

Social Injustice and Ethnic Crises in Nigeria: A Rawlsian Remedy

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Abstract

One of the major problems plaguing the Nigerian society is that of social injustice and ethnic crises. This is due to challenges of inequitable allocation of national resources amongst her ethnic groups, consequently triggering social injustice and ethnic crises. These social injustice and ethnic crises cannot be ignored. It is, therefore, blatantly clear that realistic measures to solve these problems are needed. The aim of this paper is to use John Rawls' theory of social justice as a model for addressing the problems of social injustice and ethnic crises in Nigeria. Rawls' social justice is a conception he distinctively coined "justice as fairness" which significantly conveys the unquestionable truth that the principles of justice as the basic structure and pivot of society are determined in an original setting or situation of liberty and equality. Through his theory of justice, Rawls made thorough efforts to resolve the demanding challenges of distributive and social justice within which people desired, and argued for fair and equitable distribution of goods and services in the society. The method used in this paper is analytic; this is used to analyze the problem of social injustice and ethnic crises in Nigeria while projecting Rawls' theory of justice as a remedy. The paper posits that Rawls' theory of social justice, through his overlapping consensus, which involves an agreement supported by all conflicting comprehensive doctrines, would guarantee and produce the conditions for a just and stable government, thereby effectively resolving the problem of social injustice and ethnic crises in Nigeria.

Keywords: John Rawls, Theory of Justice, Overlapping Consensus, Justice as Fairness, Ethnic Crises

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation that today has more than 250 ethnic groups. Each of the ethnic groups has a distinct language that characterizes the particular group. Ethnic relations in Nigeria are characterized by division, hatred and rancor. Since the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates by the colonial lords in 1914, Nigeria has witnessed a lot of ethnic disputes and crises over allocation and sharing of resources, power and position.

With this kind of problem on the agenda, it has become appropriate to consider the John Rawls theory of social justice more closely. He has, in a unique way, handled the political and moral problems actualized by the fact of pluralism and the need for a common institutional framework for social cooperation. When turning to Rawls' theory of social justice, the intention is to consider vital parts of it from a liberal perspective. And it is indeed interesting to consider certain aspects of Rawls' theory of justice, especially his idea of an overlapping consensus, from the perspective of political liberalism. Overlapping consensus, as outlined by Rawls in *Political Liberalism* (1993), on the other hand, can be translated to national consensus in a society where there is a constitutional protection of social justice for aggrieved ethnic groups through mutual understanding and shifting of positions to accommodate the views and interests of others. In a multi-ethnic state such as Nigeria, characterized by division, hatred, unhealthy rivalry, and pronounced disparities between ethnic groups, creating a just and fair society must guarantee ethnic cooperation, harmonious relationships, and stability among the various ethnic groups. This can only come through consensus.

Social Injustice and Ethnic Crises in Nigeria: An Overview

The question of social justice is a question of what is a proper just polity, which can guarantee human equitable and equally distribution of

benefits and burdens in a society, which will lead to a flourishing state where individuals are treated equally by the state regardless of society status or creed. A just polity cannot allow for a society of disadvantaged people, where for some people, resources external to them are been subjected entirely to communal control, such that they having no control or very little control of means of life, thus leading to their autonomy been undermined.

Nigeria as a nation has been bedeviled with a series of ethnic political, ethnic crises, social injustice among other problems.¹ There are loads of divergent viewpoints on this. Some see this problem as a result of the colonial occupation by the British government who colonized the nation; while others see the problem from governance.² And as such the country has been divided along ethnic lines which promotes disparities among the people. These disparities have engendered rivalries due to disproportions in the sharing of the nation's resources. Furthermore, there are tensions arising from the marginalization of one ethnic group in favor of the others, particularly the minority ethnic groups.

Mukherjee and Ramaswamy point out that, social justice means that the state recognizes the contribution of each individual to society and gives a share to everyone in the polity. The principle of social justice connotes balance and equity. It means that the state gives opportunity to all and privileges to none. Principle of social justice is intricately linked to social welfare. Social justice is concerned with equal justice for all, not just in the law courts, but in all aspects of society and fair opportunities for all

¹. Olugbemi Victoria, and Ucheoma Osuji. "Gender Equality and National Development: A Historical Viewpoint" *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Developmental Studies* (SGOJAHDS) 4, no. 2, (2021): 390.

