

**JOHN LOCKE'S LIBERAL THEORY OF REPRESENTATION: A CHALLENGE TO
NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION.**

Chibueze T. Nwoke (M.A)

Post Graduate Research Student, Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University,

Awka

08038387507

tcnwoke25@gmail.com

Abstract

The subject of representation in democracy is a fundamental issue because it helps to define the success of the government in the society. When the leaders do not represent the interests and the will of the people as the case of Nigerian system, things do not augur well. Democracy as a system of government has enjoyed popular acceptance because of its inherent principles. It is people oriented and the rule of the majority. The people's will as the majority is the subject of representation in a representative democracy. However, contrary to this idea and the known tenets of democratic practice; in Nigeria, the representatives (leaders) lord it over the people. The representatives which constitute a minute percentage of the population rule over the majority will. This situation is a clear case and unless there is a reverse in this trend, the future for sustaining democratic culture in Nigeria will remain murky, to say the least. This paper therefore critically analyses the Nigerian democratic representation and further challenges this situation with John Locke Liberal theory of representation. It also presents this theory as an imperative for a proper democratic representation in Nigeria.

Key Words: Liberal, theory, representation, democracy.

Introduction

There is no gainsaying the fact that there is bad leadership in Nigeria even under democratic rule, leaders are simply oppressors. “Oppressive government is more terrible than tigers, says Confucius” (Russell: 1938). The products of bad government in Nigeria are: poverty in the land, under development, high death rate, insecurity, insurgency, to mention but a few.

A critical assessment of Nigeria democracy reveals the facts that democratic representation is the bane of Nigerian democracy. The leaders do not represent the will and interests of the people, despite the fact that democracy is the rule of the people. They rather legislate and execute policies which favour them to the detriment of the citizens. This problem affects every sector in Nigeria, both politics and economy. In the economic sector, Dukor (2010:29) believes, “there are indeed some forms of corruption that are impossible to wipe out in-creeping incorrigible capitalism of Nigeria”. This actually makes it impossible for some reformation in the banking sector not to succeed.

The question then becomes of what value is democracy despite the universal acceptance it has now, as the best form of government. This informs, the fact that democracy today faces several criticism from friends and foes alike on several important points. To suggest that the political system used in the many of the states that practice liberal democracy even United State is not very democratic is not necessary to criticize it. It is simply a statement of fact, not a value judgment. When Nigeria’s own political system is analyzed, the result becomes horrible. This picture brings out the idea that practice of democracy is however relative, despite the universal principles.

John Locke has been treated as one of the founders of Philosophical Liberalism and modern Representative Democracy. His ideas caught the mood of his country and his era so

much so that G.H. Sabine wrote. “His sincerity, his profound moral conviction, his genuine belief in liberty, in human right and in the dignity of human nature, united with his moderation and good sense made him the ideal spokesman of a middle-class revolution” (Odimegwu 1997:21). Locke postulated a Liberal Theory of Representation, which he advocated for what should be the basis of representation in a democratic society. Public officials should represent the people’s interests and the people’s will.

Therefore, through Analytic method, this research x-rays the problem of representation in Nigerian democracy as the bane of bad leadership in the country. Nigeria is a democratic state where the will of the masses is truncated even in electing their representatives. Hence, the objective of this research is geared towards revamping the Nigerian socio-political system. The paper makes recommendations on how Nigerian socio-political system will change positively by adoption of John Locke’s Liberal Theory of representation.

The Concept of Democracy

Democracy has become one of the over used and misused words in the society today. “When word acquires a universally sacred character... as has today the word democracy, I begin to wonder whether by all its attempts to mean, it still mean anything at all”, William (2004:297). Mbaegbu (2008:55) avers, “People both literate and non-literate make use of the word “Democracy” in their daily conversation, but ask them what they mean by democracy they find it rather very difficult and elusive”. Democracy has become very difficult to define conceptually. Zato (2008:278) believes that “the only known non-controversy regarding democracy is about its origin; that it originated from the Greeks”.

