IMPLICATIONS OF HANNAH ARENDT'S AGONISM FOR MODERN DEMOCRACY: A CASE OF NIGERIA'S ELECTORAL PROCESSES

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Abstract

This essay discusses the implications of Hanna Arendt's agonistic spirit for modern democracy in the light of Nigeria's electoral processes. It claims that while Modern democratic experience of the Twenty-first Century in most nation states is tremendously driven by public spheres, the contest is characterized by agonal spirit. The impacts of the public spares and agonal spirit accomplished transformation of the social and political lives of the citizenry through good leaders. Generally conceived, a public sphere is an arena in social life where individuals can assemble to discuss issues and to identify societal problems and through that discussion influence political action. In modern society, it can be seen as a theatre in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk and social participation in which public opinion can be formed. While the public sphere in the contemporary Nigerian society is heightened, consolidated and complemented by the use of the social media where public opinion could be expressed to a global coverage, the agonal spirit is characterized by fraudulent electoral practices. The paper argues and upholds with Benhabib that whereas the public spere is inclusive, and hence democratic, candidacy and contest for public offices should be agonistic. It maintains that agonism is at odds with the culture of fraudulent electoral practices in Nigeria. It recommends measures that will checkmate the problem of electioneering and electoral fraud thereby strengthening the nascent democracy though, not without the political will of the Independent Electoral Commission that must make itself credible to gain the confidence of the electorates and the competitors.

Introduction

Democracy in most modern nations in the Twenty-first Century is tremendously impacted by public spheres. These impacts accomplish transformation of the social and political lives of the citizenry. A public sphere is an arena in social life where individuals can assemble to discuss issues and to identify societal problems and through that discussion influence political action. It is a discursive space where matters of common interest are discussed and where possible, reach common judgement. In modern societies, it can be seen as a theatre in which

political participation is enacted through the medium of talk and social participation and possibly, public opinion could be formed.

Political theorists generally group public spheres into three broad categorizations corresponding to three main currents of Western political thought. Firstly, the view of public sphere common to the republican virtue or civic virtue tradition, is described as agonistic view. Secondly, the conception provided by the liberal tradition, and particularly by those liberals, who beginning with Kant made the problem of a just and stable public order, the Centre of their political thinking. This goes for the legalistic module of public sphere, and it will be exemplified by Bruce Ackerman's conception of public dialogue. Thirdly, the module of public sphere is that implicit in Jurgen Habermas's work. This module which envisages a democratic socialist restructuring of late-capitalist societies, will be named "discursive public sphere" (Benhabib, 1992, p. 73).

For Jurgen Habermas, by "Public sphere" "we mean first of all our domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. A good portion of the public is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public" (Habermas, 1992, p. 103). In Habermas, citizens act as a public when in their discussion on public issues, they are offered liberty of deliberation. On the strength of this liberty, when the public sphere is large, media is needed to disseminate information to the wider public. Habermas also thinks that the public sphere exercises the function of mediation between state and society through the formation of public opinion which serves as its vehicle. Therefore, in this understanding, public sphere is a conceptual resource whose existence and activities help to overcome some societal problems through the medium of talk and discursive interaction. The public sphere is conceptually distinct from official economy; rather than being an arena of market relations, it is a space of discursive interactions.

In Nigeria, the awareness of the public spheres seems to be resent. It is indeed a welcoming development because of its influence on political spheres. The common forms are the mass media (television and radio) programs complements the public spheres. The social media have assumed unprecedented role in this regard more than the town and village hall meetings, though not without its abuses. The aim of the public sphere is to discuss, influence and accelerate political decisions and actions in view of credible candidacy, fair elections and good governance.

