NIGERIA DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: OPIUM OR POTENCY?

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Abstract
Looking at the political landscape in Africa and Nigeria in particular, one easily observes a divide between the political elites and the masses both in terms of socio-political and economic powers. The masses are simply kept on the periphery. Yet this is a polity that claims to be a democracy which has been described as 'Government by the people, of the people and for the people.' It is a situation like this that has made a number of scholars to view democracy as simply illusion and opium of the people. The concern of the present work is to argue that democracy is not an illusion, neither is it an opium. While acknowledging the conceptual and operational difficulties surrounding the conceptualization of democracy, it also factors the reality of oligarchic stranglehold. Using the method of hermeneutics, the paper interprets politics in terms of Karl Marx history of struggle which is basically a struggle between inclusivity and exclusivity of the masses. While the iron law of oligarchy is a reality, it is for the people to struggle to thin down the circle of power of the oligarchy or at least to increase their own sphere of influence. I argue that democracy is more suitable for this struggle given the psychological force of ownership that it projects. It nevertheless factors atomization of the masses, apathy, ignorance among others as what keeps the masses from achieving this. It observes that in Nigeria the hydra-headed factors of ethnicity and religious bigotry further incapacitate a unified action from the masses.

Keywords: Democracy, Nigeria, Opium, Potency

Introduction
The framers of democracy as a system of governance had the mind ofhanding over the ownership of the government to the people. Even in its etymology democracy designates rule, *critos* of the people,

demos. The term demos had its evolution. It moved from being used as a reference to the people of the countryside, to being used for the commons as opposed to polites (citizen) and then to the entire population. Inspite of the theoretical promises, it is fraught with many difficulties in the praxis that many scholars have considered democracy as simply an illusion. Democracy for these scholars has never been in practice a rule by all people neither in today's representational democracy nor even from its birthplace in Athens where there was no pretence that democracy was a rule for all. The practice had always been rule not by all but by many particularly the *polites* as opposed to the plebs, the citizens precisely adult male members of the polis-community. And even at that the total number has always been 5,040 such that it does not even include all the adult males of the polis. This negative feeling against democracy is even made more acute given the recognition that people even do not actually govern and that it is the bidden of the few that is most often done. In this the proponents of political-economic elitism have argued not just with reference to democracy but with all forms of government that in the normal course of governance it is the few that welds the real and actual power. This is not just ideological but science of the organization of human society. Michel for instance speaks in terms iron law of oligarchy. One may not go far to see that the claims of elitism have *fundamentumin re*. That there is truth in this claim is evidenced in the situation of governance in Nigeria. For the present writer while recognizing the reality of oligarchic hijack, interprets political history in terms of Karl Marx history of struggle which for the present writer is essentially the history of struggle between inclusivity and exclusivity. In each case it is always the people that must stand against exclusivity in order to reduce its sphere. With regard to democracy, the *demos* of democracy must continually assert itself if democratic process would be respected and oligarchic stranglehold increasingly dislodged.

Democracy asGovernment by the People and the Reality of Oligarchic Stranglehold

Ever since Abraham Lincoln, democracy has come to be characterized as government of the people, by the people and for the people. This is rhythmic as it is idyllic but as J. Obi Oguejiofor

(2007) observes, democracy in real terms is not as straightforward as Abraham Lincoln defines it. According to him, the term can be said to have "descriptive and normative, idyllic and real, theoretical and practical connotations." While in its descriptive, idyllic and theoretical dimension, "democracy would mean the type of government in which the people, the masses rule," in its normative and practical dimension, "the term refers to the actual practices whereby the legitimacy of the ruling elite is derived from majority of the populace through forms of expression of their will. This already shows some difficulty, some disparity between theory and the praxis where in the theoretical is more democratic than the practical. It is this disparity that has the subject of attack by many a scholar. This is all the more where in praxis the legitimizing of the ruling elite by the majority is questionable and many cases brazenly disregarded and obstructed leading eventually to oligarchic hijack. The dissenting voices do not so much find problems with regard to the notion of democracy as government for the people and of the people. Though democracy could fall short in the praxis as government for the people and of the people, there is no conceptual difficulty with regard to the government being for the people and of the people. But what has not sunk down with many is how a government could be run by the people in terms of all people and not just few people. In his masterly piece, "Africa and Illusion of Democracy", Godfery Igwebuike Onah (2004) argues extensively on the absurdity of the so called rule by the people. In fact, his view is clearly captured in the phrasing of the title of the work which portrays democracy as illusion. Well, he would not be a lone and the first dissenting voice. Socrates was even the first to reject democracy, though on a different ground. I. F Stone remarked that following Plato's Apology it would seem that Socrates got into trouble with the Athenians not just because of exhorting them to virtue, but according to him, the wider perspective indicates that the first and most fundamental disagreement was on the nature of the human community. Socrates rejected the concept of Greek polis, an association of free men in which the ruled is the ruler. Socrates' basic thesis according to Xenophonon is "that it is the business of the ruler to give orders and of the ruled to obey." (Stone, 1989) According to him, the true or ideal "kings and rulers" are those who know how to rule."(Stone,