Etymologically, democracy is derived from Greek words *demo-kratia* which means “the rule of the people” or “rule by the people”. It is through joining of these to Greek words *demos*

people and *kratia*-rule, that gives us President Abraham Lincoln's famous classical definition of democracy as the "government of the people, by the people and for the people". As a political doctrine, an essential feature of democracy as a rule of the people means that it is the right of the people that should count in the process of governance. Pericles the Athenian Statesman in 431 B.C, emphasizing on democracy says:

Our constitution named democracy because it is not in the hands of the few but of the many. But our laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes and our public opinion welcomes and honours talent in every branch of achievement... on grounds of excellence. Our citizens attend both to public and private duties and not allow absorption in their various affairs to interfere with their knowledge of the city's ... We decide or debate, carefully and in person all matters of policy, holding... that acts are foredoomed to failure when undertaken undiscussed (Macradis 1982:16).

The idea, here, is that people were equal in the exercise of their right especially the male adults. Decision making was based on the public opinions which were aired directly. The supreme power is vested on the people. This gives credence to Abraham Lincoln's definition as "the government of the people by the people and for the people". Democracy in its ideal, hence emphasizes the free consent of the people, which could be direct or indirect in the decision making process of the government.

Democracy has often been criticized by many on the ground of the definition of the word "people". Does the word refer to the ruler or the ruled. Oguejiofor (2004:21) opines that "democracy implies the government of the people but in reality there is no place where the people govern, nor indeed is it practicable for them to do so". It is in this light that some people like (Onah 2004:276), lay claim that "democracy is an illusion". Rousseau () corroborates this when he says that in the strict sense "no time democracy has ever existed nor ever will... were there such a thing as a nation of Gods, it would be a democracy. So perfect a form of government

is not suited for mere men”. Onah (2004:278) maintains that “democracy, is hypocritical, illusory and opium of the masses because in democracy, it is not the people that rule but special people”. “Even the Athenians never pretended that by it they mean rule by all... because excluded were women, children, every other person from outside the city, aliens, slaves and all the adult males who had been convicted of crime” (Onah 2004:280).

This reflects the basic fact that the traditional definition does not capture the meaning of democracy or that democracy as a form of government in its strict meaning does not exist. Odimegwu (2008:2) claims that it is the sophists’ understanding of democracy that stands the test of time. “Democracy is a political context in which the few who possess the enablement and capabilities of wealth and speech, move the many who have neither or not the two, to the adoption of their interests and opinions, as the preferred position of all”.

In this sense, one would ask, why the universal enthusiasm and clamour for democracy? It is my humble opinion that there are some intrinsic values in democracy which has made it desirable more than other forms of government.

Democracy and its Preference

In the history of mankind different forms of government have evolved in the effort to take care of the welfare and well being of the people. Some of these systems are: Theocracy, Communalism, Monarchism, Autocracy, Fascism, Aristocracy, Socialism, Meritocracy and Democracy. Suffice to say that of all these forms of government, democracy seems to have proved the best that meets the requirement of taking care of the welfare and the needs people.

Actually, no system is totally wrong and unworkable, but it is the operators of the system that make it bad. This is because an autocratic “people based system” anywhere is better than

democratic “leaders based system” in Nigeria”, (Oguejiofor 2010:4). The success of any system depends on the leaders.

Nevertheless, by principle, some forms of government are better than others. It is this reason that democracy becomes desirable because of its intrinsic principles. On this democratic character, Agyaman (2004:334) writes:

Democracy appears to have become part of the globalization phenomena and mankind seems to have slowly accepted the idea that democracy is good for a variety of reasons, although there are various kinds of democracy in the world. The American type of democracy as practiced there is different from British’s and Britain’s from France’s and France’s from Germany and so on and so forth. But the variations appear to be less important than the universal ideals of democracy which override the cultural or national considerations.

Democracy is often preferred, not because of abuses as depicted in the various type practiced in various countries, but because of its universal ideal. Some of the ideals of democracy lie in the provision it makes for the protection of the weak, the equalization of opportunities for all, the equal treatment of all the before the law, and the respect for human rights of all etc. The strength of democracy lies in the fact that the people are the *terminus adquo* and the *terminus adquem*. “The people begin everything and end it for their own sake” (Agyaman 2004:335).