Hannah Arendt's model of public sphere described as "agonistic" operates on the principle of exclusion in which the elites exclusively contest to prove their excellence. However, modern democracy operates on the principle of inclusion. Therefore, this paper transposes agonism to Nigeria's electoral process and juxtapose it with the public spheres in Modernity. It argues that the Arendtian model of Agonism provides a model for Nigeria's Electoral process because it will, in keeping with the agonal spirit bring out the best among the competitors. For, Nigeria's electoral process particularly, the nomination of candidates under different party platforms for the different offices as well as the actual elections are often a dupe of excellence. These fraudulent electoral practices militate against good governance in Nigeria. Thus, agonism and fraud are incompatible. So, Benhabib's discursive public sphere and conception of Modernity serve as a complement to Arendtian agonism. To defend these claims, this essay begins with a sketch of the analysis of agonism and Arendtian agonistic public sphere. It further makes a sketch of modernity and Seyla Benhabib's view of modernity. It highlights Arendt's challenges in understanding the modern public sphere, followed by an investigation of Nigeria's electoral process in Modernity and concludes that agonism will bring out the best for Nigeria's electoral process and governance.

Agonism and Arendt's agonistic public sphere

There are two versions of agonism: persuasive and polemical agonism (Roberts-Miller, 2002, p. 595). "In persuasive agonism, one plays down conflict and moves through reason to try to persuade one's audience. However, polemical agonism intends not necessarily to prove one's case but to make public one's thought…in persuasive agonism, success is achieved through persuasion; in polemical agonism, success may be marked through the quality of subsequent controversy" (ibid. p. 595). Roberts-Miller describes Arendt as a polemical rhetoric because she puts less emphasis on gaining assent of her audience (ibid. 595). The two versions are strategies of selling oneself and views to the electorates thereby excellence is mirrored in a more popular contestant.

The style and the use of polemical agonism involves a strong vocal or written attack. These are means of engaging in a controversial debate or argumentation that does not aim at persuading one's readers or hearers to merely appreciate one's position perhaps out of sympathy but to make one's position explicitly defined by means of critical and counter argumentations as much as possible. In view of its nature and style, polemical agonism often makes use of many

The strong agonal spirit in the Arendtian picture of agonistic public sphere was not an end itself but rather, a means to a certain end which Arendt summarizes thus

> Excellence itself*, arte* as the Greeks, *virtus* as the Romans would have called it, has always been assigned to the public realm where one could excel, could distinguish oneself from all others. Every activity performed in a public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public…. (ibid. pp. 48-9).

The strong agonal spirit was aimed at deciphering who was the best in moral and political matters. Remarkably, this excellence is almost completely ignored in Nigeria's politics. Rather prospective candidates and supporters often take to violence and other forms of electoral malpractice in favor of preferred candidates. This duping obfuscates the value of the public that should be a boost to assessing excellence of the contestants in the public space. With the above analysis of Arendtian notion of agonistic public sphere, a contrast could be made with the associational public sphere.

In contrast to the agonistic public sphere, the "associational" model which Benhabib derives from Arendt's *Origin of Totalitarianism*, is anchored on the view of common action: "whenever and where ever, in Arendt's word, 'men act together in concert' on this model, public space is the space where freedom can appear" (1993, p. 102). The key idea in the associational module of the public sphere is 'men acting together in concert'. In this outlook, public space has no fixed location or time. Therefore, in Benhabib's idea, a town hall or a city square where people do not act together in concert is not a public space as Arendt conceives. But a private parlor or a dining room becomes a public space when people gather to hear a *samizdat* or in which dissidents have a meeting with foreigners (Benhabib, 1993, p. 78). The important feature which translates a meeting / gathering into a public space according to Arendt is when the people in the meeting act together in concert. It is important to note at this juncture that the Arendtian understanding of the public sphere relates with the natural gift of speech which people employ in persuasions and hence, translate these into different arenas of public affairs.

deliberators who would speculate and discuss their defined position. However, the major challenge of polemical agonism is prolongation of deliberation and the tendency of the discussion translating into long disputes and unending arguments (ibid. p. 597). As a style, "agonism demands that one simultaneously trusts and doubts one's own perceptions, relying on one's judgements and considers the judgments of others, think for oneself and imagines how others think" (ibid. p. 597). The above notion and demand of the agonistic rhetoric sounds well but whether it is practicable seems a difficult question to answer.

