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# **Lack of Social Justice: The Challenge to Nigeria's Development**

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## **Abstract**

*Nigeria has been widely perceived as a society that cannot afford the internally oriented social justice which is the societal blood stream or the substance of societal life energy. This is because of the sorrowful and brutish realities, especially the predominant crises of systemic inequalities, deprivation, lack of public morality, poverty and degeneration of human dignity. In our attempt to address this phenomenon, we employed documentary research method for gathering and analysing data while the Marxist Theory of Postcolonial State was used for the analytical framework. Nigeria's Postcolonial experience with associated imperialist features were identified. They are incompatible with Nigeria's indigenous cultural values necessary for cultivation and sustenance of social justice. The work recommends an alternative mode of production: restructuring of the economy along socialist line. Socialist transformation is the ultimate panacea for restoration of social justice and freedom from imperialist enslavement of the country, it would revive the political economy of the state to be oriented towards enhancement of indigenous cultural values as the key factor for real development that cannot take place in the context of foreign culture.*

**Keywords:** *Social justice, Bureaucratic authoritarianism, Imperialism, State, Capitalism, Post-colonial State and Poverty.*

## **Introduction**

The disillusionment and frustration of people over the inordinate issues concerning lack of fairness, human right violations, lack of rule of law and deplorable governance system which culminate in the prevailing collapsing point of the Nigerian society appear as severe threat that has eroded the confidence of people in the social justice system. Social justice is the root or foundation of every society as a system of human institutional organisation, therefore the primary factor for survival and for transformation of societies into different developmental stages.

The mode of Nigeria's emergence or creation as a state (product of imperialist powers) impacts directly on the integrity of the governance system in a manner that the political economy of the country as a postcolonial state shapes the structure of social justice. Essential feature of a post-colonial state is the fact that it is peripheral and dependent. Dependence in the sense that the state with its institutions especially social justice system still serve the interests of the colonizers who use the modality as a means of articulation of injustice and operation. The postcolonial state just being instrument of capitalist oppression and imperialist enslavement basically on the fact that the state especially the economic structure has not been decolonized in reality.

Social justice is the framework of the economic structure which is the real foundation and the basis of the rest structures especially the political super structure. The deplorable condition of the political super structure demonstrated by bureaucratic authoritarianism, lack of public morality, monopoly of power by the ruling class etc. has significantly proved that social justice has no practical relevance in Nigerian society.

Nigerian society's underdevelopment (irrespective of the enormous oil potential) is predicted on lack of social justice. The platonic theory of social justice and the sacred injunction or basis of the social contract theory is that the common good should be controlled and applied towards development and welfare of the citizens. Nigerian citizens in deplorable economic condition of unemployment crisis, poverty, exploitation etc. entangled themselves with social injustice system.

The crux of the problem is that Nigerian citizen's alienation is rife severally, to the extent that even the international community sympathetically feel aggrieved concerning sorrowful and brutish realities inflicted on the people who seek equity through the order of social justice. The work therefore sets to interrogate why the political economy of the Nigerian state is incompatible with the social justice system with a view to reconcile them, that they would be orderly restored and harmoniously compatible to promote sustainable development.

## **Conceptualization**

### **Social Justice**

Social justice refers to moralistic consolidation of human dignity demonstrated in fair and just appropriation of resources, opportunities and privileges within a society, Social Justice primarily aims at promoting human rights, equality and fairness for all individuals irrespective of their background, socio-economic status or identity. Finally, it aims at addressing issues relating to systemic inequalities in society.

Major aspects or components of social justice include: environmental justice which advocates for equal opportunities for individuals and equal access to social services. Employment creation by the state is a major aspect of social justice. Through employment, the state performs essential role of appropriation of the common good; tangible and non-tangible resources (physical and non-physical values under the custodian of the sovereign). Common good connotes different forms of wealth which join the people together with the state as a civil society that needs effective social justice system for equitable distribution, application and utilization of the wealth for prosperity of the state and the people.

### **Bureaucratic Authoritarianism**

This concept metamorphosed from colonial bourgeoisie; a social class; agents of colonial powers during colonialism. At independence, the indigenous elites who collaborated with the colonizers inherited governmental machinery but continued with the style of western education, cultural values and orientation they had adopted in form of bureaucratic authoritarianism: The prevailing system of governance in Nigeria characterized by centralized power, limited political participation, bureaucratic control, authoritarian

tendencies, hierarchical structure, and lack of accountability is premised by bureaucratic authoritarianism.

