

# **CIVIL SOCIETY AND OPPOSITION POLITICS IN NIGERIA (1985-1999)**

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science in the school of Human and Social Studies, Faculty of Human and Management Sciences, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

December 2002.

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of civil society in the Nigerian polity between 1985 and 1999. The institutions that constitute civil society, particularly human rights organizations, professional groups, and non-governmental organizations have played crucial roles in checking the excesses of Nigerian governments. They have also served not only as instruments for protecting human rights and guarding against the abuse of the rule of law in the absence of a constitution but also in the advocacy of democracy in Nigeria. The study examines generally and in theoretical terms not only the relationship between state and civil society but also how far, and in what ways the state can affect or engage, purposefully, civil society in general.

Drawing on de Tocquville, Diamond, Gramsci, Hegel, Hobbes, Mamdani, Marx, and Mill, the study attempts to cut through the definitional quagmire by defining civil society as an arena made up of voluntary associations with differing interests and objectives and anchored within the space between state and society, which work towards those diverse societal interests with the aim either of promoting change or maintaining the status quo. The struggle against military dictatorship in Nigeria gave rise to a large and complex civil society. The study examines the activities and internal problems of these organizations. Specifically, it focuses on the role and effectiveness of civil society groups as instruments of democratic change in Nigeria. In this regard, it examines extensively their oppositional stance against military dictatorship and assesses their effectiveness in promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance in Nigeria. In essence, then, the study seeks to provide insight not only about the workings of Nigerian civil society organizations but also their potential as a vehicle for emplacing transparent and effective governance.

To drive the point home, the study examines three major civil society organizations (representing different categories of civil society) that played crucial roles in the struggle for good governance and the protection of fundamental human rights in Nigeria. These are the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), and the Campaign for Democracy (CD). Looking systematically at each of the three cases, it investigates the dangerous and, often, brutal struggle by members of the civil society as they sought to compel successive military regimes to adhere to principles of good governance, respect for basic human rights, transformative development, and democracy. A testimony of their relative success in pursuit of their oppositional agenda was reflected not only in the political transition activities of each military government but also in their ability to isolate recalcitrant regimes and externalize the struggle by sensitizing the international community as happened under General Sani Abacha.

Nevertheless, the ability and capacity of civil society to sustain its role as a balancing force between the Nigerian state and people remains in doubt due both to continuing uneasiness in its relationship with the state and to organizational and operational problems associated with internal factionalization, proneness to infiltration and sabotage, victimization by obnoxious laws and decrees, inadequacy of funding, weak operating capacity, fragile organizational structures, and poor alliance and networking arrangements. The study argues that in order to provide a constructive challenge to the authority and power of the state and to achieve their transformative agenda for

social, economic, and political development of Nigeria, civil society groups would need to wrestle effectively with some of these problems.

## DECLARATION

I declare that except where explicitly stated to the contrary, this dissertation -- "Civil Society And Opposition Politics In Nigeria (1985-1999)" -- is my original work.

  
Bukola Akintola  
December 2002

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, The Alpha and The Omega....

And also to my precious little gift, OLUWAFERANMI.....

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I want to express my profound gratitude to Dr. Ufo Okeke Uzodike for his encouragement and for painstakingly supervising this work. I am also very grateful to Dr. Laurence Piper for his helpful contributions as my co-supervisor and to Jasper Lee for his invaluable assistance in editing some of the chapters.

I am indebted to my parents, Chief and Chief (Mrs) J.O Akintola for their support and faith in me, though I sometimes let them down. To my brother, Joseph Ayodele Akintola, though our relationship is 'strange' (at least to me), you remain an integral part of my life (you can't get rid of me!!). To any member of my family who can truly say he/she has been of help to me (and I mean truly!), I say a BIG thank you.

To Professor Julius Ihonvbere, words are not enough to express my heart. You made this possible. You made me believe in myself and urged me to press on every time I wanted to give up. To Dr Abubakar Momoh, Comrade, you sure will never know what you have done for me in this world. Thank you for guiding me and for your assistance with materials for this work.

To Kwasi Yobo, child of Ananse, you are more than just my best friend... You understood and helped when I was at my lowest ebb, and there was no one to turn to. I am at a loss as to how to thank you; I am sure that it is only the Good Lord that can adequately reward you...

I owe so much to so many people and it is difficult to isolate particular acts of help or kindness. To everyone who assisted me in one way or the other throughout my stay at the University of Natal, I say: Ngiyabonga kakhulu (Thank you very much). Without financial support, this work would be impossible. I am grateful to Ford Foundation for awarding me a scholarship for this work, and also to the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg for financial assistance, including the Leif Egeland Award (2002).

To the Only Wise One be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, now and forever...

I say: THANK YOU ALL. GOD BLESS YOU....

**BUKOLA AKINTOLA (2002)**

## ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Action Group
ASUU	Academic Staff Union of Universities
AWU	Abeokuta Women's Union
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CD	Campaign for Democracy
CDHR	Committee for the Defense of Human Rights
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CLO	Civil Liberties Organization
CNC	Committee for National Consensus
CRP	Constitutional Rights Project
CSU	Nigeria Civil Service Union
DPN	Democratic Party of Nigeria
EMU	Eastern Mandate Union
EU	European Union
FEC	Federal Executive Council
FEDECO	Federal Electoral Commission
FEM	Foreign Exchange Market
FNWS	Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies
GDM	Grassroots Democratic Movement
GNPP	Great Nigerian People's Party
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
ING	Interim National Government
JAC	Joint Action Committee
LC	Liberal Convention

MAN	Manufacturers Association of Nigeria
MHWUN	Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria
MNR	Movement for National Reformation
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NADECO	National Democratic Coalition
NADL	National Association of Democratic Lawyers
NANM	National Association of Nurses and Midwives
NANS	National Association of Nigerian Student
NARD	National Association of Resident Doctors
NBA	Nigerian Bar Association
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons
NCPN	National Center Party of Nigeria
NCWS	National Council of Women's Societies
NEC	National Electoral Commission
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
✓NLC	Nigerian Labour Congress
NLP	Nigerian Labour Party
NMA	Nigerian Medical Association
NNC	Nigerian National Congress
NPC	Northern People's Congress
NPN	National Party of Nigeria
NPP	Nigerian People's Party
NRC	National Republican Convention
NSCIA	Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs
NSO	National Security Organization
NUBIFIE	National Union of Banks, Insurance, and Financial Institutions Employees
NUJ	Nigerian Union of Journalists



NUNS	National Union of Nigerian Students
NUPENG	National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers
NUPMTPAM	National Union of Pharmacists, Medical Technologists, and Professions Allied to Medicine
NUS	Nigerian Union of Students
NUT	Nigerian Union of Teachers
NWU	Nigerian Women's Union
NYCOP	National Youth Council of Ogoni People
NYM	Nigerian Youth Movement
→ OATUU	Organization of African Trade Union Unity
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OTUWA	Organization of Trade Unions of West Africa
PENGASSAN	Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria
PFN	People's Front of Nigeria
PMAN	Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria
PRC	Provisional Ruling Council
PRP	People's Redemption Party
PSP	People's Solidarity Party
PTDA	Petroleum Tanker Drivers Association
RPN	Republican Party of Nigeria
RSIS	River State Internal Security Task Force
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SFEM	Second-Tier Foreign Exchange Market
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SSAUTHRAI	Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research, and Allied Institutes
TCPC	Technical Committee on Privatization and Commercialization

TMG	Transition Monitoring Group
UAD	United Action for Democracy
UNCP	United Nigeria Congress Party
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization
UPGA	United Peoples Grand Alliance
UPN	Unity Party of Nigeria
UPP	United Peoples' Party
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WAI	War against Indiscipline
WASU	West African Students Union
WIN	Women In Nigeria

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

*...a central hypothesis of the civil society paradigm is that it is a force for societal resistance to state excesses, and the centerpiece organizationally, materially, and ideologically of the social movements and protests for reform and change (Ikelegbe, 2001: 2-3).*

### 1.1 Introduction


Civil society has been widely seen as an increasingly crucial agent for limiting authoritarian government, strengthening popular empowerment, enforcing political accountability, and improving the quality and inclusiveness of governance. Since the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has also been broadly regarded as a vital tool for monitoring the actions of governments and mobilizing public opinion to hold governing elites accountable for their actions. Overall, civil society organizations represent “the constellation of associational forms that occupy the terrain between individuals and the state” (Wiktorowicz, 2000: 43). As with some other parts of the world such as Eastern Europe, African civil society organizations assumed more explicitly political roles during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, they have been associated with the wave of popular protests and social mobilizations that resulted in the increased democratization of many African states since the early 1990s (Bayart, 1986: 109-125; Chazan, 1992: 297-307; Young, 1992: 36; Bratton, 1992: 51-81). Also, there is an increasing awareness of the potential role of civic organizations in the provision of public goods and social services, either separately or in conjunction with state institutions. This is because the activities of civil society can relieve demands on the state given not only that such organizations can develop their own solutions to problems but also they can create horizontal ties among citizens that decrease the importance of vertical relationships with political authorities (Diamond, 1999: 249).

Nevertheless, a closer look at many civil society organizations reveals serious deficiencies, which stand in the way of their efficiencies as agents of good governance. For instance, many civil society organizations are highly vulnerable to repression and cooptation by the state. Also, there are many 'uncivil' civil society organizations that pursue goals contrary to the common good. As such, there is a need to arrive at a clear determination of not only the character and role of civil society organizations but also their strengths and weaknesses in their relations with governance structures, and the ways in which they can be strengthened and in which their roles could be effective in fostering better governance. Further, it is important to examine the inter-relationship between civil society and the state in order to understand the strength and character of the impact of each upon the other as they have evolved over time.

There is a tendency to sum up civil society to mean non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Rather, civil society is a broader concept, encompassing all the organizations and associations that exist outside of the state. It includes the whole range of organizations traditionally labeled interest groups – not just advocacy NGOs but also labor unions, professional associations, ethnic associations, and others. It also incorporates associations that exist for purposes other than advancing specific social or political agendas such as religious organizations, student groups, cultural organizations, sports clubs, informal community groups, and any other kind of association in which people try to advance their vision of a good life (Carothers, 1999-2000: 19).

NGOs do play important and growing roles in developed and developing countries. They shape policy by exerting pressure on governments and by furnishing technical expertise to policy makers. They foster citizen participation in political activities, and






civic education. They provide leadership training for young people who want to engage in civic life but are uninterested in working through political parties (Diamond, 1999: 246). In many countries, however, NGOs are outweighed by more traditional parts of civil society. Religious organizations, labor unions and other groups often have a genuine base in the population and secure domestic sources of funding. By contrast, elite-run groups that have tenuous ties to the citizens on whose behalf they claim to act tend not only to dominate the NGO sectors in such countries but also to depend on funds from international donors for budgets they cannot obtain from domestic sources.

Civil society, therefore, can be described as what citizens do together in their own right at the bidding of no higher authority, for the common good, and apart from direct party political affiliation or alignment (Guthrie, 1994). Civil society is not concerned primarily with power, although it may kick against the excessive concentration or abuse of power by the state. Its primary concern is with the improvement of the quality of lives of the people. Many civil society organizations are identified with a tradition of addressing the issue of state neglect of the material and living conditions of local communities in such areas as social welfare, education, and health (Agbaje, 1990: 98).


## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

As in many countries, civil society in Nigeria is made up of a wide array and a rich variety of rural and urban based voluntary associations, charity organizations, professional associations, trade unions, hometown associations, cooperative societies, ethnic associations, academic associations and alumni, age grades, youth associations and clubs, religious associations, the press as well as NGOs. Members of the society formed many of these associations, primarily, to serve and protect the interests and values of their members, and to address many developmental needs that may not be




met by the state. Secondly, they promote political awareness and educate their members on their rights and responsibilities as citizens of the country. But in the period between 1985-1999, many civil society organizations such as professional, non-professional and youth associations, largely located in urban areas, became actively involved in political matters and they mobilized the society to oppose strongly military rule. They organized rallies, demonstrations, strikes, and other forms of activities to pressurize the military to relinquish power in favor of civilian governance. It is this section of civil society that will be the focus of this study.

The major task of this study is to examine the role and importance of the Nigerian civil society. It highlights the role civil society organizations played in the struggle against continued military rule in Nigeria. Although the struggle by civil society for the entrenchment of democratic values has been a feature of the Nigerian political history even before the country's independence in 1960, it became far more passionate, far-reaching, and rigorous between 1985 and 1999 than in any period in Nigeria's post-colonial history. The constant refusal of the military to return the country to civil rule, the gross abuse and violation of human rights, and the frequent attempts by the state to cause conflicts within organizations using various divisive tactics served to fuel the resistance of civil society.



To this end, using the organizational dimension of civil society associated with Antonio Gramsci (1967) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1955), the study will examine the strengths, weaknesses, and potentialities of civil society in the Nigerian political system. Both models provide useful insights into the workings of the Nigerian civil society, particularly given that they recognize the importance of social associations in shaping the norms of society. De Tocqueville (1955), in providing a strong case for civil society, advocated for a civil society made up of articulated associational groups, which could rely on an informed leadership to shape public opinion in a positive



manner. To him, a civil society that is self-organized and independent from the state is necessary for the consolidation of democracy. He argued that the most effective way to limit the expansion of the state is to reinforce the network of associations.

Likewise, the Gramscian model recognizes the importance of associational activity. The model serves as a synthesis of the liberal, Hegelian, and Marxist ideas about civil society. It goes a step further than other theories by viewing civil society as the sphere that extends beyond class domination. It serves as a useful tool in understanding organized resistance, most especially in the African context. Also, it allows us to look at civil society from a developmental perspective that is shaped by specific historical conditions (Woods: 1992). In the Gramscian conception, the dominant class does not maintain its hegemonic position solely through the use of the state. Political and economic hegemony are maintained through mediating institutions, representing and reflecting in their actions the dominant normative claims of the ruling class. To Gramsci (1971), civil society is the primary locus for creating ideology, for building consensus, and for legitimizing power; that is, for creating and maintaining the cultural and social hegemony of the dominant group by consent rather than by coercion. The most effective way to undermine the dominant position of the ruling class, according to Gramsci, is by developing a counter hegemonic position; thus, the need for an independent public sphere. Accordingly, there shall be an assessment of the activities and efforts of civil society in Nigeria to resist the imposition of the state's hegemony.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Research**

This study seeks to explicate the nature and character of civil society. It intends to find out the roles civil society can play in impacting positively on the political environment. Specifically, this research has four main (but closely related) objectives:

- ◆ To gain a clear analytical, and practical understanding of the character and functions of civil society, both in general and in light of the Nigerian situation;
- ◆ To examine the Nigerian civil society during the period under study to analyze the purpose for its opposition stance;
- ◆ To identify and analyze the positive roles civil society organizations can play in improving the quality of life of the people, and enhancing good governance in the Nigerian society; and
- ◆ To identify and analyze practical measures and guidelines, which can be, aimed at empowering civil society organizations to improve their role in the promotion of good governance in Nigeria and other African countries.

#### **1.4 Scope of the study**

The struggle against military dictatorship in Nigeria gave rise to a large and complex civil society. This study seeks to examine not only the activities and internal structures of these organizations but also their various challenges. It is also vital to assess their role and effectiveness as instruments of change in the country and, by extension, in other developing countries being ravaged by the effects of incompetent, suffocating, non-transparent, and non-participatory governments. To this end, this study will examine the roles of civil society in the Nigerian political system, with a specific focus on the period between 1985 and 1999. Three military governments made up this period. These were the Babangida regime (1985-1993), the Abacha regime (1993-1998), and the Abubakar transitional regime (1998-1999). This period is particularly of importance because it brought about a proliferation of civil society organizations. These organizations were habitually locked in confrontations with the state over issues of rights, liberties, and good governance. Nine broad categories of civil society organizations can be identified during this period:

Professional Associations: e.g. Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), and the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA.);

Workers' Associations: e.g. Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG);

✓

Youth Associations: e.g. the National Association of Nigerian Student (NANS);

Ethnic and Regional Associations: e.g. Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP);

Religious Associations: e.g. Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN);

Women's Rights Non-governmental Organizations: e.g. National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS); Women In Nigeria (WIN);

Academic Associations: e.g. Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU);

The Press: under the umbrella of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ);

Human Rights and Civil Liberties Non-governmental Organizations: e.g. Campaign for Democracy (CD), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR).