². O.F Bolarinwa, and Ucheoma Osuji. "Political Elitism in Nigeria: Challenges, Threats and the Future of Citizenship" *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 12, (2022):105. <http://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2022.121007>.

citizens.³ Etieyibo asserts that, the principle of social justice requires that the distribution of advantages and disadvantages in society be egalitarian and as fair as possible. It demands that there be a level playing field for everyone (from the poorest person to the wealthiest) and that every member of society has equal rights and opportunities.⁴ Etieyibo further reiterate that the principle of social justice places an obligation on government to promote a level playing field for every member of society and to maintain a social minimum for its citizens. It requires that the government promote social welfare programs, that is, to pursue those social and economic policies that promote the quality of life and well-being of every member of society. This responsibility is that the government is required and must use public resources and funds not only judiciously but also justly and fairly, namely, for the benefits of its citizens.

With regards to the Nigerian situation, the Nigeria's socio-political conundrums stem from numerous complicated tides. Egharevba states that the “nation-state of Nigeria emerged out of political amalgamations of extremely diverse ethnic groups and class configurations brought together as a colonial necessity in 1914.”⁵ Oguejiofor avers that questions of social injustice in Nigeria is represented in two main forms. Firstly, in the exertion of control and appropriation of state resources by more advantaged ethnic groups over the disadvantaged ones even when the later seem to be the main producers of such resources. Secondly, social

³. S Mukherjee,amd S Ramaswamy. *A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*. (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall, 1999):12.

⁴. E Etieyibo. “Privatization in Nigeria, Social Welfare, and the Obligation of Social Justice”. *Journal of Economics*, 2,(2011): 45.

⁵. M Egharevba. *Political Corruption and National Development*. (Abakaliki: Platinumlink Communication,. 2007), 28.

injustice in the Nigeria polity consists in the overwhelming gap between few ethnic groups and the majority ethnic groups.⁶

Having considered the above analysis, it is clear therefore that measures must be taken towards addressing the problem of social injustice and ethnic crises in Nigeria, in order for political stability and unity between the various ethnic groups can be achieved. Sadly, only few attempts have been made by the government towards achieving the aforementioned objective. This is where we find the theoretical postulations of John Rawls on social justice and his idea of overlapping consensus very useful because Rawls' conception of social justice and his idea of overlapping consensus contain ideological guides for rectifying social injustices in multi-ethnic societies like Nigerian.

Rawls believes that the major function of the basic structure of any society is to distribute the benefits and burdens of that society equitably. The benefits of social cooperation are wealth and income, food and shelter, authority and power, right and benefits among others while the business of the social cooperation included duties, obligations and liabilities. However, the most important value of this research is to reemphasize the critical role of John Rawls' social justice through his overlapping consensus which involves an agreement supported by all conflicting comprehensive doctrines. This agreement would guarantee and generate the conditions needed to produce a just and stable polity, thereby effectively resolving the crises of ethnic relations and the problem of political stability in Nigeria.

⁶ J Oguejiofor. *Indigenous Democracy and overnance in Africa.the Quest for Sustainable Democratic Governance in Africa.*(London: Transaction Publisher, 2005), 71

Colonialism as the Root Cause of Ethnic Crises in Nigeria

Nigeria, in 1960, felt the same immense excitement experienced by Indians in 1948, or possibly the elation that Ghanaians must have felt in 1957 when the nation of Ghana finally got freed from the British cord that tied the country to their then colonial masters. Nonetheless, it was ill-fated that, contrasting the nation of India or Ghana, the country of Nigeria did not have any form of idea of where she was heading or even how to get there because the amalgamation into which they were about to go had no concrete foundation, as was the case of India and Ghana. The British had persuaded the various ethnic groups into a forced unification for their selfish interests, perhaps to use the riches of the south to develop the north and get the best of its resources for onward repatriation to their home countr.⁷ The various ethnic groups have diverse philosophies, cultures, languages, religions, and educational abilities as well as warm human relations with one another.⁸ The union of diverse ethnic groups into one country called Nigeria by the British brought with it several problems. The major challenges which these artificial creations brought include how to end the crises of ethnic relations which they have engendered. The unification was done to serve the interest of Britain without the consent of the different ethnic groups through any consensual procedure. The unification process was carried out and completed without ascertaining the wishes of the people or by a referendum. Among the various ethnic groups that were fused as Nigeria incongruously were the Kanuri, Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Igala, Idoma, Jukun, Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, Edo, etc. Therefore, the country continued to

⁷. LinusOkika. "Editorial Foreword" in *Nigeria and the Challenges of National Integration*, Pope John Paul II Annual Memorial Series, L. N. Okika (ed.) no.7, (Awka Anambra: Demercury Bright Print and Publishing co. 2012), xiii-xv.