The implication is extension of (internal) colonialism in form of neo-imperialism characterized by cultural alienation, acceleration of exploitation, inequality and imperialist enslavement being the predominant feature of Nigeria as a post-colonial state.

### **Theoretical compass**

Some scholars have attempted to explain the issue relating to lack of social justice in Nigeria from different theoretical underpinnings like theories of social change and other naïve theoretical perspectives that have failed to approach the problem from the foundation (origin of the country as a post-colonial state). This study therefore, adopts the Marxist theory of post-colonial state for analytical framework. It's main thrust is on material condition of existence in the analysis of political issues (Ake, 1981). Other proponents of the theory include Franz fanon (1961), Edward said (1978) etc.

The theory is an offshoot of Marxian Political Economy. The post-colonial state is based on the colonial legacy, therefore inherited arbitrariness, intimidation, violence, exploitation, force etc. (the strategies for achieving colonial objectives) which have continued to erode the social justice system in Nigeria.

This theory does not examine issues of post-colonial state superficially. It probes into the depth of issues to ascertain the interconnection of phenomena, programmes, policies, purposely to know their class origin, behaviour and logic of their existence. It therefore penetrates deep into social facts or realities concerning social justice system to discover their essence and to explain concrete forms of their manifestation.

The theory as an approach promotes social justice through reconciliation of the authority of the state with the economic liberty of the people because of its concern for social development, production of material wealth and mode of production. In this process the dominant or supreme emphasis is not on the economy rather on the generality of the social relations.

The post-colonial Nigeria inherited bureaucratic authoritarianism (metamorphosed from colonial bourgeoisie) in control of both the political and economic structures which have consequently remained fragile, unstable, deplorable and destructive to social justice system. So lack of social justice is inherent in unstable capitalist economy of post-colonial states. Marxist approach is of the view that the only way to permanently eliminate crisis of post-colonial state especially crisis of lack of social justice would be to abolish capitalism, and shift to a socialist or communist method, Onyishi (2009). It points out that in capitalist societies, the basic function of the state is to serve and to protect the interest of the powerful and dominant class of imperialist capital owners who benefit from lack of social justice through exploitation and monopoly of resources.

## **Empirical Review**

A study carried out by Ofodile (2019) titled “Nigeria Political Vis-à-vis Machiavellian’s Moral and Political Principles” sought to establish the impact created by Machiavelli political thought which influenced Nigeria n elites in action and thoughts. The study adopted qualitative method and Machiavellian theory as a theoretical framework. The study established that Nigerian elites are not incentivized or monitored to focus on the good of the society, that rather than being professionals, they are slaves to ideology; enlisting themselves as students of Machiavelli, ruling for private or personal interest in a manner that engendered severe destruction to the social justice system. The study recommended cultivation of moral principles and enforcement of ethical laws.

A related study carried out by Akam (2024) titled “Politics of Money and Greed: Exploring the Nigerian situation”, examined the roles of the elites in Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative method and elite theory for analytical framework. The study reveals that the line between public service and personal gain blur into job obscurity, that the desire for acquisition of private wealth, influence and control has eclipsed the noble ideals of governance. The study concluded that the pervasive culture of greed has conquered the spirit of patriotism as demonstrated by lack of social justice in Nigeria. The study recommended comprehensive reforms and ethical revolution at all levels of government in Nigeria.

### **Lack of Social Justice in Nigeria**

Deterioration of social justice in Nigeria promoted lamentation by Nwankwo (2019.p.36) that “when honesty and public accountability are also removed along with morality from politics, we then have gangs of thieves in government, each with the key to national treasury. In view of this, one may support St Augustine of Hippo who said, “if justice (especially social justice) is removed from a kingdom, it will no more be a kingdom but a gang of criminals on a large scale”. Omoregbe (2019,p.19) regretted that “Nigeria is the only country in the world where people do such things and get away with it. In other countries, such people would be arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned”. Obviously such other countries have effective social justice system, unlike Nigeria with various forms of crises relating to lack of social justice which are illustratively highlighted below:

1. **Crises of Unemployment:** Nigeria’s unemployment rate stands at “2.99% in 2024, based on yearly data” according to the National Bureau of statistics (NBS). This is a major factor for the position of the country in the lower rung of the United Nations Development Index irrespective of her enormous potentials of the oil wealth. All employment policies in Nigeria including National Directorate of Employment (NDE) rather aggravated the problem; they failed at the stage of implementation, hence the persistent crisis of unemployment predicated on lack of social justice.

