that is comparatively akin to western typology. Notable among these Nation states in Nigeria are the Igbos; Yorubas; and Hausas of Eastern, Western and present day Northern Nigeria, respectively.

While the system of government in Igboland

centred on adequate representation; the excesses of the Yoruba Oba's were effectively put in check by the senior chiefs. The Hausas on the other hand derived their source of authority and government from the Quoran. But the upsurge of the trans-Saharan slave trade and the emergence of colonialism changed the course of history in the entire West Africa Coast and Nigeria was not an exception.

Colonialism as a system of government strived largely on domination, discrimination, divide and rule, exploitation and autocratic rule. Nigeria being a post colonial state, a creation of the British, inherited the British policy of divide and rule. This did not only polarize the class structure along tribal lines, but has equally given vent to the upsurge of antagonistic groups which have continued to fan the embers of tribalism which grew to an unimaginable proportion following the later policy of regionalism. This among other factors has given vent to some salient factors which have

continued to be inimical to the growth, development and promotion of democratic principles in Nigeria. In its place, the system of government in Nigeria is characterized by corruption, with lack of patriotism, corruption, selfishness, Godfatherism, tribalism, conspiracy and autocracy remaining constant (see Coleman J. 1958; Nnoli O. 1978; Ode J. 2002; Ode J. 2007 and Buell R. 1928), Tar U and Shettima A. (2010) and Smith (2011).

### What is Democracy

Democracy as a system of government according to Western scholars was first practiced in the Greek city-state of Athens. It is a form of government which thrived on equal representation. Democracy was defined by Abraham Lincoln, the great American President, as the government of the people, by the people and for the good of the people. The *New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, International Edition, defined democracy as government by the people usually through elected representative.

### Home Grown Democracy – Nigeria

Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as the government of the people. The brand of democracy as practiced in Nigeria today is entirely antithetical to the above dictum. It can be summed up in Shakespeare's exclamation of sorrowful anguish from the lips of Macbeth. *It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sounds and fury signifying nothing.* Commenting on the Nigerian brand of democracy. Odey(2002) opined that;

It is an organized robbery consortium where the organizers convert leadership into what... Franklin Roosevelt said about a democracy that breeds unemployment, insecurity, hunger and hopelessness. Home made democracy... a government of political jobbers. In a place like Nigeria where what counts is how much wealth one is able to acquire as a leader within the shortest period of time, home made democracy... a government of looters.

Deducting from the above assertion, there is no gain-saying, that home made democracies, especially in Nigeria, remains a mere illusion in lieu of the present realities. Chinua Achebe, (1963) had

earlier on foresaw this ugly trend hence, writing in his book "The Trouble With Nigeria", he asked rhetorically,

*"does it ever worry us that history which neither personal wealth nor power can pre-empt will pass terrible judgment on us, pronounce anathema on our names when we have accomplished our betrayal and passes on? We have lost the twentieth century, are we bent on seeing that our children also lose the 21<sup>st</sup> century?"*

The question remains, what factors are visibly responsible for this ugly development. The factors responsible for this ugly development have been traced to some existing traditional factors which has continued to negate the growth, development and promotion of democratic principles in Nigeria and these factors are not divorced from the reasons given for the fall of both the first and second republics and have not disappeared from Nigerian body politic as the practical realities of the general elections in Nigeria still portend.

### Some of the Factors that Retard the Growth, Development and Promotion of Democratic Principles in Nigeria

Some of the factors that have continued to retard the growth and development of democratic principles in Nigeria are:

- i. Lack of Patriotism.
- ii. Hypocrisy.
- iii. Laissez-faire.
- iv. Tribalism.
- v. Illiteracy.
- vi. Poverty.
- vii. GodFatherism.
- viii. Election rigging etc.

### Lack of Patriotism

Nigeria as a state polarized along tribal lines. It is Yoruba for the Yoruba man first, before Nigeria later, the same applies to other tribes that make up the country. According to the foremost nationalist Fagbile Awolowo, "Nigeria as a country exists only on Paper" According to Ode in his book, "The Parable of the Wasted Generation", what still holds Nigeria is the money from the oil wells, and if they

eventually dry up, the slogan one Nigeria one destiny will evaporate. Presently, the call for a state of Biafra; agitation for Ogoni etc, have not died a natural death.

### **Corruption**

Corruption has been the bane of Nigeria's underdevelopment, both culturally, economically, socially, spiritually and politically. Obasanjo (1999) described corruption in Nigeria as one of the single greatest bane of our society and greatest bane of our society tragedies of many years of uninterrupted military dictatorship. He stressed that, corruption in Nigeria has become a full blown cancer which has been allowed to grow unchallenged and unchecked even when it has become visibly glaring in public life.

Nwanekwe (2016) observed that in Africa generally, corruption flourishes as luxuriantly as the bush and the weeds which it so much resembles, taking the goodness from the soil and suffocating the growth of the plants which have been carefully and expensively bred and tended. The forces ranged against it are negligible.

