

THE RELEVANCE OF MILL'S CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY TO NIGERIAN POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This research examines the concept of democracy in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill with a particular reference to Nigerian democratic experience, as acceptable democratic principles for social change, reformation and transformation, with a view of achieving an enhanced national development. The research study employs the philosophical method of analysis to examine Mill's concept of democracy in order to show what constitutes better democratic government and to see how it could help to evaluate Nigeria's democratic system and make far-reaching recommendations on the contemporary needs of democracy in Nigeria, and see a better way it can assist in ameliorating the long existing Nigeria's democratic predicaments. Looking closely at Mill's concept of democracy reveals some of the enduring challenges facing democratic societies in the world today. Such challenges are clearly evident in Nigeria when a closer examination is given to her democratic system of governance since its inception; for only little identification could really be made, if at all, of what good and ideal democracy is, in Nigeria. The study clearly exposed that Mill's democratic ideology could actually solve the Nigerian democratic problems if properly harnessed, inculcated and applied to Nigerian political system as well as into the individuals who appear to be the potential leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, for a country like Nigeria to actually experience peace, stability, progress and development; quality, good, intentional and ideal democratic government and governance is urgently needed with a focused leadership and leaders imbued with the required and requisite leadership capacity and ability. Thus, proper democratic tenets, rules and principles are yet to be seen in the Nigerian political system which Mill's concept of democracy has an answer to, for the betterment of Nigeria as a Country.

Keywords: Democracy, Mill, Nigeria, Equality, Liberty, Politics, Proportional Representation, Freedom, Justice

Introduction

Democracy or rule by the people and/or the rule by the majority is an unrestricted form of government in which all the inhabitants of a nation determine public policy, the laws, and the actions of their state together. Democracy requires that all citizens have an equal opportunity to express their opinion. Practically, democracy is the extent to which a given

system approximates this ideal, and a given political system is referred to as a democracy if it allows a certain approximation to ideal democracy. Although, no country has ever judiciously granted all its citizens the right to vote in an election, nevertheless, most countries today hold regular elections based on egalitarian principles, at least in theory. It is obviously nice to note that the fruit of any philosophical thought is its practical application or its relevance to the situation at hand. The most potent way of determining the usefulness of any good theory is to apply it to reality in order to know the extent to which it can accommodate the existing realities in the society. John Stuart Mill's theory on democracy represents one of such theories. It is incontestable that the lessons from Mill's theory of democracy, in conjunction with other postulates from other philosophers, have helped to shape up the frame of thought of the founding fathers of many constitutions in human history. This is evident in the premium attention paid by such constitutions to certain concepts like, democracy, freedom, justice, liberty, fairness, equity and equality etc. It thus, becomes very pertinent to apply critically John Stuart Mill's theory to the Nigerian political experience by ardently using his liberty principles, as a synthesis to any observed ills that persist in Nigeria and therefore using it to proffer a better remedy to Nigerian democratic predicaments.

John Stuart Mill as an ardent promoter of human freedom and individual rights and generally known as the most famous and influential British philosopher of the nineteenth century was born on the 20th May, 1806 and died on 8th May, 1873. He was a British Philosopher, Political Economist and Civil Servant. His works influenced many social and political theories. He was a utilitarian in the mold of Jeremy Bentham and being a liberal political philosopher, him and Jean Jacques Rousseau are major defenders of liberty and most especially Mill who believed in the possibility of democracy ahead of time. He was one of the last systematic philosophers, making significant contributions and waves in logic, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, and social theory. He was also an important public figure, articulating the liberal platform, pressing for various liberal reforms, and serving in Parliament. During Mill's lifetime, he was most widely admired for his work in theoretical philosophy and political economy. However, nowadays Mill's greatest philosophical influence is in moral and political philosophy, especially his articulation and defense of utilitarianism and liberalism.

Consequently, modern democratic thinkers have adopted certain major features of a good democracy to include; there should be majority rule, tolerance of opposition, protection of minority interests, provision for and guaranteeing of fundamental human right, respect for the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, periodic free and fair elections, universal adult suffrage, existence of multi-party system, freedom of speech or expression, independence of mass media, independent electoral commission, fixed term/tenure of office for political officers, and existence of a citizens-oriented constitution among others, and these are what Mill tries to make sure it's in place in human society for the good and betterment of all citizens no matter your place or position in the state.