These organizations served as instruments for protecting human rights, and for not only guarding against the abuse of the rule of law in the absence of a constitution but also for the advocacy of democratic rule in Nigeria.

Given this context, this study seeks to examine extensively what civil society has done, and what it still needs to do in the promotion of accountability and good governance in Nigeria. The study will address crucial questions regarding the dynamics of civil society. Specifically, the questions will focus on a number of issue-areas, including: ✓

- What is civil society?
- Who makes up civil society?
- What functions or roles must civil society perform in the democratic process?
- How are these roles to be performed?

- To what extent do Nigerian civil society organizations conform to the theories on civil society?
- What are the political orientations, objectives, and activities of civil society organizations in Nigeria?
- What informed the oppositional stance of civil society in the period under study?
- How can civil society develop and/or maintain transparency and good governance internally and also contribute to good governance in overall public life?
- What does 'good governance' mean, and how can the conditions for good governance be put in place?
- In what ways can civil society organizations have a constructive impact on political life?
- How can civil society organizations be strengthened in order to perform their roles effectively in the political system?

### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

The issues of civil society in Nigeria have assumed center stage in the study of politics in Nigeria and many other African countries. This study will help provide insight about not only the workings of Nigerian civil society organizations but also their potential as catalysts for transparent and effective governance. Given Nigeria's size and influence within Africa, a dynamic and progressive civil society environment would have much positive impact in a region mired by bad governments, poor economic and political performance, and reputedly bad prospects. There is a need to study civil society because it is an asset for good governance, especially when certain conditions are in place, including:

- (a) When civil society plays the roles of educating the citizens about their rights and responsibilities; building a culture of tolerance and civic

engagement; incorporating marginal groups into the political system; and limiting the power of the state by challenging its abuses of authority;

- (b) When politics is steered toward participatory democracy, whereby the people – especially at the grassroots level -- could be involved in the making of decisions affecting their destinies;
- (c) When civil society refocuses and coordinates its activities to ensure credibility and effectiveness;
- (d) When civil society transcends its internal problems so as to promote good governance, transparency, and accountability in government; and
- (e) When the media continues to play the role of a watchdog without undue interference from the state, and by improving its investigative reporting skills.

Succinctly, the study argues the importance of civil society in Africa by illustrating the significant role it plays not only in engendering democracy in Nigeria but also in the consolidation of good and effective governance on the continent.

## **1.6 Methodology**

This study has been carried out using several overlapping research methods. These included a historical analysis, an extensive examination of existing literature including newspapers, magazines, mimeographs, monographs, Internet articles, scholarly/academic journals, documents of several civil society organizations, and findings from previous fieldworks conducted by this researcher on related issues on civil society. Oral interviews were also conducted to supplement these sources.

Due to time and financial limitations, three civil society organizations were used as case studies. These organizations are the Campaign for Democracy (CD), the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). The CD is a coalition of many civil society organizations that seek to promote democratic values; the NLC sees itself as a representative of the masses,

especially the working class; and MOSOP is representative of the struggle of the minority groups in the southeastern part of Nigeria for a fair share of the country's resources. Oral interviews, involving a total of twenty-five people, were carried out using interview schedules based on open-ended questions to allow a wider coverage of the research issues. The interviews were conducted with at least two officers of each of the three organizations – the president and secretary – as well as no fewer than two other ordinary members. This was to juxtapose the responses of the leadership and members of each of the organizations in order to come to a more balanced conclusion about the issues being investigated. Thirteen members of the public were also interviewed to gather their views about the activities and effectiveness of these organizations. These people were chosen using a simple random sampling method.

### **1.7 Overview of the Study**

In this study, civil society is taken as a multifaceted concept and phenomenon. Aside from being an arena, which contains the struggle for political space, it is an avenue for the coordination of various societal interests in the promotion of change or for the maintenance of the status quo. It constitutes a check on the arbitrariness of the state, and also serves as a buffer between state power and private spheres.

Chapter One is an introduction to the study. It provides a general background of the study. It incorporates the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, as well as the purpose, significance, scope, methodology, and overview of the study. Chapter Two is a review of relevant literature on civil society. It examines intensively, the concept of civil society both in western and African conception in order to gain a clear understanding of its meaning and usage. It examines the theories on civil society and the state as well as the nature of civil society and its relations to the state. Chapter Three provides the historical background of the study. It examines the



creation and the evolution of the Nigerian State, as well as the evolution of civil society.

Chapter Four examines the opposition stances of civil society against military rule between the periods 1985-1999. An attempt is made to examine the main players in the opposition, who and what they represent, their programs and methods of mobilization, and the usefulness and impacts of their tactics and strategies. Chapter Five incorporates the case studies. It offers an in-depth analysis of three major civil society organizations in Nigeria. It examines their activities, problems and achievements as well as how they can improve on their performances. Chapter Six examines the concept of good governance, the essential roles that civil society organizations need to play in order to be relevant in the political system, and also what the future holds for both the state and civil society. Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter, serves as an overview of the work. It proffers some practical suggestions for effective governance in Nigeria and, by extension, the rest of Africa.

As a whole, the study demonstrates the nature of the position and strength of the Nigerian civil society: sometimes weak, at times strong – often both; and sometimes anti-state, or at times co-opted. Typically, after the objective of its opposition seemed realized, civil society withdraws and remains passive until there is need for another uprising. This study, therefore, suggests the need for vigorous and abiding activities by the civil society to keep the state responsive and accountable to citizens through the promotion and maintenance of good and effective governance.

## Chapter 2

### A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

*...civil society is becoming an all encompassing term that refers to social phenomena putatively beyond formal state structures – but not necessarily free of all contact with the state... (Woods, 1992: 77).*

#### 2.1 Introduction: The Search for Clarity

The concept of civil society has gained currency in political discourse all over the world. Largely due to the crisis in Eastern Europe and the failure of democracy in Africa (~~which was~~ characterized by the growth of military dictatorships) and its seeming successes in Latin America, attention has shifted to the role civil society can play in the rescue of a country from imminent collapse. It is usually assumed that a vibrant civil society will act as a watchdog over the state to ensure a responsive and accountable government. Civil society is also viewed as a mechanism of collective empowerment that enhances the ability of citizens to protect their interests and rights from arbitrary or capricious state power (Wiktorowicz, 2000: 43). The concept has been freely used in recent years to characterize efforts and structures challenging dictatorship and the outcries for freedom in Africa. Such usage is in line with the experiences elsewhere. For instance, freedom seekers in Latin America and in Eastern Europe utilized the concept, and Marxian thinkers in the West seeking a non-statist social theory of the Left often used it (Hall, 1998:32). Narsoo, commenting on civil society in South Africa, observed that it has become:

Fashionable to invoke the magic term 'civil society' as panacea for the ills of the failed East European regimes, the decline of the welfare state, the ailing economies of the African Continent, and for the reconstruction in South Africa (Narsoo, 1991: 40).

Galston (2000: 64-65) offered four principal reasons for the explosion of interest the concept of civil society has generated among scholars and political activists alike in the past two decades. Firstly, events in the former Soviet-bloc nations of Central Europe dramatized the ways in which civic associations could serve as effective sources of resistance to oppressive governments. Secondly, non-governmental organizations emerged throughout the world as forums for previously unheard voices addressing issues of transnational significance. Thirdly, the concept of civil society provided a basis for criticizing the excesses of both the state and the market. Civil society began to be seen as an alternative way of fostering civic engagement and promoting public purposes, as well as a source of stability and virtue. Finally, the concept of civil society responded to the anxiety throughout the advanced and industrialized nations (especially in the United States) that the traditional sources of socialization, solidarity, and active citizenship were becoming dangerously weak.

The concept of civil society has a long history in political philosophy. It was explored in the works of many great political philosophers like Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Karl Marx (1818-1883), and Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Although the concept has captured so much attention and has become widely used in a short space of time, there is still no consensus as to what it means. There has been a lot of miscommunication between people ostensibly talking about the same subject. This chapter seeks clarity in the meaning, nature, characteristics, and role of civil society. The study will offer a tour through the various arguments and theories that have been put forward in the attempt to find the meaning and assess the significance of the concept and its relation to the state.

Carothers (1999-2000: 18) observation about the importance and currency of the concept of civil society is worth noting:

Civil society has become one of the favorite buzzwords among global chattering classes, touted by presidents and political scientists as the key to political, economic and societal success. As with Internet stocks, however, civil society's worth as a concept has soared far beyond its demonstrated returns. To avoid disappointment in the future, would-be buyers should start by taking a closer look at the prospects.

Pointing to the same problem, Momoh (1998: 2) also observed, "too much confusion has entered the analysis, conceptualization, and understanding of the civil society question. So much so that civil society is everything and nothing".

The misunderstanding surrounding the concept creates obfuscation in a number of issue-areas. For instance, it is difficult to come to a conclusion as to the relationship between civil society and the state. Is civil society part of the state, or is it in partnership with the state, or even, can it stand alone without the assistance of the state or vice versa? Should civil society replace the state? Also, there has been no consensus on what organs constitute civil society, whether it is interest groups, social movements, civil or civic associations, civil movements, human rights groups, or just associational activities. Much of the debate on civil society does not bother about how much of the western framework of civil society is transferable to non-western societies. Can what constitute civil society to the West apply to Africa, for instance? What are the proper roles of civil society organizations? Should civil society be seen as an alternative to the state?

The overall aim of this chapter is a critical survey and review of some of the literature on the concept of civil society. Specifically, the objectives of this chapter are, firstly, an examination of the concept of civil society as used in the western classical and medieval political thought. This is based on the assumption that a full understanding of civil society may not be possible without a thorough assessment of its historical conception. Secondly, there will be a critical evaluation of some of the current usages

of the concept in the period between 1980 and 2002. Thirdly, the chapter will analyze critically the relationship between civil society and the state to see if civil society can be understood outside of its relationship to and/or articulation with the state.

Fourthly, an attempt will be made at understanding the conceptualization of the concept of civil society and its relations to the state as it relates to the African environment in comparison to its application in Western political thought.

## **2.2 Civil Society and the State in Western Classical and Medieval Political Thought**

In its history, civil society has undergone different shifts within and between traditions of thoughts. What we have as civil society is a complex, multi-layered concept. Different aspects of the concept of civil society have been used to describe various societies at various historical periods. Civil society started from being separated as the realm of the secular from the realm of the Church. Later, it was portrayed not only as the realm of civilized relations as against the state of nature (as portrayed by Locke and Rousseau) but also as the realm of society against the realm of the state (as put forward by Hegel and Marx). In modern times, civil society is frequently used to describe all voluntary social relations outside the domain of the state.

As Starr (1990: 194) rightly observed, civil society “has a rich history in Western political thought, most notably in the writings of Locke, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill. It is grounded in ideals of citizenship under law; in freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, and of worship; and in the protection of minority rights under majority rule” (Starr, 1990:194). Starr further described civil society in Western tradition to be a social space that is different from government, pointing out that government is just one of several institutions coexisting in a pluralistic social fabric. To Black (1984: 32-43), the values of civil society comprise personal security

in the sense of freedom from the arbitrary passions of others, and freedom from admonition in general. The central ideal of civil society may be identified as personal independence and its central imperative as respect for persons. In other words, in Western political history, freedom of association was seen as important whereby individuals can freely participate with other citizens in activities that will enhance their common goals and in the rule of law that binds the state and these voluntary associations together in a common public platform. Bendix et al (1987:12) pointed out that prior to the French Revolution, the term civil society was another word for high society, and it also referred to the ruling groups concerned with the interest of king and country.

Nevertheless, in much of Western Europe, the notion of a civil society is linked to the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the subsequent efforts by this class to separate private spheres from state actions (Habermas, 1989). During that period, monarchical and semi-feudal institutions treated the political arena as the private domain of kings and lords. Thus, civil society emerged as a counterweight to ensure the separation of the public realm from the private sphere. It eventually succeeded in undermining and reducing patrimonial rule through the spread of the notion that political authorities should be held accountable to a public. Poggi describes the period thus:

Certain social groups – predominantly bourgeois, though sometimes mixed with elements from the nobility and the lower clergy – progressively put themselves forward as an audience qualified to criticize the state's own operation. They were seeking, as it were, to compliment the public sphere constructed from above with a 'public realm' formed by individual members of the civil society transcending their private concerns, elaborating a public opinion on matters of state and bringing it to bear on the activities of state organ (Poggi, 1978: 82).

### **2.3 The Concept of Civil Society in Historical Perspective.**

Historically, the concept of civil society has its origin in the classical and medieval political thought as evidenced in the work of writers such as Aristotle (384-322 B.C) and Cicero. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the term was synonymous with

the state or political society. It was more or less a translation of Aristotle's *Koinonia Politike* or of Cicero's *Societas civilis*. Civil society here was seen as representing a social order of citizenship in which men regulated their relationships and settled their disputes according to a system of laws, where civility reigned and where citizens took an active part in public life (Chandhoke, 1995; Ferguson, 1991). In other words, during this period, civil society was not distinguished from the state. Aristotle saw the state as being essential for political involvement. A good state will maximize its citizens' opportunities for participation in politics, and will enable them to develop their highest qualities.


The modern usage of the term civil society is traceable to the works of Thomas Hobbes (1651), Baron de Montesquieu (1748), John Locke (1924), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1950). These political theorists still did not distinguish civil society from the state. Rather, they used the term "civil society" and "political society" to contrast the uncivilized condition of humanity in what was termed a "state of nature" where the system of government was by despotic decrees rather than by laws. Thomas Hobbes (1651) saw the state of nature as completely and utterly terrible and terrifying. Writing in the mid-seventeenth century, Hobbes was admittedly terrified by the consequences of the English civil war. He wrote:

In such condition, there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and, consequently, no cultivation of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instrument of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worse of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes, 1651).<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, Hobbes challenged anyone (who disagreed with him on the awfulness of the natural relationships among men), to ponder on the reason why people do certain

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the edition of *Leviathan* edited by Michael Oakeshott (1960: 82).



things such as carrying weapons, locking their doors, or securing their houses against burglars. Hobbes saw the escape route from the state of nature in what he called *civitas* or commonwealth. To him, the commonwealth is founded on the readiness of individuals to forgo their quests for self-preservation and, instead, agree -- mutually and voluntarily -- to appoint an individual or assembly to provide security for all. Civil society involved the notion that individuals had entered into some form of compact or contract, by which they agreed to subordinate their separate wills into a unified commonweal. This process of consent involved the definition of the principle by which the society was to be governed and the term of governance. Individuals in civil society were to pursue their self-interest within a framework of mutually recognized rights and obligations regulated by public authority.

Hobbes was particularly concerned about the fate of civil society in the face of the overwhelming threat presented to it by the state of nature. He argued that in the state of nature, all individuals were quite astonishingly vain and arrogant, since each believed he was the wisest person alive. Although each individual believed he had the expertise to secure whatever he wanted, the resources available were not enough to satisfy every individual's needs. Thus, the state of nature was one in which self-centered individuals created a condition of scarcity. Hobbes maintains that this caused problems: 'if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end...endeavor to destroy, or subdue one another' (Hobbes, 1991: 87).

John Locke (1924: 160) also employed civil society as a synonym for civil or political society. He wrote that "wherever.... any numbers of men so unite into one society, as to quit everyone his executive power of the law of Nature, and to resign it to the public, there, and there only, is a political, or civil society". However, he was more explicit about the distinction between society and civil society. He observed that



there were indications to point to the fact that there was the existence of society before the formation of government. This was manifested in the popular consent in the establishment of currency in the form of gold and silver, accumulation of individual wealth in the form of land, labor and capital. This society, he said, was different from that in which individuals agreed to the basic principles to govern their lives based upon “mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates, which I call by the general name property”(Locke, 1970: paragraph 123).

