

Cannibalism and the Paradox of Nigeria's Democratic Experience: A Levinasian Analysis

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Abstract

Democracy is a popular form of government practiced in many countries of the world because of its assumed positive impact on the lives of the people. In most African countries, the dividend of democracy is grossly lacking because the process is believed to be undermined. In particular, Nigeria's democracy is characterized by political "cannibalism". Cannibalism is in opposition to the values and principles of democracy and is absolutely antihuman and hence, contradictory. This paper interrogated this anomaly using Levinas' ethics of responsibility which advocates an absolute, infinite and non-symmetrical responsibility for other people as a panacea for correcting this anomaly. This paper employed the qualitative method of critical analysis and phenomenology. The paper observed that the activities of political elites had greatly compromised the welfare of the citizenry. It concludes that any democracy that does not translate to better welfare for the citizens is not worth the name.

Key words: Democracy, Values, Principles, Responsibility, Levinas, Welfare

Introduction

Politics and experience of democracy in most African countries could best be described as cannibalism and Nigeria is a case in point here. The reason is that the purpose of democracy is defeated by the misconception of the notion of politics and the application of the same to governance in Africa and particularly, in Nigeria's by political bourgeoisies. Political and democratic cannibalism are characterized by the rupture of democratic principles/values and miscarriage of justice,

kleptomaniac tendencies and embezzlement of public funds, money laundering, indifference to the suffering of the masses that lead to poverty. Poverty is antithetical to welfare and human flourishing, a position absolutely anti-Levinasian. It is this scenario that generates the expression 'political and democratic cannibalism' in Africa. Emmanuel Levinas in his ethics of responsibility advocates absolute, unconditional, nonreciprocal and unlimited care and hospitality to all humans that are in need and would certainly expect much more from political leaders because they are constitutionally obligated to do so. Whereby some constituted authorities disregard democratic values and principles on behalf of the people they represent and appropriate to themselves the resources that are meant for the people's welfare, this situation can certainly be described as democratic cannibalism. For the values of Levinas ethics of responsibility parallels the principles and ideals of democracy. Therefore, this paper argues that the experience of politics and democracy in most African countries can be likened to cannibalism because the political elites rather than salvaging the masses, devour and prey on them whom they, by virtue of their oath of office, are constitutionally obliged to protect in terms of their lives and properties and provide for their welfare. Contrary to the desired democratic experience, Nigerians experience savagery and cannibalism instead of care and welfare.

To justify this claim, this paper proceeds in the following steps: firstly, it explicates the notion of cannibalism and democracy to elucidate on the terms and relate them to the African and Nigerian context. Secondly, it examines and defends the claim that Levinas' ethics is anti-cannibalistic. It advocates for the wellbeing and the welfare of the weak ones of society. It further contrasts Nigeria's dismal experience of politics and democracy, juxtaposing it with Levinas' anti-cannibalistic ethics to show that the description of Nigeria's democracy as 'nascent' is an unnecessary excuse for the dismal performance by politicians. Lastly, it shows this anomaly by exploring the question cannibalism in Nigeria's democratic

experience. Democracy practiced in this way is absolutely anti-human and amounts to cannibalism.

The Notion of Cannibalism and democracy

Cannibalism essentially is the act or practice of preying on the flesh of one's own specie. From this understanding, those that should serve, rather prey on the people and constitute themselves as objects of fear. Cannibalism, is also called anthropophagy, eating of human flesh by humans.

Cannibalism exists in two separate forms that are mutually exclusive: endocannibalism and exocannibalism. In exocannibalism, the victims belong to another social group, enemies killed in combat or prisoners of war, with the aim being to take revenge or assimilate such virtues as their strength or courage. In the Fiji Islands, for example, people did not eat enemies who were considered cowards. Conversely, endocannibalism refers to the ritual consumption of the deceased from one's own social group, to guarantee that the dead person's spirit would remain amongst the living, in order to perpetuate their presence or maintain continuity between life and death¹

The literal meaning of cannibalism defined above can intelligibly be applied in nuanced aspects and perspectives of human life situations. Exocannibalism parallels the form of cannibalism between some Nigerian political elites and the people since they belong to disparate social classes. Furthermore, certain (in)human attitudes can as well be likened to cannibalism in so far as the attitudes tantamount to consuming or suffocating the human otherness to suffering and death. This claim may as well be described as a metaphorical use of cannibalism. It is this latter meaning that this paper seeks to analyze in the context of Africa's democracy and

1. Anthropophagy/Alimentarium. <https://www.alimentarium.org/en/fact-sheet/anthropophagy>
Retrieved on 21st March 2024.

Nigeria in particular. In what follows, based on the above assumption, we can construe democratic cannibalism further.