Mill's Concept of Democracy as a Paradigm (Antidote) to Nigerian Political Predicaments

Liberalism is a political philosophy or worldview founded on ideas of liberty and equality. Liberals espouse a wide array of views depending on their understanding of these principles, but generally they support ideas such as free and fair elections, civil rights, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, free trade, and private property etc. It is important to note that there exist different liberal democratic theorists and virtually all can agree in their endorsement of representative democracy where representatives are chosen in accord with formal procedures combined with state protection of political and civil liberties and a private sphere free of state manipulations and/or interference. J.S Mill set out what is often considered the first systematic explication and defense of liberal democracy. According to Mill in an International Journal:

Liberal democracy is a political system with representative governments elected by popular majority, the rule of law enshrined to protect individuals and minorities, and a significant sector of economic, associational, and communicative activity that is largely autonomous from government control. It rests upon the principles of individual liberty, civic equality, popular sovereignty, and government by the consent of the governed. Liberal democracy's institutional characteristics and principles are mutually dependent. Popular sovereignty exercised through the periodic election of representatives, together with a representative government constrained by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and constitutional rights, helps to secure individual liberty. Concomitantly, individual liberties, civic equality, and limited government support democratic governance. They undergird a vibrant civil society, a prerequisite for the effective exercise of popular sovereignty.¹

This principle is a basic fundamental pillar of the concept of democracy. It can also be termed as representative government which stems from the conduct of free and fair competitive elections. Mill advocated for a government by the consent of the people or the governed for a sustainable development, liberty and equity. Generally, government by consent can only be achieved through the conduct of elections and elections play a very important part of representative democracy. In this case, individuals and groups have to compete in an open contest for the peoples votes. When this is done fairly and credibly, the wishes of the people would easily prevail, and by then democratic justice is not only done but seen to be done.

Consequently, Nigeria since her independence as a political entity or country has experienced several types or forms of government and governance; that is, government by the consent of the governed and the government without the consent of the governed, i.e. civilian and military government and regimes. All the military regimes that we have had and experienced in Nigeria have all come into power without the proper approval from the governed or electorates. Hence, it has failed or fallen short of this principle of liberal

democracy. Additionally, Nigeria experienced her first military intervention in politics on January 15th, 1966 and since then there has been four other successful coups, few abortive coups, some attempted coups and several alleged coups all by different military government at different times in history.

More so, the government by the consent of the people which must come from the conduct of a free, fair and competitive elections, has also been slightly dysfunctional due to the fact that elections conducted in Nigeria have to a large extent been far from been free, fair and credible competitive elections. Elections serve as one of the major instruments for selecting political office holders. It serves as means of ensuring accountability and mobilization of the citizens for political participation. Yet, elections in Nigeria have always been characterized by malpractices such as: strategic election rigging, snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes, political intimidation, witch-hunting and assassination prior to, during and after elections among others and to mention but a few. Elections are critical aspects of democratic framework for governing modern political societies. They serve as instruments of political choices, mobilization, confidence and accountability. In the context of liberal democracy in the world, elections are to facilitate the smooth transition from one civilian administration to another and help in legitimizing sitting governments. Hence, an International Journal in this regard opined thus:

Since her return to civil rule in 1999, the Nigerian experience with general elections has shown that the political elite have not truly come to terms with the referents of elections for democratic sustenance. More often than not, the elite has failed to play by the rules of competitive electoral politics which prioritizes politics of tolerance, conflict and consensus, bargaining and compromise. They see elections as warfare, characterized by gangsterism and political disorder. Political parties which organize for elections are also, like armband of men and women going to war, where there must be victors and the vanquished. Elections in Nigeria have become warfare where it is a sin to lose.²

More so, election is central to the effective functioning of modern representative democracy. Since direct democracy has become almost impossible to practice on account of the large population in every modern political society, electing or selecting political leaders through periodic elections has become the norm. This is particularly so under liberal democracy. Under liberal democracy, elections play wider roles such as instruments of accountability, mobilization of the people, promotion of legitimacy etc. All these principles or features listed above have been noticeably absent in Nigerian democratic system, thereby making void the feature of government by the consent of the governed through the conduct of elections under the general umbrella of liberal democratic theory.