Thus, Locke recognized that civil society was different from society. To him, civil society defines the nature and principles of political life from which government itself results. He stressed the point that individuals only enter into civil society and subject themselves to authority on the basis of freely given consent i.e. the social contract. Locke’s conception of the process of civil society implies the imputation of a common substantive purpose to society (the protection of private property), and the establishment of such purpose by common consents (Haberson et al, 1994: 16). Men will withdraw their consent to subject themselves to the institutions of symmetric reciprocity if it fails to guarantee life, liberty, and property. It is this principle of consent that links together the purposes of society and those of government.

According to him,

this puts men out of a state of Nature into that of a commonwealth, by setting up a judge on earth with authority to determine all the controversies and redress the injuries that may happen to any member of the commonwealth, which judge is the legislative or magistrate appointed by it. And wherever there are any numbers of men, however associated, that have no such decisive power to appeal to, there they are still in the state of Nature (Locke, 1924:160).

Locke asserted that although men give up their political power to someone else who will make and enforce the laws that keep secure the lives and property of individuals, “this power still resides in the individuals making up the civil society - those who delegate it to others to govern them. Whether this “other” is a monarch, or an elected

legislature, power is given to them only as long as they fulfill the protective function, equitably governing the individual members of the civil society” (Camoy, 1984: 18). Thus, citizens enter into a social contract between themselves and government. The citizens agree to obey the laws and the government agrees to respect the citizens’ rights. Citizens, therefore, have the right to resist or overthrow the government that ceases to serve the interests of the citizens.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) established in his social contract theory a sharp contrast between society, civil society, and the state, placing civil society as an indispensable intermediary between the two. Unlike Hobbes, he saw the emergence of civil society as signifying a decisive movement out of the state of nature. It is this movement that created the basis for the reorganization of human relationships along a path that allows individuals and groups the possibility of overcoming scarcities. To Rousseau, the social contract indicated popular consent by members of society in stating the principles of the community and of its governance (Rousseau, 1950). He insisted that the state is illegitimate without the consent of the society. By the term of the contract, all citizens enjoy an equal right to participate in the making of law, and to participate in the decision-making that defines the appropriate boundaries of the law and the proper domain of state activity. Also, the state remains legitimate for as long as it operates according to the principles of popular sovereignty.

The concept of civil society came into wide usage again in the eighteenth century Western European political thought. It emerged in the Scottish and Continental Enlightenment of the eighteenth century out of the effort to wrest a social space within which emerging and pre-existing types of associations could pursue their own ends relatively free from the constraints of the state. During this period, liberal theorists like Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), Adam Smith (1723-1790), and Thomas Paine (1737-1809) developed the notion of civil society as a domain parallel to, but

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separate from, the state – a sphere of free competition and peaceful social interaction independent of the state. In these theories, civil society exhibited three main characteristics: the rise of private property, development of market competition, and emergent individualism.

Civil society was seen as a realm of free exchange, the social space where people and firms come together freely to contract, produce, and consume. It was viewed as the realm of free association and, most of all, free market. The right of private property was regarded as being essential to civil society. The market was seen as an economic tool and as a moral and ethical organization of society. Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith were more particular about civil society in relation to the political economy. To them, the history of civil society involved the establishment and diffusion of wealth, personal independence and the refinement of arts, sciences, and manners (Fine and Rai, 1997: 31). Ferguson saw civil society as a socially desirable alternative both to the state of nature and the heightened individualism of emergent capitalism. He argues that if the laws of civil society do not restrain men, the society would be so full of violence or meanness that it would be worse than an animal kingdom (Ferguson, 1995: 17). The main function of the state, therefore, is to protect the general system of commerce, trade, and property. The market on its part must be self-regulating and free from state interference.

Smith also stressed modernization and market self-regulation as necessary components of civil society. According to him, the wealth of a nation result from each individual working for his own economic advantage. He emphasized the importance for nations and societies of certain principles and mechanisms such as the division of labor, system of laws, contracts, money, exchange and private property (Smith, 1978: 335-527). Smith argued that although there was a need for political intervention to moderate the effects of the expansion of the division of labor on the

society, such intervention ought primarily to favor commercial associations and monopolies. Analyzing the social theory of Smith, Fine concludes that “the strength of Smith’s work as a whole was that he did not simply look to the effect of state intervention on commerce but also reversed the question to examine the determination of the state and its laws on commercial society” (Fine, 1985: 46).

Later liberal theorists such as J.S Mill (1806-1873), and Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) described civil society as the arena where individuals collectively organized themselves to limit the power of the state, thereby providing a buffer between the individual and the state. De Tocqueville made a strong case for civil society. He wrote:

The most natural privilege of man, next to the right for acting for himself, is that of combining his exertions with those of his fellow-creatures, and of acting in common with them. I am therefore led to conclude that the right of association is almost as inalienable as the right of personal liberty (De Tocqueville, 1952:129-30).

Challenging the Anglo-American emphasis on the market and its exchanges as the model and core of civil society, De Tocqueville emphasized the importance of small-scale free associations and interest groups that populated America in mid-nineteenth century. He stressed the importance of volunteerism, community spirit, and independent associational life as protection against the state’s domination of society. He saw the associations as counterbalance necessary to keep the state accountable and effective. To him, civil society is essential to sustainable democracy. Civil society is “the independent eye of society”, made up of a plurality of self-organized and vigilant civil associations. Without civil society, those in power can become despots. Due to the fact that anyone could form an organization, and because these groups usually operated in informal and democratic fashion, the culture of popular associations represented egalitarian principles and universal inclusion (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 19). They were, therefore, representatives of a miniature form of direct democracy.

These associations prepare private individuals for the exercise of public power. They emphasized the distinction of civil society from the state, and from political parties.

The distinction between the state and civil society became clearer in the theory of G.W. Hegel. To Hegel (1952), civil society was distinct from the household or the state. Civil society was a product of a multi dimensional process, a property of modern bourgeois society. Hegel described civil society as a particularized phase of history in which reason becomes increasingly differentiated along socio-economic lines. Hegel portrayed civil society as a set of social relations, which are penetrated by the logic of market relations. Although civil society offered avenues for the self-definition of the individual in an atmosphere of freedom and relative equality, it also reflected the domain of self-serving action. Therefore, civil society is the outcome of a historical transformation, which is manifested in the creation of space where various private interests interact and conflict with common interest. Thus, civil society could not remain “civil unless it is ordered politically and subjected to the higher surveillance of the state”(Hegel, 1952: 132).

Hegel described civil society as “the battlefield where everyone’s individual private interest meet everyone else’s, and as such, it was conceived as an arena where the needs and interests of individuals conflict with common interest, on the one hand, and those interests together conflict with the interests of the state, on the other” (Knox, 1965: 189). To him, civil society is the sphere of universal ‘egoism’, where the individual treats everybody as a means to his own ends. Its most acute and typical expression is economic life, where he sells and buys, not in order to satisfy the needs of the other, his hunger or his need for shelter, but where the individual uses the need of the other as a means to satisfy his own ends. The individual’s aims are mediated through the needs of others. The more other people are dependent on a need that he

can supply, the better his own position becomes. This is the sphere where everyone acts according to what he perceives as his enlightened self-interest.

Thus, the enormous task of uniting both private interest and public benefits in civil society became very crucial. To Hegel, only the state could guarantee the rational organization of society. In other words, there was a need for civil society to be balanced and ordered by the state, otherwise it would become self-interested and would not contribute to the common good. Hegel views the state not as an arrangement aimed at safeguarding man's self-interest (this is done in civil society), but as something transcending it (Hegel, 1952). The state to Hegel is universal altruism – a mode of relating to a universe of human beings not out of self-interest but out of solidarity, out of the will to live with other human beings in a community. Civil society to him is the realm of “dissoluteness, misery, and physical and ethical corruption” (Mouffe, 1979: 28). It is the expression of alienation, of the separation of individuals from one another into competing firms, religious sects, clubs, and organizations, despite being the realm where the norms, morals and values of a society are grounded and where the socialization process of individuals takes place.

Hegel therefore proposed two systems of controls for the containment of civil society. The first involved the safety of lives and property and this was to be overseen by the state institutions such as the courts of law, welfare agencies and the police. Secondly, he proposed a social order to oversee the operations of the market and regulate contractual relations among individuals. The state has the right to intervene when individual interest begins to undermine public interest. Hegel argued that the normative unity of society is the responsibility of the state. As Marcuse puts it:

The anarchy of self-seeking property owners could not produce from its mechanism an integrated, rational and universal social scheme. At the same time, a proper social order...could not be imposed with private property rights denied, for the free individual would be annulled... The task of making the necessary integration devolved

therefore upon an institution that would stand above interests... and yet would preserve their holdings (Marcuse, 1968: 201).

To Hegel, civil society thus becomes a necessary moment in human progress towards the realization of the consciousness of freedom. But it is subordinated to the higher universality of the state. In other words, civil society is not self-sufficient, and it needs to be regulated by the state. But Hegel's theory did not take into account the need for the regulation of the state. Who regulates the activities of the state? Is the state always right? Hegel deified the state so much that he believed it could do no wrong. He believed in the absolute rationality of the state as against an otherwise 'irrational' civil society.

Karl Marx's theory of civil society was a reaction to the Hegelian theory. It was a reversal of Hegel's view. He saw civil society as a historical phenomenon, coterminous with the economic substructure in capitalist society. While accepting the perception of civil society as a bourgeois society characterized by egoism, self-interest and conflict, he rejected the beatification of the state. Contrary to Hegel, Marx postulated that the state is founded on the contradictions between public and private life, and between general and particular interests. Marx is quoted extensively here to show his view on this:

My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind. But that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term "civil society" that the anatomy of this civil society, however has to be sought in political economy.... The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarized as follows:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of the

material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of the society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life (Marx, 1970: 20-21).

He described civil society as a complex set of historically determined forms of relation from which originate the state. He states that:

Civil society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of the development of productive forces. It embraces the whole commercial and industrial life of a given stage and, insofar, transcends the state and the nation, though, on the other hand again, it must assert itself in its foreign relations as nationality, and inwardly must organize itself as state (Marx and Engels, 1968: 615).

Unlike Hegel, Marx contended that the state is not only a coercive apparatus used in protecting definite material interests but also evolved from the real and specific form of material conditions of civil society and, as such, it is an official expression of the development of civil society (Marx, 1975: 166). He argued that contrary to Hegel's postulations, the state is a representative of class interests rather than the common or general interests of a society. He emphasized the separation of the state and civil society by pointing out that economic individualism and *laissez faire* express this dichotomy between civil society and state. The separation of civil society and the state is an embodiment of human alienation and also reflective of sophisticated forms of institutionalization of capitalist exploitations throughout society. This separation serves to mask the true nature and basis of exploitation in modern bourgeois societies. In other words, the freer bourgeois society seems to be, the more exploitative it becomes. Civil society, then, is an outcome of bourgeois society. Marx argued that although there are contradictions in civil society, the solution to solving these contradictions may not be found in the state apparatus as postulated by Hegel but in civil society itself.



However, this is not to mean that Marx was a strong advocate of civil society. As Gellner points out, “one way of summarizing the central intuition of Marxism is to say: Civil society is a fraud” (Gellner, 1994: 1). Rather, with the use of a historical analysis of the evolution of civil society, Marx argued that civil society failed to live up to its promise of creating a space where the individual could find freedom and self-determination. For civil society to perform this expected role, Marx maintained that it must undergo revolutionary transformation. He foresaw a political and social revolution by proletariats seeking to liberate humanity. ✓

Marx’s conception of civil society appears to contain two contradictory notions. On the one hand, he argues that civil society opens the door for freedom from medieval bondage since it abolished political restrictions on property and economic activities. On the other hand, civil society was the basis for the establishment of a new form of domination where the consciousness of alienation were formalized and institutionalized (Avineri, 1968: 20-21). He argued that alienation and depoliticization of the individual in civil society accompanied the achievement of individual freedom from medieval bondage in a situation where political life was monopolized by the state. The apparent freedom granted to the individual was in reality a disguise to the underlying realities of class domination. The capitalist state merely cements the power of the ruling class instead of resolving the tensions of civil society. In the process, citizens are hopelessly fragmented, alienated from each other as well as from the means of production and the product of their labor. This he believed can only be overcome by ‘true democracy’ where there is no alienation between man and the political structure. This “true democracy” will only be achieved when the state withers away, signifying the victory of the proletariat. Thus for Marx, civil society is the ensemble of relations embedded in the market and the agency that defines its character is the bourgeoisie (Mamdani, 1996: 14). ✓

The concept of civil society came into wide usage again in the writings of Antonio Gramsci. He took the concept up with contemporary reference to advanced capitalist formation. While Marx emphasized the reality of class domination, he focused largely on the privileges of freely associating individuals. Identifying with the civil society struggle in Italy, his native country, Gramsci expanded the Marxian notion of civil society and portrayed it as a special nucleus of independent political activity, a crucial sphere of struggles against tyranny. He saw civil society as the place where other social groups and classes could undermine the position of the bourgeoisie and prepare for revolution against the capitalist state (Gramsci, 1967: 164). Gramsci's major contribution to the discourse on civil society was his development of a tripartite schema, which separated civil society both from the state and the market. He argued that civil society is the arena, separate from the state and market, in which ideological hegemony is contested. Analyzing the relationship between the bourgeois state and civil society in the age of monopoly capitalism, his location of civil society in the complex set of social relations differed from that of Marx.

Gramsci argued that 'between the economic structure and the state with its legislation and coercion stands civil society' (Hoare and Smith, 1971:207). He transferred civil society from the indeterminate base, which Marx called the economic base, to what he called superstructure – a realm of public opinion and culture. He described civil society as the ensemble of organizations called 'private' and comprising a wide range of social activities and institutions such as trade unions, voluntary associations, church organizations, and political parties, if they do not form part of the state apparatus (Forgacs, 1988: 420). Civil society for Gramsci is a set of institutions autonomous from the state through which society organized and represented itself. To him, civil society is the milieu in which the state takes the form of a moral force, which can regulate and control the activities of individuals without having to resort to armed force.

Unlike Marx, Gramsci distinguished civil society and political society at two superstructural levels, perceiving them as a terrain of intertwined functions – hegemony and domination – exercised by the dominant groups. Writing in his famous *Prison Notebooks*, he posits:

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the state'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony which the dominant group exercises throughout society, and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the state and 'judicial' government (Hoares and Smith, 1971: 12).

He distinguished civil society as the site of hegemony and consent as opposed to the political society, which is a sphere of coercion and domination. Thus, to Gramsci, civil society is the terrain in which the dominant class or group establishes its hegemony and consent. It is the basis for securing legitimacy for the state. But as Mersha (1990: 8) pointed out, Gramsci was explicit that civil society, with its myriad of constituent groups and activities, is not an uncontested terrain. It is also a terrain where alternative or counter hegemony could be established. It is both the realms of hegemony or voluntary consent to the rule of the dominant class and an arena for struggle over such hegemony. It was necessary to transform civil society to create an alternative hegemony of the subordinate classes before it could be possible to challenge state power. Yet, although a hegemonic class predominates, it cannot use the state simply to impose its interest on other classes. He compared civil society to the trenches of warfare:

...in the case of the most advanced states... 'civil society has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions' of the immediate economic elements (crises, depressions, etc). The superstructures of civil society are like the trenches of modern warfare. In war it would sometimes happen that a fierce artillery attack, seemed to destroy the enemy's entire defense system, whereas in fact it had only destroyed the outer perimeter; and at the moment of their advance and attack the assailants would find

themselves confronted by a line of defense, which was still effective .  
(Hoare and Smith, 1971: 235).

The main proposition advanced by Gramsci is that the state cannot be understood without a thorough understanding of civil society. To him, civil society is the sphere where capitalists, workers and others engage in political and ideological struggles and where political parties, trade unions, religious bodies and a great variety of other organizations come into existence. It is the sphere not only of class struggle but also of all the popular democratic struggles that arise out of the different ways people are grouped together. He used the term 'political society' to represent the coercive relations which characterized the activities that are carried out by the various institutions of the state. Yet, he also noted that aside from the coerciveness of its activities, the state plays an important role in the organization of consent through its educative and informative roles.

