

Rethinking Liberal Democracy in Nigeria's Post-Colonial Democracy

Chidiebere Okutalukwe & Timipa Igoli

Department of Political Science

University of Africa

Corresponding author: chidiokutalukwe@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper focuses on the unpacking of liberal democratic policies that are characterized on the logic of election and methodical individualism in the post-colonial Nigeria. This characterization is chiefly driven by the post-colonial authoritarian nature of policies underpinned by exclusion and deprivation that signpost Nigerian state and her evolving democratic space. Liberal democracy is an Eurocentric metropolitan type of democracy that reinforces elitism, disempowerment and negates the principle of popular consciousness built around subaltern political emancipation. The study therefore, interrogates the role of election in strengthening the epistemic value of democracy. The Nigerian state still manifest the legacies of colonial empire rationality in shaping her democratic institutions, practices and norms that are devoid of “spivakian” postcolonial discourse that centers around incursion, empowerment, reciprocity and solidarity. This reifies binary opposition of rulers and the ruled in consolidating democratic culture in Nigeria. The study engages qualitative data as its main methodological guide. The study discovers that rethinking the liberal democratic politics in Nigeria through subaltern discourse will provoke an intellectual engagement that will lead to the emergence of deliberative democracy.

Keywords: Liberal, Democracy, Subaltern, Nigeria, Postcolonial.

Introduction

There is perhaps no other time in the postcolonial history of modern Nigeria to interrogate and re conceptualize the electoral politics that have underpinned the praxis of liberal democracy in its form and character than this present time (Kwesiga, 2021). There is incontrovertible evidence that the trajectory of electoral democracy in Nigeria are in rapid recession and decrepitude. The euphoria of the contemporary wave of democratization and democracy which have engulfed the African continent is incrementally witnessing the potency of reversibility to authoritarianism and fragility, as Adejumobi (2000) stressed that the percepts, structures and processes of election are mostly characterized by reckless manipulation, the politics of brinkmanship and subversion. He went further to argue that the role and essence of election in a democracy are highly circumscribed in terms of expressing the popular will, engaging political changes and the legitimation of political regimes; the present tendency is to regard election not as a catalyst but as a devalued element and a fading shadow of democratic process in Africa (Adejumobi, 2000). Despite the popularity and frequency of election in functioning liberal democracies,

there is increasing violence, plagued by cohesion and wild spread irregularities which tend to dislocate the existing socio-political stability in the post-colonial state (Kwesiga, 2021).

Since the Greek time, there have been a monotonous definition of democracy namely; rule by the 'demos' i.e., the people, for the modern definition of democracy. The French revolution of 1789 is an irrefutable historical moment (Mafeje, 1995) since then, it can be said that three concepts of democracy have featured in European theoretical and political discourse, namely Liberal, social and 'socialist' democracy. Theoretically, each emerged as a critique of pre-existing forms of rule and distribution of wealth. Today, liberalism is generally thought to be inseparable from democracy so much so that the term 'democracy' is applied to denote 'liberal democracy unless otherwise specified (Gaubu, 2007). The French and American revolutions signaled the victory of liberal democracy over absolutism, centralism and unquestioning obedience in the last decades of eighteenth century. In the twentieth century, Marxist notion of class, state and collectivism challenged liberal democracy's basic tenets (Hazelkorn, 1995).

The collapse of existing communism in the late 1980s has resurrected the universalism of liberal democracy and its core principle; periodic election put differently, democracy has become a global discourse with an internationally endorsed normative force that has become increasingly important in legitimizing a post-cold war politics around the globe with the libertarian rationality (Paley, 2008). The global expansion of electoral democracy in recent decades, however being occurred largely in postcolonial countries where the introduction of electoral politics has been captured by elitists primitive accumulation tendencies like corruption, cronyism, state capture and populism. In this vein, election which constitutes the episteme and ritual of liberal democracy becomes antithetical to competing policy platform or ideologies for effective governance. The general discourse of this paper is to unpack the electoral politics of disempowerment and deprivation with theoretical engagement of liberal democracy and analytical lenses of postcolonial framework embedded on subaltern encounters. The paper also forays into the trajectory of electoral democracy in Nigeria and the reification of deliberative model of democracy as a new paradigm to reshape the oppositional relationship between the elite and the masses, dominated and subordinated, privileged and deprived citizens in Nigeria.

The paper is organized into four sections: Section one is a conceptual and theoretical discourse on democracy and election. Section two examines post-colonization and subaltern engagement of Spivak's binary opposition encounters. Section three evaluates the context of electoral politics in Nigeria. The final section reifies the re-conceptualization of electoral democracy under the rubric of deliberative democracy in Nigeria.

Democracy and Election: Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse

Anthropologically, it is probably true that the concept of democracy is as old as humankind itself. What might have varied over time are its manifestations and conceptions. In this study, the modern history is of utmost concern to us. As mentioned earlier, it can be asserted that in recent times three concepts of 'democracy' have

emerged. These are all European in origin, constructed from the metropolitan cities in provincial form to universal praxis. The three concepts of democracy known to modern history are 'liberal' 'social' and 'socialist' forms (Mafeje, 1995).

Their chronology is of course, not as straightforward as their simple enumeration would suggest. Nevertheless, irrespective of whether one uses Cromwell's revolution in England or the French Revolution at its inception, liberal democracy is by far the oldest. As a political form and utopian vision, it pervaded Europe and its kindred extensions such as North America and the British dominions for umpteen times and remained unrivalled. Therefore, not surprisingly, it is the best-studied and the well popularized form of 'democracy'. Its characteristics includes freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of press, rule of law, periodic elections and respect for individual rights, are still unexceptionable. As Adejemobi (2000) submitted the discourse and theories on democracy especially in its libertarian assumptions, place election as a core variable, bearing an organic linkage with the democratic concept; indeed earlier attempt at conceptualizing liberal democracy equate it with the phenomenon of elections. In other words, election should not be the only pathway that substantiates the essence of democracy.

