

## **JOHN RAWLS' POLITICAL LIBERALISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country has continuously been confronted with among other issues, the problem of a weak and unjust social structure resulting in widespread social injustice. It is at the root of most of the crises and social malaise of the Nigerian society and is made more serious by the problems associated with ethnicity and arbitrariness by the state and government. Part of the resultant effects of this weak structure include unjust public institutions and social, ethnic, religious and political crises due mainly to a lack of social cohesion, political integration and an unfair principle of distribution of income, resources, goods and burdens in the society. All attempted palliatives by different administrations have all failed and a very bitter 3-year civil war between 1967 and 1970 in which more than a million lives were lost was the first major manifestation of the problem in post colonial Nigeria.

This condition of affairs not only makes political stability and development difficult but also stifles the natural ingenuity of the people to grow. And very serious poverty and underdevelopment of the people in addition to a complete absence of liberty and rights have become institutionalised. In reaction, some Nigerians have resorted to all sorts of immoral, illegal and criminal actions and conduct, including corruption, lawlessness, indiscipline, tribalism, nepotism, and ethnicism, etc. Others have joined the political class and accepted the status quo of injustice as justice and hold this to be the proper and easiest way to achieve their life goals. This has inadvertently led to a warped and distorted sense of justice in the society. This sense of justice sees nothing wrong with vices such as public and institutional injustice, crime, fraud, corruption etc and embraces them wholeheartedly.

I propose in this research therefore, the analysis of the fundamental ideas and ideals of John Rawls' political liberalism as contained in his *Political Liberalism* as a way of addressing these social-political challenges. In doing this, the merits and intentions of Rawls' two principles of justice which centre on liberty, equality and differences are examined to deduce their level of coherence, relevance and utility to the Nigerian society. An argument will be made that these two principles represent the closest philosophical and sociological paradigm that have the core ideas and ideals necessary in addressing the twin problems of social injustice and political instability in a third world disordered society such as Nigeria.

## LIST OF CONTENTS

<b>JOHN RAWLS' POLITICAL LIBERALISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>List of contents.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
1. Statement of problem.....	11
2. Aim/Rationale for the study.....	13
3. Significance of the study.....	15
4. Contribution to Knowledge.....	16
5. Research questions.....	18
6. Structure/Methodology/Organization of the study.....	18

### PART ONE:

#### CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

<b>CHAPTER ONE: SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN NIGERIA.....</b>	<b>24</b>
1. Introduction.....	24
2. The dynamics of social structure.....	25
3. Structure and agency in the Nigerian perspective.....	30
4. Between leadership and structure, where is the problem?.....	33
5. Some Basic Institutions in Nigeria's structure.....	36
A. <i>The state/government.....</i>	<i>37</i>
B. <i>Federalism.....</i>	<i>42</i>
C. <i>Derivation/Distributive justice: The Niger Delta Question.....</i>	<i>45</i>
D. <i>Constitutionalism.....</i>	<i>47</i>
E. <i>Democracy.....</i>	<i>49</i>
6. Colonialism and post-colonialism in Nigeria.....	53
7. Ethnic pluralism in Nigeria.....	61
A. <i>The Yoruba nation.....</i>	<i>63</i>
B. <i>The Hausa/Fulani nation.....</i>	<i>64</i>

C. <i>The Igbo Nation</i> .....	66
D. <i>The Niger Delta Region</i> .....	67
8. Effects of ethnic pluralism on the social structure of Nigeria.....	67
9. Conclusion.....	69

**PART TWO:**

**THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALISATIONS**

<b>CHAPTER TWO: RAWLS' POLITICAL LIBERALISM AND SOCIETY</b> .....	74
1. Introduction.....	74
2. Fundamental ideas.....	85
3. Rawls two principles of justice.....	95
4. Original position.....	97
A. Original position in Nigeria's context/discourse.....	105
5. Overlapping Consensus.....	108
A. Overlapping consensus in Nigeria's context/discourse.....	109
6. Well ordered society.....	111
A. Well ordered society in Nigeria's context/discourse.....	112
7. Conclusion.....	115

**PART TWO:**

**THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALISATIONS**

<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE IMPERATIVES OF THEORY IN NIGERIA</b> .....	120
1. Introduction.....	120
2. Argument for social restructuring through theory.....	121
3. The status quo theory.....	129
A. <i>Dearth of political Philosophy/Ideology</i> .....	129
B. <i>Lack of civil liberties</i> .....	131
C. <i>Inequality in society</i> .....	132
4. The role of theory in restructuring society.....	135

5. Transition from theory to practice.....	140
6. The theory of liberty, equality and welfare.....	145
7. Nigeria and the social contract theory.....	151
8. Conclusion.....	160

**PART THREE:**

**CASE STUDY OF RAWLS' PROCEDURE FOR JUSTICE**

**CHAPTER FOUR: A FAIR PROCEDURE FOR SOCIAL STRUCTURING IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS IN CONSTRUCTIVISM.....162**

1. Introduction.....	162
2. Extrapolating political liberalism in an African social setting.....	163
3. Two arguments relating to a new social restructure.....	165
A. Ethnic sovereignty, autonomy and self determination.....	166
B. True federalism, fiscal Federalism and resource control.....	170
4. Imperatives of national consensus.....	179
5. A well ordered society in Nigeria: Social justice as development.....	181
6. Conclusion.....	189

**CONCLUSION/SUMMARY.....192**

**REFERENCES.....205**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.....219**