In essence, Gramsci was not actually arguing for a civil society independent of the state. Civil society may be state-organized, but it is not state-controlled; while it is autonomous of the state, it cannot be independent of the state (Mamdani, 1995: 605). For Gramsci, the realm of civil society is not the market but public opinion and culture. Its agents are the intellectuals, who figure prominently in the establishment of hegemony. Civil society, therefore, offers the subordinate classes an opportunity to deny the ruling class hegemony in the realm of ideas, value, and culture, as a basis for the transformation of capitalist property relations and the state (Bangura, 1992: 45-46).

Although Gramsci built on the theory of Marx, he differs from Marx in varying ways. Bobbio (1979) points out that Gramsci emphasizes the primacy of the ideological superstructures over the economic structures; and also, that he emphasizes the primacy of civil society (consensus) over political society (force). While Marx

envisaged the total disappearance of the state and civil society after a complete revolution carried out by the proletariat, Gramsci, on his part, believed that historical process would eventually lead to the identification of the state with civil society and the creation of a regulated society. It is worthwhile to note that Marx's vision of the 'withering away of the state' and its overthrow by the proletariat has not come to pass. Despite the struggle of the working class, it has not been able to overthrow the state. The working class has only been able to achieve better working conditions for its members and improvement in their conditions of living through its struggles. Also, there have been the overthrows of the bourgeoisie state/aristocratic rules through proletarian and agrarian revolutions in some European states such as France, and Russia.

Also, Gramsci emphasized the capacity of civil society in the west to resist state intervention in its realm. He argued that the 'frontal' attack on the state in Russia in 1917 succeeded because the civil society there was primordial and gelatinous. This, he believed, would not have happened in the West where civil society is not only strong but also enjoys a proper (good working) relationship with the state (Hoare and Smith, 1971: 238). Gramsci believed that the working class could only dismantle the hegemony of the bourgeois by building alliances with all the social movements that are striving to transform the relationships within civil society. The hegemonic power exercised by the bourgeois through the organizations of civil society has to be increasingly undermined by the countervailing power of the social movements based on the growing activity of the members of these movements, linked together under the leadership of the working class (Hoare and Smith, 1971: 207).

In other words, the process of revolutionary change from capitalism to socialism would require the transformation of the social relations of civil society as the basis for the transformation of the state apparatuses and of the organizations of civil society

(Hoare and Smith, 1971: 241). This war of position may take the form of very sharp struggles, and even violent ones, against the coercive organs of the state. Thus, to Gramsci, for communism to be achieved, there has to be the continual extension of a civil society characterized by a degree of autonomy, self-government and self-discipline, along with the gradual disappearance of the coercive, hierarchical and bureaucratic elements of the state.

The whole logic of Gramsci's hegemony is the "consensual aspect of political control" (Femia, 1987: 25), whereby subordinate classes accept their subordination based on certain compromise equilibrium. To Gramsci, a public is the product of concrete struggles in which one social group or set of demands succeeds in symbolizing the demands of a variety of groups and classes. Such a struggle operates across the state/civil society divide and, as a consequence, that divide is unstable, shifting according to the specific content of the hegemonic order. Thus, Gramsci at times assigns hegemony to the state and at other times to civil society. The public good is represented in different ways in both realms. The state is designated as the site of moral and political order and yet this is achieved only if civil society is regularly brought into alignment with it. According to Buci-Glucksmann, Gramsci's hegemony is expressed in society as the complex of institutions, ideologies, practices, and agents that comprise the dominant culture of value of one group or class over the other (Buci-Glucksmann, 1974: 64).

To Carnoy (1984: 70-71), Gramsci's concept of hegemony has two principal meanings. First, it is a process in civil society whereby a fraction of the dominant class exercises control through its moral and intellectual leadership over other allied fractions of the dominant class. Secondly, it is a relationship between the dominant and dominated class. Carnoy pointed out that the "emphasis on the influence of superstructure – on the intellectual and cultural influences rather than the economy –

enabled Gramsci to explain how capitalism in the more advanced industrial societies of the West was able, despite the activity of revolutionary movements, to retain its hold on and support among such a sizeable proportion of the working class” (Carnoy, 1984:87). Gramsci saw that the dominant class did not have to rely on the use of force or even economic power to rule; rather, “through its hegemony, expressed in the civil society and the state, the ruled could be persuaded to accept the system of beliefs of the ruling class and to share its social, cultural, and moral values” (Carnoy, 1984:87).

## **2.4 Civil Society and the State in Contemporary Political Thought**

The concept of civil society came to prominence again in the 1980s and 1990s. Some of the factors that may have been responsible for this include:

- ◆ The collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe, and authoritarian regimes in some parts of the world;
- ◆ The role of ‘social movements’, ‘mass organizations’, ‘popular organizations’ and ‘liberation movements’ in the overthrow of these regimes;
- ◆ The global trend towards democracy;
- ◆ Privatization, and other economic structural adjustment policies, and other market reforms, with the retreat of the state as an economic agent; and
- ◆ The global technology revolution, or the new information age, which made it easier for organizations to empower citizens.

All these factors may have contributed in creating an enabling environment for making civil society an attractive concept to scholars and activists alike. In Eastern and Central Europe, the severe totalitarianism of the communist state did not give much room for the existence of civil society. Thus, the project of democratization involved a major effort on the part of civil society to force an opening up of the political space to create a ground for political opposition. The movements and

organizations of civil society were not out to overthrow the state but to see to a structural reform and social change.

The concept of civil society in modern times reflects a basic configuration in which society stands apart from the state, develops autonomously, and becomes increasingly aware of such autonomy at both the individual and the collective levels (Adamson, 1987: 320-39; Taylor, 1989). It envisages the existence of public space that is not only politically structured but also increasingly open to public debate and public opinion (Taylor, 1990: 95-118; Cohen and Arato, 1992; Frazer, 1992:104-92; Seligman, 1992). Yet, in spite of the many conceptions of civil society as separate from the state, civil society activities cannot be completely divorced from political concerns. Whether the relationship between the state and civil society is hostile or cordial, there is still an important link between them. Fatton (1995: 67) pointed out that as “the state is transformed by a changing civil society; a civil society is transformed by a changing state. Thus, state and civil society form a fabric of tightly interwoven threads, even if they have their own independent patterns”. In other words, civil society may be the realm outside the state but it is still a realm where political activities take place. At this juncture, there is a need to examine the various modern conceptions of civil society.

## **2.5 Civil society and its meanings**

Despite the fact that so much research has been done on the concept of civil society, no consensus has been reached on its meaning and inclusiveness. Conceptual debates on civil society have always been diverse, and contradictory positions have emerged. Adopting a monolithic view of both civil society and the state does not give sufficient attention to the full picture of civil society which is not only plural but also structured by unequal power relations and which encompasses uncivil elements as well as civil ones. Civil society has been defined in so many ways in relation to its boundaries,



and what sets of actors should be considered within it. Some of these definitions are either too broad that they become analytically unhelpful, or too narrow that they exclude many important actors. A few of these positions and definitions will be examined here.

- Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992: ix) define civil society as “a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication”. Their conception of civil society excludes direct political and economic activities. It is also not clear why the family is considered to be part of civil society in this definition, since it is assumed that it does not exist in the public realm.
- John Keane (1988: 11-15) defines civil society as “an aggregate of institutions whose members are engaged in a complex of non-state activities – economic and cultural production, household life and voluntary associations – and who in this way preserve and transform their identity by exercising all sorts of pressures or controls upon state institutions”. However, he warns against the danger of idealizing civil society and demonizing the state. He pointed out that “without the protective, redistributive and conflict-mediating functions of the state, the struggles to transform civil society will be ghettoized, divided, and stagnant, or will spurn their own new forms of inequality and unfreedom.”
- Ellen Meiksins Wood (1990: 61), tracking the paths of Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, sees civil society as constituting a relocation of coercive power from the public realm to the private realm and thus facilitating the emergence of the opaque dictatorship of the market. Wood finds the origins of civil society in the expansion of

capitalist systems of exchange and production, which facilitates the formal separation of state and market (Markovitz, 1998: 29). According to her, civil society:

represents a separate sphere of human relations and activity, differentiated from the state but neither public nor private or perhaps both at once, embodying not only a whole range of social interactions apart from the private sphere of the household and the public sphere of the state, but more specifically a network of distinctively economic relations, the sphere of the market-place, the arena of production, distribution and exchange.

She asserts that the concept of civil society:

has become an all-purpose catch word for the left, embracing a wide range of emancipatory aspirations, as well – it must be said – as a whole set of excuses for political retreat. However constructive its uses in defending human liberties against state oppression, or in marking out a terrain of social practices, institutions and relations neglected by the ‘old’ Marxist left, ‘civil society’ is now in danger of becoming an alibi for capitalism (cited in Fattou: 1992: 18).

- Keith Tester’s (1992: 8) description seems to capture the essence of civil society.

He described civil society as “all those social relationships, which involve the voluntary associations and participation of individuals acting in their private capacities... Civil society can be said to equal the milieu of private contractual relationship”. To him, civil society is clearly distinct from the state. Civil society is about the individual’s basic societal relationships and experiences.

- John Hall (1995: 1) defines civil society as “an opposite of despotism, a space in which social groups could exist and move, something which exemplified and would ensure softer, more tolerable conditions of existence”. Elsewhere, he defines civil society as an ideal that is capable of social embodiment, a form of societal self-organization, which allows for cooperation with the state whilst enabling individuation (Hefner, 1998: 54).

- Seligman (1992: 5) defines civil society as “that realm where the concrete person, that particular individual, subject to his or her wants, caprices, and physical

necessities seeks the attainment of these 'selfish' aims... the arena where free, self-determining individuality sets forth its claims for satisfaction of its wants and personal autonomy". This definition is narrow in the sense that it reduces the whole essence of civil society to individualism.

- Mark Swilling (1991: 21) describes civil society as the associational life, which exists between the individual's activities (which may be called 'private realm') and the organizations and institutions constituted by the state (or 'public realm'). To him, true civil society is evident where ordinary citizens who do not control political and economic power, have access to locally constituted voluntary associations that have the capacity to influence or even determine the structure of power and the allocation of material resources.

- To Patrick Chabal (1986: 15), "civil society is a vast ensemble of constantly changing groups and individuals whose only common ground is their being outside the state, and who have acquired some consciousness of their externality and opposition to the state". In as much as this definition acknowledges the plurality of association in civil society, it reduces the activities of civil society to that of opposition. It does not take into cognizance the fact that civil society does not always need to be at odds with the state.

- Gellner (1994: 5) describes civil society as "that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society". He, however, defended the insufficiency of his definition on the basis that it may not adequately specify the link between civil society and the modern concept of freedom. In the concluding chapter of his book, Gellner defines civil

society as “a society in which polity and economy are distinct, where polity is instrumental but can and does check extremes of individual interest, but where the state in turn is checked by institutions”(p. 211).

- Naomi Chazan (1994: 259) posits that civil society is separate from the state but it relates to the state. State organs and social groups continually engage each other in multiple settings that are arenas of struggles for domination and accommodation. In the same vein, she asserts that to be part of civil society, an organization must simultaneously contain state power and legitimate state authority, thus excluding what she called ‘parochial’, ‘fundamentalist’, ‘ethnonational’ and ‘ideological’ groups. If the goal is to create a vibrant civil society so as to contribute to democratization in Africa, she suggests that the problem is not a lack of groups, because Africa has always ‘revolved around group affiliation and group action.’ The problem, rather, is how to separate ‘those associations that form part of civil society from the morass of groups, networks, and movements that exist in Africa today.’

- Shils (1991: 3-20) notes that civil society has three main components:
  1. That part of society comprising a complex of autonomous economic, religious, intellectual and political institutions, which are distinguishable from the family, clan, locality or state.
  2. A complex of relationships with formal and informal rules and procedures and practices to safeguard the separation of state and civil society, yet which maintain effective ties between them.
  3. A wide pattern of refined or civil manner.

- Arnaud Sales differentiates between the private, the public and civil society realms, locating civil society between the other two realms. To him, the private realm is made up of all the relations of individuals within the society and the public realm consists of political relation. Quoting Julien Freund, he declared that “ the public or

the state and the individual as such rarely confront each other directly, for between them exists the private sphere which consists of both the individual's intimate relations with others, and inter-individual and more impersonal relations of various associations of civil society, where the dialectic of the private and the public are negotiated" (Freund, 1978:309 cited in Sales, 1991: 297). Civil society is thus formed as social relations and interaction between the state and collective individuals in the private realm.

To Sales, the contemporary content of the concept of civil society should frame civil society as:

1. A place of association and social integration where meditations take place between individuals and groups, groups and social institutions, social institutions and political and economic institutions;
  2. A place where social identities and new lifestyles are formed;
  3. Diversified, if not divided (a characteristic which is the key to its internal dynamics);
  4. The locus of public opinion formation and resulting struggles;
  5. A reality primarily linked to the state, but also to the transnational economic system and, more and more, to the domestic or internal area of everyday life;
  6. And, last but not the least, having fundamental ties with democratic systems as a condition for existence and development (Sales, 1991: 308-309).
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- Alfred Stepan (1988: 3-4), writing on civil society, political society, and the state in Brazil, defined civil society as the "arena where manifold social movements (such as neighborhood associations, women groups, religious groupings, and intellectual currents) and civic organizations from all classes (such as lawyers, journalists, trade unions, and entrepreneurs) attempt to constitute themselves in an ensemble of arrangements so that they can express themselves and advance their interests". He defined the political society as the "arena in which the polity specifically arranges

itself for political contestations to gain control over public power and the state apparatus” (p.4). Its institutions include political parties, elections, electoral rules, political leadership, intra-party alliances, and legislatures. It is through these institutions that civil society can constitute itself politically to select and monitor democratic government. In the same vein, however, he defended his definitions on the ground that “ the strongest defense of a definition is its usefulness in analysis”. This definition, however, is controversial (Levin, 1995: 2 [electronic version]). It is a significant departure from the classical definition of civil society. While the eighteenth century liberals saw civil society as a non-political zone of social intercourse based in the free market and dominated by the bourgeoisie, Stephan in contrast, portrays civil society as a highly politicized space occupied by actors from all social classes.

- After long deliberations at three sub-regional workshops organized by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) between 1998 and 1999, the participants agreed that civil society could not be conceptualized the same way in all of Africa. The participants of the workshops came up with different definitions for each sub-region they represented (Civic Agenda, 1999:18-19). In West Africa, it was agreed that:

Civil society is made up of social movements that act in the public realm, and is located between the family and the state and serves the concerns of a well-defined group whose members are mobilized to reach more or less clearly-defined objectives.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, participants defined civil society as:

A wide range of associative voluntary organizations - structured or unstructured - that occupy the space outside the state and which seek to influence the process by which state rules are made and applied in society. These may range from opposition political parties, professional associations, trade unions, NGOs, ethnic associations, co-operative movements etc.

Civil society was defined in Central Africa as:

The whole range of voluntary organizations and institutions outside/and independent from the state's political apparatus, and which aim at the improvement of members and the general welfare of the people with or without partnership with the state.

- Larry Diamond (1995: 9-10) defines civil society as:

The realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by the legal order or set of shared rules...it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable. It is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state.

The implicit notion of civil society in Diamond's definition is that of civil society that is "law abiding", and not seeking to put itself up as an alternative authority to the state, despite making demands on the state and trying to hold the state accountable to the citizenry.

Thus, we can see that there is not only a myriad of definitions and positions on civil society, but also that there is an absence of consensus other than the recognition that it is a sphere outside the state. For the purpose of this study, *civil society is defined as an arena made up of voluntary associations with differing interests and objectives and anchored within the space between state and society, which are seeking avenues for the coordination of those diverse societal interests with the aim either of promoting change or maintaining the status quo.* It constitutes a check on the arbitrariness of the state, and also serves as a buffer between state power and private spheres.

