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Economy and Politics in the Nigerian Transition

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Abstract

This essay is an attempt to offer a general overview of the range of political and economic problems that served as the context for the transition to elected forms of governance in Nigeria after some sixteen years of military rule. These problems, even where they did not originate in military rule, were exacerbated by the years of political exclusion, chicanery, and repression as well as the continuing decline in the national economy and deep-seated corruption associated with prolonged military rule. It is suggested that a serious-minded effort at tackling these problems and the kinds of success recorded will be central to the viability of the Fourth Republic and the restoration of the confidence of the populace in public office holders. Several of the problems that need redressing are of a "nuts and bolts" kind and the fact that they arose at all is indicative of the depth to which Nigeria sank during the military years; others are far more profound and challenge the very basis on which state-society relations as well as nation-territorial administration are presently constituted. Whether basic or profound, they will tax all the commitment and leadership qualities of the elected politicians of the Fourth Republic.

Introduction

The 29 May 1999 hand-over of power to elected politicians marked the formal end of nearly sixteen years of the second military interregnum in Nigeria's post-independence history. For many Nigerians, it was seen as a case of third time lucky after the many self-serving and costly political machinations that had resulted in the outright discrediting and eventual collapse of the two earlier attempts that were made by the Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha administrations to return the country to elected civilian government (Diamond, et al, 1996; Beckett and Young, 1997; Joseph, 1998; Osaghae, 1998; Mustapha, 1999; Olukoshi, 1999). Given the local and external pressures that were brought to bear on it, and cognizant of the

profound discredit to which the corrupt dictatorships of Babangida and Abacha had exposed the military, as well as the highly fragile state of the polity, the Abdusalam Abubakar administration which presided over the third attempt at restoring elected government probably did not have too much of an option than to seek a quick and orderly exit for the military from the political terrain. In doing so, it won itself the distinction of organizing the transfer of power in record time, taking only eleven months to complete the various stages of its transition programme. Given the profound doubt which many in Nigeria had about the ability and willingness of the armed forces to cede power to civilians and return to their professional duties, a high sense of relief was felt across the country on 29 May 1999 as the television networks beamed live pictures of the swearing in ceremonies in Abuja and the capitals of the 36 states of the politicians who were to take the place of the military at the helm of the executive arm of government (*The Guardian*, 29 May 1999, 30 May 1999, 31 May 1999; *Vanguard*, 29 May 1999, 30 May 1999, 31 May 1999). Against all the odds, the Fourth Republic appeared to have been successfully born.

Yet, considering the array of economic and political problems which prolonged military rule has bequeathed the country and which the elected politicians are now required to tackle, it remains open to question the extent to which Nigerians can begin to congratulate themselves on the birth of the Fourth Republic and the restoration of elected governance. This is because most of the problems which the elected politicians have inherited are complicated and although some of them may be amenable to a relatively quick solution, others would require both time and the best of political and managerial efforts to resolve. The capacity of the elected politicians to rapidly establish their credibility as governors of the economy and polity will, therefore, be critical to the prospects for the strengthening of the foundations of elected governance in Nigeria. It is against this background that an attempt is made in this essay to offer a broad overview of aspects of the economy and politics in the country's transition from military to elected government. Particular attention is paid to some of the key economic and political problems that served as the context for the transition process and which are critical to the prospects of the elected politicians in stabilizing the country under civilian rule. It is suggested that the destructive economic, political, institutional and constitutional legacies of prolonged military rule are such that the viability of the transition to elected government and the establishment of a democratic basis for civilian rule cannot be taken for granted and will demand both high quality political leadership and popular vigilance to be realized.

Decay of the National Infrastructure

One of the biggest legacies of military rule and one which is serving as an immediate acid test for the elected civilian politicians is the state of Nigeria's infrastructural facilities over whose rapid expansion the leaders of the first military interregnum (1996–1979) had presided, taking advantage of the massive increase in the revenues accruing to the state from expanding oil exports. These infrastructural facilities

were allowed to undergo a rapid and profound decay during the second military interregnum (1983–1999), particularly during the latter half of the Babangida administration and the entire period of General Abacha in power. Quite apart from the consequences of this adverse development for the national economy and the livelihood of the populace, it is important to situate it within the wider national political process in order for its full import to be grasped. In this regard, perhaps the most important point to note is that one of the key pillars on which military intervention in the political process was always justified was that it was more efficient and less bureaucratic in delivering public services than civilian rule. In the period from 1966 when the military first intervened in the political process, this was an attribute which was favourably remarked upon both within the civil service and in the wider society. Whereas the politicians would spend an endless amount of time debating actions to be taken, the military, in this line of thinking, were always quicker off the mark, using decrees to pave the way for necessary action.

This image of the military as an efficient, no-nonsense and action-oriented institution of governance was, however, to suffer its first serious blow in the early 1980s as Nigerians suddenly woke up to the realization that this mode of administration which entailed the short-circuiting of procedures was dangerously prone to the neglect of due process, the sidelining of the principle of the rule of law or its replacement by a wholesale, non-justiceable form of rule by law, the abuse of basic human rights, the denial of the right of association to all sectors of civil and political society, and the suppression of the freedom of expression. The harsh record of the Buhari-Idiagbon junta between 1983 when they came to power and 1985 when they were toppled in a palace *coup d'état* was critical to this awakening in Nigeria to the increasing incompatibility of military rule with the need to respect the rights of citizenry. It was a realization which played a crucial role in the birth, in 1987, of the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and the array of other human rights and civil liberties groups that were to follow.

But even more crucially, the image of the military as an efficient organ of administration suffered a fatal blow as successive juntas from 1985 presided over the decay and collapse of the country's road, rail, electricity, water, postal and telecommunications infrastructure. In spite of the huge budgetary allocations made to the country's road infrastructure, most remained in a state of disrepair and, in the worst cases, were unmotorable all year round. Similarly, the national railway system virtually collapsed, in spite of the recourse, at huge financial costs, first to Indian and then Chinese technical support to revive it. The dilapidation of the road network and the virtual collapse of the railway took its toll both on intra- and inter-state economic transactions. By the time the Abacha regime consolidated itself in 1995, it also became clear that the national petroleum infrastructure had been allowed to go into a state of disrepair, with the pipeline network and the refineries suffering from a lack of the most basic and essential maintenance. Even the joint ventures commitments of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) were neglected with implications for the development of upstream and downstream activities. The cumulative result was the bizarre spectacle of Nigerians having to

queue for days on end in order to buy petrol, kerosene, gas, and diesel, this, in spite of the fact that their country is one of the biggest producers of oil in the world. With the refineries crippled, the government resorted to the importation of refined petroleum products for domestic use, a process that was itself marred by high level corruption, cronyism and recrimination.

Similarly, electricity supply, always a problem of the post-Civil War period, and previously the target of the spirited effort at promoting public discipline that was undertaken by the Buhari-Idiagbon regime, took a sharp turn for the worse, again because the thermal plants, hydroelectric dams, and the national grid had been neglected. For domestic and industrial consumers, electricity supply through the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) became a luxury. Some of the thermal plants and dams either had to be shut down or were forced to operate at around one-third of their installed capacity because of the lack of maintenance. As a consequence, NEPA's installed power-generating capacity fell from some 5,400 megawatts to just about 1,600 megawatts (*The Guardian*, 13 September 1999; 15 September 1999). The water supply, telephone and postal systems too sank to new depths of inefficiency which, as with the electricity supply situation, allowed both corruption and criminality to thrive on a stupendous scale. This was so in spite of the sharp upward review of tariffs which was repeatedly undertaken but which rather than translate into an improvement in services, was simply accompanied by a further all-round deterioration. In fact, even the costs of keeping what was left of rapidly dwindling water, electrical and telecommunication services functional was passed on to consumers who were required to pay for the costs of repairing pipes, cables, transformers, and other equipment in their homes, businesses and neighbourhoods.

As will be discussed further later in this essay, what many found most disconcerting about the precipitous collapse of the national infrastructure was the fact that annually, huge resources were voted to the different installations and activities but these were never applied for the purpose for which they meant (*The Guardian*, 13 September 1999). The consequence for the economy and society was far-reaching. For all categories of businesses, the cost of operating shot up astronomically. The bigger business concerns devoted huge amounts of capital to purchasing electricity generating sets for which Nigeria emerged in the period from the late 1980s as the single most important export destination. But these generating sets were useful only to the extent that their owners were able to find diesel to power them. Among small and medium entrepreneurs who were unable to afford the capital outlay required for installing generators, they simply watched their businesses collapse. Petroleum product scarcity fed into barely motorable roads and the absence of a railway-based alternative to raise the costs of transportation which, in turn, were reflected in the rising cost of consumer goods and food items. Needless to add, in this environment, inflation remained a constant feature of the economy in spite of the collapse of consumer purchasing power. In sum, the formal sector of the Nigerian economy, especially the national productive base, was severely under-

mined—the national average manufacturing capacity level, for example, fell below 30 per cent—and the boundaries of the informal economy were extended in part as a response to the absence of the basic infrastructural facilities necessary for sustaining the aspiration for a modern national economy. Accumulation, to the extent that it occurred, increasingly took on primitive forms. That the economy continued to function at all in spite of the depletion of supporting infrastructure owed much to the informal sector and the activities of transnational oil companies which continued to mine oil in the volatile Niger Delta and, thus, assured the state of access to a modicum of revenues in foreign exchange.

The question of the revival of the national infrastructural system is one which will be crucial to the establishment of the basis for a functioning national economy and credibility of the renewed effort at elected civilian governance. Indeed, success in this regard might well enable the civilian political establishment to successfully promote a link in the minds of Nigerians between elected forms of governance and the effective management of public goods and services as contrasted to the dismal record of the military officers who dominated the second military interregnum. This would give concrete expression to the suggestions which several commentators made in taking stock of the record of the Babangida regime in the lead up to and after the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential elections that the only alternative to bad civilian government is not a military government but a better civilian government. It would also play a crucial role in clarifying the political terrain by helping in the task of separating those aspects of ethno-regional grievances and other types of disaffection associated with the infrastructure crisis from the more deep-seated ones that would still require to be tackled. To successfully refurbish the national infrastructural system would require both an outlay of huge investments and the institutionalization of mechanisms for checking financial leakages as well as the enforcement of a culture of prompt and timely maintenance of facilities.

The early picture which has emerged since 29 May 1999 is a mixed one. Concretely, the supplementary budget which the Obasanjo presidency presented to the national assembly contained a fairly substantial appropriation to the national electricity, telecommunications, railway and road infrastructure, including an accelerated rural electrification and feeder road programme but this would need to be sustained over the life of the entire administration in order for a significant and sustained difference to be made. Dotun Phillips in fact suggests that an investment of $30 billion yearly over the next five years would be required for the national economy to be placed on the path to sustained recovery (*The Guardian,* 9 September 1999; *Vanguard,* 9 September 1999). In Lagos, Niger, Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom and Taraba states, the state governments have also taken independent steps to attempt to generate electricity in co-operation with private local and foreign investors. Similarly, the Lagos state government has opened negotiations with the International Finance Corporation and an assortment of foreign companies with the aim of improving the supply of potable water in the state through the licensing of a private provider to serve those areas of the state which are not covered by the Lagos State Water Corporation. At the same time, the federal government has committed

itself to a policy of privatizing the country's telecommunications and electricity monopolies. In the midst of these initiatives, however, it bears pointing out that the issues involved go well beyond simply privatizing the main public utilities, especially given that the activity areas involved are crucial to the social livelihood of the citizenry. An acid test of success in tackling the infrastructure crisis would, therefore, not just be the efficiency of the services provided but also the accessibility enjoyed by the generality of Nigerians to electricity, water, telephones and transportation at prices that are affordable within the prevailing income structure. This implies the necessity for the government to avoid replacing a public monopoly with a private monopoly—both of which will simply enrich a minority—and, if it must privatize, setting up an adequate regulatory mechanism to ensure that there is genuine competition, standards are high and consumer rights are fully protected.

Corruption and Legitimacy

At the heart of the decay and collapse of the Nigeria's infrastructure during the second military interregnum was the institutionalization of corruption to the status of a primary objective and directive principle of state policy. The Babangida regime began this process in earnest as its leading functionaries at all levels generously helped themselves to public funds with scant regard to accounting procedures and the approved budgetary lines. To facilitate this process, the Central Bank was moved from the jurisdiction of the Finance Ministry into the presidency while offshore escrow accounts were opened into which some of the country's oil receipts were paid and then diverted. Indeed, as observed by the Okigbo panel that was established to investigate the "disappearance" of over two billion dollars in oil receipts, the use of such offshore accounts was central to the misappropriation of much of the windfall that accrued to the country as a consequence of the unanticipated increases in the price of oil that followed the outbreak of the Gulf war in 1990. Furthermore, in the guise of promoting civil service reforms, ministers were named accounting officers for their ministries in place of permanent secretaries who, as career civil servants, previously played that role in line with the General Order. More than that, the post of the permanent secretary was also politicized by opening it up to appointees who were not career civil servants but political loyalists of the regime that appointed them. General Babangida's own personal ambition to completely master the Nigerian political terrain and perpetuate himself in office also led to the introduction of a sinister new dimension to corruption, namely, that of deliberately targeting individuals, groups and institutions in all sectors of society for corrupt inducement. The line separating personal from public resources was gradually blurred by the regime as General Babangida's version of personal rule took hold. The use of the carrot of public resources to complement the stick of the denial of patronage became two sides of the same agenda for serving the interests of the regime as personified by General Babangida.

Taking stock of the legacy of the Babangida regime, his predecessor in office, the harsh and austere Muhammadu Buhari, was to note that:

> The regime that came to power in 1985 that ushered in General Babangida destroyed all national institutions which in its own opinion, stood in its way. It tolerated, encouraged, entrenched and institutionalized corruption and glorified its perpetrators. At the end of its tenure in 1993, the military government had established an image of corrupt, unreliable and unaccountable lords of the manor.

In what was also clearly a cruel joke on Nigerians, General Babangida himself was to comment to journalists that given all the stress to which it had been exposed, he was amazed that the Nigerian economy had still not collapsed completely. Throughout his tenure, various categories of Nigerians, including respected and retired senior military officers like Generals Theophilus Danjuma, Domkat Bali and Salihu Ibrahim were to observe the moral decay that had eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society and all public institutions, including the military. Ibrahim was to tell a gathering of senior officers who attended his farewell party that the army he was leaving in 1993 had become "an army of anything goes", bereft of professionalism, discipline and esprit de corps. Significantly, these high profile critics all pointed to General Babangida and his closest aides as being central to the spread of corruption and the decay of the national moral fibre.

Where Babangida left off, Abacha continued, taking personal greed and avarice to new levels. General Abacha, members of his immediate and extended family, and his closest military and security advisers embarked on a wholesale plundering of the country. After Abacha's death, the evidence which emerged indicated that the money had been diverted by members of General Abacha's immediate family and that this type and scale of corruption was only the tip of the iceberg. The Abubakar regime was to announce to a shocked country that it had managed to recover over $2 billion from General Abacha, his family and his aides like Ismaila Gwarzo (national security adviser), Dalhatu Tafida (Minister of Power and Steel), and Anthony Ani and his friend and procurer of soothsayers, Azeez Arisekola-Alao. This included some $817 million and 8 billion Naira surrendered by the Abacha family alone. An assortment of prized properties in Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Kaduna and Zaria, as well as shares worth hundreds of millions of dollars in a refinery project in Sierra Leone were also confiscated from the Abacha estate and Gwarzo. The search was launched overseas for national resources that had been corruptly diverted into private accounts while within Nigeria itself, evidence amassed on innumerable contracts that were awarded to cronies and family members at stupendous amounts but for which little or no work was done (*The News*, 2 August 1999).