Democracy in the classical sense as Ake (2000) argues that the concept is uncharacteristically precise. It simply connotes popular power. It is not about delegated authority or representative governance, but about popular expression of power by the people. To safeguard the democratic culture in Nigeria, elections should be considered as a feature and not the basis for, democracy.

According to Schumpeter (1947) the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquired the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for people's votes. The ascendancy of liberal democracy has seen increasingly reduction of democratization especially in Africa to the introduction of election and multipartyism (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1997).

This suggests that the need to interrogate

importance of election within the democratic process especially given the seeming tendency of democratic rule in Africa is collapsing through illiberal elections (Olaitan, 2005). In a reductive sense of it, liberal democracy is conceived as a 'political system characterized by regular and free election in which politicians organized into parties compete to form the government by right of virtually all adult citizen to vote and by guarantee of a range of familiar political and civil rights (Sandbrook, 1988). To elucidate Ake's argument:

Instead of collectively, liberal democracy focuses on the individual whose claims are ultimately placed above those of the collectivity. It replaces government by the people with the government by the consent of the people. Instead of sovereignty of the people, it offers the sovereignty of law. In the final analysis, liberal democracy repudiates popular power (Ake, 2000).

Popular power as Ake views it is the essence of democracy. Equating liberal democracy with democracy in the classical sense is to devalue and trivialize the concept of democracy. While democracy in its traditional sense serve the realization of human potentialities through active participation in rulership, liberal democracy offers only protection. In the former freedom is positive and active, in the latter, it is a passive acceptance of immunity. The former enables and empowers; the latter prevent and protects (Ake, 2010).

The amalgamation of liberal democracy with democracy has been a logical outgrowth of the nature of the historical development in western societies in which private property and market society were created, accentuated by the dynamics of industrial and technological revolution (Adejumobi, 2004). The challenges for a fledging market economy and society was to engineer a political infrastructure and mode of policy that will service and protect the base of society- the economy. However, most of the literatures on democratic theory espouses the compatibility of liberal democracy with a market economy. Ake (2000) states that the values of the market are the same core values of

liberal democracy: egotism, property, formal freedom and equality. Both also share the faith and commitment of limited government. Undeniably, the Marxist critique of liberal democracy sees it as a class project that reflects dominant power interests in the capitalist societies (Gaubu, 2007). Although the process of its evolution is embedded in complex social struggled, but its crafting and the hegemonic interest is largely that of capital and bourgeoisie class (Adejumobi, 2004).

The elitist and pluralist theories of democracy have added an empirical dimension to democratic theory by incorporating the result of sociological theory. In a nutshell: (a) the elitist theories concede that election and policy making in a democracy is the function of the elite while people's role is confined to approval and rejection of candidate and policies advocated by competing elites (b) the pluralist theories view democracy as a decentralized process characterized by bargaining between competing autonomous groups towards a model described by Dahl as polyarchy (Gaubu, 2007). Robert Dahl succinctly averred that election is a fundamental rubric of democracy. Dahl (1991) concluded that the citizens possess civil and political rights, that is easy access to information not monopolized by the state or a single group; and there is an enforceable right to form and join political organizations including political parties and interest groups (Dahl, 1991) J. S. Mills in the defense of representatives democracy and public voting reinforces the supremacy of majoritarianism and representation by buttressing the primacy of election to democracy (Mackenzie, 2009).

Conceptually, elections symbolize popular sovereignty and the expression of the 'social contract' between the state and the people defining the basis of political authority, legitimacy and citizen obligations. As Adejumobi (2001) stated, it is the kernel of political accountability and a means of ensuring reciprocity and exchange between the governors and the governed. Democracy is, therefore, not conceivable outside of the contest of election as it supplies the essential platform for the building of democracy. In this regard, the working of democracy is intrinsically linked to election, suggesting that the positive place of election within democratic practice is germane

(Olaitan, 2005). That is, democracy cannot be contemplated in the absence of the context of election. As Amuwo evocatively justified the argument that election:

Is an important starting point for democratization because legality of the political opposition, enlargement of the public space through a public press and a rich array of civic organization and gradual abandonment of under persecution of conscientious objectors (Amuwo, 1999).

It has been asserted that the nexus between election and democratic rule is controversial of the reality that democratic systems do collapse in spite of the holding of election, indicating that the ritual and rhetoric of election is not enough to sustain democratic practice. The narrative is thus canvassed that if election is not to sustain or guarantee democratic rule, it would be difficult to conceive of election as a bulwark of democracy. This is why beyond the formality and ritualization of elections, political science must be preoccupied with the structural and material conditions that define rules under which elections are administered and conducted to ensure their exact indeterminacy (Jinadu, 2005). Jinadu (2005) pointed out that the critics of elections in western liberal democracies, like Herbert Marcuse have pointed out, so-called free elections will not remove the slaves or the masters, illustrative of Claude Ake's observation that; under the on-going democratic transitions in Africa people were voting without choosing, and of Thandika Mkandawire's characterization of African countries undergoing democratic transitions as 'choice less democracies (cited in Jinadu, 2005).