The study posits that civil society can serve positive purposes. Civil society, with its web of voluntary associations, can serve as the vehicle for joint efforts in holding the state accountable as well as ensuring positive development of society – which is as

true for the Nigerian society as elsewhere. Since civil society is discussed in this study in relation to the state, at this point there is a need to take a glimpse at the conception of the state in the literature reviewed.

## **2.6 The Concept of the State**

The concept of the state is as ambiguous as the concept of civil society. Many political theorists focus on the state because of their recognition of its capacity to control and shape the lives of individuals in a way that no other institutions can (Chandhoke, 1995: 46). While many theorists like John Hoffman (1988) have argued that the state should be the center of any political theory, others like David Easton (1981) believe that conceptualization of the state only leads to vapid debates and conceptual morass. However, there is a need to trace the origin of the state as well as to understand its nature in order to explore its relationship with civil society.

### **2.6.1 The Origin of the State**

Many accounts have been put forward in the attempt to explain the origin and evolution of the state. One such account is attributable to Aristotle (384-322 B.C), who acclaimed the importance of the state like many philosophers. Aristotle observed that man is by nature a political animal, and that it is only in an organized human society that man can obtain his real fulfillment. Through interaction with fellow humans, a human community is formed and the formal organization of this community is the state. Therefore, the formation of the state grew out of man's natural inclination. According to the natural theorists, the state is best understood, not as a mechanical contrivance of man's inventive ingenuity, but as an evolving organism that develops naturally according to some inherent dynamic of growth (Rodee et al., 1983: 27). This account describes the ancient Greek city-states, the Roman Republic, and some other city-states as the earliest forms of states in Europe,



although the term 'state'<sup>2</sup> was not in use then. The Greek city-states or *polis*, whose origin and development could be traced to about 800 BC to 500 BC, developed from family and tribal units, which united together in fortified settlements (Hall, 1984: 2-3; Vincent, 1987: 11). The city-states were autonomous units and usually relatively small. In the city-states, all citizens belonged to the Assembly and they voted and participated directly in government. A number of people were appointed by the citizens to govern, and these representatives were expected to act on behalf of the community (Van Creveld, 1999: 23). The Roman Republic, also a city-state, was based on a senate dominated by aristocratic power, but later, its base was broadened to include the consuls, who were elected by assemblies of the whole people (Hall, 1984: 3). The republic had four different assemblies, with each comprising a different section of the population. The republic was based on a series of laws on which the power of the government is derived.

Another account of the origin of the state has its foundation in the perception of the state as a divine institution. According to this account, the state is an institution established by a higher authority: a superhuman force. The introduction of centralized authority, formalized hierarchy and specialization of task marked the origin of the state. The most obvious characteristics of early statehood are monarchies supported by royal bureaucracies (Rodee et. al, 1983: 22). The king had supreme power over his people because it was believed that God or the gods appointed him. The monarchies introduced standing armies, permanent bureaucracies, and national taxation and codified laws (Anderson, 1983: 137). The divine right theorists saw both temporal and spiritual authorities as coming from God

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<sup>2</sup> The gradual awareness, from the late fifteenth century onward, that a new kind of political association was emerging in Western Europe led to the search for an appropriate word with which to characterize this new phenomenon. Many words like *Lo stato*, *l'Etat*, *el estado* or 'the state' slowly came into usage over time. For an analysis of the usage evolution of the term 'state', see: Dyson, 1980.

but lodged separately in the king and the church respectively. The theory served as a platform of support for many rulers who were unaccountable to their citizens.

### **2.6.2 The Modern state**

The modern concept of state, formed during the period between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, represented a decisive shift away from the idea of the ruler maintaining a community (or 'a state') to the notion of 'the state' as a separate legal and constitutional order. According to Skinner (1978a: x),

One effect of this transformation was that the power of the State, not that of the ruler, came to be envisaged as the basis of government. And this in turn enabled the State to be conceptualized in distinctively modern terms – as the sole source of law and legitimate force within its territory, and as the sole appropriate object of its citizens' allegiances.

Thus, the state came to be seen as not merely the specific regime in power at any given time, but also as “the basis for a regime’s authority, legality, and claim for popular support” (Alford and Friedland, 1985: 1). The conception of the modern state can be traced to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years War. One of the greatest conflicts of early modern European history, The Thirty Years War consisted of a series of declared and undeclared wars that were fought throughout central Europe between 1618-1648. It was in part a German civil war, and also, in part, a religious war among Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists. The war or series of connected wars began in 1618, when the Austrian Habsburgs tried to impose Roman Catholicism on their Protestant subjects in Bohemia. It pitted Protestant against Catholic, the Holy Roman Empire against France, the German princes against the emperor and each other, and France against the Habsburgs of Spain. The Swedes, the Danes, the Poles, the Russians, the Dutch and the Swiss were all dragged in or dived in. Commercial interests and rivalries played a part, as did religion and power politics.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of Westphalia. (Octobers Past) (October 24, 1648; Westphalia, Germany) (Brief Article) [http://www.findarticles.com/cf\\_dls/m1373/n10\\_v48/21207867/pl/article.jhtml](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m1373/n10_v48/21207867/pl/article.jhtml)

The Treaty of Westphalia was significant in several respects. It established a political guarantee that the German states, numbering about two hundred, would be given full sovereignty and it also provided for religious tolerance among the three major religious denominations in Europe – Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism. It marked the beginning of the concept of the nation-state, and it marked the further decline of the influence of the religious establishment in Rome. In other words, the treaty demanded the recognition of the territorial entities in dispute as states, with fixed borders, an acknowledged government and a population identified as living within that state's border (Duncan, et. al, 2001: 48). It also established the non-interference of one state in the affairs of another, and that the relations among states are to be regulated by international law. The Treaty of Westphalia thus consolidated the system of state sovereignty, which has been applicable since then.

### **2.6.3 Theories of the Modern State**

There are a number of theories put forward over the years in an effort to generate an understanding of the concept of the state. Alford and Fieldland (1985: 6) posit that a theory of the state must incorporate three basic levels of analysis. According to them,

The state must be understood first in terms of the contradictory relations among its capitalist, bureaucratic, and democratic aspects, which constitute the state at the societal level beyond the visible appearances of legal structures, governmental decision making, and political behavior. Second, the state also can usefully be seen as composed of organizational networks, as structures that differ in their political and legal capacity to control internal and external resources: funds, personnel, and political support. Third, the state is also a decision-making arena within which multiple groups contend for influence, with varying outcomes depending on what interests are at stake, how successfully they mobilize, and the specific mechanisms of access of those making political demands upon political leaders.

Theories of the state have been formulated against the background of certain assumptions and beliefs both about how society functions, and about the standards by which conducts should be judged (Dyson, 1980: 139). Some of these theories of the state can be summarized as follows:

The **liberal theory** perceives the state as a device or set of institutions created to secure and guarantee the basic rights of the individuals in society (Schwarzmantel, 1994: 42-46). To the liberalists, there is the possibility that the state may become too powerful, thereby infringing on the rights and liberties of members of society. To this end, there is a need to put in place devices and institutions for checking and controlling the holders of state power. To them, the state is at worst a 'necessary evil'.

The **pluralist theory** arose from the protest against the overbearing nature of state power. The pluralists perceive the state as a relatively neutral, impartial arbitrator among the various groups of society. The pluralists advocate for a competitive process where-by a plurality of organized interests strive to control government through taking part in electoral contests and/or to influence the policies of the respective government (Hirst, 1989:3). Pluralist theory, therefore, argues that the role of the state parallels that of a neutral arbitrator with its main role being to ensure that the participants observe the rules of the game (Kellow, 1992:33).

The **integrative theory** of the state conceives of the state as the institutionalization of centralized leadership. In this conception, the state sought "to protect, not another class or stratum of the society, but itself. It legitimized itself in its role of maintaining the whole society" (Service, 1975: 8). The integrationist view emphasizes the enormously increased capacities that state systems have for coordinating and organizing large numbers of people, often of different ethnic and ecological backgrounds. Centralized government offers protection and security, machinery for

settling disputes, and access to sustenance in exchange for loyal acceptance of an overlordship that satisfies new needs in a changing situation (Cohen, 1978: 6-7).

The **Marxist theory** portrays the state as an instrument of class oppression, whose role is to maintain stability within a system of unequal class power. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels characterized 'the executive of the modern state' as 'but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Marx, 1977: 223). Thus to the Marxists, the state is an agency of class warfare by which the capitalist controlled the workers. The state is an expression and protector of 'the bourgeoisie' at the expense of the 'proletariat'.

There is (presumably) a general consensus among political theorists that there cannot be a theory of the state but theories of the state, as political thinkers perceive the state differently. Nevertheless, most political thinkers regard the state as "an ineluctable feature of modernity, part of the landscape of all societies other than those based on kinship or feudal patronage" (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 6).

#### ✓ 2.6.4 Defining the State

As there is no single theory of the state, there is no single and generally accepted definition of the state. Different scholars have defined it in many ways. To this end, many political scientists create definitions and typologies of the state that serve the purpose of their theoretical or polemical needs. The main problem with these definitions is rooted in the decision on what to include or exclude. Another problem these definitions face is the relation of the state to the society. The ambiguity of the concept may have prompted a comment by Michael Mann that "the state is undeniably a messy concept" (Mann, 1988: 4). Some of the definitions and perceptions of the state will be examined here.

Many of the definitions of the state in modern literature lean heavily on the notion of the state by Max Weber. Weber argued that:

A compulsory political organization with continuous operations will be called a 'state' insofar as its administrative staff successfully holds the claims to the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force in the enforcement of its order...[The modern state] possesses an administrative and legal order subject to change by legislation...This claim of the modern state to monopolize the use of force is as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and continuous operation (Weber, 1978: 54-6).

Thus, other scholars have defined the state along this line. Mann defined it as a power organization that engages in "centralized, institutionalized, and territorialized regulation of many aspects of social relations" (Mann, 1986: 26). The state has also been defined as "a set of organizations invested with the authority to make binding decisions for people and organizations judicially located in a particular territory and to implement these decisions using, if necessary, force" (Reuschmeyer and Evans, 1985: 46-47). Chilcote defines the state as "the legal forms and instruments, such as police and standing army, that maintain class rule" (Chilcote, 1981: 405). Nordlinger defines the state as "all those individuals who occupy offices that authorize them, and them alone, to make and apply decisions that are binding upon any and all segments of society" (Nordlinger, 1981: 11). Krasner perceived the state as an autonomous actor. He describes it as a "bureaucratic and institutionalized legal order in its totality" (Krasner, 1984: 224).

In a related vein, Skocpol defines the state as "a set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by, an executive authority" (Skocpol, 1979: 29). In a later work, Skocpol defines the state as "{[a] configuration of organizations and action that influence the meanings and methods of politics for all groups and classes in society" (Skocpol, 1985: 28). She sees the state as an autonomous actor, formulating and pursuing its own goals. Duval and Freeman

define the state as “the organized aggregate of relatively permanent institutions of governance” (Duval and Freeman, 1981:106).

According to Kenneth Minogue, the “state refers, in its widest sense, to any self-governing set of people organized so that they deal with others as a unity. It is a territorial unit ordered by a sovereign power, and today involves officeholders, a home country, soldiers distinctively equipped to distinguish them from others, ambassadors, flags, and so on” (Minogue, 1987: 235). D.D Raphael defines the state as “an association designed primarily to maintain order and security, exercising universal jurisdiction within territorial boundaries, by means of law backed by force and recognized as having sovereign authority (Raphael, 1976: 53). Andrew Heywood defines the state as “a political association that establishes sovereign jurisdiction within defined territorial borders and exercises authority through a set of permanent institutions” (Heywood, 2000: 39). Charles Tilly, on his part, defines states as “coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories” (Tilly, 1990: 1).

As there is no single definition of the state, there is also no singular consensus on the characteristics of the state. Many characteristics of the state can be inferred from the various perceptions and definitions of the concept of the state. Of these, it is possible to identify five key features of the state.

- First, an obvious prerequisite for a state is the possession of a **territory**. A state is a geographical entity that occupies a defined physical space and boundary. The state has universal jurisdiction within geographically defined borders.
- Second, for a state to exist, it must have a resident **population** within its geographical boundary.
- Third, the state is perceived to possess the right to the **monopoly of the use of force** within its boundary. Herman Finer argues that the essence of the

state is in its monopoly of coercive power declared and enforced as the only legitimate monopoly. The state allows the use of force only to its coercive institutions. He argues that if the state is to make good its claim to universal jurisdiction within its territory, it must be able to discipline recalcitrance. Furthermore, given that a basic function of the state is to maintain law and order, it must maintain a force of its own sufficient to prevent the settling of disputes by violence (Finer, 1945).

- Fourth, the state is characterized by a **government**, which is responsible for making and enforcing collective decisions within the territory.
- Fifth, the state possesses **Sovereignty**. Anchored on a system of laws and rules, the state has supreme or final authority within its area of jurisdiction. In other words, the state is predominant over any group or association within its territory.

## 2.7 Civil Society and the State in Africa

Unlike many of the western states, most of the states in Africa were colonial constructs. Different colonial powers in Africa (French, Belgian, British, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and German) used different administrative systems, but all retained a common element of repression and forced compliance. The primary duties of the colonial governments were to their mother countries -- not to the indigenous populations over whom they maintained formal authority. Not surprisingly, the colonial political system was characterized by not only the absence of indigenous foundation but also of related political and moral legitimacy. Although the colonial administrators retained some of the indigenous social institutions and brought about a redefinition of others, a new administrative structure was imposed on these social and political orders.

A well-developed coercive apparatus backed the colonial state. Indeed, colonial security forces played the decisive role in ensuring the conformity of the indigenous people to the system. For instance, the police forces, which were established in every colonial territory, were a key instrument not only for the enforcement of law and order but also for the repression of dissent and opposition to the colonial enterprise. In essence, then, the colonial state was fundamentally an authoritarian system. As



Kasfir (1983: 34) puts it, “the political culture bequeathed by colonialism contained the notions that authoritarianism was an appropriate mode of rule and that political activity was merely a disguised form of self-interest, subversive of the public welfare”. Quite aside from the absence of transparency or consultation with the governed, the colonial governments were oppressive in other ways including: assorted forms of restrictions imposed on property ownership (especially land); orientation of economic activity to the needs of the mother country rather than the colonial state itself; little or no attention devoted to the development of social infrastructure and services; and the explicit (sometimes, tacit) devaluation of many indigenous cultural values and practices.

All that notwithstanding, the colonial period witnessed a rapid expansion of organizational life in Africa. As colonial urban centers grew and attracted more African migrants, voluntary associations spread to accommodate the various needs and demands of the new residents (Woods, 1992: 86). These new types of organizations fell into four broad categories (Chazan, 1994: 259). The first consisted of voluntary organizations (such as ethnic organizations, kinship groups, sports clubs, women’s organizations, old boys’ and girls’ networks, youth movements), mutual aid societies (such as credit unions, burial societies), cultural organizations (such as hometown associations), and recreational groups (such as literary societies). The second encompassed occupational organizations including producer co-operatives, trader associations, craft guilds, professional associations, organizations of chiefs, and workers movements. The third category comprised religious organizations, such as diversity of church organizations and Islamic brotherhoods. The fourth category comprised of an array of traditional and new community-based associations formed in the rural areas. In urban settings, organizations from all those categories proved to be useful networks for newcomers seeking to insert themselves into unknown environments (Woods, 1992:86). However, the struggle against colonialism gave rise

to the establishment of many civil society organizations, which were interested not just in making life easier for their members but also in the protection of basic human rights of all members of the general public and in working to end colonial rule.