1989) Here Socrates was defending absolute rule for it is not the consent of the governed that is required, it is simply and quite dangerously their submission. This is obviously an authoritarian regime that creates a gulf between the ruled and the ruler. In this there seems too little time before the façade of "the one who knows" become eclipsed by the face of tyranny. Monarchies have slipped to totalitarianism in the history of mankind. For Plato, as for Aristotle democracy is worst kind of government. Plato in particular characterizes democracy as next in the sliding to despotism. Democracy for them violated their fundamental notion that the rulership of a state should be in the hands of those with special talent and training for it. And so Aristotle claims that his grouse about democracy is because it arises out of the assumption that those who are equal in any respect are equal in all respects as well as the claim that because men are equally free, they are absolutely free. How democracy could be next to despotism is a little bit not clear unless he means tyranny of the majority which is unfortunately what today's democracies have had to suffer. It is this tyranny of majority that is one of the major problems that led to Kwesi Wiredu's advocacy for consensual democracy in which both formal and substantive representation matter for all parties. It seems that Plato thinks in terms of masses seeking a strong person to be their champion in upstaging the rich. The strong person unfortunately acquires absolute power to the chagrin of the masses over the masses. Plato seems therefore to be thinking in Karl Marx's terms. Yet the tendency to absolutism is not in anyway doubted. It may not readily turn to a one-man tyranny but to the absolutism of a group, elitism or oligarchism.

Karl Popper while tinkering with the problem of conceptualization and operationalization of democracy writes that "By democracy I do not mean something as vague as 'the rule of the people' or the rule of the majority…" (Nwabueze, 1993) What he means by democracy would be shortly noted. The elitist scholars reject democracy on what they claim is the science of society and governance. For instance, such Italian thinkers as Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca albeit independently project the view that democracy was illusory and only served to mask the reality of elite rule. They argued that elite oligarchy is the unbendable law of

human nature and that democratic institutions would do no more than shift the exercise of power from oppression to manipulation. Gerrant Parry speaks of the existence of some real power behind the sham power of the government.(Parry, 1969).Bagehot corroborates when he writes that "the real rulers are secreted in second-rate carriages; no-one cares for them or asks about them, but they are obeyed implicitly and unconsciously by reason of the splendor of those who eclipsed and preceded them.'(Bagehot, 1963)They seem to follow LoiusBradeis' disjunctive assertion that "we may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." In their book *The Irony of Democracy: An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics,* Thomas Dye and Harmon Zeigler write that "only a tiny handful of people make decisions that shape the lives of all of us and despite the elaborate rituals of parties, elections, and interest group activity, we have little direct influence over these decisions." For instance, a study led by Princeton professor Martin Gilens showed that of 1779 U.S government decisions "elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence." (en.wikipedia)There is always a tendency to an oligarchic hijack. This is part of the reason that some scholars think that the control of the demos is a hoax and refer to the so-called democracies as being at best pluralistic dictators in which selfish and unscrupulous tyrants ride on the shoulders of "the people" in order to defend only their personal interests and those of their political cronies and clubs.

Government of the People and by the People: Opium or Potency?

Onah (2004) was unequivocal when he maintained that "Modern democracy is the opium of the people—apology to Marx. It makes the people believe they are ruling when in fact they are not. The people do not know that the rulers are not really accountable to them but to their real masters—the handful rich and powerful who call the shots, that is, when they are accountable to anybody at all." Onah reasons that to deliberately speak in terms of rule by the people while in actual fact it is not the people that rule is simply a deliberate

dishonesty. Onah advocates for a different kind of government and courts aristocratic rule. Of course I do share the view that democracy is not the only form of government and the best form of it. Obviously there are people who ought to rule others. Dispositions and expertise differ. What is important is that any form of government in power must be guided by the good of the sovereign such that it is a government of the people for the people. Hence he writes "what is important is that whatever system of government adopted should guarantee some stability and some form of participation of the larger public in issues that concern all. This participation should, however, not be invasive but should be limited to the few fundamental issues about which it is possible for the general public to make an informed choice."(2004) Here Rousseau was handy. Rousseau distinguished among three types of aristocracy, namely natural, elective and hereditary. While the first according to Rousseau is the worst of all forms of government, the second is the best and aristocracy in its strictest sense. Onah pitched tent with this but was explicit in rejecting the classification of any form of government as the best in an absolute sense. He took up this on the ground of morals namely that it is more honest to talk of elective and open aristocracy. He alludes to efficiency when he avers that it is the actual job of governing is always left to a small group of supposedly qualified members of the society. According to him, what matters is that one possesses the requisite qualities for the job and that nobody is aprioristically excluded from being elected and that they are chosen by a larger section of the society.