Arendt never fails to trace back polemical agonism to the ancient Greeks. She situates polemical agonism within the context of action which is the only dimension of the vita activa that does not admit intermediary of things. The *polis*, Arendt say, is the most loquacious among bodies politics (1958, p. 26). Therefore, it is *ab initio* obvious that long deliberation of matters is involves. One could infer from here, the origin of rhetoric and by extension the two types of the public spheres mentioned above. Tracing further, Arendt

> Observes that the emphasis shifted from action to speech, and to speech as a means of persuasion rather than the specifically human way of answering, talking back and measuring up to whatever happened or was done. To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not force and violence. In Greek self-understanding, to force people by violence, to command rather than persuade were pre-political ways to deal with characteristic of life outside the polis (ibid. p. 26).

By this statement, one could understand the credibility with which Arendt associates the power of rhetoric and how disgusting force, command and violence were regarded in the Greek city states. It is very clear here that such offensive manner of life was not only disgusting but was also considered uncivilized 'pre polis'. Agonism is a plausible model for Nigeria's electoral process and democracy. Although the classification between polemical and persuasive agonism was not yet made, it is evident here that both polemical and persuasive agonism are of a common origin namely, the Greek antiquity.

To drive to its conclusion, the origin of agonism to ancient Greece, Arendt, contrasted the manner of life in the Greek polis and in the household. She observes that while in household life was characterized by uncontested despotic

powers by the head, life in the polis among the peoples featured persuasion (ibid. p. 27). Arendt then links the power of persuasion to Aristotelian definition of man "as *zoon politikon* (a living being of the polis) which was not only unrelated and opposed to natural association experienced in household life; it can be fully understood only if one adds the second famous definition of man as *zoon logon ekhon* (A living being capable of speech)" (ibid. p. 27). Arendt explains this second definition of man not from the point of view of man's highest capacity, but rather in terms of man's powers of contemplative life. Juxtaposing this conception with Nigeria's democracy that is characterized by brutal force and violence, one is left with an understanding of it as uncivilized. However, while agonal spirit makes sense for Nigeria's electoral process, agonistic public sphere does not.

A sketch of Hanna Arendt's agonistic public sphere

Arendt's conception of the public sphere could be understood from two contrasting views namely, "agonistic" and "associational". Characteristically, the agonistic model of public sphere is based on the principle of exclusion. It is a sphere where certain people, the aristocrats or elitists in the sphere of appearance, engage in a competition in order to distinguish and reveal themselves in their individual excellence and greatness, morally and politically to the others. Arendt captures this thus,

> To belong to the few "equal"*(homoioi)* meant to be permitted to live among one's peers; but the public realm itself, the polis was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through their unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (aien aristeuein).The public realm in order words was reserved for individuality; it was the only place where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were (ibid., p. 41).

The Arendtian description of the agonistic public sphere above not only reveals its exclusive nature, it also revealed that it was through it that the participants, the elites or the aristocrats assessed certain administrative positions in the state public affairs. It was the practice of exclusion and the strong spirit of competition that characterized this public sphere. While this model could serve the purpose of Nigeria's electoral process, it is undemocratic for political discussions because it does not admit everyone. However, all prospective candidates for elective offices could test their excellence in this discursive sphere.

Acting together in concert according to Arendt is possible in a public space because the public space is real. It is in this sense that Arendt posits that appearance is reality because people encounter, talk with each other and can engage action. The Arendtian understanding of reality is from the socio-political viewpoint in reference to Aristotelian definition of man that we earlier met. It is also in the polis that freedom is experienced because life and relations is based on persuasions rather than the uncontested despotic powers of the household head in the private realm (Arendt, 1958, p. 27). This insight into the agonistic public sphere leads to the idea of modernity in general and how Seyla Benhabib in this context conceives of modernity. It will be investigated in order to evaluate its compatibility with the agonistic public sphere.