At independence the new African leaders assumed the role and space previously occupied by the departing colonial masters. Many of these new leaders were vocal members of civil society, who had played a substantial role in fighting against the injustices of colonial rule. However, on assuming power at independence, many African leaders began to gravitate towards the oppressive ways of the colonialists as they faced political opposition and competing claims to scarce resources. It was easier, it seems, to tighten the grip on power by eliminating opposition through legal and extra-judicial means than to tolerate or allow open debate, transparency, and accountability. Faced with resistance, the rulers of the newly independent states tried to consolidate their power by making liberal use of the repressive apparatuses of the state. By 1980, the typical African state was characterized by the over-centralization of power at the center and the total (near complete) irrelevance of the general public in decision-making processes, including in the choice of political leaders. In many ways, this was made possible not just because of the state's putative monopoly of coercive powers but also because of its sharply enhanced co-optative capacity as a result of the entrepreneurial role the government assumed at independence, which made the state the largest single employer. To this effect, the state's

...expenditures not only facilitated private capital accumulation, (they also) constituted the major life-blood of the economy. In addition to providing infrastructural facilities to make private accumulation possible, the state provided loans, invested in the productive sectors of the economy such as minerals, agriculture, and manufacturing, and organized savings in the banking and insurance sectors (Agbese, 1992: 344).

In essence, given the high importance of access to the center, individuals and groups scrambled to establish linkages with the state and its officers in order to secure a share of the available resources. The net effect was not only that the state served as a key

actor in the accumulation and distribution of wealth but also that the political patronage through which the process was moderated also served as a key factor in ensuring the continued maintenance of political power by the ruling factions

Given this immediate post-independence environment, the hopeful euphoria about the prospects for Africa's newly independent countries started to wear off. Most Africans had eagerly supported the nationalist struggles against colonialism with the hope that independence would usher in a new era of freedom and material prosperity (Ade-Ajayi, 1982: 1-6). There was, therefore, much expectation from the people, especially from groups that took part in the struggle for decolonization. While these groups were expecting compensation for the long years of struggle, the masses were expecting the provision of social services on a large scale. At independence, things seemed to have started on a promising note, as many of the post-colonial states of Africa started off with the introduction of varying social services such as free education and free health services. However, faced with the objective realities of scarce resources, those states soon withdrew such free services. Many African countries had inherited from the colonial period a dependence on a narrow range of primary commodities for their foreign exchange earnings, which made them vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices. The rollback of services and general perceptions of mismanagement and corruption coalesced to trigger a series of strikes and demonstrations during the first few years of political independence.

Rather than use the instrument of persuasion or logic to convince rivals, many of the political leaders opted to suppress opposition to their policies by arresting and incarcerating many vocal members of opposition groups. They saw the need to restrain civil society in order to forestall it from serving as a breeding ground for opposition politics. To this end, post independence rulers often employed different methods of influence and manipulation (including the dangling of financial

inducements and political appointments) against civil society organizations in order to temper their oppositional stance against their policies and ineffective governance. Many of the organizations that resisted the state baits (frequently in the form of financial largesse) usually ran afoul of the security regulations aimed at controlling dissent and opposition. The range of the clampdowns was often as intensive as it was extensive: the media were often muffled with arrests, confiscations, or closures; academic and social critics were harassed and persecuted (Ihonvbere, 1996:19); labor leaders and movements were banned; and many members of civil society were arrested or forced into exile.

The 1980s saw the early beginnings of the reversal of fortune for many African despots. As economic problems worsened during that period, many African states became increasingly unable to supply vital social services such as free education, healthcare, and utilities. This led to the growth of civil society, as individuals created new organizations to meet basic needs and to push for greater transparency and accountability by the governors. By the 1990s, Africa witnessed a proliferation of civil society organizations as a result of changing economic circumstances due to the ravaging effects of the IMF and World Bank imposed structural adjustment programs (SAP). While some of these organizations engaged in activities aimed at alleviating poverty and restructuring of development from below, many other organizations kicked against the continued inability of their rulers to match rhetoric and promises to economic progress. Subsequently, with the incursion of military dictatorship into African politics, civil society expanded due to the creation of many organizations that fought basically against military rule and the opening up of democratic space.

Furthermore, in several African countries like Benin, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, and Tanzania, civil society contributed significantly to public debates on democratization and monitoring of elections. They gave a voice to citizens and

communities by providing them with a channel for inclusion, participation, and contribution to the process of governance.

## **2.8 The Indigenous African Civil Society**

The existence and nature of civil society in Africa has been the focus of one of the most engaging debates in African politics since the 1990s. Questions have been raised on whether there is civil society in Africa or, rather, an African civil society. While some have argued that the concept of civil society is new to Africa, others argue that the concept of civil society cannot be applied to Africa, and that it is not useful outside the West. This section examines the concept of civil society in African reality. The basic question it seeks to address is: Is the concept of civil society relevant to Africa?<sup>4</sup> Three different answers to this could be generated based on literature.

◆ The first is a 'yes' based on the universalist view that civil society is important anywhere in the world for the building and entrenchment of democracy. This view is hinged on the belief that a pluralist society can only be successful as a democracy where independent organizations serve as mediating structure between the government and the people. For instance, Diamond (1994: 5) argues:

consolidation of democracy will be impossible if civil society is not established. Democracy will be successful only if the civil society adheres to institutionalization, is resourceful and pluralistic, exhibits harmony in its interactions with the state and correlates cooperation and independence, confidence and skepticism, civility and assertiveness.

Harbeson (1994: 1-2) also argues that:

...civil society is a hitherto missing key to sustained political reform, legitimates and governments, improved governance, viable state-society and state-economy relationships, and prevention of the kind of

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<sup>4</sup> See Lewis (2001)

political decay that undermined new African governments a generation ago.

In this view civil society is perceived as crucial to Africa's political development, and a necessary ingredient for ensuring the accountability of the political leadership to its citizens.

◆ The second is a 'no' based on the argument that the concept of civil society is not exportable to anywhere outside the West on the ground that it emerged at a distinctive moment in European history and, therefore, has little meaning in other cultural and political settings. For instance, Gellner (1994) argues that the concept of civil society can only be applied to fully developed capitalist societies with modular human relations that have not lost any element of cultural aspirations. Therefore, it cannot be simply used in pre-modern or theocratic societies or where association by ascription is dominant. Maina (1998: 137) contends that "civil society is a concept made to order for the political reality of western society", and has "limited explanatory power" for the complexities of African associational life. Ferguson (1998: 3-4) also argues that:

...the current (often ahistorical and uncritical) use of the concept of 'civil society in the study of African politics obscures more than it reveals, and, indeed, that it often serves to help legitimate a profoundly anti-democratic transnational politics.

◆ Third is the adaptive view, which looks at the possibility of the usage in a non-Western context if it is adapted to the reality of the environment of which it is being used. Thus, to this end, many scholars have argued that the conception of civil society in Africa is not new to Africa. Its usage should be informed by African circumstances and needs, and not in a universalistic (usually Western) point of analysis (Ekeh, 1992; Hartman, 1994; Mamdani, 1992). Ekeh contends that the concept is not a new phenomenon in Africa. According to him:

the structures and processes that are labeled civil society in Africa are not new. Historians and social scientists in the pre-1985 period used other concepts and terms to designate phenomena that this fresh

construct of civil society now claims for its domain. It is important that we reconcile the new label of civil society with the old concepts and terms that were used to characterize these same objects before civil society acquired its recent wave of importance (Ekeh, 1994: 1).

Ekeh saw the need to take this into cognizance because of the usage of the concept in many of the debates on what constitutes civil society. Hartmann (1994) also argues that the concept of civil society is applicable to Africa once it is grounded in African realities, and it is shed of its Western arrogance without reducing its comparative relevance and utility.

This study takes the position of a combination of the first and third views. The concept of civil society is as applicable to Africa as it is elsewhere given the instrumental value of such organizations and considering not only the importance of good, transparent, and accountable governance but also human rights protection and democracy on the continent. Secondly, the concept is useful to Africa considering the beehive of associational activities that have characterized the space between the state and the individual even before independence.

Another issue that emerged in literature is that of the relationship between the state and civil society. A plethora of literature on Africa presents this relationship as that of confrontation and engagements. Civil society is usually seen to comprise of organizations that have the capacity to engage in conflict with the state and to challenge its powers.<sup>5</sup> This has led to the misconception that civil society does not exist in Africa. To Bayart (1986: 106-125), for instance, the institutions of society become civil society when they engage in a struggle for social space and the

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, Naomi Chazan (1992) has argued that civil society precludes organizations (which she considers parochial) that are not willing or able to confront or restrain the state. However, Kasfir (1998: 4) argued that defining civil society as confrontational creates problems, as it leaves us to wonder what happens to civil society when its actors are engaged in non-confrontational activities, and when there is no basis for confrontation.

preservation of their autonomy from the state. He posits, “civil society exists only in so far as there is self-consciousness of its existence and of its opposition to the state (Bayart, 1986: 117)”. Therefore, according to him, there is no civil society in Africa on two grounds. Firstly, what appears to be near the description of civil society lacks unity and, as such, lacks effective organizational principle capable of challenging absolute state control. Secondly, Bayart maintains that Africa does not have a civil society because the region is characterized by deep cultural, religious, and linguistic rifts. But, following Bayart’s argument, if civil society is totally about opposition and given the history of opposition stances taken by many civic associations in Africa (both in pre-colonial and post-colonial periods), is it not plausible to conclude that civil society does exist in Africa? His position does not acknowledge the fact that Africa has a vast array of associations, some of which do not engage in confrontation with the state but are avenues through which social values are constituted, and in which resources outside of the state are exchanged (Barnes, 1975; Shultz, 1977; Hamer, 1981; Woods, 1992).

Clearly, an argument can be made about the existence of an African civil society before and even during colonialism. Africa was populated with rich varieties of associations – voluntary associations, charity organizations, professional associations, women associations, trade unions, hometown associations, co-operative societies, ethnic associations, academic associations, age grades, youth associations, religious associations, a resilient press, and political associations. Members of the society formed many of these associations, with possibly the exception of the press and political associations, primarily, to serve and protect the interests and values of their members as well as to address many developmental needs that were not being met by the state. They provided social services and infrastructures for their communities, and they also engaged in social empowerment of the people by providing them with formal and political education, and finances. In addition to all that, they were not




politically complacent. As Barkan et al pointed out, these associations were not totally passive politically:

In some communities, they were effective mechanisms for mobilizing political action to make claims on the state, while in others they became the arena of party squabbles (Bakan et.al.1991: 479).

In fact, resistance and social uprisings have been known to come from within the ranks of these associations. The Egba Uprising of 1918, the Aba Women's riot of 1925, the Agbekoya's revolt during the Nigerian civil war are some clear examples of social revolts that can come from the least expected quarters of civil society in Africa. Also, during the 1980s and 1990s, many Africans took to the streets to express their discontent with economic hardship and political repression that had become the order of the day, and also to demand for political and economic reforms. The state responded to these protests with threats, repression, and selective compromise (Nyang'oro, 1996: 201). Thus, it may be possible to conclude that civil society in Africa did not engage the state in confrontations except when there was a dire need to do so. In describing or defining civil society in Africa, it is essential to take into cognizance associations that are preoccupied with serving mainly the interests of their members, those who possess manifest capacity to confront the state as well as those that possess latent capacity to confront the state.

Civil society groups have proved effective in prompting protest and reform in most cases, thereby bringing changes. Many civic groups in Africa were formed as a channel of detachment from the state or as a means of protest against state repression. Nevertheless, confrontations with the state served to force many civil society organizations to become more self-sufficient. Tripp observed that the crisis between the state and civil society "opened up new economic and political spaces that allowed for the emergence and strengthening of viable voluntary organizations, especially at the communal level" (Tripp, 1989: 42). People in the society are now able to rely less




on the state for their welfare than before. Africans have now come to rely more on family, kinship, village, community and other relationships than on the state for the provision of vital services. As Naomi Chazan aptly observes:

The most noticeable changes took place at the local level, where the multiplication of communal associations was everywhere in evidence. Entrepreneurial, credit, banking, and barter groups were established alongside new welfare associations, mutual aid societies, educational initiatives, and self-defense groups (Chazan, 1994: 269).

## **2.9 Conclusion**

Observably, the literature on civil society does not agree on a single definition of civil society. There remains vagueness about what the notion of civil society implies. The main level of agreement in literature is twofold: the distinction of civil society from the state, and that it comprises of activities outside the domain of the state. However, there is no basic consensus on what should be the constituents or components of civil society. Should all organizations formed outside of the state be classified as part of civil society, or is it only organizations that “contain state power and legitimate state authority” as contended by Bayart? But despite all the confusion in definition, it could be observed that the concept of civil society is one that cannot be done away with. Civil society is an important realm of any society. The concept of civil society alludes to the existence of organized public life and free associations beyond the tutelage of the state, yet oriented toward influencing public policies (Alexander, 1998: 67). Civil society needs to participate in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policies, which are meant to govern, and direct development in society.



It should be noted, however, that even within civil society, there is an absence of consensus. The various social forces within the realm of civil society are not always aggregative and inclusive. There is usually some evidence of division. This often provides the opportunity for the state to cause confusion within the realm. John Dunn

notes that there is “good reason to see in the internal domination of state power, the relative inconsistency of civil society, (the low) degree of viable and sustainable institutionalization of social forces outside the sphere of the state” (Dunn, 1978: 15). Some civil society organizations even conspire with the state to undermine the political system. Some other civil society organizations are also formed to pursue purely selfish interests, mainly to enrich the organizers.

Quite a number of scholars have emphasized the need for the strengthening of civil society organizations so that they can better perform their expected roles in society (Held, 1987:267-99; Fraser, 1992: 109-142). Held posits that civil society organizations “must be protected by a legal framework which recognizes the rights of their members to control the resources at their disposal, whether these are material or authoritative, without undue interference from the state or political parties” (Held, 1989: 168). This can be done through the existence of effective and accountable state structures. Also, there is the need for an encouragement of the spirit of ‘brotherliness’ in building a strong link within civil society and among the groups that make up civil society. There is a need to promote positive values such as “trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putman et al, 1993: 167). In essence, civil society organizations should practice the basic values they preach to state officials including internal transparency and accountability.

Finally, even though civil society is distinct from the state, this does not mean that their relationship should be one of constant confrontation. Although the state has the wherewithal to override civil society, it can play a role of promoting civil society organizations by creating conducive conditions for them to exist with minimal interference. This can only be possible when the state starts perceiving civil society not as a threat but rather as an indispensable instrument for the promotion of

democracy and development. Through its access to various sources of funding, civil society could supplement the effort of the state in the provision and effective delivery of services to the people, most especially in the rural areas.



## Chapter 3

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: Development of Civil Society in Nigeria

*...the most natural privilege of man, next to the right for acting for himself, is that of combining his exertions with those of his fellow creatures, and of acting in common with them. I am therefore led to conclude that the right of association is almost as inalienable as the right of personal liberty (De Tocqueville, 1952:129-30).*

#### 3.1 Introduction

As with many African countries, Nigeria is blessed with a rich variety of vibrant associations and organizations. These include voluntary associations, charity organizations, professional associations, trade unions, hometown associations, cooperative societies, ethnic associations, academic associations, youth associations, religious associations, a vibrant press, and a plethora of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The nature and character of the Nigerian civil society can be traced back to the colonial period. Indeed, Nigeria's civil society played a very significant role in the anti-colonial struggles.

During military regimes, civil society organizations mobilized the populace to resist military rule. The relationship between the state and civil society during these military regimes, especially between 1985 and 1999, was more of antagonism than of accommodation. This period marked a very significant epoch in the history of civil society in Nigeria. It witnessed the proliferation of civil society organizations – many of which were constantly locked in confrontations with the state over the issues of rights, liberty, and good governance. As civil society organized and fought for military disengagement, the military sought to ensure a passive civil society by trying to suffocate it. Nevertheless, civil society remained irrepressible despite decades of

military dictatorship and frequent bans on political activities, restrictions on the power of the judiciary, curtailment of press freedom and the freedom of speech and organization, and the deepening economic and social crises in the country (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998:141). In 1999, civil society succeeded in pressurizing the military to relinquish power and to return the country to civil rule.