Notably, one of the holding principles or pillars of both liberalism and liberal democratic theory according to Mill is liberty, which is encapsulated in sub-principle such as; civil rights, freedom of press, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, speech and association, etc which is known as the fundamental human rights. All these are needed in a

society where the principle of democracy is widely pronounced and held in high esteem. Going by the fact that Nigeria has experienced both sides of the coin of governance, i.e., military and civilian rule. It is imperative to note that there exist different levels of individual liberty. Military regimes in the country are normally known for the suspension of constitution and these constitutions contain the fundamental human rights in which the principle of liberty is embedded. This made the principle of individual liberty to be totally absent in Nigeria during these periods.

Furthermore, the promulgation of decree no. 2 of 1975 also during the military regime is an instance whereby the principle of individual liberty was totally absent and relegated to the background. The promulgation of the decree no. 2 (1975) according to the Nigerian Constitution, granted the state the full rights to arrest, detain and prosecute anybody who opposed its policies and government, without giving such an individual the opportunity to stand for trial and appeal before the court of law.³ In notable partial contrast, democratic dispensations in Nigeria have not fared any better. Though, civilian or democratic regimes are not known for suspension of constitution, hence, the fundamental human rights (FHRs) remain intact. Yet, notwithstanding, the principle of liberty still remains obviously and seriously threatened in civilian rule in Nigeria. Looking backwards to history, different democratic regimes have limited in no small measure the liberties of citizens of the country in various ways. The freedom of press which is part of the principle of individual liberty has been greatly inhibited, threatened, constrained, censored and sanctioned at several points and times. The Nigerian media most often only broadcast government censored news items which the government gives it permission to do. Also, despite the promulgation of the freedom of information bill in 2007, information still has been limited and not free and available to the Nigerian public for scrutiny. Cases of pressmen been sanctioned, suspended, beaten, intimidated and arrested for performing their rightful duties and obligations have also been the order of the day in Nigeria. All these and many more does not speak well of a country that is widely acclaimed to be practicing liberal democratic theory.

According to Mill, the pure idea of democracy is government of the whole people by the whole people, equally represented,⁴ which requires proportional representation so a minority is not denied government representatives, and hence, this stands led to him been justly classified as an egalitarian in all ramifications. He insisted not only on political equality, but also on social and economic equality. Therefore, it can be pointed out here that Mill's principle of civic equality was based on proportional representation, so as to avoid the denial of minority government representatives. Nigeria is a country of extraordinary diversity and extraordinary complexities, these complexities are a reflection of the avalanche of ethnic groups co-habiting the territory and intricacies of interaction among them, and its notably said that there are over 450 ethnic groups in the country and for Mill, all must be represented or at least to an extent for social justice, equity and equality.

Though, looking at it critically, the avalanche of the ethnicities that are present in Nigeria had made the issue of equality and proportional representation a very difficult task to

achieve, despite every attempt by successive governments to achieve a considerable amount of civic equality in every sector of the country. Yes, this is noted, but all policies of government must gear towards the good of all in the country to fill in the gap. However, it is noteworthy that different measures have been adopted at different points in time by the federal government of Nigeria to ensure the required level of equality and proportional representation, and some of these include; federal character principle and resource allocation, amongst others, but still they are not enough and does not have much impacts in the lives of the citizen especially the badly affected ones. The federal character principle was a policy that was entrenched in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to cater for the diversity in the country. The principle states thus:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies according to the designators of this principle, it is described as a distinctive desire to give every citizen a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversity and multiplicities of ethnicities present in the country.⁵

Nigeria has over the years experienced various inter-ethnic rivalries and conflicts between groups, hence, there was the need and importance to make a provision that would prevent against the domination of the government and its various agencies by a single ethnic group, that is, to ensure equality on all levels for all regions. However, a twist to the attempt to ensure equality in the country through the entrenchment of this principle has been met by different forms of opposition either directly or indirectly. Some of the critics of this principle have argued that the principle aims at disregarding the major principle of merit in the various appointments into the civil service, military, police force etc; therefore, they believed that instead of the principle promoting the idea of equality which it was created for, it otherwise promotes inequality, mediocrity and incompetence in the country.