While this may be a way out of the conceptual difficulty surrounding the concept and practice of democracy as the government by the people and of the people, it seems the advocacy may also have arisen from a certain frustration that there has never been a time government is by the people and of the people. It is actually few that govern.

Well one thing that has seemed to have eluded the grasp of antagonizers of democracy on account of its problematic definition as government by the people and of the people while advocating for government by few or that forms of government is the reality of Robert Michel's iron law of oligarchy or at least oligarchism which comes to bear in every form of government. While I may not agree

with Michel's depiction that this tendency is inevitable and unstoppable at any given time, I do agree with him of the reality of this tendency and in all forms of government. If it happens in a democracy characterized essentially as a people's government, how much more a government that is precisely depicted and legitimized as government by a few, no matter how qualified they may appear to be. There seems to be something about power that makes the holder to be restrictive of its shareholders and to make it exclusive. There is always a corruption of this power with the result that the circle of holders would continue to be thinned down with time so as to have a rather unchallenged and exclusive power, politically and economically. The holders of power may reject and antagonize moves to inclusivity. The oligarchy does not just hijack but on account of fear of creative destruction wage war against all forms of policies and reforms that would attenuate or destroy their stronghold of power. They do everything possible to retain their power in an exclusive way and as they amass more political power, they become more economically powerful and vice versa creating a full vicious circle.

I do not know where to place this, in the power itself or in the human tendencies. Is it not easy for aristocracy to slip into oligarchy? Plato envisages this gradual decline from the aristocratic ideal state, though I do not share with him that there is any ideal state. He envisages that there is the possibility of decline from aristocracy to despotism and inbetween are timocracy, plutocracy, democracy all of which for him are of degeneration from the aristocratic ideal to the mud of despotism. I do not share in the fact that democracy is a degeneration but what is highlighted here is the fact of degeneration from what one had characterized as ideal government.

For G. Mosca (1939) in his *The Ruling Class*, the various forms of government which Aristotle projected constitute simply legal fronts behind which a small ruling class wielded political power in the society. Here he distinguished between de *jure* authority and the *de facto* authority. While the former is simply the formal structure of power, the latter is the informal structure which enjoys real power. According to Mosca, while the constitution places sovereignty in the hands of many as is the case in

democracies, the constitution places in the case of aristocracy power in the hands of the upper class and in the case of monarchy in the hands of a single person, yet in every case it is always an organized minority who took the real decisions. Thus, "a king's decisions were always taken with the participation of his advisers, in aristocracy a smaller group of activists made the policies issued in the name of all the aristocrats and in a democracy the sovereign electorate was manipulated by the politicians." (Mosca 1939). Robert Michels' celebrated formulation to the effect that 'who says organization, says oligarchy falls in this light. ((Michels, 1958) It must however be noted that the elitists are not unanimous in their various accounts of the science of polity, there are really points of departure but their fundamental thesis is one, namely that power in every society is concentrated always in the hands of few. The (elitist) pluralists depart from the classical elitists in maintaining that the elites of the society are not one central body but vary in such a way that there are a number of oligarchic parties competing for influence. Sometimes they simply exist in various departments without such rivalries. This arises from the fact that attempts at control of an organization by the mass of its members involves "an amateurishness totally self-defeating in an age of large-scale organization" (Parry, 1969). An example could be found in the political party where in a political party campaigns to appropriate power. In order to achieve this, it engages in a number of activities ranging from organizing its vote and canvassing of supporters to establishing a coordinated policy lines require expertise and efficiency which strictly require professional direction. It also requires financiering, a task way beyond the ordinary masses.