⁸. *FestusAjeli*. "The North and the Rest of us: A Historical Evaluation of the Paradox of one Nigeria, 2007-2020" in I. A. Kanu, E. J. O. Ndubisi, O. V. Obiagwu, (eds.) *Africa Ideologies and Socio-Political Issues: Innovative Trends and Advances*, (Maryland, United States of America: APAS, 2021): 161-184.

operate along ethnic lines. Suspicion, hatred, lack of trust, and discrimination have often characterized the relationship between the people of different ethnic groups in the country, thereby robbing the nation of true national loyalty or unity.

It has been proven that the country Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural and human resources, however, these resources are taken for granted and misused by the destruction of lives and material goods resulting from ethnic crises.⁹ These ethnic crises were planted by the colonial masters for their selfish interests. Regrettably, our leaders who are supposed to disentangle the situation are now using the opportunities to gather resources, power, and wealth for themselves and members of their ethnic group at the expense of the persons who do not belong to their ethnic group. In a bid to distort this scenario, many aggrieved Nigerians who are left out or who do not back these deceitful leaders have resolved to engage in ethnic crises by disrupting the political process and social orders that bind the people of this great country together. This has generated problems of political settlement, elite movements, and ethnic politics in Nigeria.¹⁰

Rawls' Notion of Justice as Fairness: Formal Justice

In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls gives a theory of justice where justice is to be considered in terms of fairness. The first part of the work is based on Rawls' notion of formal justice. In formal justice, all hypothetical individuals will be more or less equal due to the restrictions Rawls places

⁹. Tony Nnachetta. "Wealth Distribution, Development and National Integration" in *Nigeria and the Challenges of National Integration*, Pope John Paul II Annual Memorial Series, L. N. Okika (ed.) no.7, Awka Anambra: Demercury (Bright Print and Publishing co. 2012), 10.

¹⁰. O.F Bolarinwa, & Ucheoma Osuji. "Political Elitism in Nigeria: Challenges, Threats and the Future of Citizenship" in *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 12, (2022):105. <http://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2022.121007>.

upon people in the original position. Rawls' theory of justice as fairness is based upon a social contract theory. And a social contract is useful for discussing justice because a social contract lends itself to the formulation of principles of justice.

Within any society, there will be different competing definitions of justice. Rawls' solution to this problem is to define social justice in terms of general principles. Principles of justice will be much broader in scope than specific definitions of justice. Principles will be much more readily agreed upon by people's specific definitions of justice. Rawls says "These principles are to regulate all further agreement; they specify the kinds of social cooperation that can be entered into and the forms of government that can be established". Justice constituted by principles will serve two functions.¹¹

The first function is that it will provide a framework that can be more or less agreed upon by all members of society. The second function of a principle is that it outlines a code of moral conduct that does not need to be governed by specifics. Rawls argues that principles of justice will be agreed upon in a hypothetical social contract which Rawls calls "the original position". The original position is the hypothetical situation where people will agree upon principles of justice. There are two provisions that Rawls argues must be obtained for people in the original position to decide upon principles of justice as fairness. The first of these is that each person must be rationally capable of making decisions concerning what constitutes what is just and unjust. The second is that these rational people will be able to agree in advance on how society is to be structured. The reason Rawls gives these two criteria is that if a theory of justice as fairness is to work, it must be based upon principles that will

¹¹. John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971): 9.

be agreed upon by rational persons. If justice is understood in terms of principles, the people within society must agree as autonomous beings. People in the original position do not know specific details about themselves and others. The principles of justice they will adopt will be based upon a definition of fairness that has its foundations in a strong, universal definition of equality. In this case of the original position, all people are autonomous, rational, and devoid of any individuating characteristics, this society will think of justice in terms of equality and fairness.

According to Rawls, the term “justice as fairness” comes from examining the agreements made by individuals in the original position.¹² Rawls maintains that “the original position is, one may say, the appropriate status quo, and thus, the fundamental agreements reached in it are fair”.¹³ Principles of justice are based upon agreements made in the original position. The structure of the original position guarantees that decisions will be made so that the structure of a just society will be fair and the people in the original position will not necessarily choose one principle of justice, such as the principle of general utility. Rather, people in the original situation will choose two separate principles of justice.