As if that was not enough, the functionaries of the Abubakar administration, including the military administrators who presided over the state governments, continued with the pattern of abuse over which Abacha had presided even as the federal authorities exposed the scale of the fraud which Abacha, his family, and closest associates had perpetrated on the country. In what looked like a suggestion that this was their last opportunity at self-enrichment at the expense of the public before having to quit the national political stage, senior military officers who mostly

held political appointments diverted resources and awarded numerous contracts for which full or partial payment was approved up front. At the federal level, the Abubakar administration itself drew down the country's external reserves by about $2.7 billion between the end of December 1998 and the end of March 1999. Between January and April 1999, it also ran a budget deficit of some 100 billion Naira, with the consequence that the Naira depreciated by 11 per cent in the autonomous foreign exchange market and inflation shot up by a similar percentage. By the end of May 1999 when the civilian federal administration was sworn in, the deficit which it inherited was more than 256 billion Naira (*The Guardian,* 19 August 1999). Furthermore, in its last two months in office, the regime embarked on an additional domestic spending spree, awarding contracts valued at over 60 billion Naira in April and May 1999; these contracts were only partly reversed following a vociferous public outcry about the intentions of the military in embarking on such last-minute profligacy. Even on the very eve of the regime's departure from office, it was reported that contracts were still being awarded, in some cases well into the night of 28 May 1999. Several supporters, cronies, and functionaries of the outgoing military regime were also rewarded with appointments into public office and the award of "sweetheart" contracts, most notably in the oil sector.

As with the record of inefficiency of the military during the 1980s and 1990s, the significance of the institutionalization of corruption during the second military interregnum also needs to be placed in its proper historical perspective in order to be fully appreciated. Even more than the reputation of the military for speed and efficiency in government is the perception of itself which it promoted, with some success, of being less corrupt than elected civilian politicians. Indeed, the promise of rooting out corruption and indiscipline always ranked side by side with the desire to preserve national unity and stability in the reasons adduced by the military for staging *coups d'état.* This factor as a justification for the military take-over of power gained in credibility particularly after the experience of the Second Republic during which leading politicians from the various political parties, but especially the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN), engaged in flagrant self-enrichment to the dismay of the generality of Nigerians. Such was the scale of corruption perpe-trated by the NPN that some commentators noted that it surpassed anything that had been seen before and that nothing after that experience was likely to match it. Generals Babangida and Abacha, in particular, and to a lesser extent the Abubakar administration were to prove them wrong, taking corruption and plunder to new levels that virtually brought the country to its knees. In doing so, they also severely eroded the credibility of the military—perhaps for good—as a disciplined and patriotic national institution committed to the public purpose. With such a key politico-ideological prop of military intervention eroded, it will take a great deal of recklessness on the part of the elected civilian politicians to make the memory of the generality of Nigerians about just how corrupt and damaging military rule has been to fade away.

The early indicators since the inauguration of the civilian administration would seem to suggest that at the level of executive rhetoric at least, there is an awareness

that, both for the sake of the well-being of the economy and the viability of the Fourth republic, corruption would need to be tackled frontally. At the federal and state level, various panels have been set up to probe shady contracts and recover public funds that were misappropriated by previous military administrations. In the context of Nigeria's political history, it marks the first time that elected civilian politicians have felt sufficiently emboldened to probe their military predecessors and already, several former military administrators have been summoned to appear before some of the panels to account for their actions. Hitherto, it was the military that always claimed the moral and political higher ground, probing and jailing the civilian politicians whom they overthrew. The executive arm of the federal government also presented a tough anti-corruption bill to the National Assembly—indeed, that was the very first piece of draft legislation which the Obasanjo administration sent to the Assembly for its consideration. However, the bill generated a great deal of well-founded concerns about the respect of due process, civic liberties and human rights, concerns which were included in the amended and watered down version that was eventually passed by the National Assembly. The handling of the case of forgery preferred against the first speaker of the House of Representatives represented the first serious acid test of the will of the political elite to discipline itself and although Salisu Buhari was eventually forced from office and was also arraigned before a magistrate, not a few commentators observed the reluctance of the federal government and many of Buhari's legislative colleagues to allow the law to take its full and proper course. In the end, Buhari got off lightly with a fine of 2000 Naira ($20) and is a free person (*The News,* 2 August 1999; *Tell,* 2 August 1999; *Newswatch,* 2 August 1999). He was also, during the course of 2000, to be a beneficiary of a state pardon extended to him by the president. In the meantime, the two arms of the National Assembly, namely the Senate and the House of Representatives continue to be wracked by cases of high-level corruption and abuse of office which have been a source of growing popular outrage as well as disenchantment with the commitment of the politicians to democracy.

The Crisis of the Educational Sector

Side by side with the decay of the national infrastructure has been the collapse of Nigeria's educational sector from the primary through to the higher levels made up of the universities and the polytechnics. The process of this collapse dates back to the early 1980s when, as part of the economic crisis management policies favoured by the government, cuts were made in the budgetary allocations to the sector and efforts were made to pursue cost recovery policies. The adoption in 1986/1987 of an IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programme by the Babangida regime served to reinforce the process of decline in the sector as further cost-cutting measures were introduced and the repeated devaluation of the Naira meant that outstanding capital and some recurrent expenditures had to be abandoned by the universities in the face of the decline in the real value of the resources that were allocated to them. Devaluation and inflation also ate deeply into the wages and

salaries of those employed in the educational sector as with all public sector employees, with primary and secondary schoolteachers exposed to the additional burden of not receiving their pay for several months at a time (*The Guardian,* 15 September 1999). In the specific case of the universities and other institutions of higher learning, not only were incomes no longer adequate, let alone competitive, research funds also dried up even as the basic infrastructure of teaching began to collapse. Matters were not helped by the decisively anti-university tone of the World Bank's education sector policy in the 1980s, a tone which questioned some of the basic precepts of academic freedom and which was predicated on the viability of the application of a market approach to the management of the higher education system. Across the educational sector, dissatisfaction with the conditions of work fuelled confrontations between teachers and the state, leading to prolonged strikes that disrupted the academic calendar and fed into a cycle of declining standards (Jega, 199).

The response of the military regimes that presided over the affairs of the country during the 1980s and 1990s consisted basically of treating the educational sector as enemy territory that had to be undermined. Thus, strike actions taken by the teachers, particularly at the higher educational institutions, were greeted with arrests and detention as well as the repeated proscription of the national unions of academics, the non-academic staff, and students. The powers of the vice-chancellors of universities, rectors of polytechnics, and provosts of colleges of education were also significantly expanded as part of the effort to prevent autonomous action by academics to demand improvements in their conditions of work. Furthermore, the security agencies were unleashed on the campuses with a mandate to assist the administrative organs of the institutions of higher learning to neutralize the most militant staff and organize pro-regime campus groupings. Militant student unionism, always a tradition of the Nigerian university system, was directly targeted as part of this "containment" strategy. As efforts were made to suppress autonomous student unionism, violent cults with membership recruited within the student body emerged and terrorized campuses in a manner which was aimed at curbing staff and student militancy against continued military rule and the decline of the educational sector. The activities of the cults, therefore, became part and parcel of the highly authoritarian administrative system that was foisted on the institutions of higher learning, serving as its vehicle of violent expression (*The News,* 19 July 1999 and 26 July 1999; *Tell,* 19 July 1999 and 26 July 1999; *Newswatch,* 2 August 1999; Jega, 1994).

The consequences of the crisis in the Nigerian educational sector are legion. At the most obvious level, they include the massive brain drain which the country has suffered; the sharp decline in the quality of instruction with its direct implication for the calibre of graduates who are produced and the local capacity to satisfy the human resource needs of the economy and society; the very low morale of staff and student; the increasing inability of colleges of education to attract candidates for training as primary and secondary school teachers; and the dilapidation of the physical infrastructure of most institutions. While it may have been convenient for the

military to ride roughshod over the educational sector, shunning most opportunities to engage staff, students, parents and administrators in negotiations on how to reform the sector in the national interest, it is doubtful that the elected politicians who are now in power can afford to tread the same path. Considering also that the problems faced by educational institutions during the military years are symptomatic of the wider crises in the entire social sector of the country, especially in the area of health care delivery, it seems clear that the reform of the educational system would need to be pursued as an integral part of the restoration of a clear-headed policy of social citizenship that could serve as an anchor for the Fourth Republic.

The early signals which have emerged since the inauguration of the elected civilian administration has, at best, been mixed. While there has been a demonstration of awareness of crisis in the educational sector and in the delivery of other social services, it is not clear if the full magnitude and urgency of the problem is fully appreciated. This is so in spite of the expressed commitment of the federal government to pursue a universal primary education programme up to the junior secondary school level, the proposal to grant universities autonomy (which is seen by students and staff as a Greek gift), the declaration by the governments of the states controlled by the Alliance for Democracy of a free education policy, the establishment of visitation panels to all the federal and some of the state universities, and the award of grants to the universities. The massacre on 10 July 1999 of student union leaders and activists at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, by members of a secret cult and the controversial decision of the federal government which it sparked to permit the Nigerian Police Force to return to the campuses of the institutions of higher learning, the deep-seated crisis at the University of Ibadan during the period between June and August over the so-called municipal fees unilaterally fixed and imposed by the university administration, and the reluctance of the federal government to honour an agreement reached between ASUU and the government of General Abubakar on conditions of work are indicators both of the complexity of the problems that lie ahead and the need for the demonstration of good faith and imagination by the government in order to restore the confidence of the teachers, parents, and students in its policies (*The News,* 19 July 1999 and 26 July 1999; *Tell,* 19 July 1999 and 26 July 1999; *The Guardian,* 15 September 1999 and 16 September 1999; *Newswatch,* 2 August 1999).

Mass Poverty

For much of the 1960s and 1970s, all the key social and economic indicators in Nigeria showed a generally upward trend. By the early 1980s, however, a reversal began to take place on account of the economic crisis with which the country was faced. Throughout the 1980s, the crisis worsened, compounded in many respects by the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programme which the government of General Babangida embraced and the widespread mismanagement over which successive military regimes presided. From being a middle-income country in the 1970s, Nigeria was very quickly reduced to a low-income country with a per capita

income less than $300. As the productive base of the economy was decimated by a combination of adjustment and non-adjustment related factors, unemployment, particularly among the youth, grew sharply and the health and nutritional status of many Nigerians declined. The ranks of the vibrant middle class of professionals were massively depleted as many slided into poverty on account of the collapse in their real incomes associated with the repeated devaluation of the Naira and the high inflationary spiral in the economy. It was reported that between 1992 and 1998, the percentage of Nigerians living below the poverty line had doubled from 41 per cent to 80 per cent (Mustapha, 1999).

Yet, even as a majority of Nigerians were driven into poverty, a minority of military personnel, particularly those who held political appointments, and their local and foreign civilian business associates and friends accumulated stupendous wealth. One report suggested that twelve of the richest Nigerians, most of them retired military officers, had some $55 billion stashed away in overseas accounts. The Nigeria of the 1980s and 1990s was, therefore, starkly polarized between an army of impoverished citizens and a tiny and ever dwindling minority of rich people whose wealth derived more from the exploitation of public office or connections with office holders than from investment in productive economic activities for which the policy and political environments were, in any case, increasingly harsh. For many Nigerians, it was difficult to defend the situation where, in spite of the vast riches of the country, the majority of the citizenry was being driven into poverty and the adoption of desperate, sometimes criminal actions, in order to survive. Although many tried to rebuild their livelihood by entering into the informal sector, for the majority it was little more than an exercise in subsistence given the saturated and highly segmented nature of the sector as well as the obstacles posed by the country's infrastructure crisis. Mass poverty, therefore, fed into the political resentment that was building up in the country to pose direct challenges to the stability and viability of the nation-state. One dimension of the resentment that arose was an anti-military one but this was also clouded and complicated by growing ethno-regional suspicions, inter-generational conflict and inter-state competition. To address that problem, the executive arm of the federal government has set up a committee headed by Ahmed Joda to harmonize and consolidate the various existing poverty-alleviation programmes inherited from the previous military administrations. More than this, however, the real test for the government will be its speed in making a real difference in the lives of the generality of the people and in this regard, its efforts at restoring the infrastructure facilities and getting the economy functioning again so that employment can be generated by both the public and private sectors will be crucial. Particular attention would also need to be paid to the gender dimensions of poverty which such cosmetic and self-promoting projects as the Better Life Programme of Mrs Maryam Babangida and the Family Economic Advancement Programme which Mrs Mariam Abacha devised to replace it, were unable to address on account of their location within the structure of the ego-driven state feminism promoted by the two self-proclaimed First Ladies.

The National Minimum Wage

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and in spite of the various efforts made by the military to weaken and destroy their autonomous organizations, Nigerian workers have been persistent in demanding the payment of a national minimum wage that would enable all sections of the labour force to earn a decent living. The earlier public sector wages and salaries review which was carried out during the Babangida years and which resulted in the national minimum wage being fixed at 250 Naira a month in 1991 was very quickly wiped out by the continuing depreciation of the Naira and the increased inflationary pressures in the economy. Demands, therefore, built up again for a review of public sector remuneration and although the Abacha regime promised to revise the minimum wage to take cognizance of the increased cost of living, it was only in the first few weeks after his death and the rise to power of General Abdusalam Abubakar that a new national minimum wage, initially fixed at 5,000 Naira and then quickly reduced to 3,500 Naira a month for federal employees and 3,000 Naira for most state government employees, was announced. While the level at which the minimum wage was pegged was unsatisfactory to labour leaders whose organizations were newly unshackled from the draconian measures which Abacha had taken to control them, state governments across the country indicated that they were not in a position to pay even the new, reduced wage without assistance from the federal government.

In a bid to compel the state governments to pay their workers, various local branches of the Nigeria Labour Congress embarked on strike actions even as the transition process was at its peak. Whilst being fully cognizant of the fact that ambitious military officers could take advantage of the state of industrial unrest that enveloped the country to reverse the transition process, labour leaders insisted that they felt duty bound to insist that the military redress the wage problem before leaving the political scene. They were emboldened in this by the announcements that were made of the huge amounts of stolen national resources that had been recovered from the Abacha family and some of the senior associates of Abacha. While many independent observers noted that the new national minimum wage was still grossly inadequate to sustain livelihood above the poverty level, most state governments insisted that their revenue base could not bear the new pay structure; the problem was, therefore, carried over into the Fourth Republic. In a number of states, workers have had to strike in order to press the elected governors who replaced the military administrators to honour the new wage and salary structure. Not a few of the elected governors complained both before and after being sworn in that the minimum wage question was like a poisoned chalice fabricated and handed over to them by the departing military in a calculated move to cripple the Fourth Republic at birth. Problems of wage and salary arrears even in some of the states that have decided to pay the new minimum wage have also persisted.

In a bid to address the issue and avert further strike actions, the elected state governments were unanimous in appealing to the federal executive to offer them a special grant, which some put in the region of 500 million Naira per state, that would

enable them cope with the new wage and salary bill. They buttressed their plea with the argument, which is substantially true, that they inherited (virtually) empty treasuries and a huge debt overhang from their military predecessors. This request was, however, rejected out of hand by the Obasanjo administration on the grounds that there is no constitutional basis for federal hand-outs to the states. Demands for a re-visiting of the national revenue allocation formula have also been made and debates are going on around this within and outside the National Assembly, including the question of the principle of derivation for the oil-producing states and the distribution of the value-added taxes collected in the different parts of the country (*Vanguard,* 9 September 1999; *The Guardian,* 9 September 1999). Also, the 36-member National Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission charged with the task of working out a new national revenue allocation formula was inaugurated on 20 September 1999 following the approval of its composition by the Senate (*The Guardian,* 21 September 1999).