Modernity: Seyla Benhabib's conception

The concept of modernity has been theorized and interpreted in diverse ways with plethora of emphasis since the inception of the Modern period. However, for Jurgen Habermas, modernity, from the Latin form "*modernus*" first came in use in the late 5th Century to make a divide between the Roman present and the pagan past. The term "modern again and again expresses the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new" (1981, p. 3). Habermas captures the entire thrust of the concept of modernity. His use of the word 'consciousness' is central to most discourse that borders on modernity. As we shall see later, Benhabib's conception of modernity is a theorization based on consciousness whereby she advocates for inclusion principle - her own philosophy of modernity which is a sort of liberation to those who had been marginalized or excluded in the past but which the trends and caprices of modernity has dismantled. Benhabib's principle of inclusion is her response to the times which she has deliberated intentionally.

Furthermore, some writers restrict the modern time to the renaissance period of history that witnessed the culmination of anthropocentricism and enlightenment. Some associate modernity and the time of certain historical personalities like Charles the Great in the 12th Century. The ideals of the French enlightenment were the important factors which dissolved the spells of the classical ancient world. The great scientific and technological breakthroughs and the continued progress were significant factors and landmark development in the cultivation of Modernity consciousness. The invention of different kinds of machines that displaced manual labor, the printing machines that boosted educational activities

etc. contributed tremendously to the enlightenment in which man greatly asserted his ability to solve his problems and so rely on his abilities.

The most resent ideas about modernism, however, is the seeming opposing views between the traditional and the present. Since the wake of the 19th Century, the confronting ideas and ideals seems to be the most distinguishing marks between modernity and the antiquity (Habermas, 1981, p. 3). Because of this, it appears that the truth of the dynamism of life is most evident in the experience of modernity. There seems to be a war between the modern and the traditional in barely all facets of life, in religion, in economy, in education, in politics, and most evidently in the social dimension of life. In all, man breaths for a relieve in the modern time, a relief of freedom from all discomfort and constraints of a better and pleasurable life.

Considering it from the aesthetic perspective, modernity refers to the characteristic of things which would replace the outmoded ones. In this sense, modernity would be regarded as classical because it is stylish whereas the aesthetic products have characteristics that will survive people's preferences and stand the test of time. With the passage of time, this emphasis does not seem to hold any longer, rather, a strong assent on the idea of modernity is the question of assessing how authentic an aesthetic material is, and this assessment is done through its qualities.

Benhabib's notion of Modernity

The central idea of Benhabib's conception of modernity is anchored on the principle of inclusionism. Inclusionism simply refers to carrying along everyone. The following passage offers insight to inclusionism

> What disturbs the contemporary reader is perhaps less the high-minded and highly idealized picture of Greek political life that Arendt draws than her neglect of the following questions: If the agonistic political sphere of the polis was only possible because large groups of human beings –like women, slaves, children, laborers, noncitizens, residents and all non-Greeks – were excluded from it while they made possible through their labors to the daily necessities of life that "leisure for politics" that the few enjoyed, then is the critique of the rise of the social, which was accompanied by the emancipation of these group from the "shadowy interior of the household" and by their entry into public life, also a critique of

political universalism as such? That is, the "recovery of the public space" under conditions of modernity necessarily and elitist and antidemocratic project that can be reconciled with the demand for universal political emancipation and the universal extension of citizenship rights that have accompanied modernity since the American and French revolutions (Benhabib, 1992, p. 75).