The epistemological narrative of electoral democracy in postcolonial societies is patterned from Eurocentric orthodoxy of liberalism with high infusion of procedural democracy that lacks substantive and popular democratic tenets. Therefore, this article is prepared to engage the dynamics of democratic logic in the postcolonial societies that marginalize the subaltern groups within the context of Spivakian assumptions.

Postcolonial Democracy and subaltern concept of Spivakian Binary opposition

In recent decades postcolonial theory has seemed to largely displace Marxism as the dominant perspective among intellectuals engaged in the project of critically examining the relationship between the western and non-western worlds. Originally in the humanities, postcolonial theory has subsequently become increasingly influential in history, anthropology, and the social sciences (Chibber, 2013). Its rejection of the universalism and meta-narratives associated with Enlightenment though dovetailed with the broader turn of the intellectual left during the 1980s and 1990s. Postcolonial theory coheres in three broad problematic rejection of cultural domination, reclaiming subaltern agency and understanding postcoloniality as hybrid contemporary (Zein-Elabdin, 2011).

Although different in approach, scope and political grounding, the articulation of these problematic in Spivak, Said and Bhabha's work present a continuous discourse with profound applicability and implication. Postcolonial theory is peculiarly attuned to the exploration of multiplicity and contingency, not only as they manifest in literally and linguistic strategies (Spivak, 1992, Bhabha, 1994), but in a range of political and economic practices (Mbembe, 2001). As such, applying postcolonial theory and subaltern narrative to notions of electoral democracy gives a sharpened edge to the exploration of politics of domination and disposition that socially characterize election in Nigeria. Subaltern discourse historiography remains one of the most significant contributions to the project of colonial discourse analysis, which has been the focus of so much critical work in the humanities.

Since its inauguration in the early 1980s, the historians involved have been primarily concerned with the attempt to write the 'histories of the margins' into a more central role than they customarily occupied in much colonial, national-bourgeois and contemporary western historiography alike (Moore Gilbert 2003). While its initial focus was India, a subaltern study has been adapted to range of other colonial regions, including (Nigeria) (Cooper, 1994; Ake, 1996 and Moore, 1998).

Electoral democracy has become a global

discourse with an internationally endowed normative force that has become increasingly important in legitimizing a post-cold war geopolitical order (Paley, 2008). The global expansion of democracy in recent decades, however, has occurred largely in postcolonial countries where the introduction of democracy has followed a linear sequence of modernization theory and larger European Enlightenment project whose objective was and remains that of modernizing and enlightening postcolonial societies. This is imperative, because applying the concepts of western social theory that underlined the social scientific analysis to postcolonial realities because of these concepts, although claiming universality, were constructed to understand western modernity (Chakrabarty, 2000). The prevailing conception of democracy could also be seen as suffering from a similar universalized provincialism. And although the philosophical and theoretical contradictions associated with liberal democracy have undoubtedly influenced power relations in the postcolonial world in important ways, they are also insufficient to mediate electoral policies of inclusion and de-marginalization in the postcolonial societies including Nigeria.

Nugent (2008) argues that we have to consider the broader political structure within which movement of democratization are embedded. He insightfully pointed out, divergent processes of state formation have resulted in the emergence of alternate democracies, that would expect histories of colonial domination to produced distinct democratic trajectories precisely because the colonial project entailed the construction of very particular types of state institutions, political alliances and forms of knowledge. Postcolonial democracies, therefore, require an analytical framework of deconstruction and reconstruction of formality into substance by challenging the existing vernacularization of imperial knowledge into the rootedness of dispossessed people through encounters of colonialism and emancipatory politics. It implies a continuing querying of and resistance to the formative relations of power, signification and representation and the material and discursive consequence of such dominant thought and action (Lee, 2011).

Post-colonialism is therefore an inherent dialectic of critique and counter critique. From this moment, the European development colossus was inscribed in the social theory, which produces Enlightenment thought that proceed by way of a series of binary opposite, modern vs pre-modern, western vs critical, rational vs irrational, colonized vs colonizer, empowered vs disempowered, capitalist vs precapitalist-which are locked in an asymmetrical power relationship (Lushaba, 2009). Furthermore, the former refer to societies that have reached the apogee of progression in humanity and history, while the latter are seen as in transition and defined by ideological and material retrogression of voicelessness, exclusion, subordination and domination.

Election, in terms of its origin in postcolonial world, was a colonial contrivance that evolved as part of the institutional transfer of the superstructure of liberal democracy from the metropolitan enclave (Jinadu, 1995). There were veritable signs of pre-colonial political systems in Africa that had some artefact of democratic norms and practices embedded in them, the concept of voting and the notion of a political majority and minority were not part of the African political tradition (Albert, 1992). Consensus, dialogue and the political collective were emphasized, as opposed to individualism, atomization and the majoritarianism of the western capitalist political system (Adejumobi, 2000).

Cohen (1983) submitted that the electoral procedure them was generally used to determined, or at least to legitimize, the form, rate and direction of the decolonization process. Adejumobi (2000) surmised that the genealogy of the authoritarian character of post-colonial elections in decolonized societies is considered relevant to contemporary trajectory of electoral politics in Nigeria. He argues that electoral pedagogy took place under colonial rule; colonialism produced three sharp contradictions or paradoxes for postcolonial electoral politics and behavior, particularly of the leadership. First, colonialism by its very nature and character is antithetical to the basic and philosophy of elections and democracy, having been constructed on a base of authoritarianism and domination.