By choosing two separate principles, people in the original position will be able to claim that a just society is one where individual rights and liberties are protected despite social and economic inequalities. The formulation of the two principles of justice as fairness will allow a just society to remain fair despite unavoidable inequalities in the overall social structure.

¹². Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 11.

¹³. Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 12.

Rawls's Two Principles of Justice

Rawls argues that the people in the hypothetical original position will agree upon two principles of justice as he clearly explains:

The first statement of the two principles reads as follows. First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. The first principle is to take priority over the second for a society to be just, individual liberties must be protected for all members of society.¹⁴

According to the two principles of justice as fairness, Rawls gives another conception of justice. Rawls says that “all social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage”.¹⁵

It follows from this formulation of the theory of justice as fairness that society is both just and fair only if inequalities can be shown to be for the benefit of all citizens. If inequality can be shown to be for the overall benefit of all citizens, then society at large can still be said to be fair. According to the theory of justice as fairness, all that is necessary for a society to be considered fair is that basic rights and liberties be protected and resources distributed following the two principles of justice as fairness. In these hypothetical structures, all persons will be equal. Basic liberties and goods are the things that all people will want in their original position.

¹⁴. Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 60.

¹⁵. Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 62.

A hypothetical model can be used for assessing whether or not a society is just. If a society adheres to the two principles of justice and fairness similarly to the society of the original position, the society can be said to be just. If it is the case that the society is not structured following the two principles, it is the case that the society can use the two principles to make necessary corrections.

The two principles of justice and fairness are structured so that basic rights and liberties are more important than economic gains. Protecting rights and liberties above social gains is the fundamental way to ensure that a society is just. If individual rights and liberties are the main interest of institutions, inequalities in economic and social status can be more or less justified. Individual rights and liberties are all that need to be equal in society for a society to be considered just. The second principle, while addressing a wider range of social institutions, is secondary to the first. Rawls is aware that within any society, different people will have different economic and social advantages. Due to the ordering of the two principles of justice as fairness, economic advantages cannot take precedence over individual liberties.

Rawls's Idea of the Original Position

The original position is the inauguration of a system or procedure that is fair for the construction of principles of justice so that at the end of deliberations, the principles of justice agreed on will be just and thus carry the kind of force that confers cooperation and anticipated justification, obedience, and acceptance.¹⁶

The idea of the original position is derived from Kant's conception of autonomy and the categorical imperative. Rawls describes the original

¹⁶. John Rawls. *Political Liberalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 16.

position as a “procedural interpretation', where the nature of persons as free, equal and rational is expressed”.¹⁷

Rawls asserts that:

Justice cannot be based upon any general moral conception of justice (for example, a philosophical grounding). The growth of constitutional governments and the institutions of large industrial market economies provide alternatives in a democratic state which allow for a diversity of doctrines and a plurality of conflicting conceptions of the good.¹⁸

Rawls claims that “the principles they choose will be those which best manifest their freedom in their community in everyday life, and fully reveal their independence from natural contingencies and social accident”.¹⁹ Rawls assumes that “the people in the original position are rational. Because they are rational, they are presumed to be capable of a sense of justice”.²⁰ For Rawls, rationality implies an inherent knowledge of right and wrong – some things are just while others are unjust.

In choosing between various principles of justice, each person will try to advance their interests, an act which in turn will be beneficial to all the people involved.²¹ This implies that they have no conception of a specific good as an end and they are not influenced by religious or other reasons. They will want to choose principles that will ensure them more primary social goods rather than less. Because they have no idea of their social standing, they will accept those principles which will be most beneficial to all the members of society. Rawls assumes that “in such a situation they will 'try to protect their liberties, widen their opportunities, and

^{17.} Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 256.

^{18.} Rawls. *Political Liberalism Expanded*, 188.

^{19.} Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 255.

^{20.} Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 145.

^{21.} Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 142.

enlarge their means for promoting their aims”.²² He further maintains that “the choices of the parties in the original position will be restricted by natural laws, and those deciding will have certain inclinations to choose among them”.²³ Rawls emphasizes the role of the family in moral formation and promoting a sense of justice in people. The constitution and politics of a country that regulate the 'well-ordered' society, the institutions and associations which form the society as well as the family need to be just, equal, and fair.