This chapter examines the role of civil society in the struggle for good governance and freedom in Nigeria. Specifically, this study will examine four interrelated issues. First, by providing an historical background, this chapter will examine the creation and evolution of the Nigerian State. This is in order to understand both the unique nature of the relationship between the various segments of the Nigerian society and the nature of the civil society that eventually evolved, which was a direct result of the character of the Nigerian state. Secondly, the evolution of civil society until 1985<sup>6</sup> will be examined with a focus on the impact of individual regimes on associational life in Nigeria. Thirdly, there will be a general assessment of the relationship between civil society and the state from the colonial era to 1985. This analysis will make a critical link between the type of government in power, the system of governance, the emergent civil society, and their effects on the evolving processes of democratization. Fourthly, the concept of hegemony in relation to the Nigerian context will be examined.

## **3.2 Wave of History: The Nigerian State and Civil Society.**

### **3.2.1 Pre-colonial state system:**

In order to understand the role and significance of civil society in Nigeria, there is a need to examine the evolution of the country itself. The country has gone through various phases since its creation, which in turn shaped the evolution and activities of

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<sup>6</sup> Civil society and the state between 1985 and 1999 will be examined in chapter 4.

civil society. This section will look at the system that operated before the creation of the Nigerian state and, after its creation, the relations between the state and society. This, it is hoped, will enable us have a clearer historical perspective and understanding of the reasons for the antagonism that seem to characterize the relationship between the Nigerian state and civil society.

Before the advent of colonialism, the entity known today as Nigeria was a collection of kingdoms, empires, and autonomous political units of various sizes. Each of the component parts has a unique history and a separate set of founding heroes.<sup>7</sup> During this period what existed was a motley array of groups whose histories and interactions, interlaced as they were by external influences – principally trade with Europeans and the Arab world – had nevertheless crystallized in three clearly discernible regional formations by the end of the nineteenth century (Osaghae, 1998:

2). According to Michael Crowther (1966: 21), what became known as Nigeria,

Contained not just a multiplicity of pagan ‘tribes’ (inverted commas mine), but also a number of great kingdoms that had evolved complex systems of government independent of contact with Europe. Within its frontiers were the great kingdom of Kanem-Bornu, with a known history of more than a thousand years; the Fulani Empire which for the hundred years before its conquest by Britain had ruled most of the savanna of Northern Nigeria; the kingdoms of Ife and Benin, whose art had become recognized as amongst the most accomplished in the world; the Yoruba Empire of Oyo, which had been the most powerful of the states of the Guinea Coast; the city states of the Niger Delta, which had grown in response to European demands for slaves and later palm-oil; as well as the politically decentralized but culturally homogeneous Ibo (sic) people of the Eastern Region and the small tribes of the Plateau.

Politically, these kingdoms and empires had different modes of administration. In the north, for instance, a Mai (king) whose authority was rooted in myth ruled Kanem-Bornu. The first Mai was able to dominate the kingdom’s politics and life since his word was unquestionable (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 2). The Mai ruled through a twelve-member council, whose duty was to advise the monarch. With the infiltration

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<sup>7</sup> Also, see: Ajayi and Crowther, 1971; Idowu, 1962; Fage, 1955; Crowder, 1966 for a comprehensive history of the pre-colonial kingdoms and empires.

of Islamic ideas from across the Sahara into Kanem-Bornu, Mai Ume, who ruled between 1085-97, became converted to Islam. Thus, the political system was replaced with the Moslem administrative system and the Sharia Laws. The Islamic incursion spread through to other kingdoms of the north, notably Kano, Katsina and Zazzau.

In the Yoruba kingdoms of the west, the essential political unit on which government was based was the town (Atanda, 1980: 19-23). A head chief called King or Oba headed each town and was entitled to wear a crown, which symbolized his authority. The king was regarded as a divine king who, in theory, had absolute power over his subjects. In practice, however, he was not an absolute ruler, due to an elaborate system of checks and balances. The king ruled in conjunction with prominent chiefs, making it difficult for him to wield dictatorial political power. In other words, though, the king enjoyed certain privileges, he also had certain limitations placed on his powers to curtail arbitrariness. These limitations were included in the cultural rites and taboos, which were recounted to him during the coronation ceremonies. These taboos varied from kingdom to kingdom and were designed to curb despotism on the part of the king, to promote harmony among the different elements in the town, and to ensure orderly existence of the people. The violation of these taboos carried heavy penalties, and may result either in the exile of the king or his suicide.<sup>8</sup> The most powerful Yoruba kingdom before colonization was the Oyo Empire under the supreme king known as *Alaafin*.

The Igbo system of government in the east was, however, different from what obtained in the north and west where a large majority of its towns had a centralized mode of administration. Many authors have described pre-colonial Igboland as a

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<sup>8</sup> The King could be compelled to commit suicide by the *Oyo Mesi* (the council responsible for the selection of kings) by presenting him with an empty calabash or parrot egg.



'stateless' society consisting of autonomous villages and village groups ruled by 'diffused' authority without formalized, permanent, or hereditary leadership positions.<sup>9</sup> Green (1964: 32), for instance, observed,

within the village, authority is dispersed among groups rather than in any one individual or body and the spirit of rivalry, institutionalized in the dual division of the village, is one of the sources of executive action and one of the main-springs of communal activity.

On the contrary, the Igbo political organization was not a uniform and homogenous entity because some Igbo communities had elaborated chieftaincy institutions in pre-colonial times. According to Nzimiro (1972: xiv),

Kings and titled chiefs might rule in one area (as in Aba, Onitsha, Osamari, and Oguta), while in others, such as Asaba and Aguleri, titled personnel and age grades combine... In some other Ibo (sic) areas, such as Nri, Ndi Nze (title associations) and heads of lineages (elders) combine in ruler ship.

However, the decisions taken by these kings and chiefs were by no means final, as they were often challenged and overruled by other titled men with whom they were required to consult. Thus, unlike in the northern and western parts of pre-colonial Nigeria, which had visible traditional monarchical political institutions on a large scale, the Igbo societies operated essentially a consultative system of political decision-making. As would be discussed later on, this later proved to be problematic for the colonial masters, as it proved difficult to find the traditional authorities to use in carrying out the system of indirect rule in this part of the country.

The kingdoms and empires in pre-colonial Nigeria were made up of different groups, with many similar interests, objectives, and imperatives. Many of these groups interacted with each other on cultural and commercial basis on a large scale. To this end, extensive trading routes and networks developed among the societies and

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<sup>9</sup> See for instance: Meek, 1937; Isichie, 1976.

communities. A detailed description of the trade of Ondo in 1881 shows the economic links that bound Yoruba communities together:

The articles of trade actually produced in the Ondo country consist of sheep, goats, fowls, pigs, pigeons, palm oil, black oil made from palm kernels, ground nuts, black soap, ivory, cotton country cloths, eastern pots and plates, and calabashes (not carved). The Ondos obtain from their neighbors in the North various articles with which they likewise carry on trade with the people of Igbo Bini [a western Ijo town] and Ikale on the south. From Ife and Ilesha they get slaves, country cloths, large red beads also the blue beads of an ultramarine blue, potash, ivory and carved calabashes. All these are taken to Aye in Ikale. The Igbo Binis (sic) bring cotton prints, powder, guns, gin, tobacco (leaf and rolled), coral and other beads, knives, machetes, etc. These are obtained from the factories in Benin River. The Ikales bring yams, corn, plantains, groundnuts, cotton, wild beasts and birds, skins, palm oil, palm kernel etc (Isichei, 1983: 85-86).

Therefore, though Nigeria was the creation of European ambitions and rivalries in West Africa, it would be an error to assume that its peoples had little history before Britain, France, and Germany negotiated its final boundaries at the turn of the twentieth century (Crowder, 1966: 21). It has been argued that the Nigerian state could have evolved eventually even without external intervention, given the level of relationships that existed among the various groups that later made up Nigeria (Bello, 1962; Dudley, 1982; Osaghae, 1998).

### **3.2.2 The Colonial Era: Creation of the Nigeria State**

The political map of Nigeria is the net result of the 1884-85 Berlin Conference. The great 'Scramble for Africa' saw Africa carved up and shared between the European powers. Within two decades after the conference, virtually the entire continent was under European control, with only Ethiopia and Liberia retaining sovereignty. As a result of the conference, the area now known as Nigeria officially became the 'property' of Britain. Officially, the colonial political history of the British began with the proclamation of Lagos Colony in 1861. This was followed by the declaration of the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1885 and the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1887. In 1889, the Northern protectorate was declared, followed by the Southern Protectorate

(which was created to replace the Niger Coast Protectorate) in 1900. In 1906, the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos became part of the Southern Protectorate. The name 'Nigeria' was first suggested in 1898 by Flora Shaw (who later married Lord Lugard) in an article for the *Times*. She suggested that all the British Protectorates should be collectively called Nigeria<sup>10</sup> (Kirk-Greene, 1956: 10).

The coming of the British heralded a turning point in the history of the entity now known as Nigeria. The occupation process of Nigeria by the British was first through the incursion of trading concerns, followed by the missionaries, and finally the establishment of British colonial government. For many years, the British interest remained basically economic. But by 1880, the growing coastal contact, the rapid expansion of trade, and above all, the fear of competition from other European rivals laid the foundations for their wanting to officially administer their acquired territories (Fieldhouse, 1973: 143-144).

The missionaries contributed immensely to the establishment of colonial rule, though it may seem that their mission was to win souls, and spread Christianity. Their process of Christianization involved the propagation of the three Cs – Christianity, Civilization, and Commerce (Izuakor, 1987: 48). Ihonvbere and Shaw note the involvement of the missionaries in facilitating the establishment of colonial rule:

The early missionaries used religion mainly to gain access to the interior, loot African art and bronze works after condemning them as evil, and ally with the explorers and military forces of the British to unseat "recalcitrant" African rulers and impose "converts" on the respective states. Their main purpose was, therefore, to facilitate trade between African and European interests and to convert the former to their own religion. In addition, they introduced Western education, language and culture. And, as well as promoting trade, they committed themselves to the protection of British interest in Nigeria (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 11).

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<sup>10</sup> Literally meaning 'Niger Area' after Niger River, one of the biggest rivers in Africa, which passes through the area.

For many Nigerians, the missionaries were the first Europeans with whom they came into contact. The pioneer missionaries helped in promoting the patronage of British goods by the Nigerian people. In places where they established schools and churches, there arose the demand for assorted items such as stationery, bricks, sacramental wines, and clothes, thereby breaking new ground for commerce and exploitation.

The call for protection of British citizens and property kept recurring in the reports sent by the missionaries from their various bases to the British Foreign office. The missionaries cried out for protection and assistance in stamping out slavery and other practices associated with indigenous religions. They emphasized the need for the British government to take over political control of the polities in order to further safeguard British interest. This thereby laid the foundation for colonial and political hegemony.

In fulfilling their economic ends, the British needed the supply of labor in the various construction works the administration embarked on. The British, therefore, resorted to the use of local work force, as it would be cheaper. However, they utilized force to get the people to yield to their bidding. Aguibou Yansane (1980: 8) noted that:

Through force and coercion and decrees, the colonial administration maintained law and order. Using African forced labor, the colonizers opened new roads, built bridges, hospitals and schools and thereby incorporated (sometimes marginally) the colonized people into the mercantile and commercial activities of the colonial enterprises and banks.

For economic and administrative reasons, the Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated in 1914, to form Nigeria. There were quite a number of reasons for the amalgamation. Firstly, the resources available in the Northern Protectorate were insufficient to administer it. The North had no direct access to the sea; the projects of river dredging there proved to be very costly. Secondly, railway construction in the area was also very costly. Rail lines were constructed to link

strategic areas with mineral resources and fertile agricultural lands with the coastal ports. Thus, Lord Frederick Lugard<sup>11</sup> decided that it would be better and more profitable to merge the protectorates, in order to “centralize the administrative control of the country, and hence facilitate ‘better’ utilization of resources” (Olanrewaju, 1987: 77). The amalgamation resulted in:

the partial abolition of customs frontiers existing between the ‘two countries’, the unification of the railway system, adoption of a standard currency..., universalization and systemization of taxation, a unified judicial system, and integrated bureaucracy (Ngou, 1989: 81).

Another problem the British encountered was that of staff shortage in managing their newly acquired frontiers. This was due to the high cost of white personnel, in salaries and other benefits. The salaries and pensions of a relatively small number of white officials consumed a sizeable portion of Nigeria’s revenue and foreign exchange earnings. In light of these, Lord Lugard devised a better means of rule that would serve both the purposes of saving the British government money as well as making the work of administration easier. The solution was the direct and indirect rule system. By direct rule, the British officials would rule the colony directly and by indirect rule, the British would use local personnel to rule the protectorates, thus, meaning an extension of it to the southern region as well. This system had been successfully put to use by the British in India and Fiji (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 14). Also, Lugard recorded considerable success with the policy of indirect rule while he was the Governor of the northern region. Describing what the indirect rule policy was like in the northern region, Lugard (1920: 14-15) wrote:

The system of Native Administration in the separate Government of Northern Nigeria had been based on the authority of the Native Chiefs. The policy of the Government was that these Chiefs should govern their people, not as independent but as dependent Rulers. The orders of Government are not conveyed to the people through them, but emanate from them in accordance, where necessary, with instructions received through the Residents. While they

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<sup>11</sup> Lord Lugard (then a Sir) was appointed Governor-General of the Northern Protectorate in 1900. The British Colonial Office noticed Lugard’s success in the protectorate, and in 1912 he was made Governor of both the Northern and the Southern Protectorates.

themselves are controlled by Government in matters of policy and of importance, their people are controlled in accordance with that policy by themselves.

The British thus resolved to use 'traditional' rulers in achieving their objectives. Lugard recognized that ruling through the people's recognized leaders would be cheaper and more efficient and was unlikely to anger the masses, which might lead to a breakdown of law and order in the event of direct rule. The traditional rulers and chiefs served as the colonial government's representatives in their respective communities. They were to report to British officials called Residents. Therefore, in the real sense of it, 'indirect rule' was nothing other than 'direct rule' after all, since the Governor and Residents had absolute powers over these traditional rulers, and the rulers had no choice but to obey the commands of the colonial masters.

The system of taxation in the newly amalgamated colony was to be like that used in the Northern region by Lugard. In the North, the taxes were raised in the name of the native ruler and by his agents, but a fixed proportion was surrendered to the government, and the expenditure of the portion assigned to the Native Administration, from which fixed salaries to all native officials were paid, was subject to the advice of the Resident, and the ultimate control of the Governor (Olanrewaju: 1987: 15). The system developed a hitch in the Eastern Region with no centralized native authorities, and other places with centralized and powerful monarchies. To find a solution to this problem, the colonial government created "warrant chiefs".

Under the indirect rule system, the indigenous leaders became ruthless; they were effectively converted to the high-handed agents of the colonial administration. They were answerable only to the colonial masters and not to the governed. In the North, the Emirs became autocrats. De St. Croix (1944: 135) observed, "the Emirs' power over the whole province greatly increased and in each district, the chief became, and

still is, an absolute leader in his own domain". In an essay written by Aminu Kano in 1943, he also pointed out that:

The emirs are not concerned with anybody or whatever may befall anybody, so long as they are fulfilling the commands of the European. And the European, for his part, out of sheer hypocrisy stands aloof and overlooks and pretends that he does not know what crimes have been committed in the course of doing his bidding. He seems to believe that so long as no one screams aloud, no one is suffering (Paden, 1973: 279).

The system of indirect rule was successful in northern Nigeria basically because the machinery needed for administration and taxation was already in existence. Also, the people of the North were already used to the tradition of submission to centralized authorities, based on the teachings of Islam. The Northern elite had a pact with Lord Lugard to keep the Christian missionaries and, by extension, western education out of the emirate (Ibrahim, 1992: 107). This act, meant as a measure to ensure the preservation of the north's cultural values in return for the cooperation of the region's emirs and sultans with the colonial government, created wide gaps in the level of education and political development between the north and south of post-colonial Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> These gaps, however, have great consequences for political competition as well as competition for socio-economic goods like employment in the public service and admission to government-owned secondary and tertiary institutions in both the latter part of the colonial and post-independence periods (Osaghae, 1998: 5).

