

# Impact of social injustice on nigeria



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The question of social justice is a question of what is a proper social order, 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 social order cannot allow for a society of slaves, 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. With regards to the Nigerian situation, the Nigeria's socio-political conundrums stem from numerous complicated tides. Egharevba (2007) 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." In other words, Nigeria's problems are predicated on the partitioning of Africa by European at the Berlin conference. This conference left the continent with an illogical pattern of geographical distribution which also reflected on the amalgamation of Nigerian by the then colonial masters (Mentiki, 2002). Ammo (1997) sees the make-up of the Nigerian state as an embodying the merging of different people with different worldview that lacks a coherent and functional unity and is consequently fragile. As will be shown in the following analysis, this research seeks to analyse how the impact of social injustice in the Nigeria state has led to the bigger problem of ethnic cleavages which has further prevented the country from attaining any meaningful development.

Balewa a former Prime Minister of Nigeria, states that some problems facing the nation include the problems of indiscipline, tribalism, lack of patriotism

and declining productivity. But one of the most obvious is the tribal prejudice inherent in the nation's polity as a result of the inequitable distribution of the ethnic groups across her landscape and the persistent attempt of the giant ethnic groups to monopolize control over state resources thereby usurping and undermining the far lesser groups in the nation's polity. This assertion has been arrived at having keenly analysed the views, lamentations, opinions and findings of some Nigerian socio-political thinkers on the problem of social injustice in the Nigerian state (Oyeshile, 2005). According to these authors, it is the repressing of the interests of some groups (disadvantaged in size, status, ethnicity, etc.) that has characterized the bane of attaining social justice and by extension, social development in the country (ibid). Anikpo identified the appropriation of available resources in Nigeria as characterized by the fundamental concept of Marx's theory which defines the instability arising particularly from distorted production and rewarded system; as societal goods are distributed to individuals based on their social class or productivity ability. Hence, this situation of polarization of various ethnic groups, social groups and class lines, etc. has led to the formation of ethnic militias raising several questions about social justice in the society.

According to Oyeshile (2005), social injustice in terms of unfair and inequitable distribution of social goods satisfactorily among the multi ethnic groups in Nigeria over the years has resulted in the sharpening of the individual's allegiance to ethnic inclinations rather than to state authority.<sup>1</sup> This reality, according to him, has led to the weakening of the federal government and state authorities in propagating agendas of national interest

and development, “ since it has become the case that issues of national interest can no longer be considered in their own merits but on how they affect the ethnic groups” <sup>2</sup> . In other words, the diversities in a contest complicated differences in language, religion and level of economic attainment has further disintegrate the various ethnic tribes in the Nigerian state.

In buttressing the above claim, Oguejiofor (2005) refers to the attitude of Nigerians towards the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election, an election which could have consolidated democratic rule in the country years ago. According to him, the North did not want a revisit of the June 12 election simply because its annulment ensured that it (the North) remain in control of power. He states further that “ the other sections of Nigeria did not see their interest attacked by the cancellation of the election (and as such did not protest), while for most Yoruba who mounted serious protest, it was doubtful whether they would have done so if the candidate who won the election were not of Yoruba extraction” (ibid). In a further analysis of the Nigerian socio-political situation, Oladipo observed another deepening effect of social injustice in the Nigeria polity. He observed that at the receiving end of the ethic pervasiveness, structural imbalance and poor distribution of social wealth, is the common man. The common man in Nigeria has, for reasons quoted above, found life extremely burdensome and unbearable because of the inability to access the essential things of life. Oladipo further made a call for the restructuring of the body polity of the country from an ethical and ideological perspective <sup>4</sup> .

Furthermore, Ograh (2014) avers that structural imbalance and 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, structural imbalance and social injustice in the Nigeria polity consists in the overwhelming gap between the living standards of the few elite citizens and the majority commoners.

Having considered the above analysis, it is clear therefore that measures must be taken towards restructuring the social order in Nigeria in order for meaningful progress and development can be achieved. Sadly, only few attempts have been made by the government towards achieving the aforementioned objective. Even those few attempts have ended in futility because as Oladipo () acknowledges that where the ideological underpinning is strong and resilient the society survives and thrive but where it is weak, the society's capacity for social progress becomes impaired <sup>5</sup> . What this means is that there is need for strong ideological foundation for the rectification of the social disorder and injustice which is on display in Nigeria. This is where I find the theoretical postulations of John Rawls on social justice very useful because Rawls' conception of justice contains ideological guides for rectifying social injustices in multi-ethnic societies like the Nigerian federation. 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 the concept of social justice in the formation and sustenance of a stable, viable, humane and progressive society.