In this way, the control of the party slips into the hands of its leading politicians, and bureaucracy. In the long run it is the case that mass control is discovered to be incompatible with political power and so oligarchy triumphs. According to Michel, the governing law of all social organizations is what he refers to as iron law of oligarchy. This is the law that all complex organizations regardless of how democratic they are when started eventually develop into oligarchies. He maintains that this is inevitable hence it is iron law and is the tactical and technical necessities of organization. Thus all organizations eventually come to be run by a

leadership class who far from serving the purpose of the masses will grow to dominate the organization's power structures. He went on to state that "Historical evolution mocks all the prophylactic measures that have been adopted for the prevention of oligarchy." (Michels,1958). Writing about democracy, he notes that its goal was impossible and went on to state that representative democracy as is generally practiced is a façade legitimizing the rule of a particular elite, and that elite rule which he refers to as oligarchy is inevitable. Such way of speaking is of course rational, democracy must be democracy! Yet to say that elite oligarchy which is tyranny of a sort is the unbendable law of human nature means that this oligarchism sets itself as always against any form of government in which the institutions are more inclusive. It is along this line that the elitists would fall out with the notion of Marxist's classless, egalitarian society which is shown to be the inevitable outcome of the class-conflict which had characterized all previous history. For V. Pareto (1935), 'it is, paradoxically, precisely the inequality of men which prompts them to proclaim their equality." Accordingly, the only true law was that society would always be ruled by elites of some sort. Robert Michels was pungent in noting that the leaders of the Marxian proletariat would as a matter of fact become rapidly bourgeosified once they clench power, becoming thereby strangers to their class. The inability of the Marxists to consider this inevitability of bourgeosification had led many elitist philosophers to tag Marxism as simply a time-bound ideology for the working class which is led to overthrow capitalism. It is far from being the science of society which it claimed to be. (Parry, 1969). James Burnham has similar elitist assumption to the effect that politics is always a matter of struggle between groups for power and status and that in all societies a small group will inevitably control ultimate decision making. Social change occurs as a result of a shift in the composition of the elite. (Parry, 1969). Thus it is not just found in democracies. There is no gain saying the fact that such an unbendable law of nature is hardly in sync with common good. There is therefore the need for a conceptual and pragmatic umbrage to upstage such.

John Locke the father of modern liberal and democratic society conceived the people's ownership of the government in his

perspective on sovereignty. For Locke, the legislature has the supreme power but it is not absolute. Legislative power according to him is held as a trust and is therefore only a fiduciary power. Thus there remains in the people the supreme power to remove or alter the legislative when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed on them. This is where the people have the right to rebellion. Unlike Hobbes for whom the sovereign is under God's judgment, for Locke, "the people shall judge." (Stumpf, 1994) This is obviously an ultimate situation that warrants the claim that the government is by the people. The people as tour de force is the distinguishing mark and bed rock of democracies both in their precursors in the classical antiquity and in the modern as formulated during the age of enlightenment. There is no doubt that it was created as a reaction to a concentration and abuse of power by the rulers. The rhythmic definition of democracy by Abraham Lincoln as government by the people, for the people and of the people seems to capture and buttress the fact that the people own the government. This definition makes it clear that the people, the demos run the government. I do think that while democracy defined among others as government by the people and of the people and for the people is both conceptually and practically problematic, it is at least psychologically potent. This psychological potency turns it into a pragmatic force. It is really a psychological force for the people to know that the government is for them, of them and by them. It gives them sense of ownership of the government. There is no doubt that where the reality is not in sync with this, it can lead to grave frustration. Yet it is also the case that such potency is never allowed to die without giving some trial, even if a present generation becomes unsuccessful, a future generation may muster the force required. Thus to give an instance, the activists of the Tiananmen Square in 1989 may not have achieved their set out goals of increasing political freedom before the heavy and blood thirsting clutches of the People's Liberation Army came down upon the movement, there is no doubt that their bravery have in a far reaching way provided inspiration over generations in China and even across board. It did inspire activists who succeeded to a reasonable extent in driving political change across Soviet bloc in such places ranging from Prague to Leipniz in months after June 4. 1989. Its memories

have continued to influence several generations of 21st century activists in HongKong. The 2014 Umbrella movement was momentous though it may not have succeeded in ensuring open election of HongKong's chief executive by universal suffrage. The 2019 protest was even more momentous. Though it is adjudged to have been unsuccessful in effecting its demands, at least it did succeed in making the government bend as it concerns withdrawing the extradition bill under contention. Well it must be observed that China eventually put in place National security law that empowers Beijing whisk activists over the border. (asia.nikkei.com).Inspite of the momentary failure, it is still a success for the fact that the oppressed offers resistance. Besides these protests have been sources of inspiration for global resistance against exclusive and extractive institutions and government, humanity enjoying as it were universal kinship.