Corruption in Nigerian political life started well under the colonial administration. Thus in Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>, 1952, the then Emir of Gwandu moved a motion in the Northern House of Chiefs thus; "...This house agreeing that bribery and corruption are widely prevalent in all walks of life, recommend that native Authorities should make every effort to trace and punish offenders with strict impartiality and to educate public opinion against bribery and corruption".

In Nigeria political life, corruption has almost become a way of life, hence, it's not strange seeing policemen on road check collecting money from motorists at gun point, and often making illegal arrest through the popular (one chance syndrome) incrimination and collection of money on bail from unsuspecting citizens.

Nothing is wrong when government personnel turn stationeries and other office equipment into private use. It is equally business as usual when medical officers sell off drugs, including equipment donated to the hospitals by some international agencies and divert the money realized from such sales into their private pockets. The falsification of election results, ballot papers and snatching of boxes, the imposition of candidates as witnessed in some political parties primaries, and in

the selection of candidates for general election hinders the growth and development of democratic principles in Nigeria.

### **Hypocrisy**

Praise signing and boot-licking have become significantly a negative factor in Nigeria body politic. Names like YEAA Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha; one-million-man-march; the Eastern outh Mandate were all forums used in Abacha's self succession bid. The year 2003 was home to the slogan continuity and consequently the third term bid by President Olusegun Obasanjo which was championed notably by state governors, top government functionaries and some politicians. The activities of these groups to a large extent are grossly detrimental to the survival of democracy in Nigeria. Without being unnecessarily cynical, the activities of the groups can be fairly summed up in Shakespeare's exclamation from the mouth of the sooth Sawyer. "There is but one mind in all these men and it is bent against us, if thou be so immortal look around you. Security gives way to conspiracy, the mighty God protect thee..." (See Odey J. 2002 and Franks F. 1963). See Ode (2002) and Nwanekwe (2016).

### **Tribalism**

Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups with diverse socio-cultural and religious background. Hence, ethnicity cum tribalism as a factor in Nigerian politics has given vent to bifurcation and altercation consequent upon spatial and ethnic loyalties. The polarization and the consequent domination of the Nigerian political scene by a few among the other minorities that make up the country has constituted a clog not only to the development and growth of democracy, but equally a threat to the corporate existence of the country. Thus, both the Hausa, Fulani and the Yorubas are suspicious of the Igbo man who at best complains of marginalization. The other ethnic minorities like the Ijaws; Ogonis, Itshekiris, and the entire Niger Delta, including the Igbos, are not satisfied with the arrangement called Nigeria.

Tribalism has not only remained a canker worm, which has eaten deep into Nigeria's political life; its effects are overwhelming. The first Nigerian civil war, which lasted for three years 1967-1970 including specters of religious disturbances and conflicts are largely linked to tribal sentiments.

These ugly trends no doubt have continued to retard the growth and development of democratic principles in Nigeria.

### Illiteracy and Poverty

The level of illiteracy and poverty has adversely affected the growth and development of democracy in Nigeria. Statistics have shown that not less than 50% of Nigerians are illiterate. Out of this number 20% are politically apathetic. Out of the remaining 30% only about 5% are directly involved in politics, and above all, more than 60% of the population is poor. This development from a critical perspective, is not akin to the growth and development of democracy. (See Egbo 1997).

### Godfatherism

In politics, right from the primordial period, we are taught that he who pays the piper dictates the tune, and consequent on the practice of forming blocs and sponsoring candidates for election remaining an open secret even in the Western world. The trend has taken rather a dangerous dimension in Nigerian politics. Godfatherism has become a matter of concern as witnessed in the 2003-2007 general elections in Nigeria. The political impasse in Plateau and Anambra states etc completes the story. (See Daily Independent vol. 3 No. 728, June 16 2005 P.A12 and Sheriff and Aliyu (2018)

### Conclusion

The import of colonialism, coupled with the introduction of slavery, witnessed a complete destruction of those democratic values prevalent in the West African coast where Nigeria falls. Thus, the post-independent Nigeria is still battling with the problem of grooming a new but home made democracy, which recently is being drastically affected by some factors inherent in Nigeria's body politics which to a large extent constitutes a great problem and a challenge towards the achievement of the desired objective. Some of those problems were identified, including corruption, hypocrisy, tribalism, illiteracy and Godfatherism e.t.c.

### Recommendation

In attempt at promoting an ideal democratic culture, this paper, recommends the only way out is to have the belief in one Nigeria and the need for the Nigerian leadership to be awake to the responsibility of stamping out corruption, tribalism, hypocrisy,

illiteracy, poverty and God fatherism, if we must achieve the feat of enthroning a true and lasting democracy in Nigeria, or the reverse, as the case may be, accordingly.

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