Democratic cannibalism is the abuse of democratic values and principles by the political leaders who are the custodians of the same democratic principles and values. Since these values and principles are supposedly meant for the common good and welfare of the masses, and since the custodians of the values and principles are the very predators, it is nowise cannibalism, and the predators are cannibals. Worst still, since the principles and values are meant for strengthening the democratic processes in lieu of its dividends, the said cannibalism is committed against the masses. It is at this juncture we highlight the values and principles of democracy in the actual governance as well as in some notable institutions and agencies of government.

We must stress that it is a moral obligation for political leaders to uphold moral and democratic values in any culture and in any society, for morality preexists in any society and helps to prescribe norms for society. Similarly, morality can also be created by a society. This is in the sense that some societies prescribe what they hold as morals and norms for their people. However, Jonathan Haidt claims that morality is derived from three sources, namely, nature, nurture and rationality. He seemingly disagrees with moral innatism thus, “if morality varies around the world and across the centuries, then how could it be innate? Whatever morals we have as adults must have been learned during childhood from our own experience, which includes adults telling us what is right and wrong”². Granted the claim of Haidt, the question arises concerning the moral status quo of most of our political leaders: Have they not been taught by their forebears? Moral codes and obligations are always present in societies, and they are what help us to mold our moral and ethical convictions and direct our actions. This is the relationship between moral code and human culture:

2. J. Haidt, *The Righteous Mind, Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 5

“Morality does not belong to Culture: it enables one to judge it; it discovers the dimension of height. Height ordains being”.³ The obligation in question is represented by Levinas as the notion of the “height”. Height is not to be understood literally in terms of elevation or position, but it is a consciousness which one in a “privilege” position must be aware of and assumes as to unite human existence within society. Awareness of notion of height intuitively the experience of transcendence. For Levinas, “Height introduces a sense into being. It is already lived across the experience of the human body. It leads human societies to raise up alters”.⁴ An awareness of the notion of height intuitively the experience of transcendence which is important. Thus, the significance of “height” is the fact of transcendence which allows one to relate well with another prior to knowing him. It is transcendence; this manner of relationship that our political leaders must impact on democratic values and principles which are prerequisite for democratic dividends.

Justice and fairness, equity and respect for the rule of law are the primal and priceless democratic values and principles. Every democratic society makes a sincere effort to uphold these. The application of these values and principles will strengthen Nigeria's democratic institutions, agencies and parastatals. Furthermore, they are the antidote for democratic cannibalism. We shall treat these values briefly beginning with the commonest of them. The commonest view of justice is justice as fairness – giving everyone his due. But there is more to justice than that because there are many theories of justice but that is not our focus in this paper. Nevertheless, it is expedient to note that justice is a central value in political morality – in democracy. A school of thought that establishes a strong connection between the duo perceives that democracy is the vehicle of justice and that is why justice is a primordial value in democracy. Although the terms justice and democracy are

3. E. Levinas, “Meaning and Sense.” *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Adriaan Theodoor. p 57

4. Levinas, “Meaning and Sense.”

complex, for the purpose of this paper, “by justice we mean a set of principles whose function is to distribute entitlements to valuable resources – including liberties, opportunities, income and wealth – among a plurality of agents competing over them”⁵. The above conception of justice satisfies the claim of giving each person or groups his/her due. A cursory look at this formulation answers the question of entitlement which is fundamental in political morality which is also a huge issue in Nigeria. A Levinasian perspective on the conception of justice is even more important and challenging. Levinas construes that justice arises from the epiphany of the face and plays out between the duo of the subject and the Other. Thus, he avers that “justice is impossible without the one that renders it finding himself in proximity with the one to receive it. His function is not limited to the “function of judgment”, the subsuming of particular cases under a general rule. The judge is not outside the conflict, but the law is in the midst of proximity. Justice, society, the state and its institutions exchanges, and work are comprehensible out of proximity”⁶. In Levinas ethics of responsibility, the (moral) subject is the benefactor where the Other, is the beneficiary. Levinas represents the Other with capital “O” to distinguish between human Otherness and non-human otherness. By proximity, Levinas refers to the context, the nearness, if we like, the relation of one, the subject to the Other. He highlights the contexts that set us in relation to other people, namely, society, state and institutions. He says that people ought to have the sense of justice in these contexts. In other words, these contexts position us in relation with other people thereby offering us the fora and compelling us to act justly.