Thus superintending the electoral process,

particularly when the colonial regime itself was seemingly interested and involved in the politics of power transfer, was very complex and problematic and the context to which an impartial or free and fair colonial election was possible were therefore questionable. Second, although the decolonization project was woven around democratic principles and the ideals of self-determination and social justice, the emergent political elites were educated and socialized under a highly centralized and authoritarian order (Chazan, 1993). Third, the statist character of colonial rule, which survived the era, was later to determine the objective and terrain of electoral competition. These were the legacies of postcolonial democracy which continuously marginalized and repressed the very people that the bride honor of the liberal democracy claimed to protect. Since the triumph of *electoralism* as the unidirectional conceptualization of liberal democracy in postcolonial societies, the competition in election has intensify to a struggle for power and primitive accumulation among elites (Ake, 1985 & 2000).

Democracy in the postcolonial state disempowers the citizens from the critical engagement of its content and essence. Ultimately, a democratic society should not be identified by whether of hoe it conducts winner-takes-all elections but rather how it allows for political inclusivity, freedom of speech, independence of media and Judiciary, policy empowerment, access to property right. Ensuring the consolidation of these elements enforces building of political participation as opposed to voting once every few years in most contested election. Moreover, exclusionary democracy has reified itself with characterization of deprivation, denial, alienation and exploitation constituting its praxis.

It is at this juncture that Gayatri Spivak's subaltern exclusion and marginalization and its counter reaction to their prevailing condition becomes exquisite to the analytical framework of electoral politics and postcolonial democracy. The subaltern discourse is used here to deconstruct the logic of bourgeoisie hegemony, elite domination and class interest that have underlined liberal democracy towards a substantive form. The dialogical, inclusive

and people oriented theorization discourse anchored on deliberative democracy as a political corridor to give voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless is paramount. After all, the essence of democracy reside in the relationship between the state and the people, especially on how much control the latter over the former.

The Essence of Subalternity in an Electoral Democracy

Subaltern postcolonial studies have provided various discourse with which subaltern, subjugated and subordinated can be identified. Scholars like Guha, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty Homi Bhabha, Benita Perm, Chatterjee and others have made their inputto the conceptualization of subaltern and how the subaltern can be entitled to their voice or effectively be represented in democratic polity. Gayadri Spivak's argument in her postcolonial theory of the subaltern is fundamentally predicated on the 'margin' which she refers to as the silenced centre (Binebai, 2015). Her argument is contained in a seminal essay christened "Can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak, 1988).

In her essay, Spivak constructed the fate of the subaltern subject and how the subaltern can be jeopardized by politics of representation. Since representation in liberal democracy is patterned to the privilege class in the society the effective representation of the subaltern is a mirage. This will always conditioned the subaltern in the terrain of margin, the silent centre and the domain of voicelessness. The subaltern classes are those individuals (citizens) or groups that are subjugated by class hegemony subordinated by the dominant theory, and excluded from having any meaningful position from which to speak. Gramsci, writing from a Marxist perspective was the progenitor of the term 'subaltern classes' to described those groups 'subordinated' by hegemony' and excluded from any tangible role in a regime of power (Holden, 2002). Gramsci had used 'subaltern' in his writings as a substitute for 'proletariat' while in prison in the 1930s to avoid government censors who waited to prevent Gramsci's political writings from entering the public sphere (Chaturvedi, 2007).

For Gramsci, in order for a particular social

group to acquire and maintain power the most established form of social and political 'control' which combines physical force or coercion with intellectual, moral and cultural persuasion or consent (Ransome, 1992) must be unleashed. As Marx and Engels (1846) had long forewarned that the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas. According to them the class which owns the means of material production in any society also controls the means of mental production. It is on this background that liberal democracy has been hijacked as the manipulative project of the political elites to capture the state through illiberal and electoral subterfuge for personal accumulation and crony patronage. In this case, election has been reduced to unilateral value of unmediated intensity for power competition with little modicum of societal value attached to it.

In the post-colonial studies 'subaltern' has been used to refer to those individuals or groups dominated or oppressed by a more powerful 'other' within a colonised society (Moretona, 2008). Homi Bhabha, a foremost theorist in post-colonial thought, highlights the importance of social power relations in his working definition of subaltern groups as "an oppressed groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of power centre (Bhabha, 1996). Santos (2002) declared that subaltern can be seen within the context of counter hegemonic practices, movements, resistances and struggles against particular social exclusion. The subaltern theory takes the perspective of the 'other' as one that has had no voice because of race, class and gender (Binebai, 2015).

The archetypical orthodoxy of Spivak's argument is that the subalterns are not people who can be represented by privileged class. They are subjects who should be empowered to speak for themselves. They should be inventors and masters of their own voices. It is only when the subaltern speaks for themselves that the subalternity attached to their identity is displaced. Spivak, a brilliant deconstructionist and postcolonial critic reinforced this critical thought to strengthen third world theorization in the literally and cultural disciplines. Her argument has been transplanted from such discipline to engage political science theoretical assumptions in the area of democracy and

election.

The Context of Electoral Politics in Nigeria

From a mood of excitement and great expectations of the harbinger of democracy, the evaluation of Nigerian electoral politics has declined to a streak of pessimism and has ended up in near despair. Nigerian's renewed attempt at democratic polity in 1999 generated huge enthusiasm comparable to the mood in the country on the eve of national independence in 1960. However, the experiences in the enthronement of electoral democracy have diminished the enthusiasm of Nigerians in the same way, the enthusiasm with which they bid farewell to the infamous colonial rule diminished (Aina, 2004). In this period, reverberations in the political firmament have stultified democratic progression and supplanted it with utter regression.