The idea of the original position, as Rawls emphasizes, “is idealistic and should be understood as such. It is introduced because there is no better way to develop a political conception of justice for the basic political structure than from the fundamental idea of society as a fair system of cooperation between citizens as free and equal persons”.²⁴

Rawls' Notion of the Veil of Ignorance

John Rawls's Veil of Ignorance is probably one of the most influential philosophical ideas of the 20th century. The Veil of Ignorance is a way of people work out the basic institutions and structures of a just society. Rawls says:

Somehow, we must nullify the effects of specific contingencies which put men at odds and tempt them to exploit social and natural circumstances to their advantage. Now, to do this, I assume that the parties are situated behind a veil of ignorance. They do not know how the various alternatives will affect their particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely based on general considerations.²⁵

^{22.} Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 158.

^{23.} Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 159.

^{24.} Rawls. *Political Liberalism Expanded*, 203.

^{25.} Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 137.

To Rawls, people in the original position naturally fall behind the veil of ignorance. People in the original position do not know the specifics of their and others' social circumstances. The lack of knowledge of individual specifics is what Rawls calls “the veil of ignorance”. The veil of ignorance is a necessary component of the stipulations that Rawls places on the knowledge of persons in the original position. One reason for Rawls' proposing the veil of ignorance is that he wants people in the original position to agree upon principles of justice rather than a specific definition of justice which may be either too broad or too narrow to establish a contractual society that is fair. If any special contingencies are allowed in the decision-making process, it may be the case that the society will be formed around specific needs and interests instead of principles of justice. Rawls claims that “as far as possible, then, the only particular fact which the parties know is that their society is subject to the circumstances of justice and whatever this implies. It is taken for granted, however, that they know general facts about human society”.²⁶ Any sort of general information about human society- political theory, economic theory, psychology, and sociology-is known by people in the original position. The original position and the veil of ignorance have an important consequence.

In the original position, however, no specifics are known. People in the original position are forced to negotiate and reach agreements based on general knowledge and principles which are agreed upon. For these reasons, the restrictions of the veil of ignorance and the original position show how Rawls can make his formulations of justice based on principles. Rawls' theory of justice as fairness is a theory about people agreeing on principles. These principles are, for Rawls, what defines a just society. The two principles of justice and fairness will not be agreed

²⁶. Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 137.

upon by persons who are not functioning in some sort of social vacuum. Knowledge of particulars will create a completely different notion of justice. Rawls' theory of justice as fairness is based upon a notion of negotiation which is based upon principles and generalizations. The theory of justice as fairness is meant to be as general as possible to give a definition of justice that can be utilized by as many different persons as possible.

Social Injustice and Ethnic Crises in Nigeria: A Rawlsian Perspective

The study as well as the application of Rawls' social justice has become very pertinent in Nigeria especially if one considers the fact that behind the ethnic crises, instability of our polity, lack of cooperation and unity in the country, necessitated mostly by unjust distributive shares, is the social justice factor. Rawls' social justice, however, is often challenged for lacking in practical relevance. But even Rawls' critics cannot deny that he has had an enormous impact on political philosophy. Let us examine the relevance of social justice to the Nigerian society and beyond.

Historical circumstances have made Nigerian society a culturally heterogeneous society; that is, a society divided along ethnic lines. One common characteristic shared by all ethnic groups is the claim of origin from a common ancestor which must have been stretched by generation.²⁷ The psychological feeling that conveys this consciousness of common origin produces togetherness and solidarity among the people. The danger of estheticism is that it creates and sustains division. This we see as one of the major problems in the Nigerian social and political world. It is only social justice that can restrain the urge and the

²⁷. Ucheoma Osuji. "Evolving Authenticity: A Logical Inquest from Trado-Cultural to Social-Political Ideals" *Scientia: Plasu Journal of General Studies*, 1, no.1, (2018)

tendency for a few ethnic groups to dominate other ethnic groups.

In emphasizing the need for social justice, it is necessary to observe that crises arise when some ethnic groups possess or have confirmed the suspicion that the state has short-changed or deprived them of accruing social benefits, rights, and entitlements. When this is noticed, ethnic crises emanate in society. That a society like Nigeria with multi-ethnic groups is bound to be unjust without a systematic application of social justice, it's a fact we cannot deny. But there is a more important question: if it is the case that few ethnic groups need to transcend the limit of justice, then how will this transition be made? Is it through violence seen in the destruction of lives and properties? How can we balance the desire to reach our goals with the means we ought to adopt? How can we avoid the contradictions that arise when the cause is as invidious as the effect or when the cure is as terrible as the disease? Etuk in "God, Justice and Minority Groups in Nation Building" writes that "a nation that wishes to forge ahead and attain economic progress can ill-afford... the display of anger and hostility; because in the task of nation-building, the goodwill of every citizen should be held at a high premium".²⁸

Looking at the relevance of John Rawls theory of in Nigerian context. His theory of social justice is a concept of justice that universalizes and carries to a higher level of abstraction, the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests will accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association.