### **Problem of Political Apathy**

According to Akam (2024 :17) “Nigeria’s Political diary is a saga of ambition, power struggles, and a relentless pursuit of wealth (devoid of justice) social at the expense of the nation’s well-being”. Concerning this, Ofodili (2019, p.45) earlier observed that “today in

Nigeria many people see politics as a dirty game to be practiced by dirty people”. This results to political apathy Nigerian politics based on Machiavellian ideology paves way to lack of effective, political participation.

## **DETORATION OF THE WORK FORCE**

Ogbu (2024, p 27) observed that “with ‘yahoo yahoo’, many Nigerian youths have chosen to pursue life of fraudster and internet theft which involves samming and hacking. A factor for this problem was identified by Ozioko (2024, p. 27) that “the unjust economic structure of the country (predicated on lack of social justice) has posed challenging moral dilemma for the people in their pursuit of wealth”. The deterioration of the work force of the nation caused by the unjust economic structure demands restoration of social justice as the ultimate panacea.

## **PROBLEM OF BUREAUCRATIC AUTHORITARIANISM**

According to Okolie, and Omemma, D. (2025, p. 109) “an accomplishing agency of government, public agencies in the course of performing their assigned statutory duties often the infringe on the rights of individuals by invading their privacy or depriving them of their inalienable rights to personal liberty or by destroying their property”

Bureaucratic Authoritarianism Metamorphosed from colonial bourgeoisie employed in colonial occupation. The elites who inherited governmental machinery at independence continued with the colonizers style if form of bureaucratic authoritarianism. The elites include leaders of government, economic elite etc. holding different key positions and placing themselves and actions above the law, for example, the Guardian (Newspaper) weekend. June 28-29, 2025 captured a typical issue premised by this, titled: “Workers’ Financial Insecurity Deepens Amid Violation of Pension Law”. Workers’ financial insecurity resulted from violation of pension law demonstrates lack of social justice system in Nigeria.

## **CORRUPTION**

Akam (2024:17) lamented that “corruption nepotism and ethnic tensions poisoned the political landscape and plugged the nation chaos and bloodshed”. Likewise, Osuagwu (2019, p. 13) raised alarm that “because of corruption in the school system, many Nigerian universities have been turning out thousands of half-baked graduates into the society”. In view of the problem, Nwankwo (2019:36) remarked that when honesty and public accountability are also removed along with morality from politics, we then have gangs of thieves”. This demonstrates lack of social justice system which is incompatible with corruptive behaviour.

## **FAILED GOVERNANCE SYSTEM**

Ogbu (2025) in the light of seven social sins or seven deadly sins which include wealth without work; pleasure without conscience; knowledge without character; commerce without morality; science without humility; religion without sacrifice and politics without principle (articulated by Mohandas, 1925) analysed the ugly realities affecting Nigeria’s governance system, especially wealth without work: money revolution among Nigerian youths. The deplorable governance system is the product of the ideology of the ruling class. In this regard,

Obi (2024, p. 33) critically observed that the prevailing ideology of selling political influence to the highest bidder in Nigeria's political sphere has profound implications for the long-term health and stability of the country. When political power becomes synonymous with wealth and greed, it undermines the principles of democracy, fairness and accountability". This portrays lack of social justice which is the foundation of responsible governance system.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION**

The study examined Nigeria's lack of the required capacity to afford the internally oriented social justice. Our investigation revealed that since the creation of Nigerian state as a product of colonialism, the people's indigenous cultural values have been severely incompatible with the alien capitalist mode of production, hence persistent lack of social justice with the associated predominant deplorable governance system. This is basically, why the study situates itself within the framework of the theory of post-colonial state of Marxist blend to critically assess how the political economy of the state shaped the structure of social justice. This paved way for the study to reveal that the state supports and defends the interests of the dominant class of bourgeois capital owners who reaps the fruit of lack of social justice through exploitation.

The findings conclude that lack of social justice in Nigeria is a problem rooted in the historical foundation of the state therefore demands concrete and radical approach, not ordinary measured in form of social policies that would be anti-theatrical with the country's capitalist environment. The study therefore recommends that the economy of the state should be restructured along socialist line in form of socialist transformation, according to the provision of the Report of 1988 political Bureau. This would replace the current imperialist capitalism, then the class of bourgeois capital owners, the beneficiaries of lack of social justice, being protected by the state and its power would vanish to pave way for decolonization of the economy and the state system in reality. This would engender effective social justice system required for responsible governance system, and sustainable development.

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