The conduct of election and electoral politics in Nigeria has acquired monotonous and notorious characterisation of ballot box snatching, rigging, vote buying underage voting, institutional partisanship and collusion that have successfully eroded the credibility and legitimacy voting confers on power and authority in liberal democracy. Ensuring free, vibrant and informed mass engagement in political life and government choices – key tenants of democracy – should not be conflated with the holding of regular elections in Nigeria (Su, Kwesiga, 2021). Explaining why election is heavily besieged with high level of manipulations and illiberalism in Nigeria, Nwankwo (2010) contends that:

Genuine democracy is not and cannot be anchored on a political system where the party in power declares that election are equivalent to war: that it must win at all cost even when popular opinion points to the contrary; where internal democracy is absent and where selection has replaced the process of free and fair election. We cannot lay claim to democracy when elections are manifestly rigged in favour of the party in power or particular candidates; we cannot lay claim to democracy when internal democracy is virtually absent, where

candidates with questionable credentials are forcefully imposed on the people; where the people's vote do not count in the choice of their leaders; when the electoral body colludes with the political party in power to rig elections; when democratic pretensions denominate to political violence, fraud, thuggery and recklessness.

Ultimately, the incursion of military into governance exacerbated the logic of autocracy and absolutism into the political landscape of Nigerian state. As Adekanye (2001) submitted that the military mid-wifed democratic transition was orchestrated with significant inherent contradictions and crucial unresolved issues cannot in any way be a catalyst to democratic consolidation. The military political culture of primitive accumulation, lack of expansion of the democratic space, crony politics, neopatrimonial tendencies, have permeated the civilian political class, some of whom served in various capacities under the military regimes in the country. These social category of politicians have been euphemistically called 'militician's (Jega, 2007 and Momoh, 2007), and their style of leadership is referred to as 'garrison democracy' (Bako, 2007)

At every electoral season; there is often the pollution of terrain arising from the activities of political elites and their god fathers to dominate the public sphere with highly infused ethnic, populist and most often propaganda that threatens the national security of the country. We have seen missive letter written by a former president, often with revolutionary content and egotistic adumbration lacking in substance to advance people oriented programmes and deepening participatory democracy. Ake (1996) aptly captured this scenario succinctly that the political struggle within the ruling class is intense and normless and the premium on power is exceptionally high. The class constantly endangers itself by engaging in a ceaseless struggle in which all seek power without limitation as to means and exercise whatever power they have without restraint except that arising from self-interest. There are unbridling displays of intolerant attitude by the political

elites to capture power at all cost in our democracy.

The critical elements of democratic custodianship in liberal democracy like media, political party, civil society, religious organization and traditional institution. They have been recruited through corporatism and entryism to continue the prebendal, praetorian and predatory characterization that have underlined the relationship between the political elites and citizens. Painting a grim picture of the crisis of the political elites to democratic consolidation, Obi (2004) asserts that:

The implication of the nature of dominant faction of the political elite is that it sees democracy more as a means to an end, rather than end itself. This creates problems in relation to its capacity to truly represent the broad interest of the Nigerian people, or even play by the rules, when its grip on power is threatened. This more often than not, results in 'cash and carry politics,' or violence, both of which fail to deliver the dividends of democracy to the people.

The problem of elitist decision-making cut across the major political parties, PDP, APC, APGA, SDP and the likes. In this regard, party decisions are taken in total dissonance and disregard of ordinary party members. Again, important democratic requirement such as party primaries have been transformed to ritual formalities rather than a genuine electoral process. In some instance, a minority group of elders, god-fathers, money bags and corporate bureaucrats have organized themselves into a politburo mafia gang to hijacked democratic process and institutional independence of the political parties to their neo patrimonial interest by substituting election with selection and anointment often reserved for the highest bidder. The Nigerian political parties have not been able to abide by the tenets of internal party democracy which has become one of the principles trampled upon by power shift, zoning or rotation (Alli & Kwaja, 2014).

The parties prefer the backdoor negotiation and distribution of party officers which are then

brought out for the endorsement of party members, usually for a fee. To be sure, political parties are not keen to deepened democracy. Rather, they are more preoccupied with the crude capture of power. They have abandoned their traditional role of membership recruitment and mobilisation and political education. With the emergence of "Godfathers", owners and joiners, political nomads and the use of uncivil means to win elections, Nigerian political parties have continued to contribute to de-democratisation (Igini, 2011). This is why party primaries are largely not open, fair, transparent, democratic and inclusive. This, the democratic rights of party members have been sacrificed and so eventually will be the democratic and voting rights of the electorate (Alli & Kwaja, 2014).

Now, in the present context of ascendancy of illiberal election in Nigeria underlined by the construction of binary relationship between the elites and subjects, dominated and subjugated, empowered and disempowered colonizer and colonized, voiced and silenced have become institutionalized by the nature of the prevailing electoral politics.

The amended 2010 electoral Act removed section 87(a), which granted INEC the power to intervene and sanction a political party, which fails to comply with the provisions of the Act in the conduct the primaries, such that, its candidate for election shall not be included in the election for the particular position in issue. In the amended 2010 Election Act signed into law, this provision has been expunged by the legislators, thus stripping, INEC of the powers to arbitrate in cases of disputes over primaries.