At the same time, there are suggestions emanating from the federal government that the national wage and salary system should be decentralized to take greater cognizance of the differential costs of living and capacities to pay across the country (*Vanguard,* 14 September 1999). This proposal was first mooted by the Babangida regime and was stoutly and successfully resisted by the labour movement and was given concrete expression in May 2000 when President Obasanjo announced at a May Day rally in Lagos that the federal government had approved a new national minimum wage of 7,500 Naira for federal employees and 5,000 Naira for most state and local government employees. This immediately produced a new round of crisis as some sections of the labour leadership, while welcoming the new minimum wage, protested the two-tier wage and salary structure that was adopted. Members of the National Assembly too protested the lack of consultation by the executive branch before the new wage structure was announced. So too did the 36 state governments whose leaders also served notice of the inability to pay the new wage structure, thereby plunging the country into sporadic public sector strikes at all levels of government.

In the meantime, some state governments have resorted to trimming down the size of their civil service by retrenching workers to a level that would make their wage and salary bill more sustainable. Others have carried out different kinds of censuses of their employees in order to eliminate ghost workers and thus plug revenue leakages. Central to all of these is the dilemma of the various elected state governments to, on the one hand, have sufficient resources over and above their wage and salary commitments to fulfill their manifesto commitments and, on the other hand, avoid actions which could result in crippling labour unrest. This dilemma has been played out at its fullest in Osun State where the elected government has been locked in a serious struggle with its employees virtually from the day it assumed office; Osogbo, the state capital has been the scene for a number of violent demonstrations that resulted in the destruction of public property, including the sacking of government offices.

It is clear, that the future of Nigeria's attempt at democratic political reform will be closely tied to the capacity of the federal and state governments to pay a living wage to their workers. A commitment to achieving this goal will be crucial to the restoration of popular confidence in public institutions and office holders, an outcome that will be beneficial to the health of the political system. As things are, public disaffection on the wage question is fired by the justifiable perception that public office holders are excessively self-serving, an impression which has been reinforced in the minds of the working poor and other concerned Nigerians by the massive furniture allowances of 3.5 million and 2.5 million Naira which senators and members of the House of Representatives awarded to themselves. Similar pressures have been mounted by members of various state legislatures, sometimes successfully, to be awarded all manner of grants connected to the highly exaggerated definitions of their comfort and welfare. Such gross insensitivity at a time of widespread poverty and the inability of state governments to pay the 3,000 Naira minimum wage approved by the departing Abubakar military administration and the 5,000 Naira introduced by the Obasanjo administration has drawn the ire of many Nigerians. It has certainly made the task of restoring the moral authority of the holders of public office more difficult to re-establish and it is a trend which, if not quickly arrested, may not augur well for the stabilization of long-term civilian rule.

Revenue Generation for a Representative Political System

As implied earlier, the minimum wage question and the difficulty of state governments in tackling it, touches directly on the twin issue of the national revenue allocation formula (consisting mainly of the proportion in which revenues from oil and the nationally-administered valued added tax should be shared among the different tiers of government) and revenue generation particularly by the state and local governments. Since the revenue allocation question has already been extensively debated in the literature, it is proposed not to spend more time on it here in preference for a discussion of internal revenue generation and its potential both for improving the financial/economic viability of the states and local governments and contributing to the development of a culture of accountability by rulers to those whom they govern. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that with the exception of Lagos and, perhaps, Rivers and Kano states, none of the other states in what presently passes for the Nigerian federation can survive on their own without financial allocations and hand-outs from the federal government. The situation is even worse for the local governments where, outside the few which have some jurisdiction over the central business districts of Lagos, all the others are at the mercy of the state and federal governments.

The dire financial situation of the state and local governments is one which has already been recognized as being very unhealthy for the Nigerian political system, especially with regard to fulfilment of the constitutionally-defined competencies of the different tiers of government and the autonomy of the different administrative-political units that make up the nation-state. More than this, however, is the question

of the need to establish a sound financial basis for the state and local governments through the development of non-oil revenue generation sources, including the reformation of the existing individual and business taxation rules of the direct and indirect types, both to improve coverage and enforcement as well as strengthen the progressive component. For this purpose, the capacities of the state and local governments in tax assessment, resource mobilization and revenue collection will need to be enhanced. An enlightenment campaign aimed at encouraging compliance with tax regulations will also need to be undertaken side by side with measures aimed at promoting the confidence of the public in the honesty of purpose of public officials and the tax collectors. Being tiers of government which are nearer to the generality of Nigerians, the strengthening of the capacity of the state and local governments to collect taxes and develop other avenues of revenue mobilization might have the additional benefit of strengthening citizen interest in ensuring that tax resources are appropriately applied for the purpose of enhancing local level social, economic and physical development. In other words, an improved tax collection drive to expand the revenue base of the state and local governments should contribute to the development of a culture of citizen vigilance aimed at extracting accountability to the governed by their rulers.

The External Debt Profile

The flip side of domestic revenue generation in the promotion of viable political reforms is external debt relief. In the period since 1977 when the Nigerian government raised a loan of $1 million from the private international capital market to enable it tide over the revenue deficit which a decline in oil prices had occasioned, the country's external debt profile has shot up astronomically. As of the end of 1998, it was reckoned that the country's external debt stood at some $30 billion, of which about $17 billion was in arrears (*The News,* 2 August 1999; *The Guardian,* 13 September 1999; *Vanguard,* 16 September 1999). Much of this debt was incurred during the Second Republic when both the federal and state governments embarked on an international borrowing spree from official (bilateral and multilateral) and private sources, including suppliers' credit and contractor finance that were accepted on terms that were highly disadvantageous and linked to projects of dubious viability. The 1979 constitution had, in what many saw retrospectively as an error, granted both the federal and state governments powers to raise loans locally and internationally. The reasons for the borrowing spree that was embarked upon by the politicians of the Second Republic have been extensively discussed in the literature (*see,* for example, Falola and Ihonvbere, 1984; Olukoshi, 1990, 1992; Forrest, 1994) and need not detain us here. What is important to note is that the external debt legacy of the Second Republic became a major source of burden on the country both as international oil prices collapsed and the fortunes of the economy dwindled. In spite of the strict ban which was placed on new international loans by the Buhari-Idiagbon administration, a measure which was later slightly relaxed by the Babangida regime and then fully reinstated by the Abacha junta, the rapid

accumulation of arrears and compound interests added to the principal to more than double the country's total outstanding obligation in a space of about a decade.

As of the end of 1998, Nigeria's debt service obligation amounted to some 36 per cent of the national budget. That translated into a payment of some $1.68 billion out of the $3.61 billion that was actually due for 1998 (*The Guardian,* 13 September 1999). Yet, in spite of the spirited efforts made by the Buhari-Idiagbon and, to a lesser extent, the Babangida and Abacha regimes to attempt to pay back as much of the debt obligations as possible, and for all the fanfare that greeted the adoption of the debt conversion programme as a viable, market-based strategy of debt reduction, the country's cumulative liability has consistently increased, making it obvious that not only is the debt not sustainable relative to revenue receipts but it is also not payable. Indeed, according to the National Economic Intelligence Committee which operated between 1994 and 1995, in spite of the fact that the country borrowed some $28.025 billion over the period 1979 to 1995 and paid back $35.845 billion in principal and interest, the outstanding debt as of 31 December 1997 still stood at a staggering $27.088 billion (*The News,* 2 August 1999). Taken together with the wanton mismanagement and theft perpetrated on the country by the military and their collaborators, it becomes easy to understand why Nigeria, with the addition of such a huge debt burden and the pursuit, for a period at least, of an inappropriate neo-liberal economic reform programme, regressed so rapidly and deeply in the last decade and half. Partly in recognition of this, a deliberate decision, which was also inserted in the 1999 constitution, was made to limit the right of state governments to borrow freely from the international capital markets. But given that even the best of honest and disciplined managerial efforts aimed at plugging corruption and other illicit forms of resource leakage in the country will still not leave sufficient resources for the purpose of promoting economic development at current debt service levels, and with foreign direct investment outside of the oil and mineral resource sector not likely to show a significant increase, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that meaningful and substantial debt relief for Nigeria is crucial to the ability of the politicians presiding over the Fourth Republic to be able to deliver the kinds of results that would enhance popular confidence in the democratic system of government (Darah, 1999). The alternative is that Nigeria's developmental capacity will continue to be retarded to the detriment of its stability and that of a representative system of government.

Mechanics of Governance

One of the features of prolonged military rule in Nigeria, particularly during the second military interregnum, was first, the increasing centralization and concentration of power in the federal government and then, the gradual personalization of that power by the military ruler. Both developments represented a sharp departure from previous practice and seriously compromised democratic governance characterized by internal policy debates within the governmental system and political scrutiny from the interested and/or concerned public. Indeed, for a long time, even

the ruling military councils that were set up by successful coup makers to run the country were organized on the basis of collective, collegiate decision-making based on vigorous internal discussion and widespread consultation. The process of jettisoning this approach to decision-making was started by General Babangida who was the first military ruler to take on the title of president and who then proceeded to concentrate all key powers in the presidency which he dominated, the Armed Forces Ruling Council having been reduced to the role of a supporting cast that was cynically manipulated to serve the ends of the commander-in-chief. General Abacha, nicknamed the "maximum ruler" by sections of the independent press, was to take the Babangida approach to its logical, if ridiculous conclusion. Meetings of the Provisional Ruling Council were convened infrequently; the statutory requirement that the federal executive council should meet regularly was completely jettisoned. As noted earlier, the federal and state civil service system was also effectively destroyed, its top echelon politicized, its ranks demoralized, and its sense of cohesion undermined. This was in spite of the decision of the government to set up the Ayida Commission to review the functioning of the civil service; most of the key recommendations of the commission were simply not implemented.

Restoring a sense of procedure, collective decision-making and responsibility in the cabinet, and a sense of direction to the civil service is clearly one of the important areas of action which could help to provide a stable and predictable administrative environment for promoting political reforms in the country. The early steps which have been taken by the Obasanjo administration are encouraging in this regard. Not only has the practice of weekly cabinet meetings been restored, a code of conduct to guide ministers and advisers was also adopted (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999), and ministers, supported by their senior civil servants, are now once again required to present and defend their key policy initiatives and actions before their colleagues. The position of the head of the civil service has also been restored in line with the recommendations of the Ayida Commission and is distinct from the office of the secretary to the government of the federation which is specifically political. Together with the permanent secretaries and the civil service commission, the head of the service is expected to lead the effort at the restoration of merit, professional ethics and high standards in the country's administrative system. As part of this process, consultations were held regarding a new pay structure for the federal civil service and the announcement in May 2000 of a new national minimum wage. These may all appear to be small and routine steps as, indeed, they should be under normal circumstances, and much more certainly needs to be done to take matters beyond the level of rhetoric, especially the code of conduct for ministers and senior civil servants. Furthermore, the size and calibre of the federal ministerial team and the array of special advisers and special assistants, both senior and regular, has been a source of justifiable concern, not least because of the cost implications and the unwieldy size of the group. But the true significance of some of the steps that have been taken to re-

establish the mechanics of government would be recognized if the extent of the collapse of the most elementary governmental mechanism, particularly during the Abacha years, is fully appreciated. Success in this area, particularly with the institutionalization of the work and decision-making culture that is being promoted would certainly go a long way in enhancing the credibility of the Fourth Republic and civilian rule.

The Constitution and Constitutional Reform

For the first time in its history, Nigeria undertook and concluded a transition programme without a published constitutional framework to guide the process. The background to this goes back to the highly secretive approach that was adopted by the Abacha regime whereby, after the proceedings of the 1995 constitutional conference, the draft document that was produced was taken out of the public domain and all further action on it, including amendments, carried out in secret in accordance with the shifting self-succession plans of General Abacha. By the time Abacha died in June 1998, no official public version of the constitution existed and within the inner recesses of Aso Rock Villa, the seat of power, at least two versions were reported to be in circulation. Speculation was rife in the media as to the changes that might have been made by General Abacha and his advisers to the clean draft that was produced by the constitutional conference. Once it had outlined its transition programme, the Abubakar administration announced its intention to submit the "draft" constitution to a national debate and for this purpose, in November 1999, it set up the Constitutional Debate Co-ordinating Committee headed by Justice Niki Tobi to collate the views expressed by Nigerians. The Tobi committee reported that its reading of the views expressed by Nigerians showed a distrust of the draft constitution produced during the Abacha years and a preference for a return to an amended and updated version of the 1979 constitution. However, although the Provisional Ruling Council met several times to iron out a constitution for the country, no finalized version of the document was available to the citizenry. In the meantime, elections were held to fill various positions on the basis of specific decrees passed by the ruling military council; politicians were in a bizarre situation of contesting for offices whose duties and responsibilities they did not fully know in advance while the citizenry was invited to vote without a guiding constitutional framework to inform their choice. It was only on the eve of the departure of the military from office that the so-called 1999 constitution was signed by General Abubakar and even then, it was still not available to the public until after the military had completely left the political scene (*The Guardian*, 7 May 1999).

The flawed constitutional framework of the transitional process certainly did not do much to enhance popular confidence in the good faith of the military and right up to 29 May 1999 when Obasanjo and the 36 state governors were sworn in, doubts continued to linger as to whether the transition would actually be completed and rumours were widespread about immunity clauses and other special dispensations that were being entrenched in the constitution for the military (*The Guardian*, 7 May

1999; Mustapha, 1999; Olukoshi, 1999). In the end, these turned out not to have been the case but the anxiety that gripped the country in the weeks to the handover was fully demonstrated by the chilling effect which rumour of the death of Obasanjo in Abuja just about a week to the handover had on the country, with spontaneous riots breaking out in Lagos and Abeokuta.

The deep distrust that is evident in the Nigerian polity is clearly one of the worst legacies of the second military interregnum and this distrust has several dimensions to it. Apart from that between the military and civilians, there is also the ethno-regional and religious dimension and the generalized cynicism with which the citizenry, having been repeatedly duped and cheated, hold all public office holders, with grave consequences for the development of a civic culture that would be conducive for democratic reforms. Furthermore, there are, as we noted earlier, pressing problems of the distribution of powers and responsibilities among the three tiers of government arising from the distorting consequences of prolonged military rule that would also need to be redressed in order to restore Nigeria to a more balanced federal arrangement. Integral to this is the Niger Delta question which, in many respects, encapsulates all that is wrong with the current political arrangements in Nigeria and the dangers of prevarication in finding long-lasting solutions (Madunagu, 1999a, 1999b; Osaghae, 1998). Further, concerns about the better representation of Nigerian women and the youth in the national political process and structures of governance continue to be widespread. All of these issues underlie the case for a revisiting of the constitutional foundations of the Fourth Republic.

Already, in the first few months into the Fourth Republic, some of Nigeria's leading legal and constitutional experts have questioned the authenticity of the 1999 constitution as being representative of the freely articulated wishes of the citizenry as opposed to the unilaterally-imposed views of a discredited military establishment. Indeed, one of the best known establishment lawyers in the country, who is also one of the most senior members of the Bar, Chief F. R. A. Williams, surprised Nigerians when he described the 1999 constitution as nothing less than a fraudulent document; these were views traditionally associated with the more radical and activist currents in Nigerian politics. The case for the revisiting of the constitution and its reworking to reflect the will of the generality of Nigerians, therefore, seems inevitable. The question which remains now is the modality that is to followed in undertaking such a review so that the constitution can be turned into a document which most Nigerians can feel that they own. Here opinion remains highly polarized between those, mainly from the radical current in Nigerian politics, who insist on a (sovereign) national conference bringing together the different nationalities and other interest groups in the polity and those who take the view that whatever amendments that are necessary would have to be undertaken within the framework of the existing elected structures of government, those structures being representative of the will of the people. As part of the latter strategy, the Senate unanimously passed a motion on 8 September 1999 for a review of the constitution; the Speaker of the House of Representatives also announced the intention of the members of the

lower chamber of the National Assembly to undertake a similar review. The executive branch of the federal government has, for its part, established a constitutional review committee made up of representatives of the three registered political parties (*Tell,* 2 August, 1999; *Vanguard,* 9 September 1999).