A thorough analysis of the above passage reveals Benhabib's theorization on the concept of modernity. The first impression presented by this passage is the question, whether Greece public sphere was only possible at the exclusion of certain persons who actually contributed for the welfare of those who were included in it. The inclusion principle of Benhabib agrees with the idea of modernity viewed as a transformation, which requires the re-definition of people's social position. More so, it encourages a kind of struggle which would eventually yield people's emancipation from social, economic and especially political constraints. Benhabib's advocacy for inclusion through her principle is an advocacy for freedom in disguise because its implementation is another way of gaining freedom which of course, is the pendulum swinging between modernity and democracy.

The ancient Greece practice of public sphere was agonal. Based on elitist or aristocratic consideration, it was typical of exclusion principle. Elites or aristocrats were a few members of the public who were well educated and so were accorded high regard by the people and they had the prerogative of handling the administrative affair of the state. In this way they constituted members of the public sphere while all the other people were excluded from it. It is therefore on account of this exclusion that Benhabib expresses her modern consciousness of inclusion which would give equal opportunity to all and the sense of freedom in participating and contributing to common opinion. Therefore, under the democratic condition and in a democratic dispensation, elitism and aristocracy are practiced in the exclusive principle which is antimodern and undemocratic. However, this essay defends that while contestants for political offices in Nigeria should characterize the agonal spirit to show that they are the best for the office, democratic experience could borrow a leaf from Benhabib's inclusionism.

Another element of Benhabib's consideration is the demand for the universal political emancipation and the universal extension of citizenship rights (Benhabib, 1992, p. 75). The modern struggle for democracy implies liberation

from the strictures of oppressive and suppressive standards and ways of doing things. The advocacy for universal citizenship is in line with the United Nations promulgation of the Universal Human Rights. This right entitles everyone to such citizenship so far as one legally fulfills its demands. What is more? The struggle to accomplish this project is a universal call. That is why Benhabib criticizes Arendt's negative account of the rise of the social which resulted in the decline of the public spheres in the Greek city states. Benhabib criticized this idea which is the core of Arendt's political antimodernism and a eulogy to agonistic public space of the Greek city states (ibid.). With this criticism, Benhabib seeks to change the narrative.

From the fore gone, one can understand Benhabib's modern and democratic consciousness from her idea of the principle of inclusion which is in direct opposition to practice of the agonistic public space in the Greek polis. Agonism and inclusionism present a model for Nigeria's democratic processes: Agonism for contestants to political offices and inclusiveness to the citizenry. Benhabib's inclusion principle implies liberty, freedom and equality which are the core emphasis of modern democracy. For the Nigeria situation, inclusiveness implies fair and free electioneering processes. Benhabib's position also agrees with the ideals of enlightenment, which may be summarized as 'thinking and acting for one's self' and in the context of electoral process implies conviction on the part of the electorates that their vote cast counts in electing the leaders. Understood in this light and in this perspective, one would agree uncritically that though Arendt's agonistic public sphere is at odds with the modern democratic experience, its agonal spirit serves as a good model for Nigeria's electioneering, for agonism serves to present the best candidates for elections. Furthermore, an investigation into Nigeria's electoral procedures is made to justify this claim.

Nigeria's Electoral processes

Electoral process refers to the different activities in preparation for voting of candidates into different offices for governance on party-basis and the declaration of the winners of the election. This process in an offshoot of the electoral system - a procedure through which leaders are elected in a democratic country by the citizens. The electoral system determines the qualifying criteria from both the aspirants and the political parties (The Nigerian Electoral System/Electoral System and Processes). This responsibility is a prerogative of a specialized committee appointed by the government of the federation. In Nigeria, the commission is called Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) at