Also, Private Sphere Free of State Interference is a very crucial principle of Mill's liberal democratic theory. It emphasizes the significant sector of economic, associational, and communicative activity that is largely autonomous from government control, that is, it can also be termed or referred to as a system of capitalism. The Nigerian state is pursuing the economic policies aimed at formation of the market environment, private business, and improvement of investment climate in the state. Three problematic factors have been identified for doing businesses in Nigeria such as having access to financing, inadequate supply of infrastructure and corruption, infrastructure that constrains development etc. Hence, it can be agreed that what actually operates in Nigeria is pseudo-capitalism, which means capitalism that pretends to be what it is really not.

However, the above is not without having some elements of government stake in the

investment. It was reported that some of these foreign companies that hold ownership of this business acted as frontrunners for government politicians who are actually the real owners of this business. Therefore, the earlier claim of Nigeria operating a pseudo-capitalist economy is rightly justified. In line with this reason, Agnes Ubana Enang argues that Nigeria's democracy has not consistently translated into national development because of corruption, poor governance, insecurity, and weak institutions. Democracy success depends on transparency, accountability, and effective leadership.⁶ Nigerian state has continued to adopt and inherit public policies for national development from the International Capitalist System and still to no avail and thus continues to deny its citizens the right to basic amenities of life for socio-economic development and well-being, and yet, up till now there is no hope of its ending sooner or later. The Nigerian government in their outright woeful failure and chronic insincerity claims to act for the common good of all citizens by continually borrowing huge amount of funds in dollars from the international communities and agencies of international capacities to fund nothing reasonable, unclear and inexistent so-called capital projects in Nigeria that are never finished year to year or simply half-baked. These borrowed huge amounts of billions and trillions of funds are mostly instead of being used for what it is acclaimed to be meant for are being siphoned and stolen by the country's elected and public office holders for personal and family use to the detriment of the country and her innocent citizens.

Consequently, liberal democracy in Nigeria when compared with Mill's theory is anti-people, anti-intellectual, anti-development and anti-reasoning, and as well has zero tolerance for criticism and fueled in a great measure de-industrialization and de-democratization to mention but a few. Liberal democracy in Nigeria has witnessed and still witnessing the cult of mediocrity. Our leaders, from federal to the local government levels have failed to deliver the dividends of democratic governance to the Nigerians because they themselves do not possess the credentials of good leaders and leadership, nor do they seem to have due governance principles in any way. A good number of them are non-prepared and ill-prepared or un-prepared for the challenges and responsibilities trusted on them by the electorates. In this line, according to Machungo:

Nigeria was and is still ruled by political sycophantic lieutenants who are only concerned about their pockets alone. Such mediocre leaders lack the spiritual and political stamina to confront the socio-political upheavals that assail their people. Mediocre leaders also thrive on cheap popularity as a means of hiding their lack of definable ideology or agenda. They do not bear criticisms with equality; rather, they resort to witch-hunting and mudslinging to mask their ineptitude. The result of hoisting a mediocre leader in power is nothing but inefficiency, a decline in national productivity and under-development. It can also lead to social unrests.⁷

Furthermore, in his essay *On Liberty*, Mill actually identifies two major concepts to which attention should be paid in order to enhance progress in a civilized society. For him, complete liberty of thought and discussion within a particular political order, and the free

development of individuality are very critical to a human person and should not be tampered with by the state. Mill centers his focus on these two main independent aspects of human life. Consequently, one of the main spirit behind the writing of *On Liberty* is the matter concerning the absolute dealings of society with the individual. Mill, therefore, explicitly puts it thus:

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. A person's own good, whether physical or moral, is not a sufficient reason for coercion. Thus, government or society may interfere with an individual's liberty only when that person's conduct harms others – not merely because others believe the conduct is immoral or unwise.⁸

From the foregoing, Mill simply wish to assert one very simple point and principle that on no circumstance should an individual rights and privileges be influenced or restricted by the state or anyone except for the prevention of injury or harm to the other or in the society. On this note it seems proper for us to state unequivocally that Mill's essay in *On Liberty* is concerned with the question of the nature and limits of power, which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual. Mill proposes a thesis that considerable amount of power be reserved for the citizens while the limits of the state intervention in individual liberty as well as the limits of public opinion as a way of ensuring good conduct of the citizens, be determined. Mill's unique concern in socio-political thought is epitomized in his strong warning against the tyranny of the majority. Hence, he declares that the tyranny of the majority is now generally included among the evils against which society requires to be on its guard.⁹ The institutionalization of democratic machinery and principles is not enough for a shield against tyranny, because there is always the dread of tyranny in any form of government. Mill acknowledges this by saying that, like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority... is still vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of public authority.¹⁰