I choose rather to explain what happens in every form of government in terms of history of struggle, thesis and anti-thesis. People's effort at making their voices heard is not just a mere contingency. It is a reaction, a struggle to wrestle power and when pushed to limiting situation would react in a more revolutionary way. Here the French revolution, the Glorious revolution, American revolution come to mind. The elites themselves in their various enclaves continue to scheme their way to exclude others and the masses. Perhaps the capitalist world with its profit motif canonizes this logic of elbowing out of many. The world never succeeds in overcoming the Anaximander's opposites as well as Heraclitean law of strife, not in politics! It seems that this opposition is always the unsurpassable characteristic of the cosmos as Heraclitus had suggested, yet Anaximander's view that shows war of opposites as an injustice requiring recompense remain valid especially in the human society. Though they actually represent the normal order of things, there must be striving to surpass them. Even in democracy the Karl Marx theory of struggle between the bourgeois and the proletariat still rages on. This oligarchic stranglehold happens in so many ways whether by pure oppression or by subtle manipulation. My take is while it is the case that democracy has both conceptual and operational problems, it is also the case that Iron Law of oligarchy is not only found in democracy, it is a tendency in all

forms of government. Oligarchic switch is the fact of politics. Though the mantra of government by the people and for the people and of the people could become opium of the people, it could also be a potent force in people to demand for the erection of more inclusive institutions. It is the masses that have to demand for this inclusivity. Karl Popper in spite of his grouse about democracy as government by the people and of the people speaks of democracy in terms of "a set of institutions (among them especially general elections, i.e., the right of the people to dismiss their government) which permit public control of rulers and their dismissal by the ruled, and which make it possible for the ruled to obtain reforms without using violence, even against the will of the rulers." (Onah, 2004)

The begging question here is how this institution would emerge and continue to be sustained. This is where ownership by the people comes into play. And thus the authors of Why Nations Fail remarked that "the people who suffer from the extractive economic institutions cannot hope for the absolutist rulers to voluntarily change political institutions and redistribute power in society. The only way to change these political institutions is to force the elite to create more pluralistic institutions." (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013). The problem is that here the elites and the oligarchies are more united in their agenda than the demos are who are fragmented and divided sometimes occasioned by ignorance, sometimes occasioned by the manipulation of the elites. Gerrant writes that "As a result of its deferential behavior, the majority '…abdicates in favour of its elite, and consents to obey whoever that elite may confide in.' So long as this disposition continued in the masses, the established leadership need not fear being displaced as a result of an extended franchise. There is certainly truism in Michels theory of iron law of oligarchy and its dominating power. This is because power breeds consciousness and it is cumulative as well as concentrated in such a way that it strives to exclude. The view of power as breeding power is a central tenet of Michels' theory and indeed all the elitists. These control access to information, they are on the news always, they control the fund. Besides with power comes the ability to reward loyalty, the ability to control information, the ability to control procedures. And all these can be used to strongly influence the outcome of any decisions made

democratically by members. This is why democratic attempts to hold them accountable according to Michels would be doomed to failure. This is all the more helped due in the main to the apathy, indifference and non-participation of most section of the people or masses.

The democratic tendency may not ultimately prevent the oligarchical hijack but it can exert a negative force in terms restraining its power. In this, awareness is required. Political awareness is required and reduction of apathy-knowing and being concerned with public matters and how political system works, namely that there is a small inner group which constitute the pyramidal top and are the truly influential. Yes the masses have a force of restraining. The oligarchs know quite well that for instance electoral success requires the support of voters and so to gain allegiance they must moderate their operation. If they form interest group and exert pressure they can restrain as well as destabilize. Thus they cannot but make concession and compromise if they must sustain their hold of power. In this I share the view of Mosca for whom the ruling elitist class is not a veto group which could deny at will and on all occasions the implementation of policies for which other groups in the society are pressing. This is because according to him the survival of the elite depends on its ability to adjust to the various demands of various interests. This is necessary if they must continue to occupy their position of power.

Nigerian Masses in the Politics of Struggle between Inclusivity and Exclusivity

Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the masses are yet to meaningfully enter into this politics of struggle for inclusivity. This is why the few are having their field day.I make bold to say that oligarchization of the political space is simply the apt characterization of the Nigerian situation. Not a few writers have been of the view that Nigeria had known no democracy. Eskor Toyo did not mince words in his assertion that Nigeria had never experienced democracy. Nwigwe (2003) on his part contends that categorization of Nigeria system of government is an uphill task. According to him, it is neither a monarchy though there are monarchs scattered all over in policy making positions. Neither is it aristocracy which is generally