the national level and the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) at the state level. The responsibilities and activities of this commission are sensitive, crucial and critical for democratic experience in Nigeria and hence its integrity is important. INEC and its powers in Nigeria is constitutional. INEC is established by Section 153 (f) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and its powers composition and functions are provided for in the first part of the third schedule in the Constitution therein (Dugabari, 2017, p. 4). Furthermore, Agude, reflecting on the Nigeria's Election governing commission upholds three functions of INEC as 1) controlling and monitoring of political parties, 2) putting the political parties in the direction that engenders national unity and 3) responsible for the conduct of elections (199, 113). Similarly, Dugabari highlights four functions of INEC as follows: 1) To organize, undertake and supervise all elections. 2) To monitor the organization and the operation of the political parties. 3) To arrange and register the electorates. 4) To regulate and monitor political campaigns (2017, p. 5). The two views from Agude and Dugabari basically concern the political parties, the candidates, the electorates and the electoral conduct. Electoral processes are in three divides: Firstly, the pre-election, (registration of parties and candidates and other activities); Secondly, voting on the election day (accreditation of the electorates and vote casts, coalition and counting of vote cast); And thirdly the post voting processes (announcement of results and alliance with the judiciary on emergent electioneering cases).

The electioneering processes are in two blocs. Firstly, the activities of the commission and secondly, the parties' activities which includes the candidates' candidacy nomination and verification activities. The commission registers the political parties and conducts elections as its greatest task. Election is immensely important because when credible, it facilitates democracy. Furthermore, in a democratic dispensation, election is a vehicle that fosters order and decorum on how successive government come into power. In a true democracy, it is believed that election expresses the will of the people (Nwokeke, 2011, p. 130). This makes sense of the popular but short definition of democracy as government of the people. Elsewhere, Nwokeke extols election as a process that accomplishes shift of leadership, effects accountability and encourages others to take part in the government. It reveals the power of the electorate (ibid. p. 128). This agrees with the idea that democracy is effective in distributing power and opportunity to the electorates to make the choice of their leaders (Schumpeter, 1947). This latest observation applies to electorates who under the political parties exercise the

power of preliminary elections and the general elections of the candidates. The above sketch give an insight into the nature of Nigeria's electoral processes which over the years have been marred by plethora of problems and challenges.

The problems or challenges that confront the Nigeria's electoral process allows the possibility of electoral fraud. Fraud makes nonsense of the agonal spirit that ought to characterize it to showcase excellence and popularity of the competitors. The frustration concerning this malady was aptly expressed after the 2011 election by Dakas et al when they noted the wide spread perception by the electorates that elections are seldomly won in Nigeria rather the electoral bodies, national and the state conspire with the judiciary to dubiously declare the winners (2011, p. 339). The lapses, problems and challenges of the electoral processes encourage electoral fraud, waste of resources and pseudo-democratic experience. This is surely a bad omen for a nascent democracy like Nigeria's. The fact that Nigeria's so-called political parties rather than being ideology-based are primarily, unfortunately and miserably based on ethnicity, religions and regions. This deepens and complicates the electoral problems in the Nigerian polyethnic society. Furthermore, Nigeria's electoral problems somewhat metamorphosized into a fraudulent electoral culture that translates a rape and a dupe of the so-called democracy.

The following are identified forms of electoral doping: 1) Illegal printing of voter's cards; 2) Illegal possession of ballot boxes; 3) Stuffing of ballot boxes; 4) Falsification of election results; 5) Illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers; 6) Infant voting; 7) Compilation of fictitious names on voters' lists; 8) Illegal compilation of separate voters' lists; 9) Illegal printing of forms used for collection and declaration of election results; 10) Deliberate refusal to supply election materials to certain areas; 11) Announcing results for places where no elections were held; 12) Unauthorized announcement of election results; 13) Harassment of candidates, agents and voters; 14) Change of list of electoral officials; 15) Box-switching and inflation of figures (Ibrahim, 2007). These fraudulent practices not only truncate the agonal spirit of election, but obfuscate excellence, mar true democracy, good leadership, hence, makes nonsense of the purported democracy.