Intervening on this development, Igini (2011) observes that "The dictatorship inherent in elitism has triumph over the overarching pluralism which underpins the democratic structure that Nigeria currently operates". It is all about the struggle for power. As noted by Amuwo (2007) "The foremost societal structure, the Nigeria state furnishes the most important context and is the most coveted prize of political contests and power game". It is also the site of high wire political struggle and severe competition between social classes and political groups jostling for political influence, power and hegemony. Constriction of the democratic space and public policy construction under the

bourgeoisie electoral democracy has created a subaltern group who felt their voice has been silenced and chained from engendering their interest and grievances. It has generally been argued that without a strong sense of nationhood or citizenship through deliberate inclusionary mechanism the Nigeria state is an easy prey to sectional and private interest (Forrest, 1995).

The vulnerability is accentuated whenever politicians show no volition to democratise the public space in order that marginalized, subjugated and oppressed class could have self-expression. This has germinated seed of reaction and resistance that threatens the very foundation of the Nigeria state itself. In most cases, this has evidenced through a highly toxic manifestation of insurgency, terrorism and kidnapping. This assertion is supported by a widely publicised speech at the south-south economic summit in Asaba between April 25-28, 2012 (Orji and Uzodi, 2012). The then National security adviser to the president Goodluck Jonathan, General Andrew Azazi, argued that the activities of members of Boko Haram and suicide bombing in the country could be traced to the PDP politics of exclusion.

Azazi says:

The PDP got it wrong from the beginning by saying Mr. 'A' can rule, Mr. 'A' cannot rule. Mr. 'B' can rule, Mr. 'B' cannot rule, according to the PDP conventions, rules and regulations and not according to the constitution. I believe that created the climate for what has manifested itself this way, the situations that created problems are not just about religion, poverty or the desire to rule. It is the system of our electoral politics (Alli and Kwaja, 2014) (Insertion mine).

The quality of conversation and narrative that pervades Nigerian political climate is also critical to building Substantive democracy. The prevailing colloquy that pervades the democratic atmosphere in Nigeria at pre-election, election and post-election seasons are so infantile and amateurish to the challenges of governance. Issues like, nationality, age, ethnicity, religion and oratory skills are profusely elevated to national discourse,

thereby relegating the critical governance challenges like education, health, economic development etc to the background. These governance discourses constitute the programmatic emblem of advancing the development and public goods to the subaltern groups. Rather, the state and its institutions are appropriated for individualistic and crony interest through renter politics. Again, Amuwo (2007) contend that:

As politics become increasingly monetised and invariably volatile, neo-liberal democracy and periodic elections lose their meaning for those whom the state has become increasingly irrelevant under market reforms. On the contrary, those who have the power and leverage to structure phony democracy and organize flawed and fraudulent elections bask in the euphoria of a big business that delivered huge financial, political and electoral profits.

The political elites in Nigeria has exhibited significant proportion of unaccountable and praetorian style of politics since the advent of democracy at the forth Republic what then shall be the future of electoral democracy in postcolonial Nigeria? How can the subaltern Nigerians speak? And what is the conceptual platform that will supersede the 'colonial democracy' in practice? Providing these answers will bring us into a brief excursion of epistemic theorization of deliberative democracy.

Electoral Politics under the Framework of Deliberative Democracy

Liberal democracies were born with conflicting ideals at their heart, and they have had to wage a constant battle of ideas against elitist detractors. Even to the point of trying to incorporate such criticisms and conversational discourse, it still contends with today's numerous internal and external challenges that are possibly growing in confidence. The general plight of contemporary liberal democracies has been and continues to be a source of concern for democratic theorists in political philosophy (Mackenzie, 2009). Public deliberation is now well ensconced as an

object of research and dispute among social and political theorists. At the core of this deliberative turn (Dryzek, 2000) in democratic thought is the intuition that democracy comprises more than just a majoritarian and representative procedure of decision-making, or a site for the tug of competing forces, but also consists in the exchange of reasons and arguments (Festernstein, 2014).

Mackenzie (2009) surmised that deliberative democracy is a model of democratic government that seem to overcome the failings of purely representative model by placing a large emphasis on the value of 'deliberation'. Deliberation in this context refers to a process, or more often processes of rational argumentation. The central claim, therefore, is that voting is not enough to sustain democracy. As Schumpeter contend (2007), cited in Gauba, that: Running of government and framing of public policies is the task of professional politicians; the role of ordinary citizens is confined to vote for the politicians, the political parties and the programmes of their choice at the time of periodic elections. In other words, modern democracy is primarily the rule of politicians in which ordinary citizens play a very limited role, at regular intervals. In view of the above, deliberative democracy has emerged as a rebuttal and resistant against the representative form of democracy to enthrone a culture of active participation and ideological pluralism. Notably, representation is the bulwark and conscience of liberal democracy. Toffler's forceful opposition against representative government is quite revealing. He stated that: "representative government does not change the structure of power: nowhere do the people exercise control. Election merely provides the illusion of equality and exercise of power. Election takes place intermittently but the exercise of influence by the elite goes on uninterruptedly. Everywhere, the gap between the representative and the represented widened" (Toffler, 1989).

The theory of deliberative democracy is usually viewed as an account of the legitimacy of political decision. It expresses an ideal of democratic decision-making as a process of reasoned public discussion of arguments for and against some proposal with the aim of arriving at a judgment which is generally acceptable

(Festenstein, 2004). Bohman (1996) sums up the ideal of deliberative democracy precisely as a dialogical process of resolving problematic situations that cannot be settled without interpersonal co-ordination and co-operation. However, the ideal of deliberative democracy may sound too idealistic to ever come to fruition. But, this study found it relevant as a theoretical discourse to sharpen the formality and rituality of election especially to accommodate the subaltern voice in a postcolonial society. It was George Habermas theories of communicative action and discourse ethics that provided the core normative basis for deliberative model of democracy.