government by the best for certainly it is not the best that are in charge, it may not even be out of place to say it is government by the worst. It is not government by the people because it is certainly not the people that govern and there is no doubt that the sphere of influence of the masses are on the lowest and barest scale. While there is a truism in this view it must be observed that there is never anywhere in the world where democracy is practiced pure and simple. Not even in the United States of America or in Europe do we have a full circle democracy. One may speak in terms of degree of the participation of the demos and the extent of inclusivity of the influence of the demos. Nwigwe takes a cue from Augustine's description of mafia government as characterizing the Nigeria system and by mafia he meant "government infested with power drunken, self-seeking, ideology-barren, orientation less operatives; usually selected by their kind in the guise of multi-party election, those to rule are clearly predetermined and chosen even before elections takes place." (Ogundiye, 2010, 201-208). Just look at what is happening with cement which has been monopolized by the oligarchy who fronts Dangote. The prize continues to geometrically rise and yet nobody seems to be concerned. The same case with the fuel price increase in spite of the continued subsidy. Even the hallowed chambers of justice have been taken over by oligarchy that any judgment could be expected from the court of law. It is the view of this writer that the masses have not given the political class who has turned themselves into oligarchy the real and strong match that is needed. Nigeria is a country that not only suffer from the crisis of leadership but I see it more as crisis of followership who because of apathy and lack of concern do not place the elites into pressure for good governance and this emboldens the latter and turn them into oligarchs. The #endsars protest shows that the latter can be kept to their toes if the masses give them this correct match.

In the #endsars protest, the populace voiced out their frustration and disenchantment in a not just the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and police in general but also the political class that has since constituted itself into oligarchy. The #endsars was birthed since 2017 but came to its height with the October 3, 2020 show of impunity in a viral video on social media which allegedly shows SARS officers shooting an unarmed victim in Delta

State. It was indeed the last straw that ushered in the quantum of protest and participation like never in the history of Nigeria. The televised panel of inquiry proceedings showed what decay has been in that special department: gory tales of brutality, killing, maiming, inhumanity done with brazen impunity and arrogance. And this had gone on for years. What does one call it if not oligarchism, the untouchables because it is only the untouchable who could act with so much impunity and brutality outside of rule of law? What else characterizes oligarchism if not this one thing: a concentration of power that eventually abuses it? What else could depict untreated reported cases of violations of human rights violations, extortion, downright corruption which is undertaken in a concomitant toxic climate of fear and brutality? But a statement was written, namely, the demos of a democracy if they ceased to be atomized entities are tour de force in holding their political class accountable. In fact, it was this #endsars protest that is the womb of the present write-up, the present writer having always been disgusted with the uncanny docility of the Nigerian masses. It may not have achieved the de-oligarchization of the Nigerian political space but it shows that the masses can restrain a brazen show of the abuse of that power. At least the government at various levels could directly caution force members to be careful of abusing peaceful protesters and civilians they were to protect. Various broadcasts by governors and president had such lines in their speeches.

Of course there is always the struggle to silence the masses in order to give maximum power to the political class and those who had constituted themselves into oligarchy. One thing is clear, namely that the struggle to silence the masses shows the potency of the people once united. This was seen in the much disputed video of the shootings at Lekki as well as tugs that in the full view of police men fought the peaceful demonstrators. Some of the tugs as some video clips on facebook were even transported using police vehicles and army vehicles. No sooner had the protest ceased than panels were set up. Here again one sees the unrelenting effort of the few to silence the masses. I had noted that the panel in various states have been would be heading to nowhere, it was just there to douse tension and to let the masses forget. That is exactly what has played out. Of course the masses generally suffer from dementia. Then came

another round of use of economic force seen in the CBN freezing account of purported financiers of the protest. Perhaps by picking on them it would be deterrent for others and so in a way silencing the voice of the masses. Thus it may not be out of place to say that what has happened was simply a display of Machiavellianism which both sanctifies use of force and deceit just to evade accountability and to ensure that the masses are kept in check. Machiavelli concerning use force adviced that "it is necessary to take such measures like force and arms that when they (the people) believe no longer, it may be possible to make them believe by force." (Ejeziem, 2006) Machiavelli extols the practice of deceit in politics so as to achieve one's end. He even derided virtue and advised that "one must know how to colour one's actions and to be a great liar and deceiver. Men are so simple, and so much creatures of circumstance, that the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived…Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are." (Ejeziem, 97)