Managing the Electoral System

Elections have always been a highly contentious issue in Nigeria and those that were conducted as part of the transition to the Fourth Republic have not been an exception, especially at the presidential level. Although few would disagree that based on the trends that were set in the earlier elections, it was highly probable, even certain that Olusegun Obasanjo and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) defeated Olu Falae who was joint candidate of the wobbly alliance between the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the All People's Party (APP) in the March 1999 presidential elections, it is highly questionable that the margin of the victory was as wide as the 7,627,867 that was recorded and officially declared. Local and international observers reported widespread irregularities in the polls with electoral officials, the police and party agents working together to perpetrate electoral fraud in favour of one or the other of the two candidates. The PDP obviously got the upper hand in this game. In some constituencies, returns indicated a nearly one hundred per cent voter turn out and all in favour of one particular party; in others, the number of votes returned exceeded the number of registered voters. So carried away were the officials and agents who presided over these malpractices that they were not even mindful of the senselessness of some of the kinds of outcomes which they delivered for their favoured party and its candidate (Transition Monitoring Group, 1999; Carter Centre/National Democratic Institute, 1999).

While Olu Falae may have been right not to pursue his appeal against the declaration of Obasanjo as winner of the presidential elections to the supreme court, the question of how to manage elections credibly in order to limit the destabilizing consequences of widespread and evident irregularities would still need to be carefully revisited as part of the attempt to strengthen the foundations of the Fourth Republic and the basis for electoral politics. The provision in the 1999 constitution for the establishment by state governments of their own electoral commissions has, in this context, been a source of concern as has been the capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure that elections reflect the will of the majority of the people. Apart from the need for the establishment of mechanisms that would win the confidence of voters and the political parties in the electoral process, partisanship in the constitution of the national and state electoral commissions would need to be checked especially as the civilian politicians themselves would be responsible for managing the process entirely on their own. Similarly, the independence and impartiality of the appeals mechanism would need to be guaranteed in order to ensure that losers have confidence in it and see it as their first and only recourse as opposed to appealing to the military to intervene in the political process. And as Mustapha points out, the politicians too would have to curb their "...

instinct for power-grabbing without regard for the integrity and sustainability of the political process ..." (Mustapha, 1999).

Militricians and Democracy

One of the enduring legacies of prolonged military rule in Nigeria is the penetration of virtually all facets of life by serving and retired military officers. From the economy where, particularly during the second military interregnum, they emerged as key players in the thick of the wheeling and dealing that oils the system to the national administrative-political structure where, in addition to their traditional presence in the ruling military council, the security apparatuses, and the federal executive council, they were also appointed managers of parastatals and specialized government agencies, the military, made up of retired and serving officers, emerged as key players in the economy and society. The scale of this presence did not, however, hit Nigerians fully until the politics of the transition began to unfold, with an array of retired military officers taking a commanding role in virtually all of the parties, but especially the PDP which was easily the strongest and best established. It was probably partly indicative of this influence, the superior resources at their disposal when compared to the professional politicians, and the coalition-building leverage which this resource endowment conferred on them that Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired general who was drafted into the presidential contest by retired Generals Babangida and Mohammed Gusau, easily trounced his other opponents for the PDP ticket. Not even the organizational acumen displayed by the political machine of the late Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'adua prepared the majority of the professional politicians in the PDP and the other parties for the virtual take over of the political terrain by the retired military officers.

What does this pervasive influence of the military mean for democratic potentials and stability of the post-military political system? This is a question which has provoked a great deal of discussion within Nigeria, with some insisting that having become retired, military officers who have reverted to a civilian life are free to contest elections without endangering the democratic system while others insist that military culture dictates that once a soldier, always a soldier, a culture which in the Nigerian context is reinforced by the numerous active networks that link retired officers, who are strictly speaking on reserve, to serving officers who constitute the active force. Others have suggested that perhaps given the profound disequilibrium which prolonged military rule in Nigeria has caused, and the fact that for some time to come, the military will continue to loom over the Nigerian political terrain like the proverbial sword of Damocles, it is perhaps fortuitous that the country was able to get a long-retired general to lead its political transition from authoritarianism to civilian-based electoral politics (*The Guardian,* 14 September 1999; 16 September 1999). The thinking behind this reasoning is that his knowledge of the culture and psyche of the military will be useful for the task of military reformation that would be required for the establishment of a stable democratic system.

There is, of course, some validity to the various positions that have been expressed on the arrival of the era of the militricians in the Nigerian political process. But beyond the different views that have been articulated on this development, what is really crucial is the need for the rapid acquisition of expertise by civilian politicians and technocrats in military science, the encouragement of popular vigilance against the revival of military rule, and the creation of popular structures for the defence of elected civilian rule in the country. A situation where the military may be out of office but not out of power is one against which both civil and political society must guard. Of course, integral to this is the extent to which the politicians themselves are able to win the confidence of the populace that the political dispensation over which they are presiding is itself worth defending against military adventurers. Although after the experience of the Babangida and Abacha years, there is a widespread consensus that military rule has been far more damaging to the country than any benefits it may have had, and on account of this, several interest groups have vowed to mobilize against any future attempt by the military to seize power, deliberate measures will need to be pursued by the elected politicians to establish a popular institutional basis for civilian rule to endure. For, to repeat the point again, entrenched, anti-democratic military interests feeding on negative ethno-regional sentiments and backed by an assortment of political opportunists are a feature of contemporary Nigerian politics which can only be ignored at the peril of the country (Mustapha, 1999).

Within a month of being sworn in, the Obasanjo administration moved swiftly to purge the military of many of the officers who held political appointments between 1984 and 1999 in what many saw as a bold effort to rid the armed forces of "political" officers. This step followed hard on the heels of the appointment on 29 May 1999 of new service chiefs for the Army, Navy and Air Force as well as a new Inspector-General of Police; prior to those appointments, there had been concern that the service chiefs who served under the Abubakar administration were extremely reluctant to leave their positions and might resist efforts by the new civilian government at replacing them. The argument for the purge that was carried was that all the officers who served previous military regimes in political positions may no longer be fully amenable to life in the barracks and could stand in the way of efforts to reprofessionalize the armed forces under civilian political leadership. As part of the effort to reform the military, a massive reshuffling of the officer corps was also undertaken entailing new command appointments and the redeployment of various categories of officers. Furthermore, suggestions have been made that the size of the armed forces would be trimmed from 80,000 to 50,000 both to improve operational efficiency and free up resources for the upgrading of the training and equipment of the different arms of the military (*Vanguard*, 15 September 1999). These are, of course, delicate measures to take and care must be taken to manage them in order not to give room for the exploitation of ethno-regional passions or a backlash within the armed forces that could well destabilize the transition or force a reversal.

Concluding Remarks

The transition from military to civilian rule that occurred on 29 May 1999 marked the beginning of a first, perhaps tentative step in the continuing quest in Nigeria for a stable and democratic political order. It is widely recognized across the country that although military rule may have been formally ended, the effects of the militarization of the polity and the destruction of the economy and the moral fibre of society that are the legacies of prolonged military rule have not made the task of democratic reforms easy. Indeed, not properly handled, the plethora of economic, political and social problems which the armed forces left behind as they quit the political stage might well obstruct efforts which must be made to extend and deepen the reform process if it is to be meaningful to the majority of Nigerians. Thus, although Nigerians may have witnessed the end of formal military rule on 29 May 1999, the struggle for the democratization of the country's political processes is still on and it is not at all certain, nor can it be taken for granted, that the civilian political elite is fully up to the challenges that lie ahead. Yet, considering the enormous costs on the economy and socio-political fabric which the failed transition programmes of the Babangida and Abacha regimes exacted, most Nigerians seem to realize that the transition which began with the transfer of power from General Abubakar to President Obasanjo is one whose failure they and the country cannot afford.

Note

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The Transition and the Media

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Abstract

This essay examines the role which the Nigerian media played in the transition from military rule to elected civilian government. It observes that the immediate political context of the transition was a post-Abacha liberalizing military administration as well as a resurgent civil society. This context meant that the media was able to play a relatively robust role in reporting and influencing the transition although the fact that the Abdulsalami Abubakar regime refused to repeal several "death decrees" targeted at the media remained a key constraining factor on the boldness and imaginativeness of the press in its reporting and monitoring of the transition. Furthermore, while the media, in all its plurality, offered coverage to all of the political parties, it was equally clear that the better financially-endowed People's Democratic Party (PDP) which also emerged as the dominant party was able to win greater advantage over the two other political parties, namely, the All People's Party and the Alliance for Democracy, through the purchase of advertisement space in the print and electronic media. On the whole, the Nigerian media played its role in the transition with credit and whatever weaknesses are observed in its performance and in the skewing of the outcomes of the transition owe more to the shallowness of the transition itself and less to the shortcomings of the media.

Introduction and Overview

Although radical and orthodox political scientists have long recognized the centrality of the media to governance and political change, they have paid surprisingly scant attention to studying the linkages between them.

The current wave of democratization has reaffirmed the importance of the media, as a vital artery of civil society in delegitimizing autocracies, in fostering transition projects, as well as in consolidating and sustaining, infant democracies

(Olukotun & Omole, 1999). International Election monitoring, to take an instance, has very often zeroed in on the unequal access of competing parties to media coverage. For example, the Commonwealth Observer Group to the Presidential, Parliamentary and Civic Elections in Kenya in 1992, observed that;

> Even before the opening of the official campaign, opposition parties began to complain that they were being denied reasonable access to the media in general and to the publicly-owned radio and television in particular ... Indeed this became one of the most contentious issues during the campaign. (Reproduced in Media Rights Agenda/Carter Centre workshop publication, p. 25).

As scholars like Jackobowicz (1995) have shown, the media in transitory politics are also in transition, and cannot be viewed as neutral references standing above society. Drawing on the experience of the Eastern European transitions, Jackobowicz posited that;

> The less democratic a state the more it is likely to perceive all the media as playing a political role and therefore requiring strict supervision. Such a state is prone to use administrative methods and possibly coercion (Jackobowicz, 1995:127).

Given that authoritarian governments, military or civilian are more anxious to determine the representations of reality conveyed by the media, or at least skew them in their favour, it should surprise no one that the media are enlisted in the fray during election periods.

The Nigerian transition took place under a liberalizing military regime, which acted as the umpire of the transition, and more or less determined the political and cultural space within which the media could report, the elections. Given that the transition itself eventually came about after several failed attempts, and as a result of pressures by the international community acting in tandem with a resurgent civil society, there was understandable care to present an acceptable face and come up with a passable outcome. Thus, the government put no overt pressures on the media prior to, during and after the various elections.

Indeed, it relaxed the siege under which the media operated in the dark period of the Abacha days by freeing journalists detained by General Abacha. The situation, however, fell short of a level playing field in that General Abubakar "... enigmatically held on to those decrees under which a violent siege was laid on the media and free expression" (Olukotun, 1999a:3), although he did not enforce those decrees.

It could be argued, therefore, that election reporting and coverage by media would have been bolder and more imaginative had Abubakar abrogated the "death decrees" on the statute books; as he was repeatedly urged to do. While the plural nature of the media, and their resilience deriving from several anti-dictatorship struggles, made it difficult for any group state or non-state to control them, in the end the media obeyed an economic logic by on the average giving more prominence and attention to the People's Democratic Party, (PDP) than the other two parties, the

Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the All People's Party (APP) which ran the presidential election on a single ticket.

As we shall see, however, no simple conclusion can be drawn from that fact since bandwagon effect, bigger advertising-spending, better professional campaign methods and money politics, are all competing explanatory variables.

Within its several constraints the media did a creditable job of informing the electorate, uncovering abuses, raising awareness, refining policy, and sustaining discourse on post-election democratic development. As is well known, however, the transition was a shallow one, witnessing several abuses and logistical hitches.

As at July 2000, the democratic regime falls short of consolidation, and is assailed by centrifugal divisions, religious polarizations, communal violence and debilitating intra-governmental conflicts. It is more properly categorized, following (Diamond, et al, 1999:2) as "a low quality democracy" where the regime tends to "remain shallow, corrupt vulnerable to plebiscitarian styles of role, and incapable of guaranteeing basic civil liberties".

The next section offers a contextual and historical backdrop, while a succeeding section discusses election reporting. We conclude by tying the issues together and looking at the future.

The Media—Backdrop and Context

In an election, the media, conceived here, broadly as print and electronic organs of mass communication play the role of providing information to the voters about candidates, the electoral process, actual voting dates, rules of the game, and much else. Concerning the candidates, for example, it is important for voters to know their qualifications, opinions, voting record, where they exist, and personality traits. Voters, in order to make a clear choice rely on the media for information the policies and manifestos of the respective parties. Finally, the media monitor elections by reporting their conduct (sometimes through live coverage on television), unearthing abuses and rigging, as well as by publishing results. In short, they are part of the apparatus for vetting and legitimizing elections.

How the media perform the roles enumerated above, is obviously a function of their antecedents and culture; the regulatory environment (legal, political and economic) in which they operate, as well as traditions and standards of journalism in the country.

Nigeria has the biggest and most virile press community in Africa followed by South Africa and Kenya (Park, 1993:1). One source put the number of publications (weeklies, dailies and magazines) at 116 (Ogbodu, 1986:81), although a number of these are fickle and are at the margins of survival. Indeed, one consequence of the economic downturn of the 1980s and 1990s and specifically a consequence of hostile authoritarian economic policies towards the press, is that as at 1999, the combined circulation of all newspapers do not reach half a million, in a country of 100 million or so citizens. If we add the circulation figures of the magazines and other publications, to those of newspapers, they barely hit the one million mark.

The Punch, a privately-owned newspaper is perhaps the most widely-read newspaper and its print run is between 60,000 and 80,000 copies per day. *The Guardian,* a favourite of the intellectuals and respected for its independent, sober views, had a print-run in 1999 of between 50,000 and 70,000 copies per day. Other newspapers such as the privately-owned *National Concord, This Day, Post Express, The Vanguard,* as well as the state-owned *Daily Times,* and the *New Nigerian,* do less well in circulation terms than *The Punch* and *The Guardian.* The magazine market is dominated by three giants, namely, *Tell Magazine, The News* and *Newswatch,* and have circulation figures of about 100,000, 80,000 and 50,000, respectively.

One under-reported, but increasingly assertive newspaper genre are the vernacular newspapers, which in the Yoruba-speaking region made a rebound in the closing years of military rule. A rash of vernacular newspapers have sprung up in recent years, trying to build on the success of Alaroye whose circulation competes favourably with the most successful national dailies (*see* Olutokun, 1999b; Dare, 1999). In broadcasting, there are close to 45 television stations, with about 10 of these in private hands, while of the 44 or so radio stations, a handful are privately owned following the deregulation of broadcasting by the state in 1994 (Bankole, 1995; Olukotun, 1996). The most successful private electronic media are AIT and MINAJ televisions as well as RayPower Radio, all of which offer refreshing contrasts to the heavily state-controlled contents of state electronic media. (Olukotun, 1997a, 1997b).