More importantly, according to Mill, a great evil is committed if the individual is denied his or her liberty. This denial of liberty is done either by action or inaction. This principle of liberty of Mill can be summarized in this way that everybody should be bound to observe a certain line of conduct towards the rest, and that this conduct should consist in not injuring the interests of one another. Mill then believes that the only ground for which the state is justified to interfere in the liberties of the individual is to prevent harm to others. Indeed, it is difficult to pinpoint a particular society and instance in which Mill's liberty principle at the level of such seriousness, has ever applied, neither is it plausible to think of designing a society in which its practicability will easily be put to bear or be identifiable. But Mill was probably trying to put to bear his proposal of designing and determining the limit of human freedom by showing that it is proper for one to think of the effects of his action before it is performed. This can only be possible by allowing reason its proper role in one's mentality. Therefore, for the action of society to be regulated by Mill's liberty principle, it must transcend the premature stage into a civilized level. Indeed, being an ideal principle on

which the conduct of the state and human affairs should be regulated, the liberty principle of Mill advances an argument as suggestively summarized by Stephen that, let everyman please himself without hurting his neighbour; and every moral system which aimed at more than this, either to obtain benefits for society at large other than protection against injury or to do good to the persons affected, would be wrong in principle.¹¹

Consequently, we reason, therefore, that the foundation for progressive and healthy social relations is rooted in Mill's liberty principle which epitomizes his theory of liberty and which holds that the exercise of an individual freedom should not, as much as possible, constitute harm to others. The ingenuity of this position can better be appreciated by first considering some areas of social relations where freedom is often exercised with the accompanying consequences on the others. For this purpose, let us consider socio-political relations, inter-group relations within social integration and with special reference to religious intolerance as we go further.

In a democratic society like Nigeria, social integration can only occur when there is mutual trust and respect for the freedom of others. The need for social integration is more important in a plural society like Nigeria. This is because according to Akinyele, Nigeria is a land of contrasts.¹² Iwuchukwu sees Nigeria as a confederation of diverse ethnic nationalities, each of which considers itself autonomous, self-conscious and to some extent, independent.¹³ Also, the problems of deprivation and domination are characteristics of the Nigerian society. As a plural society, Nigeria is polarized into majority and minority groups. The three ethnic groups, who are in the majority, often exhibit a sense of superiority and domination over the minority ethnic groups so much that there are cries of neglect and marginalization by the latter, especially as the former has dominated the political and social economic sphere of the country since independence.

The issue of integrating the ethnic minorities which is an indicator of national development has not been addressed seriously by the Nigerian leadership. Most of the measures taken to address this issue have actually as continued Iwuchukwu, reinforced ethnicity rather than integration.¹⁴ It is possible that certain groups are not adequately represented and their opinions are silenced. Thus, Mill warns us to beware of the tyranny of the majority which often occurs when some ethnic groups are not fairly treated in the affairs of the society. Mill maintains that the evil done by government to the minorities may be either by actions or inactions as already stated above. Through action, the government may exploit a section or an ethnic group in favour of the others, as we have in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria and some other parts of the country. Through inaction, the government may refuse to listen to the cries of the people on matters affecting their individual and collective affairs. Both options abound in developing societies, especially in Africa with Nigeria as example, where the people are either exploited and/or neglected. Besides, Mill advocates the toleration of opinions. Any modern government that is insensitive to the cry of the people, to the requests of the people, and to the interests of its citizens is incubating crises. The federal government of Nigeria for example, has been insensitive to the voice of the people,

thereby being indifferent to people's opinions and causing evil through its inactions. Even with the enthronement of democracy, the Nigerian federal government's insensitivity to the people's problems and plights often results in devastating crises, especially ethnic clashes.

