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.
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