The same struggle to silence the masses was already seen earlier during the years of Nigeria Labour Congress. In the past, Nigeria Labour Congress was a formidable force especially during the time of Obasanjo. It tackled Obasanjo fiercely over fuel hikes and a number of times brought the country to a standstill through general strikes to make its point. Eventually Obasanjo was forced by the Labour to reverse its policy decision despite his firm control of the executive and legislative arms of government. This was in spite of the fact the Obasanjo had argued that the increase was to remove entirely fuel subsidy and drain the swamp within. Well the write-up is not about looking at the legitimacy of the demands of the union and whether it helped the nation in the long run as in that the masses had a voice and could restrain the governing elite in spite of the massive power he enjoys. Obasanjo made frantic efforts to destroy the union. Once in a televised broadcast to the nation in October 8 2003, Obasanjo showed his when he asserted that the NLC has constituted itself into a parallel government and went on to avow his preparedness to deal ruthlessly with NLC if it does not retrace its stance. He actually made good his avowal. Thus Obasanjo did not waste time to unleash this power against the vibrant NLC to render it. Obasanjo had to present a bill to parliament that aimed to curb the

NLC's powers by amending the Trade Union Act of 1990. It aimed among others at deregistration of the NLC and limiting the scope of rationale for strikes, limiting it strictly to wage disputes. The NLC was thence balkanized with the result that there arose a number of independent unions which hardly could be a tour de force in weighing in against the government. It is unfortunate that Obasanjo would come today to speak about good governance when he a bill that disintegrate voice that could speak up.

That is always the tactics of the oligarchy. They do everything to see that the demos do not unite! They know that it takes time for them to gather and gain momentum so they strive to leave them in their individuality and atomicity or at best fragmented groups that could barely exert any meaningful force. The demos are incapacitated most often by their apathy and indifference. The mass is, typically, 'atomized'. Its members are not organized for unified political action. Instead each person is much more concerned with his own private life, concentrating on his interests both in work and leisure. His contacts with others in the mass tend to be limited to the members of his family, neighbours and his immediate work associates. The narrow confines of such a life limit the individual's view of public affairs."Generally, for the elitists, especially Mosca and Michels the mass in a representative democracy was politically incompetent, apathetic and inert. And because atomized was not equipped with the wider view of the society necessary for ruling. Far from being ambitious, the mass displays a psychological need for guidance and direction. This is why for them they require to be integrated from outside by elite in order to form a solid, unified group. For example, Lenin speaking about working class revolution insists that without the elites the workers themselves never transcend their milieu to see the distinction between bread riots and total revolution. It requires therefore an elite of trained professional revolutionaries able, from their central positions in the movement, to co-ordinate its activities. In this way otherwise isolated uprisings by the mass gained revolutionary significance. For him even the working class movements aiming to promote mass interests collapsed without leadership of a bourgeois oligarchy. (Parry, 1969) Of course the elitists would always work to show that their theory of science of the society fits all situations without exception.

Well what the present writer would insist is the need for seasoned leadership for the masses to form a united and coordinated front. The #endsars protest which garnered momentum like never in the history failed as result of this lack of coordination. I would have rather that specific realizable demands should have been made and insisted upon that would be of immense help to the repositioning of the country. No doubt ending SARS is a goal but it was already granted earlier such that if there had been more practical goal it would have been better. The momentum gathered far outweighed its demand. Because at a point it looked the protest have been exhausted and lacking any focus and agenda. It did turn into bread riots with the discovery of palliatives in various states. A rare opportunity was lost or at least very small gain for a quantum of effort like never before. The social media bill continues to rear its head. Of course it has been argued that it is made for creating sense of responsibility much the same way that Obasanjo argued for the deregistration of NLC as promotion and democratization and freedom. Yet political considerations were the key motivator towards bringing the bill into existence. While sense of responsibility must be upheld, there is no doubt that the social media makes the elite class uncomfortable by the wide coverage it gives to their acts. They could mortgage the mainstream media but not the social media. In their unfortunate politics of information dissemination, they could dictate what information should be churned out and what should not as well as the way it could be presented. But unfortunately this could hardly be done with respect to the social media hence the fuss. In the words of Ademola-Olateju "the social media has altered the nature of engagement in collective conversation and dissemination of information and it is just the beginning. It has shifted the balance of power in favour of the governed, with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube becoming powerful weapons in the hands of the youth and dissatisfied voters…It is now business unusual." (Olateju, 2015)