More so, ethnic clashes in Nigeria are partly motivated by the deprivation of political freedom. In the Niger Delta area, the Ijaw and Itsekiri were locked in a protracted and gruelling war over the location of Warri South Local Government Council.¹⁵ Others like, the Ife-Modakeke crisis in South-West Nigeria and the Zango-Kataf crisis in North-Central Nigeria, the Umuleri and Aguleri in Anambra state of Nigeria, and the Tiv-Jukun crisis in Benue state over local government elections also fall into this category.¹⁶ It must be noted that ethnic conflict is not peculiar to Nigeria. Olukotun notes that:

Ethnic and communal conflicts, whether in the guise of genocidal ethnic cleansing or of low-intensity conflict have become a staple feature of contemporary politics since 1990s. Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia, and Liberia represent one notorious face of this phenomenon. In Africa, the resurgence of identity conflicts, the breakdown of the post colonial state into its constituent, feuding parts as well as the rise of sectarian and religious movements have become familiar to students of the continent.¹⁷

As noted earlier on, in Nigeria today, almost all ethnic groups feel marginalized, especially in the allocation of social amenities and political positions. Indeed, according to Babawale, ethnic differences are natural, but trouble starts when the ethnic groups are oppressed or manipulated.¹⁸ Such developments in Nigeria have led to the evolution and growth of freedom fighting and secessionist groups and some militias. As a way of seeking redress and protecting their interests and freedom, they may constitute themselves into ethnic militias and freedom fighters as the case may be. In the South-West, there is the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) and the Yoruba Nation Now (YNN), in the North, there is the Arewa People's Congress (APC) etc, in the South-South there is the Egbesu Boys of Africa/Niger Delta Militants/Avengers etc and in the South-East there is the Bakassi Boys, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) amongst others. Though, most often, some of the group's protests are mostly violent in some parts of the country while others are peaceful, each group seeing itself as interacting and belonging to a socio-cultural group with specific interests to be protected and achieved within the larger society of Nigeria. The presence of violent ethnic militias is a sign of oppression, deprivation, neglect, government actions and inactions and lack of inter-group cohesion or integration. It is, therefore, undeniably clear that ethnic clashes are caused by the denial of freedom and inclusiveness or excessive exercise of freedom. This means that the prevention of ethnic clashes, inter-group conflicts, and intra-group conflicts is a function of our freedom. Government must be sensitive and responsive rather than being coercive and forceful in its actions in dealing with or tackling the situations as they arises.

Furthermore, with the coming of democracy in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria, it is

expected that Nigerian government would be more responsive to the agitations of the people. Unfortunately, this has not happened or the revise remained the case. In Nigeria, most times under credible evidences both nationally and internationally, innocent citizens are squashed, crushed and slaughtered by government security agencies saddled with the constitutional responsibility of protecting lives and properties just for agitating for their God-given fundamental human rights and liberty. This demonstrates a high level of insensitivity, irresponsibility and irresponsiveness of a democratic government in this contemporary era. It is also interesting to note that most of the violent crises in Nigeria started with signals and warnings which ought to have been addressed by government before the crises escalates or became magnified or uncontrollable. Thus, the evil is done by the inactions and neglects of government. That is why Mill insists that in order to ensure a harmonious relationship we must not perform actions that will constitute harm to others. Thus, in all our actions in social relations we must be mindful of the freedom of others.

Mill emphasized that it is evil to silence the expression of opinions because it is robbing the human race; prosperity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth.¹⁹ We must note that freedom to express opinion and the methods and management of opinions are different things. The minority should be able to express their opinions. Such opinions of the minority often carry details of their interests and complaints, which if attended to in time, can prevent the eruption of crisis. A responsible government with necessary infrastructure does not wait till crises mature before acting on the agitations of the people.

Tolerance is the foundation of a harmonious relationship no matter the way anyone looks at it, and most of the problems in the whole wide world today especially in Nigeria are caused majorly by intolerance. However, it may be asked: why intolerance? This question has many answers. It could be answered by saying that it is because of the discriminatory and egoistic nature of man and also because of negative indices of social relations motivated by unnecessary hatred, greed, ignorance, political manipulations, ethnic and religious bigotry, natural resources control and the likes. Sometimes, a social relation may be founded on faulty pillars which may generate intolerance, especially if the plurality of society is not put into consideration like the case of Nigeria as a country. These and other related problems emanating from faulty planning and implementation are responsible for cases of crisis in Nigeria after the enthronement of independence and democracy in the country.