As in Kenya, publications rise, fall and are sometimes reborn with dizzying regularity. This is particularly true of the genres of afternoon newspapers, soft-sell magazines as well as newspapers owned by sub-national authorities. Take *The Diet* newspaper, for example. It was founded in 1997 by Mr James Ibori, a close ally of the late dictator, General Sani Abacha. In 1999, most of its staff had walked out as a result of the non-payment of salaries for several months—a typical syndrome in Nigerian press culture. The paper virtually grinded to a halt in late 1999. In 2000, its publisher, now Governor of Delta State, relaunched *The Diet* as an attractive, technicolour publication.

The imposition of value added tax on inputS into newspaper production by both the Abacha and Abubakar administrations, and the consequent skyrocketing costs of production, forced many newspapers to downsize, cut back on circulation, increase cover price or simply capsize. The years, between 1994 and 1999 were harsh ones for the press, not just because of censorship decrees and frequent detention, but because of hostile economic policies. The imposition of 5 per cent Value Added Tax on newspapers in the 1999 budget by General Abubakar, stiffened further the climate in which many newspapers found themselves. Increases in cover price and advert rates by *The Guardian* and other publications in 1999 made the press even more of an elitist product than it ought to have been in an election year.

Feeble capacity of media meant that reporters lacked, often the necessary

infrastructure and ancillary materials to do an in-depth coverage of the election and resort to dubious survival strategies. For doing a live coverage of the PDP President election primaries, held in Jos, the African Independent Television (AIT), a medium on the edge of bankruptcy, presented a bill running into several thousands of Naira to the party.

As at election year, various newspapers state-owned and private were owing their staff several month of salary, ranging from 3 months to 8 months, as a result of the distress in that sector of the economy. One senior journalist observed correctly that the Nigerian journalist "goes out to work armed minimally despite today's electronic age. Side by side with his foreign counterpart he is equipped like a stone-age communicator amidst the clusters of sophisticated gadgetry presided over by his Japanese equivalent. Under these conditions, the Nigerian journalist is an unsung hero ... deplorable low wages and delayed salary payments are common" (cited in *Daily Times*, 9 June 1994, p. 20).

Most journalists are not computer literate, much less own personal computers, in spite of the arrival on the Internet of *The Post Express*, *The Guardian* and *The Vanguard*. In an age in which "electronic networks connect data bases and video cameras around the world" (Cairncross, 1997:237); one survey informs pertinently that;

> A visit to *The Guardian* newsroom does little credit to its place and influence in journalism. Besides being a long clutter of tables and chairs, reporters still go through long-hand production. Very little information technology presence is felt here (*Media Review*, March/April 2000, p. 23).

As mentioned earlier, all the anti-media decrees promulgated by Generals Babangida and Abacha were on the statute books as at the time of the Nigerian election. These include, for examples; Offensive Publications (Proscription) Decree No. 35 of 1993; State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree No. 2 of 1984, under which, for instance, journalists can be detained and held incommunicado for security reasons; The Treason and Other Offences (Special Military Tribunal) Decree No. 1 of 1996; as well as The Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 107 of 1993, which annuls a citizen's right to public apology or compensation, if he was unjustly or unlawfully detained (*see* Media Rights Agenda 1998 report; Olukotun and Osuntokun, 1999; Olukotun, 2000A).

General Abubakar, as pointed out did not enforce these decrees, unlike his predecessors Generals Abacha and Babangida; they nonetheless hovered like a sword of Damocles over journalists and other civil society groups throughout the transition. Furthermore, occasional skirmishes such as the seizure in February 1999, the month of the presidential elections of the *News Magazine* edition of 8 February, apparently due to police over-zealousness, suggests that the atmosphere was less liberal than it could have been for media work. Although the media are well known for their combative tenor and disposition and for surviving several dictatorships from the colonial times, it is clear that the military still determined the boundaries of free expression as at the time of the election and beyond it.

Another feature of the media worth noting is their overwhelming concentration in the South-west area due to historical and economic reasons. This itself has spawned a debate on media and federalism amidst allegations of a "media monopoly" by a section of the country (*see* Olukotun, 1999C, 2000B & 2000C).

Two influential media genres active in Nigeria are the international press and the emergent telematics sector; as well as the alternative press consisting of indigenous artists, orature and social criticism (Olukotun, 2000D) BBC, VOA and CNN are quite popular, in view of an esteemed higher credibility rating. They, in fact, increasingly shape the content of Nigerian media (Olukotun, 1996; Owens-Ibe, 1997). There is also a tiny but growing telematics sector featuring E-mails, Internet messages and the whole province of new information technology in which the country remains peripheral. The 1999 presidential election at a stage moved to the Internet as presidential aspirants opened up web sites to send and to receive messages.

Content/Coverage

For analytical convenience, it might be worthwhile to divide media coverage of the transition into two phases: The period up till the 5 December local government elections; and the period after it. The first period was taken up mainly with foundational activities such as the setting up of the Electoral Commission; Registration of Voters and the production of a voters' register; Formation of political associations whose graduation into parties was made contingent upon their performance in the local government elections; the revision of the 1995 Draft Constitution midwifed by a committee set up by government and other activities. In the second phase, we had the governorship and state assembly elections of 9 January 1999; the National Assembly Elections held mid-February, the presidential elections of 27 February and its aftermath.

First of all, let it be said that all aspects of the transition were extensively covered and intensely reported on by the media. Nigerian media culture is overwhelmingly political in its reportage and emphasis, often at the expense of other beats such as environment, human rights, gender issues, business and other aspects of life. In a campaign and transition season, newspapers and electronic media attempt to outdo one another in offering the readers up to date information and even exclusive stories as part of gaining a market advantage or at least preserving their market share, in a keenly competitive milieu. Readers are offered, however, a somewhat predictable fare of straight political reporting, day after day by ten or more newspapers, relying on broadly the same sources for their information. Analysis and commentaries are made, too, but there is little in-depth analysis, investigative feature stories and candidate scrutiny such as might have made the papers and broadcasting media more imaginative and more focused.

There is, in sum, a predominance of the tabloid culture of direct, salient reporting offering little in the way of analysis, qualitative feature stories, backgrounders and research-based monitoring and prediction of trends. As a

chronicle, the reach of the media is constrained not just by low circulation and an overwhelming urban concentration, but also by, as noted earlier, media geography, arising from their preponderance in the Lagos–Ibadan axis. The derisive epithet "Ngbati Press" has been coined as a censorious description of an allegedly Yoruba-dominated media. It is not that there are no newspapers located in other parts of the country; it is that they have been distinctly less successful, in view of a less developed reading culture, and their failure to insert into the advertising and commercial opportunities offered by the big industrial coastal cities of the South-west where most publications derive close to 80 per cent of their sales and advertising revenue. With the growing commercial importance of Abuja, it is possible that there might be a shift in that trend in the foreseeable future (Olukotun, 2000 C/D).

A. Between July and December 1999

After some initial dithering and public debate, General Abdulsalami Abubakar announced on 20 July 1998 that, "After all necessary consultations government has decided that the election of a civilian president will be held in the first quarter of 1999. The newly-elected president will be sworn into office on 29 May 1999" (cited in Oseni, 199:7). The populace suffering from transition fatigue moved in slowly and warily to embrace Abubakar's programme. The apprehension and initial scepticism, which lasted well into December, was fully captured in the media. Ray Ekpu, publisher of *Newswatch* and a long-standing columnist wrote that

> 29 May 1999 is the 7th disengagement date that various governments have fixed since 1985. None has so far been fulfilled. We must hope that the 7th will be Nigeria's lucky number (cited in *Liberty,* Sep.–Dec. 1998, p. 25).

Similarly in his "A Few Prescriptions for Transition Fatigue", this researcher counselled that:

> The military must distance itself, this time around, from a well-heeled tribe of political contractors, temporarily unemployed, whose lucrative business it had been to "persuade" serving military heads of state to "accept" or contrive a further tenure, beyond the terminus of the transition programme" (*Sunday Times* Column, July 1999).

More to the point, a senior journalist, Mr Tunji Oseni, organized a national seminar in August 1998 on the media and the transition, with the declared aim of getting journalists to reflect on the new transition programmer, in the light of the nation's tortuous experience of previous transitions, and to set an agenda for journalistic coverage. Oseni himself set the ball rolling by listing the responsibilities of the media in a transition as: keeping the administration to its word of promise; being strong in the face of danger; offering where necessary, alternatives to the transition agenda; serving as a feedback on government policies as well as expanding the scope of the transition to areas such as morality, accountability, management of national economy and the amelioration of poverty (Oseni, 1999:16).

Within the constraints literated earlier, there is evidence that a section of the

media at least, tried its best to play the role of transition watchdog suggested by Oseni. For example, *Tell Magazine* did week after week a countdown to the hand-over in every single issue it published between July 1998 and the hand-over of power in May 1999. It reads in its 7 November edition (p. 7) "31 more weeks for Abubakar to hand-over to an elected civilian president"—in bold letters and boxed. This was a kind of advocacy advertising for the transition programme and the elections.

At the conference on media and transition, Charles Obi, who had just been released from a three-year detention on framed-up charges of aiding the planners of the phantom coup of 1995, suggested that "Journalists must play their watchdog role even more effectively by monitoring and investigating aspirants to public office to enable the electorate to make reasonable decisions". Obviously, Nigerian journalists, no stranger to democratic transitions, and having been traumatized by successive dictators who clung to power through governance by transition were in no mood to brook another dummy transition project. Still on the perceptions of the journalists, Ray Ekpu had said at another forum that he hoped that:

> The Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigerian Press Organization can work out a way for the equitable treatment of all political parties and candidates by the print and electronic media, government owned and private. That way the level of partisanship in the media can be curtailed and the dramatis personae in the political drama can have something close to a level playing field. South Africa did it, why can't we? (*Liberty*, Sep.–Dec. 1998, Vol. 9, p. 25).

Ekpu here was showing awareness of the linkage between the differential access of parties and candidates to media and the outcome of elections. Even in a more mature democracy like Britain, the role of the tabloid press in the 1992 General Election, became a subject of scholarly and popular interest. Guidelines were issued on fair coverage in the Nigerian transition by the Broadcasting Commission, the Press Council and other bodies, but there is no evidence that they were enforced or that erring newspapers or television stations were sanctioned. However, as pointed out earlier, except for a few excesses and partisanship here and there, there is no evidence to suggest that any medium actively denied any candidate or political group access to its medium. As we shall see however, that is not the same thing as saying that no party enjoyed better coverage, on account of, for instance, higher campaign spending. That the PDP had much more money to play around with had already been evident in the controversy over General Obasanjo's donation of 130 million Naira to the party for the 5 December council election (*see The Tribune*, 24 November, p. 8). Various newspapers criticized the donation and attempted to hold Obasanjo down to a cogent explanation and "a full disclosure of the identities of those involved in [in aiding him] ... to help members of the public in establishing the real character and motives of the contributors—in the final analysis, however, the authorities must seriously consider setting a ceiling on the amount on individual

aspirant could spend in the course of seeking public office" (*Tribune* Editorial, 24 November 1998, p. 8).

That this donation and other ones by financially endowed members of the PDP translated into enhanced media coverage can be easily demonstrated. Between 1 December and 5 December (just before the council elections), the PDP placed 18 full-page adverts; the APP and the AD placed 3 in 6 privately-owned newspapers (Maja-Pearce, 1999:86).

Any student of media sociology knows that advertisers exert subtle and unsubtle pressures on content—a fact more obviously so in a depressed newspaper industry. The linkage between advert-spending and news coverage is borne out by the fact that in *This Day,* a privately-owned newspaper, and one of the six which enjoyed PDP's advert-spending, for the month of December 1999 there were 90 stories on PDP; 51 on APP; and 48 on AD. Similarly in *The Guardian,* also one of the six papers referred to earlier, there were, for December 1999, 56 stories on PDP, 39 on APP and 44 on AD (MRA scorecard, January 1999). Of course, higher advert-spending is not the only variable for explaining better visibility but it is certainly a conducive factor.

When we turn to broadcasting we find that some programmes such as Political Diary on MINAJ, a privately-owned television station was sustained by commercial spending, and therefore open to politicians who had money to spend. Unsurprisingly, PDP chieftains such as Chief James Ibori and Dr Alex Ekwueme featured prominently in the month of December, especially in the week before the council polls. This fact is partly compensated for by the fact that MINAJ also had other programmes such as Election Watch, which was made open equally to all candidates (MRA Airwaves Scorecard, January 1999, p. 20). In general, if we isolate the influence of commercial spending, the media coverage was, on balance, even-handed.

The media both print and electronic paid meticulous attention to the role of INEC, the electoral regime and the content of the transition. In this, it kept the authorities on their toes and prevented the programme from derailing or tolerating gross abuses that could delegitimize the entire exercise. This remark should be taken, in the context of the fact that Nigerians were eager to get rid of the military, while the military itself having exhausted its political bag of tricks was eager to leave office. Consequently, some irregularities in the voting process and in the electoral regime were overlooked or not strongly protested about.

INEC—its independence and impartiality was a critical test of the elections and the media devoted considerable space to discussing the institution and making suggestions. For example, *The Guardian* editorial comment of 19 August 1999 (p. 16) suggested that INEC should put in place measures to avert the spectre of rigging. It also admonished it to distance itself from manipulation by security agencies, state administrators and bureaucrats. Also, taking up the issue of "The Flawed Voters' Registration" in its editorial comment of 26 October 1998 (p. 8).

The Punch lamented the hitches in the exercise and urged that INEC fine-tune its

logistic to cope with the demands of running hitch-free elections. Similarly, *The Tribune* comment of 30 November 1998 (p. 8) welcomed the relaxation of some of the stiff guidelines put in place by INEC for the 5 December elections.

There was, therefore, an intimate dialogue between the media, often conveying "public opinion", and the electoral authorities, with the result that the system profited and avoided reckless excesses. Of the 21 editorial comments published by *The Guardian* in the month of November 1999, 5 of them dealt with the transition programme and dealt with such matters as the 1995 constitution; the new political parties; INEC guidelines for the December council polls and related subjects. A similar trend is noticeable in all other papers. And this brings us to the second phase of the transition, covering the period from January onwards.

B. The Period from January 1999 Onwards

Most of the trends identified earlier—the higher comparatively visibility of PDP in the media; overall balanced coverage of contestants leaving aside occasional partisanship and the influence of money; keen media monitoring of polling and electoral regime and so on—continued right till the end of the transition. For example, on the eve of the governorship/state assembly elections, between 5 January and 9 January in the six privately-owned newspapers identified earlier, the AD had 3 full-page adverts; the APP 9 while the PDP had 18 (Maja-Pearce, 1999:92). At this time, however, a bandwagon effect was already operating with PDP being increasingly viewed as the big party.

The media gave full coverage to the instances of abuses in the governorship/ state assembly as well as the presidential elections. For example, in its report of 25 January 1999 (p. 27) *Newswatch* reported the findings of the Transition Monitoring Group—a non-governmental coalition of 56 human and civil rights groups about malpractices in the governorship/state assembly elections. These included under-age voters in Katsina, multiple voting in Abia State as well as stories of bribery in Delta and Ekiti states. The report was extensively covered in newspapers and broadcasting stations.

The media weight of PDP is shown in the fact that the *New Nigerian* in the month of January carried 51 stories on PDP; 12 on AD; and 18 on PDP while the privately-owned *Punch* had 81 stories on PDP; 47 on AD and 34 on APP (MRA Scorecard, February 1999).

As is usual in Nigerian politics, however, most of the excitement, competition and spending power were reserved for the presidential elections. As late as 7 February 1999, an article in *The Guardian* described the campaign as relatively tame with candidates relying more on posters and newspapers rather than television and outdoor campaigns. Indeed, the article said correctly that one can easily count the number of TV adverts on one's fingertips. Most candidates could not afford professional marketing services, thus leaving the field to the big spenders.