Furthermore, Levinas takes a swipe at favoritism and allied attitude as

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5. L. Valentini, Justice and Democracy, Princeton and Oxford, CSSJ Working Paper SJ012 November 2010, https://www.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inlinefiles/SJ012_Valentini_Justice%26Democracy.pdf. Retrieved on 9th February 2024.
 6. E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Translated by Alphonso Lingis (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1974), 159

inimical to experience of justice. Responsibility for other people is acceptable and connected to the value of justice. He vouches out what justice is and what it is not thus:

In no way is justice a degradation of obsession, a degeneration of for-the-other, a diminution, a limitation of anarchic responsibility, a neutralization of the glory of the infinite, a degeneration that will be produced in the measure that for empirical reasons, the initial duo would become a trio. But the contemporaneousness of the multiple is tied about the diachrony of two: justice remains justice in a society where there is no distinction between those close and those far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest.⁷

Whereas justice as fairness advocates for the wellbeing of the other, it upholds those values that are akin to it. Justice cannot be degradation or degeneration for it is progressive and aims as well as motivates goodness. It is for this reason that justice cannot make a distinction between people for it is fairness and neither does proximity deter it. The point here is that where justice is compromised in any democratic setting, the result is cannibalism hence, anarchy. But democracy, by its very constitution, ought not to be so.

The popular view of democracy has it as the government of the people for the people and by the people. In following this definition, if the people govern themselves in the government that is for them, perhaps, there is minimal or no chance for political cannibalism. However, the usual divide in political parties and ideologies when misconstrued and applied open up lacunas for cannibalism. But there is a different approach to conceiving democracy which will bridge the lacunas

⁷. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 159

of the party politics and ideologies. Albert Weale constructs democracy as a set of decision-making processes whereby members of particular groups have equal decision-making opportunities in selecting the rules that should govern them⁸.

Although there is a possibility of twisting the rules but fidelity to it will certainly protect the rights of all. Democracy is a vehicle and an instrument to achieving justice, especially in a society where freedom of speech is guaranteed. In this regard, Ronald Dworkin claims that freedom of speech and expression, and the rights of association are irreplaceable values in democracy. These variables play a vital role in the electioneering process as they are prerequisites to credible election as a process in democratic government. Furthermore, political offices will be governed by laws, and rules of law whereby the masses are included in the process.⁹ The mainstream of his argument is that equality is the essence, the driver, of democratic virtue and hence, it is indispensable in any truly democratic society. It is from this perspective we can understand the possibility of cannibalism where the *weak* masses become prey to the more *powerful* political leaders. A just democracy that obeys rule of law will support and care for the Other which in Levinas' ethics is responsibility. Thus, caring for the other is opposed to cannibalism.

Levinas' anti-Cannibalistic Ethics

Levinas' ethics of responsibility advocates absolute and unconditional, infinite and non- reciprocal responsibility for the Other. Levinas uses “Other” with capital “O” for all human alterity and “other” with small “o” for non-human alterity. Whereas the Other is the beneficiary of responsibility, the I/Subject is the giver of responsibility. He assumes that the I/Subject is the virile one, always available and capable of answering the Other while the Other is always fragile and needy. In Levinas' ethics, responsibility entails care, solidarity and hospitality toward the