Habermas work can be described as the attempt to rescue the enlightenment democratic vision in the wake of its rather one-sided and distorted incorporation into modern western democratic culture (Mackenzie, 2009). The fundamental problem with the classic enlightenment project was that it assumed that every society is governed by rational individualism. Habermas argued instead that we cannot presume that our own idea of a rational solution to a problem is one that all other rational beings must share. Rather we have to present our reasoning through argumentation and debate, and only when we have reached a consensus can we say that we have found the proper rational course of action (Habermas, 1990). The innovative aspect of Habermas' claim in this regard, however, is that he turn to every language use to construct his properly dialogical conception of human rationality. If we understand the presuppositions of human communication, argues Habermas (1990), then we will be able to understand the democratic potential of debate. This framework is increasingly essential in widening political participation and entrance of the marginalized subaltern group into power relations in Nigeria. It is important to note, that the post-colonial context of this work is not to create and recreate absolute resistance against western knowledge production. Rather, post colonialism is an approach that has long asked us to be conscious of the situatedness of our own knowledge, and to interrogate what that might mean for our scholarship (Spivak, 1988). In other words, we can hybridize and transplant theories as long as the context and form is relevant to our situation.

Deliberative democracy could be pragmatically employed to enrich the legitimacy and effectiveness of real existing democracy. Akin to Habermasian logic, Young (2000) sees public sphere which is the oxygen of deliberative democracy as “the primary connector between people and power,” it substantiates the citizen driven democratic structure and governance that foster states society relation. The latter further develops is threefold: opposition and accountability influence over policy, and changing society through society (Obadiare, 2004). There is the risk of conversational or dialogical imperialism inherent in a deliberative democracy. But a democracy of inclusion and empowerment acknowledges the existence of a space where all strata of citizenry can engage in debates, freedom of expression, publicity, free flow of opinion, access to information, dialogue and the freedom to contest established orthodoxies. Why should the state seek to 'totalize' (Bayart, 1986) dialogue, stifle it or at the very worst subordinate voices? The theoretical import of this discourse is that election is seemingly a ritual and rhetoric without any tangible contribution to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

In rethinking electoral politics in Nigeria, this study affirms that strengthening the quality of conversation and expanding the political space by incorporating the voice of the lower class through de-elitism of electoral politics will advance the order of democracy in a postcolonial Nigeria. Critics have accused deliberative democracy as being utopia in nature. And the lack of pragmatism in the theory like, how can deliberations be transformed into public policy and what method is adopted to reach consensus? These are questions that deliberative democratic theorists failed to answer. Besides, we may value democracy precisely because it allows diversity and dissensus to flourish, and we may not want to question an idea of democracy that places such a strong emphasis on dialogue and agreement. Hence, democracy becomes bastardized and devalued as voting becomes a metaphor for disempowerment as the people are deceitfully made to vote without choosing.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to situate that the electoral policies in Nigeria is enmeshed in a binary opposition of the elites and subaltern group which is a reminiscent of a postcolonial societies. The spivakian discourse entails the deconstruction of inequality and marginalization that have characterized the Enlightenment artifact of liberal democracy. There is no gainsaying that elections in Nigeria have become ritualized and formalized without substantive form. Democracy has become the elitist project that has been hijacked to create and recreate disempowerment, oppression, exclusion and dispossession.

The public sphere during and after election, has been polluted with dominant discourse driving by sectional, clannish and primordial sentiments or nuances. The electoral process has been authoritarian, steeped in rampart unleashing of violence and illiberalism. Hence, the paper argues that deliberative democracy became relevant to enthroning quality conversation and expanding the public sphere to sharpen the essence of electoral democracy in Nigeria. The dialogical form is not only a site of contestation and resistance but aspiring to conduct a healthy narrative and counter narrative that promotes the tangibility of substantiveness in a liberal democracy especially debates about healthcare, education, economic development, industrialization, labour relations that are critical to popular consciousness and societal advancement.

The future of election and democracy in Nigeria remain hugely controversial, and open to speculation. The issue is not whether multipartism and election are desirable in postcolonial Nigeria. However, emphasis should not be on the form, rather the context and its tangibility. Again, the Nigerian state should be impartially and non-partisan seen as agent of promoting major component of liberal democracy, the constitutionalism and rule of law, neutrality and autonomy of electoral institution, press and security agencies. The Nigerian state has to imbibe the culture of developmentalism and social policy programmes to reduce material poverty that polarizes the society and also create site of electoral clientelism and servitude.

References

Adejumobi, S. (2000) 'Elections in Africa: *Fading shadow of Democracy*', International

political science review, vol.21, No. 1, pp: 59-73.

Adejumobi, S. (2004) 'Democracy, Good Governance and Constitutionalism in Africa; in Odion-Akharne, S. (Eds.) *Governance: Nigeria and the World*, CENCOP: Lagos.

Adekanye, B. (2011). 'From violence to politics: key issues internationally'. A keynote presentation at the fifth international, Ethnic Studies Network, (ESN) Conference from violence to politics', hosted by initiative on conflict resolution and Ethnicity (INWRE) University of Illster, Northern Ireland.

Aina, A.D (2004). Party and Electoral Politics, in Agbaje, A.A.B, Diamond, L. and Onwudiwe, E (Eds) *Nigeria's Struggle for Democracy and Good Governance*, Ibadan University Press.

Ake, C. (1985). 'Indigenization problems of transformation in a Neocolonial Economy', in Ake, C. (Ed.) *Political Economy of Nigeria*. London: Longman.

Ake, C. (1996). *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Ibadan: Spectrum books.