Ray Ekpu in his write-up of 8 February (p. 6) captured the mounting excitement of the presidential primaries and campaign when he said that "all the elections

conducted so far fall, in a manner of speaking, into the minor league". Also in the same period of the presidential primaries two politicians, General Obasanjo and Chief Alex Ekwueme moved their campaigns to the Internet, opening a new page in Nigeria's electoral history (*Guardian,* 2 February 1999, p. 1).

The virulence and ethnic mobilization of the presidential primaries was captured and denounced by *The Guardian* in its editorial of 11 February. Entitled "Presidential Campaign Trivia", it lamented the exchange of diatribe and destructive lampooning instead of attention to issues such as the economy, the energy crisis, the liquidated federal system and the Nigeria Delta cauldron. Warned the paper; "An Electoral process that is not guided by solid ideas and progressive thinking can only produce incompetent and opportunistic leaders". One year after the transition to democracy, one can see the result of not heeding the agenda set by the newspaper.

Newspapers such as *The Guardian* have on their editorial board intellectuals and academics—often a remedial virtue in the somewhat Philistinic climate of Nigerian journalism. Following the emergence of Obasanjo and Olu Falae as presidential flagbearers of the PDP and the AD/APP alliance respectively, *The Guardian* editorialized pertinently that "Little Secret is made of the fact that behind Obasanjo's emergence is a formidable corps of retired, ... but ambitious and financially endowed military officers ... The nuances of the run-up to the Fourth Republic would, therefore, seem to suggest that the military and paramilitary class is creating a leverage for itself. In the future, it remains the challenge of civil society to reclaim its primacy of political authority". On 3 February 1999, *The New Nigerian* editorialized on "The Last Set of Elections", namely, the federal legislative and presidential, which it described as a "big test to INEC".

The month of February expectedly witnessed intense political commentary and coverage by the media on the elections of 20 February and 27 February. It also involved an unprecedented clutch of foreign reporters, observers and election monitors in the country. It was thus possible for Nigerians and the world to have full information on virtually every aspect of the election.

The irregularities reported by the Carter group and other observers in the presidential elections were well reported in the media. However, confronted with a choice between cancelling the election and grudgingly accepting its flawed outcome, most newspapers editorialized on a grudging acceptance—warts and all.

The Punch counselled editorially on 10 March 1999, in a typical comment that;

> Unless the AD/APP alliance has overwhelming and incontrovertible evidence that the results as declared did not reflect the preference of Nigerians, they should be contented with documenting the atrocities of the election, making them public and sending copies to the Head of State, the PDP and General Obasanjo.

The cynicism of the international media on the more sordid aspects of the election, especially the influence of money was reflected in a comment in *The Economist* of late February 1999 entitled "In Nigeria, Who Pays Wins".

Conclusion: Looking Ahead

As we have seen in previous sections, the media, drawing on their experience of reporting transitions (real or pretended) gave a passable account of themselves in covering the Abubakar transition. There were lapses here and there: The partisanship of *The Champion* whose publisher, Chief Iwuanyanwu, is an APP stalwart; unethical lapses as in unbalanced stories and pictures in some of the newspapers and so on. Nonetheless, as earlier broached the pluralism of the media; the traditions of professionalism in a broad section of the media; the guidelines issued by bodies such as the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission, all served to keep the media on course. In some of the quality papers, attempts were made to set agenda for the incoming civilian government, as well as for civil society.

We have seen, however, that one of the parties, the PDP received consistently better coverage than the other two parties. This as argued earlier partly relates to higher advertising-spending by the PDP which harbours a plethora of well-heeled individuals. It relates, too, to the professionalization of its campaign efforts and the use of better marketing strategies. The Obasanjo presidential campaign had a full-fledged media department at a well appointed building in Ikeja and was manned by a professional corps of public relations experts and former senior journalists. It was directed by Chief Onyema Ugochukwu, a former editor of the *Daily Times,* ably assisted by the managing director of *The Week Magazine.* By contrast, one of the early adverts placed by the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was paid for by a senatorial aspirant because according to him "there was no money in the kitty to pay for adverts" (interview).

Even if we discount such things as the brown envelope syndrome (bribe-taking to kill or publish stories), it is clear that the unequal commercial strength of the parties is an explanation for differential media exposure.

The media continue to play an active role in Nigeria's infant democracy. They have through exposure of abuses, forced the resignation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Salisu Buhari, and the President of Senate, Chief Evans Enwerem. They created a crisis of legitimacy for the Lagos State Governor, Chief Bola Tinubu, which he narrowly weathered, over allegations that he had fiddled with his bio-data.

The power of the media in the polity goes beyond what their capacity and reach would have predicted. However, this power is celebrated by democratic activists and resented by others who criticize the media for selective justice—thus reopening the debate on the extent to which the media respond to ethnic, partisan and ownership drives, and the extent to which it caters to a trans-ethnic civic constituency.

Building media capacity, extending circulation, hooking to up to date information technology, encouraging the vernacular press are issues that need to be taken on board given the growing disparity between Africa and the industrialized countries of the North who are increasingly worried about information overload (Berger, 1998, Franklin & Love, 1998, Tedjabosu, 1998). Such concerns may also make the

media more alert to issues of mass poverty which throws up a legitimacy problem for Nigeria's still tender democracy (*See* Olukoshi in this edition).

Note

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Ethnicity and Transition to Democracy in Nigeria: Explaining the Passing of Authoritarian Rule in a Multi-ethnic Society

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Abstract

This essay addresses an important variable in Nigerian politics, namely, ethnicity and the ways in which it affects the conduct of national affairs. It represents an effort at theorizing the role and place of ethnicity in the transition from authoritarianism in a multi-ethnic setting such as that represented by Nigeria. Drawing on historical evidence on the ways in which ethnicity was constructed in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria as well as the wide literature on the subject, an attempt is made to demonstrate the centrality of the variable to Nigerian politics but without suggestion that it is the sole or most important determinant of political outcomes. Indeed, it is argued that there are other important variables, such as class, which not only affect the political process but also impinge on ethnicity. The ways in which ethnicity influences the different phases of the transition from authoritarianism are discussed drawing on the Nigerian experience.

Introduction

In the recent past, there has been a burgeoning of literature on transition from authoritarian to democratic rule. Two major intellectual strands are deducible from this development. One strand interprets the Latin American transition as a logical outcome of forces released by unique experiences with authoritarian rule in each country. As such, each transition unfolds under specific conditions from which it is arduous to deduce general features (Lechner, 1991; O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). But the difficulty in making generalization notwithstanding, Lechner suggests that democratization in Latin America is a reaction to social disintegration wrought by capital. Modernization, defined as capitalist efficiency or rationality, has become the unavoidable path to economic development. But this hegemony of modernization is leading to social disintegration, hence new demands for community (1991: 542–543).

The second strand roots the current wave of democratization in the end of the cold war and the "victory" of the West. This set of writings, usually by Anglo-American and European scholars, form an extension of a long pedigree which, tacitly and overtly, have portrayed East-West relations as a struggle between authoritarianism and democracy (*see* Moore, 1966; Arendt, 1973). By extension, the victory of the West in the cold war is a triumph of democracy over authoritarianism. Consequently, we have witnessed the resurgence of Tocquevillean and Schumpeterian notions that associate democracy with institutional political arrangements originating from the West and spreading to the rest of the world (Modelski, 1992; Dahl, 1989; Schumpeter, 1987; Tocqueville, 1969). Thus in Modelski's estimation, democratization is

> ... a technology, that is, a means to an end, a technique of collective choice or a form of macro decision making, [then] its dissemination may be subject to patterns observed in the diffusion of technological and other innovations. For societies unfamiliar with such practices, democracy is indeed a bundle of innovations (1992: 1361).

It is not difficult to see that in this reincarnation of "modernization", Africa is one of those areas that are "unfamiliar" with democratic practices to which democracy will inevitably spread by diffusion. It is true that global factors, for instance, the end of the cold war, the resurgence of liberal democracy in the former Soviet bloc countries and demands of political conditionalities by the Bretton Woods institutions, have had an effect on democratization in Africa. However, they have only served as a fillip to popular discontent with economic stagnation and political repression that had become pervasive on the continent. Calls for a second independence (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1987) encapsulates this long-standing discontent, which ironically was fuelled, in many cases, by the same external forces.

To be sure, democratization in African countries has its own internal logic quite apart from the thaw in East–West relations. Unfortunately, the limits of democratization in Africa have been set prematurely by the West as liberal, multiparty democracy. Consequently, as with modernization, liberal democratic theory has guillotined the mass-based intellectual ferment and political struggles in which Africa's democratization was initially being shaped.

Today, a majority of African countries have either adopted liberal, multiparty democracy or are transiting to it. According to records, in 1992, only nine countries, Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Gambia, Mauritius, São Tomé and Principe, Senegal and Zambia, were regarded as democratic. In the same year, 28 other countries were said to be in the process of transition to democracy. But in 1995, 15 countries were classified as democratic, representing a 66 per cent increase, while 14 were transiting (Diouf, n.d.: 9). Presently, following the mass revolt that ended military rule and brought Mr Gbagbo to power in Cote d'Ivoire, virtually the entire African continent has transited to liberal democracy with varying degrees of pretension.

Conceptualizing African Transitions: Orthodoxies and Paradoxes

Early studies of what Huntington (1991) has described as the "third wave of democracy" were on Eastern Europe and Latin America (Pastor, 1989; Przeworski, 1991; O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Malloy and Seligson, 1987). African situations were treated as marginal, and analysed on the basis of conceptual tools distilled from the experiences of Eastern Europe and Latin America. However, in recent times, African experiences with democracy and transitions from authoritarian rule have been attracting more attention (Ake, 1991; 1992; Anyang' Nyong'o, 1987; Olagunju, et al, 1993).

A number of salient ideas, concepts and theories about African transitions are now discernible. Some of them are quite original, while others are strongly influenced by writings on other parts of the world. There is need to critically re-examine these orthodoxies.

A. Transition as Democracy

The link between transitions and democracy is one that is commonly made in the literature. A dominant way in which this link is posited is that transitions in Africa, as elsewhere, represent a diffusion of democracy from the West to the rest of the world. The "third wave of democracy" (Huntington, 1991) or the third democratic transformation (Dahl, 1989) is "the process by which democracy spreads across the world" (Modelski, 1992: 1353). Democratization has emerged as the modernization of the 1990s, a process in which non-Western societies that are not familiar with democracy are sucked in by its "irresistible and universal" movement (Tocqueville. 1969).

Liberal democratic theory, as most forcefully argued by Schumpeter, has now re-emerged as the alter ego of transitions. The essence of this theory, as Schumpeter stated over fifty years ago, is to make the power of "the people" in deciding political issues secondary to the election of men who are to do the deciding.

> ... the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote (Schumpeter, 1987: 269).

But for a few attempts to argue an African perspective, for instance, Anyang' Nyong'o (1987), Ake (1992; 1993) and various projects and Working Groups of CODESRIA, the Tocquevillean and Schumpeterian notions of democracy are the orthodoxies, even for African researchers.

We do not think that democracy is the preserve of any one people, culture or part of the world which is spread by proselytizing others. Therefore, while Africa's democratization may be influenced by extra-African experiences, is not a bequeathal from the West. Africa's democratization is first and foremost the product of the internal logic of relationships among social forces in various African countries, though linked in complex ways with extra-continental forces.

Still, are transitions from authoritarian rule necessarily transitions to democ-

racy? Leaving aside the meaning and content of the democracy on offer, to say speak of transitions from authoritarian rule as if they necessarily end up in democracy is incorrect. The African experience so far amply illustrates this. Many African countries saw a rapid demise of democratic institutions and practice only a few years after the transition from colonial rule to self-rule in Africa. Of about forty African countries which became independent under democratically elected governments in the 1950s and 1960s, only seven were classified as democratic in 1992 (Diouf, n.d.). Even in the current "wave of democracy", the rate of recline into authoritarianism has been high. In Benin, President Soglo dissolved parliament a few years after transition, and almost plunged the country into crisis by refusing to hand over to Kerekou after he lost the presidential election of 1996. President Ousmane of Niger dissolved parliament, and when his party lost the ensuing parliamentary election he decided to obstruct the opposition prime minister in performing his duties. And in Zambia, barely 18 months after his election, President Chiluba declared a state of emergency and arrested many opposition leaders. He has since followed these up by trying to stop former President Kaunda from contesting the next election.

Surely, the mere transfer of power to an elected government is not enough for democracy. It is what happens after power has been transferred that determines whether a democratic transition has taken place. What is critical is consolidation of democracy, the acid test of which is the first post-transition election. We cannot determine a priori that democracy will follow transition. Democracy may be the expectation from transition, but transition is not a warranty for democracy.

B. Transition as Transfer of Power

There is a broad agreement that transitions involve power transfers. But what is less unanimous is whether all transitions, both from and to democracy, should be studied. One approach sees transition as an aspect of military/authoritarian rule. By this approach, transition is both a movement from democracy to military/authoritarian rule and from military/authoritarian rule to democracy. Thus, Olagunju, et al, argue that

> ... when applied to the politics of Africa and Latin America, the concept of transition is a specific generic reference to the cycle of democratization, authoritarian or one-party rule and of redemocratization that has characterized the politics of many countries in the two continents since the 1960s. ... Sometimes, it is set in motion by military intervention to prevent the national descent into chaos and anarchy. ... At other times, the cycle is triggered off by the long stay in power or "overrule" by authoritarian or even pseudo-democratic regimes (1993: 9–10).

Edmond Keller then suggests that what needs to be studied is the general process of regime change in Africa as a means of understanding of ongoing transitions (cited in Olagunju, et al, 1993: 18).

By making transitions a post-independence phenomenon dating to the 1960s, this approach does not account for the very first wave of democratic transitions in Africa, namely decolonization. Moreover, in defining transition as a phase in a vicious circle of authoritarianism-democratization, this approach is bound to wind up in one of two enervating conditions. At one level, even though it speaks of democracy and the general process of regime change in Africa, it banishes transitions involving statutory transfers of power between constitutional governments, and non-statutory transfers between authoritarian governments. And even if it limits itself to changes between authoritarian and democratic governments, it is likely to end up, at another level, analysing all forms of regime change, thereby emptying the term transition of parsimony, which is so crucial to conceptual clarity. For example, changes may be from unelected civilians to elected civilians, from elected civilians to the military, from military to elected civilians, from elected civilians to unelected civilians, from "pseudo-democratic" military regimes to democratic civilian regimes, etc. In addition, there is the case of transfer from an authoritarian regime to itself, following a manipulated transition process. Moi in Kenya, Rawlings in Ghana and Biya in Cameroon promptly come to mind.

A different approach limits the concept of transition to change from authoritarian rule to democratic government through elections. This is the dominant usage of transition in the literature, and it explains why transition is usually linked with democracy. But it does not account for cases of truncated transition to democracy, for instance where an authoritarian regime democratizes at some levels of government but retains overall control. This was common in transitions from colonial rule to independence in Africa. For instance in Ghana, following the Aiken Watson Report, the Justice Henley Coussey Committee Report and the 1951 Constitution, an election was held for the Legislative Assembly in 1951. Still, even though that election put Nkrumah and other members of the CPP into the Executive Council, colonial control persisted under a Governor, Sir Charles Arden-Clarke.

The same experience of elected governments without overall sovereign power is common in both colonial and post-colonial transitions. A theory of transition should be capable of accounting for these conditions. While it is true that transfer of power from unelected to elected governments is central to the concept of transition, for transition to have duly occurred such elected governments must be capable of making and implementing sovereign national decisions.