8. A. Weale, *Democracy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 14

9. R. Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 186

Other. It vouches for the preservation of life and upholding of human welfare. For this reason, Levinas ethics is an anti-cannibalistic ethics. The notion of responsibility is defined by Levinas as the “essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity”.¹⁰ By this definition, his ethics is anti-cannibalistic. Levinas posits that to be responsible or to bear out responsibility for another person is natural to the human person and it is that which singles us out as individuals. In other words, caring for another human person is the essence of being human. Can one who truly cares for another in the manner described above be cannibalistic towards Other people? That is why the claim that Levinas' ethics is anti-cannibalistic is undoubtedly a truism. Furthermore, Levinas defines the concept of responsibility when he claims, “I understand responsibility as responsibility for the Other, thus, as responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; or which precisely does not matter to me is met by me at face”¹¹. The definition and analysis of Levinas' notion of responsibility is a new perspective and seemingly antithetical to the usual conception of responsibility. However, Levinas takes the face of the Other as the point of departure of his ethics.

Against theoretical ethical formulations, Levinas begins his ethics with the phenomenology of the human face. The face, *visage*, encapsulates the expression of the entire situation of the Other. It goes beyond its features, such as the eyes, contours, color and shapes. It expresses the whole person of the other. Thus, one could say that his ethics is phenomenological because it comes to its birth on the emergence of the human Other before the I. The epiphany of the face is the beginning of ethics. “The epiphany of the face is ethical... The epiphany of the face brings forth the possibility of gauging the infinity of the temptation to murder, not only as a temptation to total destruction, but also as the purely ethical impossibility

10. E. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversation with Philippe Nemo*, Translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1982), 95.

11. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversation with Philippe Nemo*, 95

of this temptation and attempt”¹². The face expresses the vulnerability of the other, his destitution, his fragility and his need to be taken care of. The face evokes his brokenness and calls for compassion which must result in care, hospitality and solidarity. These descriptions of the face which offer the starting point of Levinas' ethics are pro-life. And since cannibalism necessarily connotes destruction of life, cannibalism becomes unLevinasian. There is a further and supporting example to buttress the truism of the non-cannibalistic nature of Levinas' ethics.

Levinas' ethics condemns murder in the same way the face resists it. An attempt at forceful manipulation of the Other, torture, privation of rights and justice is antithetical and tantamount to cannibalism. Cannibalism would mean using power on what resists it. Rather the face invites relation, communication, life enabling fellowship with others. Levinas points out that “the face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge”¹³. Whereas, the face invites relationship, it resists and abhors violence. Cannibalism is violence and murder and cannibalism are expressions of violence and Levinas ethics condemns it absolutely and describes it as negation: “Murder alone lays claim to total negation. Negation by labor and usage, like negation by representation, effect a grasp or comprehension, rest on or aim at affirmation; they can. To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises a power over what escapes power”¹⁴. The ethics of responsibility condemns all sorts of violence and actions that are destructive and hinder care and human well-being. The highest expression of violence and cannibalism is man's violence against his fellow man. While condemning cannibalism, the ethics of responsibility upholds and vouches for the

12. E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity, An Essay on Exteriority*, Translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg and Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 199.

13. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity, An Essay on Exteriority*, 198

14. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity, An Essay on Exteriority*, 198

care of others.

Our irreplaceable indebtedness to the Other is the essence of responsibility for them. In the entire text, *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas propounds responsibility not only as a moral duty, which is the stronghold of his ethics, but as an irreplaceable duty an individual owes the Other and must comply to it. In concert with this view, Joe Momoh forwards, “in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas does not just see the self as being responsible to the Other as a moral duty but as an obligation from the self, and this unique relationship requires the self to answer the call of the Other as a moral and imperative duty. Furthermore, he believes that any alternative to this relationship must be rejected as ethical and not worthy of consideration”¹⁵. This representation of Levinas' notion of responsibility is quite apt and faithful to the philosophical analysis of Levinas on the subject matter. The presupposition is that we are responsible for the Other and that the interest of the Other comes before the self since the word, I means availability and readiness to respond to the essential destitution of the Other and to care for him. For Levinas such answerability is completely selfless lest it breaches the non-reciprocal character of his responsibility notion. Following from this prescription, Levinas agrees that responsibility for the Other is never an accident of his being but that it proceeds from the essence of our being and grows to obsession where we cannot resist any action in favor of the Other¹⁶. Levinas' notion of responsibility is prioritization of the Other. One could say that this prioritization climaxes in a way in this: “for the other, despite oneself, starting with oneself, the pain of labor in the patience of ageing in the duty to give to the other even the bread out of one's mouth and the coat from one's shoulders”¹⁷. In Levinas' notion of responsibility, the ethical subject assumes responsibility for what

15. J. Momoh, “Levinas' Ethics in Society's Beneficent Responsibility to the Other”, <https://www.academia.edu> Pp. 1-18. Retrieved on 10th February 2024.

16. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 114

17. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 55

he did not do. He assumes the pains, concerns, woes and so on of the Other as his own. Levinas speaks out this explicitly in his conversation with Philip Nemo when he avers that his notion of responsibility is completely on behalf of the Other in which the person taking responsibility is ordinarily not bound to. It is a responsibility for what I did not do and what does not matter to me. “It is responsibility for what goes beyond what I do.... This means that I am responsible for his very responsibility”¹⁸.

In Levinas' notion of responsibility, the entire concern of the Other is assumed not just as a moral duty but as an obligation by the I. The dexterity and the enthusiasm of Levinas for the wellbeing of the Other singles out his ethics as welfarist and anti-cannibalistic. However, this ethic is plausible for societal building, flourishing and cohesion. Unfortunately, cases of political cannibalism are banal in Africa. In the light of this ethics, we briefly focus on Nigeria's democratic experience.

Nigeria's Dismal Democratic Experience

The current democratic governance is unsatisfactory. For example, Anyim-Ben *et al.* note that “Nigeria has faced significant challenges to its democratic development, particularly in the areas of freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly”¹⁹. These challenges lead to problems of shrinking Civil Space in Nigerian democracy. They further outline the following challenges: suppression of Human Rights, weakening democracy, limited civil society engagement, erosion of social cohesion, negative impact on development, increased vulnerability of

18. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversation with Philippe Nemo*, 96.

19. Francisca Anyim-Ben, Anthony Itumo, and Benjamin A. Anyim Benjamin, “Challenges of Shrinking Civic Space and the Path towards Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria: Lessons from the President Muhammadu Buhari Administration”, *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies (AJPAS)* 16, no.2 (2023):1-22 Available online at <https://www.ajpasebsu.org.ng/>.

marginalized groups²⁰. A lot needs to be done to improve on the present status quo if we must call the present form of governance democracy. In its analysis, Levinas' ethics of responsibility has close parallels with democratic values. With this in mind, Momoh liken the democratic leaders with the Levinasian *I* and rejects self-interest for beneficent human relation that answers to the Other:

Societal preferences might be for individuals to look after their own best interests, and this is at odds with the ethics of Levinas who theorizes that the *I* must put the interest of the Other above itself. Levinas believes that being responsible for the Other must be the sole purpose of the self. Therefore, he believes that acting for the benefit of the Other is not a choice based on rationality but a lifestyle that must be accepted as one's path in life as designed by their inner self rather than another higher power. In this sense, the self is uniquely chosen to act for the Other²¹.

Acting in adherence to the principles and values of democracy might not cohere perfectly with Levinas' ethics but it is certainly close to it. The principles and values that define democracy are minimally experienced or definitively absent in the current democratic dispensation. Justice, inclusiveness, welfare of citizenry, fairness, accountability, adherence to the rule of law and respect to court injunctions and regulations, freedom of speech and association are yet to be experienced as in a democratic society. In Nigeria, often times, the contrary is the case to the utter frustration and hopelessness of the masses. Some of the leaders, most times openly show the people that they do not care for them. A case in point is the controversial

20. Anyim-Ben, Itumo and Anyim, "Challenges of Shrinking Civic Space and the Path towards Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria", 4-6

21. Momoh, "Levinas' Ethics", 2-3

vacation allowance that Nigerian senators insensitively appropriated for themselves despite the suffering of the masses in a scenario of hardship which has never been experienced before. The *Premium Times* of 11th August 2023 reported that, “each serving senator received not less than N2 million as allowance before proceeding on seven weeks of vacation”. This news headline generated condemnation and uproar among the ordinary Nigerians who described it as 'untimely insensitive'. Unbelievably, majority of these senators are also ex-governors who are also receiving humongous sums of money as pension after their tenure. This is at a time the country seems to be in total disarray and many cannot have a meal daily due to hardship caused by many factors especially the removal fuel of subsidy without appropriate alternative and palliative plans. Currently (February and March 2024), the inflation rate and the cost of living in Nigeria has sparked up hunger protest in the major cities of the country. These scenarios are contrary to the demands of Levinas's responsibility. By Levinas' ethical standard, this action is absolutely irresponsible because it portrays insensitivity and a total disregard to the welfare of the Other whom they are supposed to care for. In the context of this paper, the action is tantamount to political cannibalism – for, many are taking undue advantage of the suffering masses.