For this reason, several suggestions are made to remedy the raped democracy. A few of them shall be highlighted here. Firstly, adequate preparation for all elections. This intuition is popularized by the 'novel tradition' of election postponement since 2011. The "logistic and operational" reasons that excused

the postponement of 2019 few hours before its commencement was absolutely unacceptable in view of the huge amount (N196 billion) budgeted and the four years preparation (2019 Presidential Election: improving the electoral process). This action led to multidimensional waste of the country's scarce resources. Secondly, electronic registration and voting system and the entire process should replace the anachronistic paper balloting system. The electronic voting system will unilaterally solve all the malpractices enumerated above. An early and adequate preparations could take care of anticipated problems especially that of database. This form has many added advantages of efficiency as it ensures safety, abates climate challenges. It is environmentally friendly as well as solves mobility problems etc. Thirdly, effective candidacy and party registration– validating candidates and parties with strong support will trim down the number of the political parties to the popular ones with their candidates (ibid.). This, however, will support the agonal spirit and showcase excellence in the presented candidates. Other considerations are fourthly, enfranchising Nigerians in diaspora which also offers them the opportunity to participate in selecting their leaders. Another side of this is offering the physically challenged persons the opportunity to participate in the election. Finally, prosecuting electoral fraudsters and allied offences will serve as a deterrent to intending similar criminals (ibid.). To facilitate this, special electoral tribunals should be established to avoid unnecessary and deliberate delay of legal actions since it is said that justice delayed amounts to a denial. If the government is committed to true democracy, these measures could be effected in addressing the electoral maladies and so sets a stage for agonistic electioneering process in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The Arendtian agonism should be a model for the selection of candidates for Nigeria's electioneering process. The exploration of Hannah Arendt's agonistic public sphere reveals its difference from other public spheres such as the liberal model dialogue and the discursive model. Hannah Arendt conceptions of public sphere and candidacy are "agonistic" and characterized by fiercely agonal spirit is based on the principle of exclusion; those included are the elites (aristocrats) who engage in the "fight" to prove their excellence while in the associational model emphasizes 'men acting together in concert', wherever and whenever. While selection of contestants should be agonistic, participation in the democratic discourse should be inclusive.

Benhabib's conception of modernity is anchored on the principle of inclusion. The implications of Benhabib's principle of inclusion are freedom and equality which is found in modern democracy. This must characterize the public sphere of discussion of political matters. It is this inclusion that is needed in Nigeria both in principle and in practice. Thus, agonism and inclusionism is significant to Nigeria's political renaissance as against fraud and violence.

The desirability of agonism is necessary to forestall some of the candidate-based fraudulent activities of the electoral processes. The fraudulent practices thrive and bloom because elections and party formation, activities and selection of candidates are hardly based excellence but often, on ethnic, religious or regional divides. These non-agonistic considerations de-robe, dupe and rape our democracy and good leadership. The exclusiveness of agonistic public sphere is certainly undemocratic and antimodern. However, one cannot deny that the agonal spirit with which competitors exhibit their excellence is desirable for Nigeria's electioneering context. This is the crux of the matter and our conclusion. Agonal consideration elevates the best competitor over his equal in a fair, free and open processes.

Fraud that has become a culture in the electoral process is a deceit to democracy and consequently, good leadership process. The continuation of this national deceit is a passive resolve to remain in the current status quo- dictatorship beautifully adorned by nepotistic alacrity and religious fanaticism instead of building political parties based on well founded and practical ideologies. The electoral commission must prove itself credible and capable of conducting credible, fair and free elections and delivering less controversial and contested results. It can achieve this if it considers the highlighted suggestions and similar others as the measures and a point of departure of resolving the highlighted problems that de-robe our democracy. True experience of democracy begins with and depends on sound electoral processes. This prescribes, scrutinizes and regulates the aspirants to political offices and consequently, passes them through agonal contestation. Agonism is the spirit of the Modern democratic contest. A truly Modern Nigerian democracy must be a departure from the past fraudulent electoral culture to the agonal spirit that showcases excellence among contestants.

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