C. Transition as the Relationship between Economic Reform and Democratization

Perhaps the most frequently examined issue in the literature on transition is the link between economic reform and democratization (Anyang' Nyong'o, 1987; Malloy, 1987; Przeworski, 1991; Olufemi, 1992; Olagunju, et al, 1993). About Latin American transitions, Lechner writes:

> Looking back at Latin America in the decade of the 1980s one sees a situation of contrast: democratic governments are taking over throughout the region, while at the same time a profound economic crisis is shaking the structures of society (1991: 541).

To be sure, this is an old issue making a second coming. In the first appearance of this question during colonial rule and the immediate post-colonial period, it was posed as the relationship between the pace of democratization and the requirements of economic development. Then it was set in the context of demands of popular demands on the colonial and post-colonial African governments for better economic conditions. Such demands were at the core of the first independence struggles against the colonial state, and the "second independence" struggles against the post-colonial state in parts of Africa (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1987). In both cases, the people's demand and object of struggle was clear: that there is an organic unity between economic well being and democracy. The struggle for one is the struggle for the other. And this is where their position diverged from that of the petty bourgeoisie, their allies in the first independence struggle. The latter had admonished the need to seek first the kingdom of political independence and everything will be added. But when this did not materialize, the people declared the first independence struggle a failure. Writing on Zaire, Nzongola-Ntalaja aptly observes:

> For the people, independence was meaningless without a better standard of living, greater civil liberties, and the promise of a better life for their children. Instead of making these promised benefits available to the masses, the politicians who inherited state power from the Belgians lived in much greater luxury than most of their European predecessors and used violence and arbitrary force against the people. For the latter, the first or nominal independence had failed. Their discontent with the neo-colonial state served as a basis for an aspiration towards a new and genuine independence, one that the 1964 insurrections were to incarnate (1987: 113).

In its current incarnation, the issue is posed as the relationship between market-oriented structural adjustments and democracy. Its context is the so-called political conditionality (political liberalization) for aid demanded by the Western governments and international financial institutions from Africa's authoritarian regimes since the end of the cold war. For instance, between 1990 and 1992, the United States suspended military and/or other aid to some of its abiding dictator-friends in Africa like Mobutu, Moi and Doe, over political liberalization.

The relationship between democracy and economic progress in Africa has been argued in two distinct ways since colonial times. First, for authoritarian regimes, both colonial and post-colonial, democracy and economic development are separate and should be pursued consecutively, with democracy only coming after economic development. The position adopted by some African scholars in reaction to this position is also that they are separate and consecutive, but in a reversed order. So that Anyang' Nyong'o (1987: 20) argues that "... political liberties and the accountability of the state to the people (in particular the popular classes) is a precondition for material progress".

Second, for the IMF, World Bank and many social scientists on the right, the two are separate, but should be pursued concurrently. In reaction to the common charge

that there is link between SAP and political repression (Ibeanu and Nwosu, 1988; Oyediran and Agbaje, 1991; Przeworski, 1991), the position is that SAP is not necessarily antagonistic to democratization. It may give rise to social and political tension, but that does not mean that it must result in political repression or undermine the democratic transition process. The furthest they go is to accept that economic reform is a burden on democratization (Olagunju, et al, 1993: 14).

But, the consistent democratic position lies in returning to the position of the masses of Africa, which they so clearly stated in their struggles against the economic exploitation and political repression of the colonial state, and have maintained in their struggles against the post-colonial state and global capital. That position is that material well being and political freedom express an organic unity. They cannot be separated either in a consecutive or a concurrent sense. Strictly speaking, the issue is not whether SAP coheres with liberal democracy or not: it may. Instead the issue is whether SAP is the path to popular economic well being: it is not. Therefore, the people's struggle for democracy is also a struggle against SAP.

D. Transition as Political and Social Engineering

This perspective presents transition to democracy as a constructionist project. Here, democratization is a process of engineered political and socio-economic change; it is a "design project" (Olagunju, et al, 1993: 20). In this "design project", constitution-making occupies a central place. As the bedrock of democracy, the constitution must embody the best and most enlightened ideas, set up effective structures and processes, and be capable of channelling political behaviour in desired, predetermined directions. Indeed, ideas are so important in this perspective on transitions that they constitute autonomous social forces (Olangunju, et al, 1993: 21). Armed with the requisite constitution, what is left to consummate the original design is political will among the leadership to construct and ultimately realize it.

This view of transition to democracy is patently idealistic and subjectivist. The *problématique* underlying it is that of the subject—the historic role of concrete individuals and creative persons who exercise their free will, reason and capacity for choice. This *problématique* of historic individuals as the origin of social action, leads research into a wild search for finalist explanations founded on the motivations of conduct of individual actors, rather than to objective conditions that determine the distribution of individual social agents into contradictory classes (Poulantzas, 1972: 242).

We need to emphasize that ideas are not social forces. Ideas are only products of struggles among social forces, notably classes, being the outcome of the endeavours of organic intellectuals to elaborate the interests of social forces (Gramsci, 1971). This explains why ideas never enjoy autonomy from social struggles. They invariably respond to the rhythms of the contradictory relations of social forces. At the same time, political will is meaningless except in the context of the relations among social forces. Without over-flogging this issue, let us state simply that

democracy is nothing to be socially engineered by rational individuals, however well-meaning they may be. The best ideas embodied in the most enlightened constitutions lay useless before the force of the dynamic relations among social forces. Social forces shape history, ideas and constitutions only reflect it. It is this fact that also explains why many constitutions, including the 1989 Nigerian Constitution, which ostensibly was well thought through, never saw the light of day.

E. Transition as a Phased Process

There are as yet very few studies that have theorized the phases of the transition process in Africa. An exploratory taxonomy has been provided in the Carter Centre's Quality of Democracy Index (QDI) (Diouf, n.d.: 23–24). It speaks of the phases of decay, mobilization, decision, formulation, electoral contestation, hand over, legitimization and consolidation.

While this is quite useful, it should be borne in mind that a theory of transition is not simply a genealogy of stages of the process but, more importantly, a theory of beginnings. Therefore, a theory of transition should incorporate answers to at least four questions:

(a) What is transition?

(b) How do transitions begin?

(c) What are the stages of transition?

(d) How do transitions end?

To say that transitions begin with decay, that is government's decline, economic stagnation, political fraud, etc., does not go very far. What is important in theorizing transitions is an understanding of the social forces at play and the articulation of their interests.

Transition: Meaning, Causes, Stages and Telos

Transition, as we understand it, has a specific meaning, which has to do with transfer of power from unelected to elected government, the latter being capable of making and implementing sovereign decisions. This definition avoids the sticky wicket of meaning and content of democracy. Transition is the progressive opening up of the political space, culminating in a change from unelected to elected government. Without doubt, only very few will contest that this process has a democratic connotation. At the same time, it is clear that democracy involves a much deeper theoretical and empirical discourse than political liberalization or an elected government.

Democratization is a phased process of decentralizing state power and promoting appropriate values and attitudes that enable justice and equity to be institutionalized in political relations. There are various aspects of the decentralization of state

power. One involves the transfer of certain powers from the authoritarian state to an emerging civil society. Another involves the decentralization of power within civil society. And yet another involves the decentralization of power within the state system itself (Nnoli, 1995).

Thus, democratization includes but goes beyond political liberalization. The latter refers to the relaxation of government controls on the political activities of citizens through the reduction of government intervention in politics and the permission of greater pluralism of opinions and associations. It occurs when the state grants previously denied civil and political liberties to individuals and groups in society (Nnoli, 1995; Bratton, 1993).

By linking transitions to the constitution of national governments capable of making and implementing sovereign decisions, the transition from colonial rule can be correctly inserted in this formulation. In addition, it accounts for situations involving transitions from unelected to elected government, but in which the elected government is not sovereign. Those often tend to be transitions within a transition.

Transitions reflect the character of social forces in struggle. These are not necessarily or exclusively class forces, even though in each concrete transition there is always a class element which articulates with the struggles of other social forces in complex ways. A central task of studying transitions is an exposition of these struggles.

Transitions begin when there is a relative balance or equilibrium of power between social forces pushing for democratization on one hand, and an authoritarian regime and its social supports on the other. This equilibrium may or may not be catastrophic, in the Gramscian sense, for the authoritarian regime (Gramsci, 1971: 219–223). Catastrophic balance exists where further attempt not to open up the political space will most likely lead to the complete destruction of the authoritarian regime. When this point is reached, the authoritarian regime invariably begins a programme of political liberalization. However, a Caesarist third force may emerge to either start the process of transition or to block it. This is most likely to be a regime resulting from the military regime. Like in all Caesarist situations, the third force could be progressive or reactionary (Gramsci, 1971: 219). It is progressive if it embarks on transition, but reactionary if it does not. In Mali, it required a Caesarist military intervention to get the transition process properly under way. But in Sierra Leone, the Strasser coup apparently obstructed the victory of pro-transition forces over Momoh. Subsequently, the uncertainty over Strasser's willingness to push through a transition was resolved with the intervention of the army in 1995.

Transition is necessarily a phased process. Generally it is a composite of four major stages (Nnoli, 1995a): (1) the phase of pressure on the authoritarian regime by pro-democracy forces; (2) phase of formulating a programme of transition to democracy; (3) phase of implementation of the programme; and (4) phase of institutionalization of democracy, including the first post-transition election.

The Link between Ethnicity and the Transition to Democracy in Nigeria

Discussion of ethnic identity and its interface with politics in Nigeria is an old one, dating to the published works of anthropologists who worked in the country during the colonial period (Smith, 1965; 1960; Meek, 1937; Perham, 1937; Green, 1948; Forde and Jones, 1950; Lloyd, 1954; 1960). Many of these studies tended to romanticize ethnic identities and the cultural, social and political systems of the various ethnic groups. Colonial administrators often drew the flak for being insensitive to the culture, history and language of the local people (Perham, 1937). Increased autonomy for colonized peoples, especially in the cultural sphere, was widely advocated. In time, it was accepted in colonial circles that colonial rule by proxy, that is indirect rule through local chiefs, was not only cheap and effective, but also good for the colonized (Lugard, 1929). It has been noted that this policy contributed immensely to the emergence of ethnic politics in countries like Nigeria (Nnoli, 1995b: 45–47; Mamdani, 1996).

The next generation of studies emphasized the political mobilization role of ethnicity in Nigeria's march to nationhood. Nigerian nationalists and expatriate writers influenced by them came to emphasize the positive contributions of the various ethnic identities to the independence movement and the social and political development of Nigeria (Awolowo, 1947; Coleman, 1958; Sklar, 1960; Levine, 1971). This went against the grain of mainstream modernization school that was dominant among Anglo-American writers in the 1950s and 1960s, which viewed communalism (religious and ethnic) as a pre-modern phenomenon that is bound to decline with technological and economic development. However, the persistence of communalism in "modernizing societies" like Nigeria led later modernization writers to suggest that communalism may not be transitory and anachronistic, but a permanent feature of social change in Africa (Melson and Wolpe, 1971: 1). What is put forward is an "inevitability thesis" linking communalism and politics in "modernizing" societies. According to Melson and Wolpe, "in a culturally plural society, the competition engendered by social mobilization will tend to be defined in communal terms" (1971: 5). Therefore, what is needed is a political strategy for managing conflicts arising from communalism (Smock and Smock, 1975).

Later studies challenged this portrayal of ethnicity and communalism as inherent and permanent in the African way of life. From the early 1980s, a near consensus was emerging that ethnicity is a historically contingent, fluid and flexible social form, which was "manufactured" or invented by colonial administrators and constantly reinvented by the post-colonial African elite to serve political purposes (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Ranger, 1994; Doornbos, 1982). Specifically, writers on the left of the ideological spectrum saw ethnicity as the creature of the exploitative project of colonialism and the manipulative politics of the petty bourgeoisie. In both cases, ethnicity served a class project (Nnoli, 1978; 1995b Mafeje, 1995). It is this class purpose that assures the persistent politicization of ethnicity in Nigeria (Nnoli, 1978).

Apart from the general link between ethnicity and politics, the more specific interface between ethnicity and democracy has also been a prominent theme in the research literature. Studies have focused principally on the reciprocal impact of ethnicity and multi-party democracy (Nnoli, 1992; Egwu, 1995). Some argue that multi-party democracy reinforces ethnicity, and therefore there is a negative impact of multi-partism on ethnicity (Wolfinger, 1965; Parenti, 1967). But others insist that ethnicity has a positive link with multi-party democracy, and that democracy offers an auspicious context for the management of ethnicity, particularly through a policy of equalitarian pluralism (Marger, 1992; Osaghae, 1986; Schwarz, 1979). These differences point to divergences in theoretical foundations (Nnoli, 1992: 7–18). But perhaps as crucial, they point to the need to study the link between ethnicity and democracy concretely, based on the historical experiences of multi-ethnic societies. It is by so doing that we can understand the seeming Janiform association between democracy and ethnicity, whereby their reciprocal impact is sometimes complementary, and at other times opposing.

Still, discussions of the link between democracy and ethnicity only make sense in their conceptual contextualization of democracy. Egwu (1995: 12–13) points out that discussions do not seriously address the kind of democracy on offer. The tendency is to assume democracy as a settled matter, namely its liberal/multi-party form. Certainly, the dominant inclination among academics, policy-makers and the general public in Nigeria is to think of democracy in terms of its multi-party form. Thus, implicitly and explicitly, democracy is portrayed as a once-and-for-all thing, having to do with setting-up and operating those procedures and institutions of governance associated with developed capitalist countries (Inkeles, 1969). This outlook has a lot to do with the resurgence, since the end of the cold war, of Tocquevillean and Schumpeterian notions that associate democracy with institutional political arrangements originating from the West and spreading to the rest of the world (Modelski, 1992; Dahl, 1989; Schumpeter, 1987; Tocqueville, 1969).

It is not difficult to see that this is a reincarnation of "modernization". But more importantly, this conception of democracy is predominantly institutional. It only tangentially recognizes the actions of social forces in the constitution and operation of "democratic" institutions. When Western democratic institutions are merely transplanted into Africa, a dangerous gap often develops between them and the democratic struggles of the people. This gap is often filled by various undemocratic and anti-democratic forces, such as ethnic, religious and other millenarian and pseudo-political organizations that manipulate and feed on the fears and deprivations of the people. In time, "democratic" institutions become distorted and converted into instruments of authoritarianism. However, this is not an acceptance of the opposing argument that cultural and civilizational traits of non-Western societies make Western values like democracy a source of conflict both within such societies, and between them and the West (Huntington, 1996).

Still, even in the context of the liberal democratic project, what remains largely lacking in existing studies is analysis of ethnicity in the recent and on-going

democratic transitions in Africa. Nnoli (1995a) has tried to fill this gap. He identifies four phases of the current wave of transition to democracy in Africa, namely pressure on the authoritarian regime, formulation of a programme of transition, implementation of the programme and post-election consolidation. He also analyses the character, dynamics and significance of ethnic conflicts during each of the phases. According to him, at each of these phases the character of ethnic conflicts differ.

There remains a paucity of analyses of the role of ethnic organizations in Nigerian politics generally, and in the just concluded transition to democracy in particular. To be sure, a number of studies have recorded the social and political roles played by ethnic associations in parts of West Africa (Wallerstein, 1964; Gluckman, 1966). Likewise, the role of ethnic associations in important political developments in Nigeria, especially in the colonial period, has been noted by various studies (Coleman, 1958; Sklar, 1960; 1963; Nnoli, 1978; 1995b). These associations, which arose in the colonial urban setting, provided a network of communication for information flow between the urban and rural areas (Hodgkin, 1956: 87) which has been very essential in maintaining ethnic solidarity and giving pan-ethnic organizations a high profile in national politics.