Nigeria's constitution vows to provide for the security and welfare of the citizen where the people shall be the primary purpose of the government. But this vow seems to be only on pages of papers as the citizen's experiences are at variance with the said provisions. The government at all levels seem to have relegated its obligations to the citizenry and concentrate on their selfish affairs²². Furthermore, the welfare of the citizenry is abysmal. Accordingly, “some commentators say Nigeria is not currently a true democracy due to its entrenched corrupt political class, its dwindling electoral participation, popular suspicion of the ruling class,

22. B. Bukar, General Articles, “Nigeria needs to take responsibility for its IDPs” <https://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/young-and-out-of-place/bukar.pdf>. Retrieved on 10th February 2024.

shrinking civil liberties, and weak democratic institutions”²³. There seems to be many strong and powerful people in Nigeria which makes institutions weak and unable to uphold the rule of law. The above outlined disgruntled experiences truncate the true democratic experience in this current dispensation. Furthermore, an alternative perspective complements the above observations which add up to the present status quo of Nigeria's democracy:

There are roadblocks to a strong democracy in Nigeria at all levels of government. Conflict—triggered by political competition and communal, ethnic, religious or resource allocation rivalries—poses a major threat to democracy. Corruption pervades the daily lives of Nigerians. Many government institutions do not adequately engage with citizens or the private sector and lack the capacity to carry out their mandates. Further, civil society lacks both the capacity and the resources to effectively engage with government and advocate for change²⁴.

Similarly, a different group, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), observes and describes Nigeria's democracy as, “a weakening economy, rising insecurity and violent conflicts threaten progress made in its democratic development. Amid deepening distrust in government and institutions, Nigeria has significant work to do in improving national, state and local security”²⁵. The views above represent of

23. Chatham House Democracy in Nigeria. Explaining the history of Africa's largest democracy and the influence of the military, ethnicity and religious belief. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/06/democracy-nigeria>. Retrieved on 9th February 2024.

24. United States Institute of Peace, The Current Situation in Nigeria: A USIP Fact Sheet, . <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/08/current-situation-nigeria>. Retrieved on 9th February 2024.

25. United States Institute of Peace, The Current Situation in Nigeria

the dismal experience of the current democracy in Nigeria. These observations though from nuance sources basically communicate one sense. These abnormalities are the primary hindrances to the real democracy of which the usual excuse is that our democracy is nascent. Since 1999, the years in between are sufficient for substantial foundation laying process, strengthening of institutions and revitalization of values if the successive leaders had the requisite knowledge, political will, and the right focus. Therefore, it is unnecessary excuse attempting to absolve this failure on the altar of nascency.

The problem hindering the true experience of democracy seems multi-dimensional but one of the obvious hindrances is lack of political will on the part of the leaders. The inability to take decisive actions on certain matters that are vital to development of democracy and the welfare of the people is troubling. What is democracy if it does not prioritize safety, security of lives and properties and the welfare/wellbeing of the people? Pained by the situation, a commentator exclaimed:

Nigeria's current federal democracy is unitarist and has hindered the adequate provision of security and safety for citizens. The ability of the state to guarantee security is central to the thriving of democracy. Unless people are free to go about their everyday life unmolested, they cannot enjoy the freedom which is the crucial instrument of democracy. Not even the ritual of voting and elections can credibly occur in an insecure environment²⁶

Democracy is preconditioned on the supremacy of the people whereby its principles and values are given paramount consideration. It is in this way the welfare of the people can be upheld and defended. But in Nigeria the experience is still crawling

26. P. Dakuku, "Has Democracy failed Nigeria"? The Cable News and Views Unlimited. <https://www.thecable.ng/has-democracy-failed-nigerians>. Retrieved on 11th February 2024.

and seemingly lacking definite direction. And the question is how long will it take Nigeria to lay the foundation to her democracy? It is almost conventional that democracy is correlated with development and economic prosperity and hence, welfare of the people. But Nigeria's experience of democracy is marred by massive corruption, lack of accountability, human right abuse, constant weakening of institutions and organs of governance only to produce strong and powerful but corrupt politicians. The result of this is increased poverty and poor population²⁷. The current experience of democracy is poor and wanting. The selfishness of a few politicians should not be allowed to truncate the flourishing of the nation's democracy. The selfishness, greed and anomalies of some of the powerful politicians constitute cannibalism against the helpless populace.