Ake, C. (2000). *the Feasibility of Democracy in Africa*, CODESRIA: Dakar.

Albert, J.O. (1992). 'Contemporary problems of Democracy in Nigeria; The pre-colonial and colonial Antecedent,' paper presented to the CODESRIA General Assembly, Dakar.

Alli, W.O. and Kwaja, C.M.A (2014). Power shift and the future of Elections in Nigeria, in Ayoade, J.A.A., Akinsanya, A.A and Ojo, O.J.B. (Eds.) *Nigeria: Descent into Anarchy and Collapse*: Ibadan: John Archers.

Bako, S. (2007). The rise and consolidation of Garrison Democracy in Nigeria: 1999-2007. Paper presented at the 2-Day Conference on the Theme: Nigeria's Democratic Development: 1999-2007. Organized by the Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Kano.

Bayart, J.F. (1986). 'Civil Society in Africa'. In Chabal, P. (Ed.) *Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the limits of power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Binebai, B. (2015). 'Voice construction in the post-colonial text: Spivakian Subaltern Theory in Nigeria Drama' *African Research Review*, vol. 9, No. 39.

Chakrabarty, D. (2000). *Provincializing Europe: Post-colonial Thought and Historical Differences*. Princeton: Princeton Press.

Chaturvedi, V. (2007). 'A critical Theory of subalternity: Rethinking class in Indian Historiography?' *Left History*, vol. 12. No. 1.

Chazan, N. (1993). 'Between Liberalism and

- Statism. African political culture and democracy', in Diamond, L. (Ed.) *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner.
- Cohen, D.I. (1983). 'Elections and Election Studies in Africa,' in Barongo, Y. (Ed.) *Political Science in Africa: A critical Review*, London: Zed Books.
- Cooper, F. (1994). 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking African History', *American Historical Review* vol. 99, No. 5.
- Dryzek, J. (2000). *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberal, Critics, Contestations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Festernstein, M. (2004). 'Deliberative Democracy and Two models of Pragmatism; *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol.7, No.3. London: Sage Publication.
- Forest, T. (1995). *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria*, Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press.
- Gaub, O.P. (2007). *Introduction to political theory*, Macmillan, India.
- Habermas, J. (1990). *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. Cambridge: polity press.
- Hazelkorn, E. (1995). *A New model of radical Democracy*, Dublin Institute of Technology.
- Holden, P. (2002). *The Subaltern: Political Discourse – Theories of Colonialism and Post colonialism*. Singapore: National University of Singapore.
- Igini, M. (2011). Amended Electoral Act, 2010 strips INEC of all powers to determine qualification on status of any candidates Business Day. Lagos
- Jega, A.M (2007). *Democracy, Good Governance and Development in Nigeria*. Ibandan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Lushaba, L.S. (2009). Development as Modernity, modernity as development, *CODESRIA*: Dakar.
- Mafeje, A. (1995). 'Theory of Democracy and the African Discourse: Breaking Bread with my fellow-travellers, in Chole, E. and Ibrahim, J. (eds.) *Democratisation process in Africa: problems and prospects*, CODESRIA, Dakar.
- Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Post-colony*, University of California press, Berkeley
- Momoh, A. (2007). Provisional notes on Authoritarian Democracy in Nigeria. Paper presented at the International Conference on the theme: Nigeria's Democratic Development: 1999-2007: Trends, problems, challenges and prospects, organized by Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Kano.
- Moore, D.S. (1998). 'Subaltern Studies and the Politics of Place: remapping resistance in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands,' *cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 13, No.3.
- Moretona, E. (2008). Restoring the history of the Subaltern: A corpus informed study of the history of Maryprince, A West Indian Slave. A Thesis in the Department of Humanities, School of English, University of Birmingham.
- Nwankwo, A.A. (2010). Politics Democracy and Development in Nigeria; paper presented at the 16th National Delegate conference, Academic staff union of universities, Benue State University, Makurdi.
- Nzongola-Ntolaja, E. (1997). 'The State and Democracy in Africa', in, Nzongola-Ntalaja, G. and Lee, M.C. (Eds.) *the state and Democracy in Africa*, AAPS Books: Harare.
- Obadare, E. (2004). Manufacturing Civil Society: The Abacha Junta and the struggle for public space in Nigeria. In Agbaje, A.AB, Diamond, L. and Onwudiwe, E. (Eds.) *Nigeria's Struggle for Democracy and Good Governance*. Ibadan University Press.
- Obi, C.I (2004). 'Nigeria: Democracy on Trail' Public lecture, Swedish Development Forum, Stockholm.
- Olaitan, W.A (2005). 'Elections and the making and unmaking of Democracy in Nigeria', in Onu, E. and Momoh, A. (Eds.) *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*. NPSA Publication.
- Orji, N. and Uzodi, N. (2012). The 2011 Post-Election violence in Nigeria, Policy and Legal Advocacy, Abuja.
- Paley, J. (2008). *Introduction in Democracy: Anthropological Approaches*, in Paley J. (Ed.), School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe.
- Ransome, P. (1992). *Antonio Gramsci: A new introduction*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheaf Sheaf.
- Spivak, G.C. (1988). 'Can the Subaltern Speak? In Nelson, C and Grossberg, L. (Eds.) *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana.
- Su, M, Kwesiga, E. (2021). The futility of elections: Rethinking Democracy in East Africa, *In Hitchen, J. Electoral Democracy in Africa: Reflections or Realities. A centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) publication, Abuja.*
- Toffler, A. (1989). *The Third wave*. New York Basic Books
- Young, I.M. (2000). *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.