Many political theories and authors have favoured democracy on the basis of its strength, which is the concept of all inclusiveness inherent in the phrase “the people”. It is supposed to concern the welfare and interest of all, the poor and the rich, the weak and the strong, the advantage and disadvantaged members of the society. It tends to offer everyone the equality of treatment; defence, protection before the law. Democracy rests on two pillars of equality and freedom.

Human beings like freedom and this freedom is what democratic principles offer. Hence the whole world now clamours for it. Fukuyama (1992:XI) in his book *The End of History and Last Man* presents democracy as the final form of government. This he argued that:

A remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of Liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world over the past few years, as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary, monarchy, fascism, and most recently communism. More than that however... Liberal democracy may constitute the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the final form of human government and such constitute the end of history.

It is the existence of the twin principles of Liberty and equality on which democracy is founded rather than on flaws in the principles themselves that makes it desirable and preferable. Hence all other forms are giving way to Liberal democracy. Fukuyama (1992:XII) therefore concludes that, "all really big question have been settled, history has come to an end with the demise of totalitarianism and rise of Liberal democracy".

The principles democracy was what made some philosophers like J.J. Rousseau, B. Montesquieu, and J. Locke to project it as the best form of government. The distinguishing character are: equality of all men, fundamental human right, majority rule and minority rights, supremacy of the law, free and fair election of representatives, press freedom, periodic election, independence of the judiciary and existence of opposition parties.

What has become the problem of democracy in spite of these values which account for its relativity and situational in practice. Political demagogues in many countries that practice democratic policy have abused it. However, despite the abuse, democracy is still preferred, knowing fully that abuse does not remove the essence of a thing.

Policymaking is seen as the most important democratic procedure. Consequently early democratic thinkers like John Locke regarded the legislative process as the core of democracy.

Accordingly, the democracy process was equated with the policy making process and the relationship between the people and the legislative process is the most important criterion for distinguishing among various democratic systems. Representative government is what most modern states today have taken to mean democracy. The people participate in the process of governance by electing their representative through casting of votes. “Thus, the decision on wide policy is left to the body of elected representatives or executive, acting in cooperation with the legislative” (Ekei 2008:324). It is in this light that Liberal democracy as a system of government is the most preferred in the modern world.

Theories of Representation

The subject of representation in a democracy as it were, is a very serious one. This question on how the people should be represented is as old as democracy itself. Bradat (1979:137) points out that, “the dilemma is the question of whether public officials should represent the national interest as Edmund Burke argued, or whether they should reflect the interest of a more local area, as James Madison recommended”. Therefore many political theorists have grappled with the problem, but none has been persuasive enough to dominate the argument. Of all arguments over the question of representation in a democracy, none is more controversial than whether public officials should represent the people’s will or their interests. This quandary returns to us the question of how democratic a government should be. If the system is highly democratic, the representatives should make every effort to determine how their constituents want them to act and accordingly.

The second position is the attitude that the representatives should use their judgment to determine the interest of the people and select the course that is best suited to those interests. This position is maintained on the ground that people may not perceive their interest as clearly as

their representatives and may favour an action that is actually harmful to them, the people's will is not always synonymous with their best interests. The basic theories of representation are:

The Reactionary Theory of Representation

This is based on the need for order and authority. The Executive serve the public interest as they perceive it. While they should be open to popular input, being of superior knowledge and judgment they should not be hindered by popular sentiment. The people, for their part must support the state and accept the government policies willing in confidence that the politicians have acted in the public best interest. This undemocratic position is supported by Thomas Hobbes and Alexander Hamilton.