The Question of Cannibalism in Nigeria's Experience of Democracy

As a recap, for the purpose of this paper, cannibalism in democracy refers to the experience where leaders appropriate, apportion and arrogate to themselves the resources that should have served the common good. It includes indifference to insecurity, unaccountability, money laundering, embezzlement of public funds, awarding of contracts to unjustifiable sums only to abandon them, subverting of the will of the people, all manners of electoral fraud, miscarriages of justice in the courts of law. These and similar malpractices constitute democratic cannibalism. Nigerians do not desire democratic cannibalism but over the years, since independence, despite the fact that “democracy has thus become a political necessity and fashion of governance globally. Yet effort in this direction since 1960 has not proved very fruitful”²⁸. In what follows, we shall elaborate on some of these evils and show how they translate to cannibalism in a democratic state.

The primary duty of government including Nigeria is the protection and security of

27. S. Ebohon and C. Emuedo, “Democracy and Development: The Nigerian Experience” *Global Journal of Social Sciences*, 8, no. 2 (2009): 99

28. Ebohon and Emuedo, “Democracy and Development”, 99

life and properties. Every successive government in Nigeria has been struggling with this issue. Currently, insecurity is still hounding the masses and certain parts of the country are just not safe as people are killed even in their houses, on the roads, places of worship and in places where they find their livelihood like the farms and so on. In alignment with this view, an author notes that “insecurity is unarguably the greatest threat to Nigeria nascent democracy. In the southern part of Nigeria, there is the menace of kidnapping for ransom and armed robbery. Several lives have been lost in the process. In the northern part of the country, there is the problem of a mindless sect, Boko Haram that has wasted several lives and destroyed property worth billions of Naira”²⁹. The relationship between the evils of insecurity and cannibalism is quite obvious as it means destruction of lives. There are different terrorist groups and other violent groups across the country. What is worrisome is the length of time it takes government to curb them whereas they continue to kill, maim and destroy properties.

Cases and instances of corruption in different areas of life in Nigeria seem to attest that it is endemic. It seems that successive government can create a mantra and claim to be fighting corruption only on the media. But the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) notes that corruption being endemic has permeated the populace: “Out of all Nigerian citizens who had at least one contact with a public official in the 12 months prior to the 2019 survey, 30.2 per cent paid a bribe to, or were asked to pay a bribe by a public official. This means that, although still relatively high, the prevalence of bribery in Nigeria has undergone a moderate, yet statistically significant, decrease since 2016, when it stood at 32.3 per cent”³⁰. The corruption of bribery has become so common that most people are affected,

29. T. Odisu, *Threats and Challenges to Nigeria's Nascent democracy*. <https://www.grin.com/document/334508>. Retrieved on 12th February 2024.

30. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC research). *Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends (Second survey on corruption as experienced by the population)* https://www.unodc.org/documents/nigeria/Corruption_Survey_2019.pdf. Retrieved on 12th February 2024.

according to the survey. However, corruption in high places takes the form of embezzlement and money laundering. It takes the political will of the elites to deal with this evil because most of the culprits are often highly placed political colleagues. In connection with this scenario, Odisu questions, “how does one explain a situation whereby elderly politicians are still amassing wealth they don't need”? It appears that many Nigerians cannot survive outside of politics and without the practice of corruption. The following suggests that:

In the fight against corruption, the conduct of a methodologically sound survey that is representative of the general population can contribute much to the comprehensive examination of the extent and nature of corruption. By generating actionable data on patterns and modalities of bribe-paying, by highlighting particular areas of vulnerability to bribery in the public administration, and by examining inadequacies in the State response to corruption, experience-based corruption surveys, such as the one presented in this report, provide concrete guidance for the design of anti-corruption strategies and policies³¹.