Additionally, the successive Nigerian leadership has not effectively addressed the issue of intolerance among the Nigerian people. Even, political activities in Nigeria have more or less encouraged the strengthening of the sectional diversities and the accompanying intolerance among different groups of the Nigerian society. For instance, in party politics in Nigeria, the leaders have planted the seeds of intolerance and division and/or divisiveness. Since 1922, when the elective principle was introduced into Nigerian politics, most political parties have been formed along ethnic lines. More serious occurrences of

intolerance happen in sectarian affairs. Religion is expected to bring peace and happiness to mankind, but instead it has brought disunity, unhappiness and war, and is also tearing mankind into pieces. This is because of religious intolerance in the human world. In Nigeria, the pick of religious intolerance is as a result of fanaticism and fundamentalism. Momoh in this case defines fanaticism as it applies to religion as:

The belief by an adherent that his own religion is the only one favoured by God and therefore, superior to the others; as a mark of gratitude to God for conferring this exclusive privilege and superiority on his own religion, the adherent is prepared to go to any length using all means – civilized or crude, peaceful or violent – to defend his religion or impose it on others. Incidentally, a fanatic's knowledge and learning in his own religion may not be very profound. The fanatic is outward looking.²⁰

This is also in line with Mill's thesis. Consequently, if religion is viewed as a personal affair, there will be peace in the society. It is wrong for the government of a plural society like Nigeria to be involved in religious matters except if its practice constitutes harm to others. Mill's insistence on freedom of speech, toleration of opinion, and free development of individuality is relevant to the attainment of religious peace. The objective perception of others is important in any social relation because it is that which will enable one to acknowledge the humanity in others with whom he or she must relate. Negative perception results in negative actions and crises. Objective perception is a phenomenological attitude which encourages judgment devoid of bias or presupposition. To avoid this unnecessary and unwarranted crisis, no religion should be viewed as superior to the other.

Specifically, Mill's liberty principle proffers solutions to religious crises in Nigeria as stated below:

First, that classification should be made between matters of private affairs and those in the area of public affairs. On those things that fall within the area of private affairs, such as religious beliefs, the individual has absolute freedom, provided his actions do not constitute harm to others. Secondly, that the consequences of our actions be viewed proactively in order to determine whether or not it will constitute harm to others. Thirdly, any such actions that constitute harm to others be subjected to control. And finally, since there are many sides to truth, to refuse a hearing to an opinion because it is assumed to be false is to assume that its certainty is the same thing as absolute certainty.²¹

Therefore, the toleration of different religious beliefs especially in a multi-religious and multi-lingual state like Nigeria is necessary in order to avoid religious crisis. Mill himself opined that, so natural to mankind is intolerance in whatever they really care about, that religious freedom has hardly anywhere been practically realized, except where religious indifference, which dislikes to have its peace disturbed by theological quarrels, has added its weight to the scale.²²

The unhealthy rivalry between religious factions or sects or groups or denominations is due to the lack of tolerance amongst the believers. Religion is a 'contagious malady,' and there seems to be joy in madness which can only be understood and best enjoyed by those who are mad. This is because everybody seems to be mad with his or her belief, and as he or she clings to it as the only truth, others who do not share the same belief or view with him or her are considered to be unbelievers or sinners or outcasts or simply enemies, and should be discarded without any mercy or thinking twice. This is usually one of the causes of religious crises in the society especially in Nigeria. However, this submission does not intend to destroy religion for any reason, but to advocate tolerance as an essential condition for preventing religious crises like the type which greeted the introduction of the Shari'a legal system in some northern parts of Nigeria. This essential condition is rooted in intolerance amongst different religious sects. To this end, the government should legislate against any means capable of inciting one religion against others in the country by all means possible.