Conservative Theory of Representation

This next theory of representation is supported by Edmund Burke and James Madison. According to Bradat (1979:133), "Conservatives grant popular control without encouraging public participation in governing process". In this variant the people choose those who are to govern them from an elite group. The people do not have the right to instruct their representatives or even to compel them to reflect a particular position in a given issue. However, if the representatives do not satisfy the public, the people may replace them with other members of the elite at the next election. This position reflects Rousseau's second distinction of aristocracy which he calls "elective aristocracy".

Radical Theory of Representation

This theory calls for the greatest amount of popular input. Rejecting representative government altogether, the theory holds that only the people themselves are capable of representing their own views, at least on important issues. Thus, this theory claims that pure or

direct democracy is the most desirable form of government, indeed it is the only truly democratic form.

Liberal Theory of Representation

John Locke is the father of Liberal theory of representation. According to Locke (1956:71) “all people are essentially equal and all are therefore capable of ruling”. It is a mass-oriented theory which requires the representative to act as a messenger to his constituents. This theory is derived from his Social Contract which is the brain child of civil society. Civil Society emerged by the universal consent of all human being. In the state of nature people agree to surrender their right of self defence and form a Civil Society and able to establish a common government. “When any number of men are so united into one society as to quit everyone his executive power of the Law of nature and resign it to the public, there and there only, is a political or civil society. And this is done, when ever any number of men in the state of nature, enter into society to make one people, one body politic, under one supreme government” (Locke 1952:50).

In this regard, for Locke what constitutes any political society is nothing but the consent of any number of free men. In this society therefore, the power of legislation belongs to the whole body of politic, but entrusted to the majority. This is what is referred to as representative government.

Lock opines that this type of government does not imply that the people will forgo their Liberty and live in servitude, but that, according to Nwoko (1988:82) “they will forgot their legislative and executive... and hand them over to the common legislative power through the majority for common good”. This is in opposition to Hobbes assertion that on entering into a civil society, individuals should agree and hand over all their right to one man who would wield

absolute power in the society. “Thus, Locke unlike Hobbes gives power to the community and not to a government” Oraegbulam (2004:100).

On individual right, Khares (1977:6) stresses that “the recognition of human right of every human being is essential for the development of human dignity and personality”. Man has inalienable right as he formerly enjoyed in the state of nature and prominent among them are right to freedom and right to personal property.

The tenets of Liberal theory of representation, therefore is that the purpose of the government is to serve the people. Hence Bradat (1979:63) opines that, “government functioned solely to increase individual right”. Public officers are obliged to vote the way their constituents want them to.

John Locke believes that people had created government to serve their needs and the most of the time government should have very little power over the individual. Unlike other theorists, he believes that the state should not be more powerful than individuals it serves. “The government was created by the society; society was created by a contract among all individual who wanted to join the society” (Bradat 1979:64). Since the power of government was derived from, and therefore dependent on the power of the individuals in the society, the “representative” (the government) could not impose the authority on the unwilling people. Such would warrant the people to remove themselves from the society and the authority of the government.

Liberal theory of representation advocates that the will of the people is what the leaders should represent. The will of the people should count in electing the representatives and also in governance.

Nigerian Democratic Representation

In principle, the form of government which Nigeria practices is Liberal democracy which is a form of representative government; but in practice none of the democratic principles is respected. A simple glance at the divergence between Locke's liberal theory of representation and representative democracy in Nigeria exposes the hypocrisy of democracy in Nigeria. In Liberal democracy which advocates liberal representation, the people are supposed to be the ones who through their elected representative make decision that would be binding on all, unfortunately this is not really so. Those who contest for elective posts in Nigerian democracy are sponsored by political parties. Therefore elections of the people's representative are done by the political god-fathers. Nwabueze (1993:70) commenting on this ugly situation writes, "election (even voting in the chambers of legislative assemblies) are dominated by part interests and spirits. So the real mind of the people does not receive as full an expression as might be desired". Even among the people of the same political party in Nigeria, there is no democracy. People are bracketed from the choice of candidates to represent them. For instance in the recently concluded party primaries, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) had parallel elections in many state. "In Enugu State there were two parallel elections, in Anambra State there were three parallel Senatorial primaries" (). In Nigeria, the party financiers in other words the "political god-fathers" make the choice for the rest of the people. Political "god-fatherism" by no means constitutes a principle in Liberal theory of representation. The will of the people reigns supreme in the electing their representatives and leaders; both the legislative and the executive arms of the government.