The above suggestion adds up to our previous intuition that political will of the political elite is crucial to any meaningful fight against corruption. This is much more necessary at a time like this where there is banality of corruption and the abusive cliché of nascent democracy and the unnecessary use of 'political will' to evade right actions. The point being stressed here is that this and sundry acts of corruption tantamount to cannibalism in our so-called nascent democracy. Commenting on the notion of political cannibalism, Moshe Arens notes:

This is a unique Israeli phenomenon. To the best of my

31. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC research). Corruption in Nigeria

knowledge, it is unknown anywhere else in the democratic world. Israeli political parties eat each other. Sometimes it is just a nibble here and a nibble there - one or another Knesset member who has been enticed to cross party lines. At other times it is a more serious bite. But sometimes it is a whole mouthful, leaving little more than the skeleton of the political party that has been subjected to the cannibal's bite³²

This Israelite concept has crept into Nigeria and has almost taken hold of the polity. Whereas Arens seems to emphasize on the structure of the Israeli political parties, but in the Nigerian experience, the political bourgeoisies consume both the proletariats and the masses in the parties and in the democratic society. Furthermore, another instance of democratic cannibalism is reported by Richard Marshall about the inhuman activities of Heidegger against the Jewry of which Emmanuel Levinas with his family was affected. He reports that Heidegger “wrote a public legal defense of Hitler's 1934 assassination of his political rivals in the 'Night of Long Knives'. He also incorporated overt anti-Semitism into his academic writings, which undoubtedly helped to normalize it”³³. This academic exercise was suppressive of truth, was inhuman and against life. Similarly, in Nigeria, as Odisu notes, the massive and countless killings in Southern Kaduna, Benue state, Plateau state, Imo state and other volatile parts, not mentioning the heinous activities of Boko Haran and Bandits are similar to the holocaust. Political or democratic cannibalism is a misnomer, a contradiction, misplacement of values as its retrogression because it destroys what it promised to redeem *ab initio* as an author reports that “Overall, Schmitt believed that democratic institutions, originally

32. M. Arens, Political Cannibalism. Located on <https://www.haaretz.com/2009-12-29/ty-article/political-cannibalism/0000017f-dbe1-db22-a17f-fff184480000> . Retrieved on 23rd February 2024.

33. Arens, Political Cannibalism.

intended to liberate the people from the arbitrariness of a tyrannical monarch, now enabled the arbitrariness of a tyrannical majority as parties used them to dominate one another and to promote their idiosyncratic worldviews”³⁴. In Nigeria, political and democratic cannibalism has thwarted and dwarfed any meaningful development and thrown the masses into untold poverty. This is paradoxical as these are precisely the challenges democracy aimed to resolve. Since cannibalism is anti-human, it is inconsequential and antithetical to democracy.

Conclusion

Democracy became the desired form of government for many people and nations state because it is a people-centred government. It is for this reason it has the potentials to liberate the people from lawlessness and the breach of the rule of law, injustice and miscarriage of justice, embezzlement of public funds and money laundering, and of course, adherence to the democratic principles in nations that truly practice it. Unfortunately, Africa experiences it in a different way, and particularly, in Nigeria, the experience of the people is in opposition to the values of democracy. It is the evil and painful experiences some political leaders unleash on the people that underscore cannibalism in this paper. This paper considers that by these underserved inhuman treatment of the masses by their political and democratic leaders, they invariably devour the masses.

On the contrary, democracy being a pro-masses government is meant to serve the welfare of the people. Similarly, government whether democratic or not is constituted for the good of the people, to secure their lives and properties and also ensure their welfare and general fulfilment. Most Africans are not proud of democracy in their countries and that answers the question of coup d' etat in many West African countries. Likewise, most Nigerians are not proud of their present

34. R. Marshall, Carl Schmitt and Democratic Cannibalism. <https://www.3-16am.co.uk/articles/carl-schmitt-and-democratic-cannibalism>. Retrieved on 23rd February 2024.

democracy. Their experience is that of the leaders appropriating the national resources for their personal aggrandizement, those of their families and political allies and this is a case of democratic cannibalism.

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