Continuing he notes that this goes to show that "our pork-barrel democracy cannot withstand the awakening and onslaught of civil society groups, student union, professional bodies, trade unions, churches, ethnic associations, underground media, intellectuals, journalists and adherents of new media."(Olateju, 2015).Thus "as

monitoring citizens, we can become purposeful actors in our government, in our economy, in this country. By becoming smart mobs, we can form new relationships, assert new public values, and mobilize political, economic, and cultural power to translate these values into action."(Olateju, 2015).This is because as N. Anyang notes democracy "is not about what governments do: it is about what the people do to make their government accomplish things for the common good. The people must first of all have the power to make their government to rule democratically." (Anyang, 1992) Paulo Freire in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* refutes the hope that an oppressor whether real or imagined will one day on his own think of the oppressed, come to a remorse and recant the evil past and pay compensation. In this he underlines that freedom is taken, not gifted. Odey was even more when he writes "As long as people summon the courage to say no to evil while the evil lasts there is always hope that someday good will triumph over evil…But once the people, for whatever reason…learn to adjust to evil hope is gone. A situation like this evil all the chances it needs to reign and reign supreme." (Ejeziem, 2006). Unfortunately, one of the key factors against unity of the masses in the multinational country like Nigeria is ethnic and religious nepotism. The oligarchy seems to know this so well that they feed fat on the sentiment of the masses and blind them not to see that the elites are diverting attention and evading accountability. Ethnic chord is always struck to weep up sentiments.

Politicians generally know this and that is why from the very beginning as they seek vote they go ethnocentric or engage in religious blabbing and would end up engaging in ethnocentric and religious campaign strategy and obviously it is always the poor and uninformed masses who fall victim to such political power play. This simply blurs the people's sense of judgment and from the election time, the wrong candidates are voted in power who obviously would disappear to their posh houses in the Federal capital and reappears when it is time for another cycle of politicking and electioneering while the masses are left to their own precarious fate. Thanks to God that the #endsars did not end up into ethnic war between the Yorubas and Igbos. Perhaps the youth have known better. There appeared write-ups and very snappy at that and catchy that tried to show that many of the properties destroyed in the Lagos

were all valuables of Yoruba history with the intent lay the blame on the Igbos. That is obviously smart way of diverting attention and resisting the accountability being. It was near a repeat of history that blamed tagged the coup as Igbo coup and led to unleashing of mayhem on the Igbos. And the Northern Oligarchy have always hidden their agenda by stoking ethnic tension. Take the case of Matthew Kukah's 2020 Christmas message in which he audaciously spoke to power bordering on Buhari-led administration's unprecedented marginalization against non-Muslims and Christians as well as decay in governance. One would have thought that he should be applauded in all quarters since his grouse in the message was factual and real. Yet that was not to be: the same story of religious nepotism and ethnicism, ranging from call to apologize and threat to life should he repeat such. The message was simply seen an attack on Islam. Yet the message was simply on sully state of things in Nigeria today. Again, this amounts to the same stoking of ethnic sentiments to distract from the real problem.

In fact, I have always argued that the so called northernization agenda is an elitist agenda and they have always stoked to cover up this oligarchization through whooping ethnic sentiments and well thanks to the incomprehensible docility of the masses. Otherwise how would one explain the fact that in spite of the long years of being at the helm of affairs in Nigeria the northern region remains backward and low in general human development index. Why are there more out of school children in that region. Why has the North been backward and have breeding ground for insurgency despite the fact of having had so many of their own in the central government since the inception? Why would they continue with the old almajiri system that would forever be the debacle of the northern Nigeria and its masses? This is after destroying Goodluck Jonathan's legacies. This unfortunate situation can only be explained in terms of weaponization of ignorance. Today it still rages on and added to the Fulani Herdsmen palaver, today underdevelopment in the North has not abated, today security has eroded the Northern axis, today the Northern axis continues to be the headquarter of poverty which makes sense only in terms of weaponization of poverty. All these are there while Buhari, one of their own is in charge and after the campaign promise of tackling the

issue of insecurity head-on on assumption of office. Most of the security chiefs are from the same region. In all the elites seemed not affected and unconcerned maintaining uncanny silence and are always ready to whip up ethnic sentiments which unfortunately easily trip the masses.

Conclusion

What has been the major concern of the writer has been to show that oligarchization is a reality in any system of government. Democracy gets its own unfortunate share. Here in Nigeria the case is very eloquent. The write-up sees politics mainly in terms of Karl Marx struggle between the inclusivity and exclusivity of the masses. For the success of the democratic system towards inclusivity, the *demos* must attune its consciousness to the democratic process and assert themselves as well as oppose harmful political and economic moves. The whole thing unfortunately gets a new twist in Nigeria where ethnicity and religious bigotry act as set back to a unified response from the masses. The truth is that until ethnicity and religious bigotry stop holding its sway on the masses, the oligarchy would continue to have their field day and would continue to manipulate the masses along these lines, making them continue to be atomized, divided and rendered impotent.

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