Another aberration is that most decision by which Nigerians are governed are made outside the legislative houses and the latter are only used, when necessary to give them some

form of legitimacy. All decisions that are binding on the whole country are usually made on the basis of the political; and economic interests of a few powerful individuals or groups. Even when decisions are taken by the legislative houses, all favour the legislators. In this regard the interests of the people are undermined against the stipulation of Liberal theory of representation. Examples of this abound during President Obasanjo's regime. One of these was that before his government could complete its first term in office, the Executive with connivance of some members of the National Assembly, doctored the 2001 Electoral Bill. This was done without due process aimed at elongating Obasanjo's regime "the third term agenda".

Embezzlement of public fund is another feature of Nigeria democracy leaders. The leaders are not accountable to the people. Misappropriation of public fund is seen among the various arms of our government. The legislatures appropriate constituency money meant for constituency projects to their private purses. The Executive embezzle money with impunity, starting from the President to the Governor and the Local Government Chairman. As a result of the misnomer; the people suffer untold hardship, because of high rate of poverty in the land. It is in this regard that Umeh (2009:204) in his poem branded the Nigeria democratic representatives "Ambassadors of poverty", because their actions and in-actions cause poverty in the land.

According to him

Ambassadors of poverty are:
The political elite
In air conditioned chambers
And exotic cars
With tearful stories of rip-off
Tucked away from
Their impoverished constituencies
Lying prostrate
With death traps for roads
Mud for water, candle for light
Underneath trees for schools
Rates for protein

Fasting as food
And alibi as governance Umeh (2009:275)

All these actions and inactions of the leaders frustrate the cooperative will of the people.

In 2002, a Nigeria Newspaper quoted Dr. M.D. Tomlinson, the Then World Bank Country Director as saying that “80 percent of the nation’s revenue about \$15 Billion yearly revenue from oil is consumed by government officials... this means that only one percent of the Nigeria population enjoy over 80% of its revenue while 99 percent of the Nigeria population are to make due with just about 20 percent of the wealth” (Nwigwe 2001:95). This happens in a country that is said to operate Liberal Democratic Government.

Another situation is respect for the Rule of Law in Nigerian democracy. There is gross abuse of the fundamental human rights of the citizens by the Nigerian democratic representatives. The people are denied their rights, but Locke made it clear that it was precisely to have individual rights more securely enjoyed that makes government necessary, as such any government that fails to secure the right of the citizens forfeits that rights to govern.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of this paper:

- ❖ Democratic representation should be based on the people’s interests or people’s will. It is by no means on the interests and will of the leaders under form of government Nigerians claim to operate.
- ❖ There is the need for the leaders who are the people’s representative to legislate according to the will of the people.
- ❖ More still, equal opportunity should be given to all citizens because all people are essentially equal and are therefore capable of ruling. In this area women and the

physically challenged should be given a place, even though John Locke did not include them in equality of all people.

- ❖ The people should reject their representatives when they work against the will of the people. In fact all leaders who have undermined the will of the people and looted the country's treasury should be brought to book.
- ❖ There is the need for a revolution in this country, though not necessarily a bloody type. It could be done through the implementation of the Report of the 2014 Constitutional Conference.
- ❖ The legitimacy of representatives lies on the people, through the adoption of Locke's Theory of Representation; the problem of representation which is the bane of Nigerian democratic government will be corrected and all democratic principles and dividends enjoyed in other democratic states like United State of America would come to bear.