The formation of a politically liberal society is the central theme of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. His theory is premised upon the idea that, in

²⁸ U. Etuk, "God, Justice and Minority Groups in Nation Building" *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. 2, no.2, (1992): 103-104.

forming a society, reasonable people together derive principles of fairness under designated hypothetical conditions where all forms of goods (e.g., social, material, and political) have yet to be distributed in society and, furthermore, no one possesses knowledge of his or her status. In the first aspect, agents produce these principles from the original position, and in the second, these principles fall behind the veil of ignorance. After the veil is lifted, agents rationally select rules that guarantee they secure maximum possible liberty commensurate with minimum possible social status. Two principles specify "the fair terms of cooperation among citizens and specify when a society's institutions are just. These are the liberty principle, according to which every person has extensive basic liberty rights, and the difference principle, which dictates social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so they benefit the least advantaged while upholding equality of opportunity."²⁹

Rawls' theory is a distributive theory of justice because his principles designate a basis on which to apportion a society's economic benefits and burdens; just distributions can be achieved through a fair process that is open to all. In Rawls' view, principles of justice are neither sufficient to ground a politically liberal society nor can they ensure political disagreements can be amicably resolved to everyone's satisfaction. By way of solution, Rawls overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines is a label for society's common understanding of the good and the procedures by which societal good is enacted, preserved, and protected. According to Rawls, "In such a consensus, the reasonable doctrines endorse the political conception, each from its own point of view".³⁰ Social unity is based on a consensus about the political conception; and stability is possible. Overlapping consensus connotes agreement that the political conception of justice is realized in the twin

²⁹. Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 23.

³⁰. Rawls. *Political Liberalism*, 14.

principles of liberty and equality, and citizens have a deliberation vehicle through which they reasonably can resolve disagreements about what those principles mean within their respective conceptions of the good. Political liberalism's demands for stability dictate the principles of justice, and overlapping consensus allows both freedom and justice. Stability in government provides the rationale for Rawls' principles of justice. To enthrone unity amongst the various ethnic groups, promote social justice and a stable, viable government in Nigeria, John Rawls first and second principles of a theory of Justice should be given immediate attention, for their proper application will be a panacea to the problem of social injustice and crises of ethnic relations in Nigeria. And also, the Nigerian structure of governance should be predicated upon John Rawls' principles of Justice and his idea of overlapping consensus.

Conclusion

The contemporary Nigerian government and society stand a better chance in the application of Rawls' social justice. The benefits will be enormous. His theory can rightly be a lasting solution to the ethnic crises and the problem of social injustice in Nigeria. Thus, Rawls' philosophy has provided the world, especially Nigerian nations with the necessary machinery which can mitigate the challenges of boundary disputes, struggle for power and resources, lack of sincerity and fair play on the part of government, and ethnic intolerance. This daunting scenario for so long now has substantially contributed to ethnic sentiments fueled by selfish political motives which Rawls' idea of overlapping consensus is capable of salvaging. The greater challenge facing Nigeria today in socio-political matters has always been how to organize Nigeria more democratically. This is true because politics in Nigeria has always been in disarray owing to the obduracy and pervasions of her politicians.

Political experience in post-independence Nigeria has shown that liberty

and equality cannot flourish in this country except Nigerians are ready and willing to abide by certain certified norms and principles. Hence, the need for proper utilization of Rawls' political concept has become more challenging than ever before. By way of a solution to the problems of modern liberal societies, Rawls proposes the overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, a label for society's common understanding of the good and the procedures by which societal good is enacted, preserved, and protected. In such a consensus, reasonable doctrines endorse the political conception, each from its point of view. Social unity is based on a consensus about the political conception, and stability is possible. Rawls' Overlapping consensus connotes agreement that the political conception of justice is realized in twin principles of liberty and equality, and citizens have a deliberation vehicle through which they reasonably can resolve disagreements about what those principles mean within their respective conceptions of the good. Political liberalism's demands for stability, liberty, and equality through the principles of justice and Rawls' overlapping consensus allow for freedom and social justice.

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