Subsequently, it is clear that the idea of societal harmony is a product of healthy social relations while the reverse produces crisis. The cause of unhealthy social relations therefore in any society can, in a way, be summed up to be the product of either the excessive exercise of liberty or absence of avenue to exercise liberty, or arbitrary placement of restraints on the peoples' freedom in one or more areas of common interest within that particular society. For example, when people are denied resource, political and economic liberty to which they are entitled to as in the case of the Niger Delta of Nigeria or the South-East of Nigeria social and political marginalization and intimidation, the Middle Belt killing crisis by Fulani fanatics and blood-letting terrorists in their area and also in some parts of the North and elsewhere in Nigeria, crises are inevitable and bound to occur. More so, the unhealthy rivalries between religious factions or sects or groups or denominations are caused by lack of tolerance amongst their believers. In continuation of his work on liberty, J. S. Mill revealed the problem with Nigeria thus:

It was now perceived that such phrases as "self-government", and "power of the people over themselves", do not express the true state of the case. The "people" who exercise the power, are not the same people with this over whom it is exercised and the "self-government" spoken of, is not the government of each by himself, but of each by all the rest. The will of the people moreover, practically means, the wills of the numerous or the most active part of the people, the majority, or those who succeed in making themselves majority: consequently, they decide to oppress a part of their number... "tyranny of the majority" is now generally included among the evils against which the society requires to be on its guard.²³

More so, reacting clearly to Nigeria's numerous problems and the way forward, Idowu et al argues that democracy has produced some political stability and economic reforms but has not fully delivered development because of corruption, insecurity, and poor leadership.

Democracy must produce tangible benefits for citizens.²⁴ Consequently, Mill's argument is that democracy should adequately promote the common good and improve citizens' total welfare by all means possible. For Idowu et al, democracy as seen in Nigeria today shows some democratic lights and minimal progress but has continually falls short of Mill's actual expectations of a democratic state at above 65years and counting. Democracy should by all mean enhance, uplift and upgrade the individual's lives and at the same time produce national development and security. This is simply non-negotiable for Mill.

Therefore, in this assertions and arguments above, looking at the indices therein and very noticeable in Nigerian politics, Mill would be quick to advocate that the only practicable remedy and solution to Nigerian political and democratic predicaments is the liberty of the individual and the proper representation of the minorities which for him forms natural opposition to the above ills and negative situations, and with it, the society can be better and make progressive development towards the betterment of all in the society especially in Nigeria as a country.

Evaluation and Conclusion

From the above then, Mill would view our position in Nigeria as not being actually democratic in nature and in practice rather a degenerated form of democracy, because he warned against this problem before hand. This problem he called the 'tyranny of the mob.' This he said must be guarded against, for once it sets in, it ushers in every other evil until a state of anarchy is achieved. Looking at Nigerian situation, the creation of an upper class which is untouchable even by the law most times creates this tyranny of the majority, as one would remember that Mill's definition of this is those who have succeeded in making themselves majority. This is found in every aspect of the Nigerian society. This tyranny, Mill would advocate that once removed would place the country in a better state and bring about social harmony as well as bring or give greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. Mill's natural answer to this is that liberty should be ensured by all and should not be interfered with except when it is for the protection of the other from harm. All the individuals in the society are expected to be free especially in Nigeria for a better and harmonious society for all.

Consequently, the panacea to the problem of ethnic clashes in plural society like Nigeria is the institutionalization of liberalism as proposed by Mill. Mill advocates freedom of expression and the free development of individuality which are the necessary ingredients for social harmony and peace in a plural society as it concerns Nigeria. Nigerian constitution should be predicated upon Mill's liberty principles and as well as in the values of liberal democracy in Mill's theory. To lay the foundation for healthy social relations and peace in Nigeria, Mill's theory of liberty can be applied to formulate government policies which do not constitute harm to the society. In order to ensure peace and harmony in Nigerian society, this work recommends the toleration of opinions of the opponents. The adoption of this principle would no doubt remove and/or reduce the occurrence of conflict in inter-group, inter-personal, inter-state and international relationships.

Therefore, to enthrone a stable, viable and enviable democracy in Nigeria, John Stuart Mill's principles of democracy as well as his liberty principles should be given immediate attention, for its proper and judicious application would eschew ethnicity, tribalism, illiteracy, bigotry, nepotism, sectionalism, identity politics, favouritism and poverty, and would also reduce or eliminate the lack of good governance and good economy that prompted stealing of public funds and allied corruption in high and low places, lack of mass education that heightened bad leadership, as well as, mind-manipulations of the led by the rulers and public office holders in Nigeria, for the good and betterment of all.

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