Conclusions

Nigerian Policy does not favour the people, even though it is believed to be democratic government "government of the people". All the principles of democracy are undermined, so much so that the democratic representatives do not care for the welfare and interests of their constituents. There is unjust state authority over the people and this constitutes a very difficult problem for political theorists to determine the classification of Nigeria's type of government. It is not monarchy, even though there are so many monarchs in the policy making. It is not also aristocracy which is the government of the best. It is of course no democracy because the will of the people are far removed from governance. Nwigwe (2004:95) says it could qualify as "Mafia government" which according to him is "a government infested with power drunken self seeking, ideology barren, orientationless operative, - usually selected by their kind and of course scarcely

ever elected by the people”. Power belongs to the representative not the people, even though there is constitutional provision for the separation of power, nevertheless, all authority is concentrated in the hands of the executive who manipulate the rest of the arms. As a result, accountability, transparency and justice are undermined.

Politics in Nigeria is a means of amassing wealth and not aimed at service to the people. Therefore power is maintained at all costs, irrespective of the illegalities and illegitimacies. The consequents of these are poverty among the people, absence of peace, insecurity political instability inform of impeachments and under development.

It is against this backdrop that John Locke’s Liberal theory of representation becomes imperative for Nigerian democracy.

References

- Abraham L. (1809-1865). *The new webster's dictionary*. USA: Typhoon compact.
- Agyaman K. (2004). *The quest for moral Democracy: Oguejiofor J.O. (ed) Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa*. Enugu: Delta Publication.
- Betrand R. (1938). *Power*, London: Orwin Paper back Limited.
- Bradat L. P. (1979). *Political ideology: their origins and impacts*. London: Prentice Hall Incorporated.
- Dukor M. (2010). Constraints of revolution in the banking industry: In *Daily Sun Newspaper* Wednesday June 2.
- Ekei J. (2008). *The rule of law and ambivalence of democracy: Odimegwu I. (ed) Nigerian democracy and global democracy*. Awka: Fab Educational Books.
- Fukuyama F. (1992). *The end of history, the last man*. New York: Pengium Book Limited.
- Khare S.C. (1977). *Human rights and United Nations*. New Delhi: CrawHill,.
- Locke J. (1956). *The second treatise on government (An essay concerning the true origin of extent and of civil government) and a letter concerning toleration: Gough J.W. (ed.)*. New York: Macmillan.
- Locke J. (1952). *Treatise on government: Peardon P. (ed)*. Indianna: Polis.
- Macridis, (1982). *Contemporary political ideology*. London: Nor trop Publication.
- Mbaegbu C.C. (2008). *Nigerian democracy and the nationality question: Odimegwu O. (ed) Nigerian democracy and global democracy*. Awka: Fab. Educational Book.
- Nwabueze B.O. (1993). *Democratization*. Ibadan: Spectrum Law Publication.
- Nwoko M.I. (1988). *Political theories*, Onitsha. Claretian publication.
- Odimegwu I. (2008). *Why democracy: Odimegwu I. (ed). Nigerian democracy and global democracy*. Awka: Fab. Educational Book.
- Odimegwu I. (2010). *Political philosophy: Fukuyama F. The end of history, the last man*. Unpublished lecture note.
- Oguejiofor J.O. (2004). *The need for re-evaluation of values: Bigard Theological Studies*, 24(2) 21. Enugu: Bigard Publication.

Oguejiofor J.O. (2010). Democracy. Unpublished lecture note.

Onah G. (2004). African and illusion of Democracy: Oguejiofor J.O. (ed) *Philosophy democracy and responsible governance in Africa*. Enugu: Delta Publication.

Oraegbunam K.E. (2004). John Locke's political liberalism: Its relevance in Nigerian democracy: Ogumadele (ed). West African journal of philosophical studies. Enugu: Snaap Press Limited vol.7.

Rousseau J.J. (1960). The social contract: Or principles of political right: E. Barker (ed). *Social contract: essays by Locke, Hume and Rousseau*, London: Oxford University Press. BK.3.

Rousseau J.J. The social contract, BK3 Chap v. p. p. 234-235

William A. (2004). The fictionalism of democratic struggle: Onah G. *Africa and the illusion of democracy*: Enugu: Delta publication.

Zato M.N. (2008). Towards Nigerian democratic stability and rule of law: Odimegwu I (ed) *Nigeria democracy and global democracy*. Awka: Fab. Educational Book.