The growth of ethnic associations has also been linked to the character of the colonial urban setting. It has been argued that the high incidence of socio-economic frustration is a central element in the motivational complex that leads to ethnic identity (Nnoli, 1992: 15). Moreover, competition for scarce resources and opportunities among people of different ethnic identities in a contact situation is at the heart of ethnic conflicts (Nnoli, 1978: 71–72). Above all, the pattern of spatial concentration of ethnic groups in a contact situation has a profound bearing on not only ethnic conflicts, but also on the emergence of ethnic associations. It has been shown, for instance, that the segregation of blacks in American urban areas was important in the rise of the Black Power Movement (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1968).

The colonial urban centres of Nigeria were, therefore, the cradles of ethnic associations for at least two reasons. First, they offered little socio-economic security to the teeming population that migrated from the rural areas (Nnoli, 1978: 72; Furnivall, 1942: 452). In addition, the scarcity that characterized life in the colonial urban setting led to fierce socio-economic competition. According to Nnoli,

> The net effect of the intense socio-economic competition arising from scarcity and inequality in colonial Nigeria, was the insecurity of individuals regarding their outcome. First, there was insecurity resulting from the search for limited job opportunities and social services. ... Once the members of a particular group gained access to the best jobs and other resources, they used their positions to find jobs for others or at least to pass on news of job opportunities to them. The repercussions were felt in unequal levels of unemployment, income and in differing degrees of social status among the

> communal groups. Attempts by each group to escape the negative consequences of this phenomenon led to the further strengthening of communal associations (1995b: 40).

Second, the character of ethnic residential settlements in Nigeria's colonial urban centres fostered ethnic associations. A policy of keeping the ethnic groups divided and separated became a hallmark of colonial administration. The emergence of "sabon garis" (strangers' quarters) in the colonial urban centres of Northern Nigeria, ostensibly to "protect" Hausa-Fulani culture from the destabilizing incursions of other "tribes", epitomized this policy (Melson and Wolpe, 1971; Nnoli, 1978: 115–116).

The net effect of these two conditions is the celeritous growth of ethnic associations. For one thing, these associations provided members of the ethnic group the much needed social security and welfare services, generally denied them by the colonial state, and equipped them to compete with members of other ethnic groups. In this regard, education was particularly important. Both Coleman (1958) and Sklar (1963), among others, have recorded in details the commitment of ethnic associations to providing education for young Nigerians from the 1940s. For another thing, segregated residential areas assured ethnic associations a recruitment and power base. In time, the rapid growth in the membership and activities of these associations made it possible for them to coalesce into pan-ethnic, national organizations such as the Igbo Federal Union (later Igbo State Union), Egbe Omo Oduduwa (Organization of the descendants of Oduduwa, the mythical founder of the Yoruba nation) and Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa (Northern Congress), and therefore potential national political actors.

The politicization of ethnicity and of pan-ethnic organizations has sometimes been explained in terms of personal rivalries among the emergent elites of Nigeria's ethnic groups, especially the three dominant ethnic groups—Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba—from the 1940s. The relationship between Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo is widely cited in this regard (Coleman, 1958: 319–352; Sklar, 1963: 88–93). However, rivalry among individuals for political power, though relevant, is perhaps too voluntaristic to constitute a fundamental explanation of the insertion of ethnic organizations in the Nigerian state and politics. For one thing, rivalry did not always run along ethnic lines. For another, individual rivalry cannot explain the persistence and importance of pan-ethnic organizations in Nigerian politics long after specific personalities have left the scene.

Apart from individual rivalries, another secondary, but relevant, factor accounting for the significance of ethnic interests in Nigerian politics is the expression of these interests in political parties. Indeed, a very profound expression of the politicization of ethnic organizations in Nigeria is to be found in party formation. Some studies of Nigeria's political history have argued the point that in an attempt by the various ethnic elites to take over political power, they transformed ethnic organizations into political parties, converted ethnic organizations into a recruitment base for party loyalists and split existing national parties into ethnic factions.

The histories of the three dominant political parties in Nigerian politics in the 1950s and 1960s, namely, the Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and Action Group (AG) are particularly illustrative (Coleman, 1958; Sklar, 1963).

We also think that the type and structure of political parties are important in understanding the link between ethnic organizations and party politics in Nigeria. It seems that the tradition of Nigerian political parties, which is not unconnected with their antecedents in the nationalist movement, is that of mass, socialist parties of the continental-European type. This type is "directed to organizing as large a proportion of the masses as possible" (Duverger, 1964: 1), they tend to favour indirect membership through primary organizations, even though direct membership is not abandoned, and nation-wide branches replace the caucuses. Zucarelli has shown the emphasis on collective party membership to be true also for Senegal, as has R. Molteno for Zambia (both cited in Gonidec, 1981: 187). In fact, Gonidec generalizes indirect party membership to the whole of Africa:

> ... as in the case of elections, membership is rarely an individual act, maturely deliberated. Allowance must be made for the structures of African societies, particularly in the traditional environment, which is quantitatively the most important. As in the past, the social group in which the individual is most closely integrated, that is to say the family, the ethnic group, sometimes the religious organization, plays a role of capital importance and exerts a pressure on those who might be tempted to adopt a political standpoint different from that of the group. In fact, it is the group much more than the individual which belongs to the party. ... To a certain extent, we may even say that African politicians favour this tendency, because it allows a manipulation of votes destined to facilitate their political ascension (1981: 187).

However, we think that the most important gap in existing knowledge about the link between ethnicity and democracy in Nigeria is the under-articulation of the character of the Nigerian state. The salience of ethnicity in the recent transition from authoritarian rule to elected government in Nigeria has to be located at two related levels: one remote, fundamental and primary, and the other immediate, exterior and secondary.

The fundamental explanation has to be sought in the character of the post-colonial state in Nigeria. First of all, this state emerged at the stage of extensive (rather than intensive) growth of capital. This is the stage of internationalization of capital. At this stage, there is really no need for the complete dissolution of pre-capitalist social forces, symbols and institutions, as in the stage of intensive growth of capitalism (Ibeanu, 1993). Consequently, there was a great deal of preservation effect on these social forces, symbols and institutions in a new symbiosis with capitalism, especially where they made it possible for capital accumulation to proceed without hindrance. As a result, the emergence and hegemony of the market-oriented, formally free and autonomous individual as the subject of economic and

political organization was either blocked completely, or impeded and limited to a few urban centres. The net effect of this is that the vast majority of Nigerians still exist as agents of precapitalist social forces, principally ethnic groups.

Secondly, the history of that state also shows that it is has been utterly unable to stand above and balance social antagonisms, like the state that emerged from the establishment of capitalism in Europe (Ibeanu, 1993). Rather, it is a state constituted by colonialism principally for conquering and holding down a restive people. As such, *ab initio,* there was no question of evolving and routinizing principles for the non-arbitrary use of the state by its controllers. When in the post-colonial era it passed into the hands of an upstart local bourgeoisie, which the colonialist had raised around its ideology of the native-subject, the state became for its controllers and their co-ethnics a veritable instrument for pursuing private and sectional interests to the exclusion of others.

Two deductions could be made from the preceding points. One, the post-colonial state in Nigeria principally deals with its members as social agents of ethnic groups, rather than as free, individual and equal citizens. In effect, state power exists as prebends parcelled out to ethnic groups, instead of a unified, objective and independent force standing above society and expressing the corporate existence of the people-nation. As such, this state is pitifully unable to autonomize class domination, which is a requisite condition for the smooth practice of bourgeois (democratic) rule. Inability to actualize autonomous class rule creates a vacuum which is then filled by ethnic groups and their organizations (Ibeanu, 1997). Consequently, ethnic groups and organizations become autonomous political actors, inserted as the solidarity and collective interests of members of the ethnic homeland. Still, behind this unity of interests and solidarity are three interconnected matrices:

- Class domination, that is the domination of the working people by bourgeois and petty bourgeois interests (the power bloc).
- Rivalries among different ethnic factions of the power bloc for hegemony.
- Politically pertinent pursuit of purely individual-private interests portrayed as the collective interests of ethnic groups and the power bloc.

Two, being the exclusive tool of those in power (who are agents of ethnic groups), defence of prebends becomes a very fundamental and charged issue. Politics becomes an overriding and war-like exercise waged among ethnic groups to increase and consolidate access to state resources. Pan-ethnic organizations are the phalanxes in this war; their leaders are the generals.

Organically linked to the character of the Nigerian state is a second, but less fundamental explanation of the importance of ethnic groups and their organizations in the transition from authoritarian rule to elected government in Nigeria. Authoritarian rule is marked by many years of ban on political parties and muzzling of independent organizations and power centres in society. This leaves pan-ethnic organizations as the most potentially effective organizations that could emerge quickly and with minimal prompting as political liberalization is embarked on by an

authoritarian regime. This is so for two reasons. For one thing, their recruitment base exists, fixed and exclusive to them. For another thing, the catalyst for them to emerge is readily present: an elite that preys on the fears and anxieties of ordinary people mobilizing them by raising the spectre of ethnic domination.

Ethnicity and the Phases of Transition: Some Hypotheses

The role of ethnicity varies with different phases of the transition process. Even in the same phase, its role could differ depending on the course of events. The period of equilibrium of power between pro-transition forces and the authoritarian regime marks the beginning of the transition process. We shall call this early stage the pressure phase. In this phase, the authoritarian regime is subjected to pressure from domestic and foreign forces which demand democratic political change. Depending on the extent of the pressure and the prevailing political atmosphere, the regime may successfully resist the pressure or succumb to it. Therefore, there are two major concerns here. One, an analysis of the forces that compel the authoritarian regime to embark on democratic change. The other is an understanding of the forces that make the regime to either successfully resist pressure or to succumb to it. In these two regards, in the Nigerian context, ethnicity is central. Ethnicity will shape both the sources of pressure for democratization and whether authoritarian regimes are able to resist this pressure or not. Political alliances will show extensive traits of division between ethnic groups of the authoritarian regime, that is those ethnic groups that are or are perceived to be the principal beneficiaries of the policies of the regime (the in-group), and those of the opposition (the out-group).

The second and third phases are those of formulation and implementation of a detailed programme of transition from the authoritarian situation. The formulation phase concerns the decision processes leading to the vision of democratic society, including the constitution-making programme. This process takes a number of forms. They include the (1) sovereign national conference, (2) constitutional conference, (3) amendment of the constitution by the incumbent authoritarian regime, and (4) agreement between an armed opposition and the authoritarian regime in a situation of contested sovereignty.

What determines the course followed? To be sure, each specific transition has its own unique logic. But two matrices are strongly suggested. First, if the history of anti-authoritarian struggles in a country is elitist, as in most of British-ruled Africa, then constitutional conference or constitutional amendment path is likely to be followed. But if the history of anti-authoritarian struggles is one characterized by mass political movements or armed struggle, then the sovereign national conference or armed opposition is likely to be adopted. Obviously, Nigeria falls into this category.

Second, if the balance between the authoritarian regime and pro-transition forces is catastrophic, then the sovereign national conference is likely to result. This is because a catastrophic equilibrium reflects a deep-seated weakness in the authoritarian regime. As such, the pro-transition forces will be capable of exacting

from it a sovereign national conference. However, this equilibrium is not a once-and-for-all situation. It is rather a shifting equilibrium. As the relative strengths of the regime and opposition shift, consequences could be any of these: dismissal of the sovereign national conference, reversal to a constitutional conference, precipitate overthrow of the authoritarian regime, emergence of a third force which may support either or none of the sides, etc.

Obviously, Nigeria falls into the "constitutional matrix" rather than the "sovereign matrix". Still, in both cases, ethnicity will be an important factor where multi-ethnic societies are involved. It is difficult to explore all the possible consequences of ethnicity in either case. But, it is safe to say that generally in the "constitutional matrix" ethnicity will tend to play a reactionary role, while in the "sovereign matrix" it is likely to play a reactionary role. However, the specific impact of ethnicity will be mediated by a number of factors. Among the crucial ones are:

1. The history of inter-ethnic relations in the country, particularly if inter-ethnic conflict has crossed a threshold of irreversibility (Nnoli, 1992; 1995a). If this threshold has been crossed, then ethnicity would play a reactionary role irrespective of whether the constitutional path or sovereign path obtains.

2. The depth of ethnic feeling. If ethnic feelings are deep-seated, then ethnicity tends to be reactionary.

3. The capacity of the authoritarian regime to manipulate ethnic feelings against democratizing forces.

The implementation phase has to do with the execution of the programmes worked out during the previous phase. It includes the conduct of free and fair elections as the final phase of implementing the programmes. At this phase, ethnicity will be particularly marked in the sensitization of the public to the need to protect the interests of the ethnic homeland. In addition, during this phase, particularly during elections, ethnic groups and their organizations will emphasize mobilization. The message is usually the need to vote massively for the chosen party and candidates that will protect the interests of members of the ethnic group and the ethnic homeland. Ethic groups will also target specific structures of the state during this phase. Generally the most important targets will include (a) The government/regime; (b) other ethno-political movements; (c) pro-democracy organizations; (d) members of the constitutional conference; (e) co-ethnics in the ethnic homeland; (f) co-ethnics outside the ethnic homeland; (g) members of adjacent ethnic homelands; (h) members of non-adjacent ethnic homelands; (i) political parties and candidates.

In line with a specific centrality of "sharing" of resources to politics in a peripheral capitalist, post-colonial state like Nigeria, ethnicity will be of most significant in the transition process at those phases involving power sharing. These are mainly the formulation and implementation (second and third) phases. During these phases of the transition, the attention of ethnic groups and their organizations shift from the authoritarian regime (its overthrow or maintenance) to one another. Once the transition process moves into phases involving the sharing of economic and, particularly, political power, ethnic groups are bound to become very active,

raising the tempo of both conflicts and co-operation among them. If those phases dovetail into periods of national economic difficulties, ethnicity will be even more marked because of scarcity and consequent competition.

Finally, the last phase of the transition is that of consolidation. It concerns the early period of the new democratic order up to and including the first election to be conducted by the incumbent elected government. In the main, this phase represents the litmus test for the new democratic order. Again, ethnicity is bound to play a crucial role here. New ethnic alliances will evolve and old ones consolidate. How well the new order is able to contain the mobilization and counter-mobilization of ethnic sentiments will depend largely on the following factors:
(a) Extent of ethnic divisiveness involved in the disposal of the authoritarian regime, especially during the first three phases of the process; (b) Extent to which the incumbent elected regime has been able to draw in all ethnic groups during its first term; (c) Extent to which political parties are able to mobilize across ethnic boundaries; (d) The economic performance of the incumbent regime.

Conclusion

Theorizing transitions to democracy in countries like Nigeria constitutes a very complex presentation. This is not just because these countries do not have a long history of democratic practice, but also because the factors involved are enormous thereby presenting stochastic and unstable contexts. It may well be an oversimplification of reality to isolate ethnicity for analysis, which may give the impression that it is the most important variable in theorizing transitions in Nigeria. Still, it remains a very important variable. More importantly, the exploration of ethnicity provides us a good context to evaluate other important variables like class that impinge profoundly on ethnicity.

Finally, the phases of transition that we have conceptualized should imply neither a genealogy nor a linear process that necessarily ends up in an elected government. To the contrary, transition is a reversible process. The most common threat being an anti-transition, ethnic coup. However, whether the transition pulls through or is reversed should not be attributed to the will of coup plotters, that would be too voluntaristic to be fundamental. Instead, it depends in the last analysis on the struggles among social forces at all stages of the transition. In Nigeria, ethnic groups and their organizations remain central players.

Note

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