Indirect rule was also successful in Western Nigeria, although not as the success recorded in the North. In Yorubaland, the kings became very powerful. The British gave them the authority that they did not possess in the pre-colonial period (Lloyd, 1953: 10). The elaborate system of checks and balances in existence was disrupted; for instance, the kingmakers could no longer compel the Oba to commit suicide. In the Eastern part of the country, the warrant chiefs created by the British were

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<sup>12</sup> Even now, the pace of the development of western education in the northern part of Nigeria has remained very slow.

unpopular and did not enjoy the support and confidence of the people. These warrant chiefs were usually the most forward of the people in the communities, and they were chosen regardless of their status. The warrant chiefs performed functions as tax collectors, government agents, and as native court judges. Such concentration of power was foreign to Igboland; it thereby led to uprisings. These warrant chiefs became notorious for corruption and exploitation. Describing the activities of these chiefs (and one of them in particular), Chukwulebe (1956: 26) noted:

The chiefs....made much money by sending their subjects in great numbers to work for the white men on the roads and bridge constructions... The chiefs were the worst set of people who defrauded the laborers from their wages and got supreme control over them. In this way and by slavery too, X accumulated much wealth and became the greatest man (sic) who lived in those days. He had the most famous zinc house by then and could entertain all classes of big men with food, palm wine and some imported drinks. He married over forty wives.

Later, one of the warrant chiefs was noted to have said, “to grow fat an insect must feed on fellow insects” (Afigbo, 1972: 309). Thus, colonial rule led to the disruption of the lives of the people occupying the area that later became known as Nigeria. As shall be seen in the next section, the direct consequence of the activities of the British and their stooges was the formation and coming together of groups to make life more comfortable for themselves, and in many cases, to revolt against colonial rule.

Colonial rule engendered societal distortions with various manifestations that were later to have grave consequences in the post-colonial Nigerian system. Firstly, there was the north-south divide. This is manifested in the uneven levels of education and political development within the country. Some groups from the south such as the Yoruba and the Igbo were systematically exposed to European influence and, therefore, had certain advantages such as access to modern education while the Hausa and some other communities in the North were insulated from exposure to western influences. This varying pattern of penetration set up an imbalance between the

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regions. Secondly, colonial rule implanted the notion of regionalism within the country. Nigeria was divided for administrative purposes into three autonomous regions: the East (dominated by the Igbo majority), the West (dominated by the Yoruba majority) and the North (dominated by the Hausa/Fulani majority). The establishment of a three-unit federal structure in 1954 secured political autonomy and hegemony for the major ethnic groups of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo in the Northern, Western, and Eastern Regions respectively. This regional division of the country led to a solidified pattern of regional and ethnic competition for state-controlled resources. At independence, three regionally based political parties emerged, and ethnic domination of the parties and regions consolidated both majority electoral bases and opposition. The struggle for political power between regions was intense since the primary source of wealth was through the control of the central government. The failure of the British colonial government to forge the basis for meaningful national integration remains to this day a crucial Achilles' heel of the Nigeria post-colonial state. As this study reveals, the north-south divide was clearly manifested in the polarization of civil society organizations during the Babangida regime (1995-1993) and the Abacha regime (1993-1998).

Thirdly, colonialism brought about the “minority” (non-majority groups) issue. From just before independence in 1960 till date, minority groups have been agitating for separate states based on the belief that they were being cheated in the distribution of the country’s resources. According to Diamond (1988: 52),

The political organization of ethnic minorities gathered momentum in the twilight of colonial rule, fed by mounting apprehension of political repression, socioeconomic discrimination, even cultural extinction by the majority groups when they took unfettered control of regional governments after independence.

Fourthly, colonial domination also laid the basis and thrust of the post-colonial Nigerian political economy. During the colonial period, Nigeria served as a source of raw materials and markets for European countries. Raw materials were shipped to

Britain, processed into finished products, and finally shipped back to Nigeria for consumption. European firms, particularly the United Africa Company (UAC), dominated the economy. This hampered the development of local economic production. Thus, instead of the promotion of domestic development of industry, non-diversified economic policies were pursued by the British colonial administration. This was later to affect the country, as there is a high dependence not only on the importation of a wide range of consumer products but also on a narrow range of export products such as crude oil.

### **3.2.3 Civil Society in the Colonial Era.**

Colonialism brought people of diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds into contact and routine interaction under new political structures (Abutudu, 1995: 7). Many cooperative societies, hometown associations, and voluntary associations were formed in rural areas to meet the various needs of members of the communities. As more people became educated, urban centers were created with the provision of white-collar jobs and basic infrastructure. Large numbers of people continued to move to these centers from the rural areas in search of livelihoods. These new urban immigrants would become the backbone of many voluntary organizations that sprang up to address the assorted needs of the urban ethnic and kinship communities.

Alienated by the anonymity of the urban environment and drawn together by ties to their ethnic homelands as well as the need for mutual aid, the new city dwellers formed local clubs that later expanded into federations covering whole regions.<sup>13</sup> These organizations helped in bringing people from the same ethnic groups, town, or village together, and they served as linkages between these new urban dwellers and their people at home. These ethnic organizations included the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a

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<sup>13</sup> Nigeria ([http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+ng0032\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+ng0032))).

Yoruba cultural group, the Jam'iyar Mutanen Arewa (Northern People's Congress), and the Ibo State Union. The Ibo\* State Union,<sup>14</sup> for instance, was formed to assist the Igbo living in the non-Igbo urban areas to meet the demands they faced as members of this new society without neglecting their old society:

During (the) 1920s, most members of the Ibo 'tribe' resident outside their homes were employed in low paid occupation. They were principally employed as laborers, artisans, house servants and similar occupations at very low wages. Savings from their paltry wages were difficult. In time of emergency, such as death or illness, it was difficult to raise funds with which to meet the funeral expenses or repatriation of the dependents of the deceased. To meet this type of emergency, family unions were formed by various Ibo [sic] communities. The principal aim of these unions were [sic] the raising of funds to meet financial problems arising from the death of a member of the family. These family unions were later widened into village, town and district unions... Early in (the) 1930s, the first Ibo man to travel abroad returned to Nigeria. Ibo leaders in Lagos arranged to give him a reception. Various families were asked to contribute to meet the expenses of the reception. It was at this event that the idea of forming a National Union to co-ordinate the activities of family and town unions was conceived (Ibo State Union Pamphlet, 1964: 5).

However, many more groups that transcended ethnic ties, cutting across ethnic barriers were formed. Associations like trade unions, sporting associations, literary and debating societies, old boys' and girls' associations, and political parties that were not organized on ethnic basis were formed (Crowther, 1966: 309). As more people became educated, many more groups were formed by the new urban elite to struggle for their inclusion in the economic and political structure of the colonial state. Many of these groups expanded their objectives from mere inclusion in the political arena to the demand for outright independence. A large number of the associations formed during this period were concerned with the decolonization project. However, some of these associations were formed to serve and promote the interests and values of their members, as well as to address their varying community needs. Some others worked

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<sup>14</sup> The Lagos Ibo Union was formed in 1936, became the Ibo Federal Union in 1944, and later became the Ibo State Union in 1948. \*Ibo was often used to refer to the Igbo.

to promote political awareness and to educate their members on their rights and responsibilities as members of the country.

Colonialism in Nigeria was severely challenged or contested by some organizations. Apart from the decolonization project, there were many uprisings against the colonial government by members of civil society. Groups were formed to resist certain stringent measures imposed by the colonial masters – such as the imposition of highly burdening taxes. While taxation had been a part of pre-colonial order in northern Nigeria, taxation in the south was a new order and was perceived by the people as being tyrannical. Consequently, there were uprisings in various parts of Yorubaland.

Also, during that period, a series of events coalesced to spark off a major riot in eastern Nigeria. There was an increase in import duties leading to a rise in the prices of imported materials such as tobacco and calico. Simultaneously, there was a fall in price of palm produce, which was a major source of revenue in the East. Also, a census count of men and women in 1928 by warrant chiefs led to a rumor that women too were going to be made to pay tax along with the men (Isichei, 1983: 3990). The negative developments, and the rumor of impending taxes on women was the last straw that triggered off ‘the Aba Women’s riot’ in 1929, involving Igbo, Ibibio, and Opobo women from a large number of communities, mainly from within a thirty-kilometer radius of Aba. This women’s movement “revealed an amazing capacity for organization and united action which transcended clan and tribal boundaries” (Coleman, 1958: 174).

As time went on, the agitation became more focused and narrowed down from taxation and other issues to the quest for a complete end to colonial rule. This period witnessed the development of national consciousness in the people of Nigeria and the push for national emancipation. At this juncture, focus shall be shifted to the

development, organization, and activities of the section of civil society that were involved in political activities and who were the most vocal and active players in the quest for the end of colonization.

### **3.2.4 Occupational Groups**

The labor movement played a very significant role in the resistance to colonial rule. Before the coming of the Europeans, many Nigerians were peasant farmers or artisans (Aborisade, 1992: 2). Before the first 'modern' trade union was formed in 1912, there were already in existence many associations like that of weavers, blacksmiths, porters, carpenters, masons, market women, and hunters, which performed functions similar to those of the guilds in other countries (Tokunboh, 1985: 15). With colonialism came the emergence of commercial activities, and various construction works all over the country, leading to a rise in wage-earning employment. Thus arose the need for the creation of welfare and social benefit associations, which brought men and women in the same business and wage-earning establishments together for mutual assistance and protection.

The Southern Nigeria Civil Service Union, inaugurated on 19 August 1912, was the first trade union to be created in Nigeria (Ananaba, 1969: 10). The name of the Union was later changed to the Nigeria Civil Service Union (CSU) after the amalgamation and creation of Nigeria in 1914. The Union was particularly dissatisfied with the pay and the limited openings available to Africans for advancement to positions of responsibility. Due to the limitations of the civil service and the level of education at this time, the Nigerian Civil Service Union was more or less a senior officers' association. As Ananaba (1969: 14-15) pointed out,

The CSU was hardly a trade union as trade unions are known today: it was more or less a petition-writing body, heard only when a crisis was developing or an important official was retiring or proceeding on transfer or coming to assume duty. There seem to be no reliable record of its membership, and its

financial position can, at best, be a matter of guesswork... Its weakness lay in the fact that it was aristocratic to a fault. It did not just abhor strikes, but it lacked the courage even to make threats in furtherance of its demands.

The CSU at the time comprised officers who were no longer treated as native clerks, and who subsequently regarded themselves as a special class. Professor T.M Yesufu (1967) observed that the union “was hardly more than a social organization confined in membership to an elite group in the civil service”.

Subsequently, other trade unions were formed. The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) was formed in 1931, the Railway Workers Union in 1932, and the Marine Workers union in 1937. These unions were considered illegal, and most of their employers refused to grant them recognition (Aborisade, 1992: 3). In time, the colonial authorities realized that the more the unions were suppressed the more popular they became. Based on their experiences in other colonies and the pressure they were receiving from workers themselves, the government was forced to pass the trade union ordinance of 1938, which came into effect on 1 April 1939. The intention of the government was that with the ordinance, it would be able to curtail the militancy of the workers by administrative procedures. The Railway Workers Union, led by Michael Imoudu, was the first to register, and by 1943, 85 unions had registered with a total membership of 27,154 (*Ministry of Labor*, 1944).

Agitation and strikes characterized labor activities in the colonial period. According to Michael Imoudu,

It was during this period that the Nigerian workers began to understand what is meant to be inferior; to be subject to the ‘bursts’ and ‘booms’ of Western capitalist manipulations. While the suffering of our workers were great, they learned to stand on their own feet. They expressed themselves by means of strikes and unrest, which the British did not appreciate. More important than the strikes were the expression of fraternal interest in workers elsewhere (Cited in Gutkind, 1974: 7).

The first organized strike was carried out by the Nigerian Mechanics Union of the Nigerian Railway on 9 January 1920. The workers' major grievances were "insufficiency of wages, long hours of working, discontinuance of payment of war bonus, non-payment of wages for public holidays, and a demand for general wage increase of 50 per cent on wages of artisans and a minimum wage of 1/6d per day for laborers" (*Lagos Weekly Record*, 17 January 1920: 7). The government refused to concede to the workers demands until they resume work, claiming that these grievances were not known before the workers went on strike, therefore, the strike was unconstitutional and illegal. The strike continued until 19 January 1920 after the government agreed to accept the conditions requested by the union (Tokunboh, 1985: 24).

Though there were many more strike actions by the labor movement between 1920 and 1945, the first major labor crisis faced by the colonial government was the general strike of 1945.<sup>15</sup> It thoroughly shook the foundation of the Nigerian colonial state. The nation-wide strike started at midnight of 21 June 1945. It lasted for 44 days in Lagos and for as long as 52 days in the other regions<sup>16</sup> (Ananaba, 1969: 47). As Jibrin Ibrahim (1992: 116) noted, "the general strike, by crippling the railways, postal and telegraph services among others, virtually paralyzed the colonial system and demonstrated its weakness when confronted with the popular will". It was the first time the government would witness such a united opposition against colonial rule. The major reason for the strike was the demand of the Nigerian workers for increases in both the minimum wage and living allowance, which the colonial government under Sir Arthur Richards did not grant (Aborisade, 1992: 29).

According to a memorandum from the CSU, 1,631 European officials in Nigeria were

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, between 1940 and 1945, there were 33 strike actions by various sectors of the labor force (author's calculation from statistics provided in Cohen, 1974: 194).

<sup>16</sup> The strike officially ended on 4 August 1945.

earning a total of £1,077,390, while 14,866 African civil servants' yearly wages amounted to £998,640. Although the government tried to downplay the effects of the strike, it was observed: "the effect of serious dislocation caused by the strike to the social services overtook all Nigeria almost immediately in spite of certain measures of relief hastily improvised by the central government" (*West African Pilot*, 15 September 1945).

The labor movement was thus very active in the decolonization process. Because of its struggles with the colonial government, it became a formidable part of the nationalist movement (Onimode, 1982; Madunagu, 1982; Shenton, 1986; Luberk, 1987). It constantly endeavored to undermine the authority of the colonial regime by its strike actions and demand for an end to colonial rule in conjunction with other members of the Nigerian civil society. Aside from promoting the democratic rights of workers in the work place as well as raising their political consciousness, the labor movement actively advocated and supported the cause of the nationalist struggles in various ways, including the push for constitutional reforms, which heralded Nigeria's independence.

### **3.2.5 The Press**

The Nigerian press has a long and rich history. In the words of Olatunji Dare (1997: 536), "there were indigenous newspapermen before there were indigenous ordained priests and doctors in Nigeria, and there were Nigerian newspapers before the geographical entity called Nigeria formally came into being in 1914". The first newspaper to be established in Nigeria was *Iwe Irohin*, which was produced at Abeokuta in 1859 (Ibrahim, 1992: 12). Thereafter, other newspapers followed, such as *Anglo-African*, 1863; *Lagos Times*, 1880; *Lagos Observer*, 1882; *The Eagle*, 1883; *Lagos Critic*, 1883; *Iwe Irohin Eko*, 1888; *Lagos Weekly Times*, 1890; *Lagos Weekly Record*, 1891; *Lagos Spectator*, 1893; *Lagos Standard*, 1894; and *Lagos Echo*, 1894.



After 1914, many other newspapers were established, with some of them servicing other parts of the country. The rapid growth of the press then could be attributed to several factors. As more and more people became literate, readership of newspapers increased. Newspapers served as an avenue for the expression of public opinion, promotion of the awareness of nationalism and, later on, the mobilization of the public for agitation aimed at decolonization.

During the colonial period, “the press assumed the role of opposition and sought to rival the government, encouraging political awareness and involvement by providing a means of criticism of the authorities and spreading disaffection with official plans and policies” (Omu, 1978: 11). The *Lagos Weekly Record*, one of the most notable papers before the 1914 amalgamation, was “a determined agent in the propaganda of racial consciousness” (Coleman, 1958: 184). The newspaper was particular about the way the British were treating the natives. In 1897, it complained that the worst feature of the British administration was that the people themselves had little or no voice at all in the administration of their affairs (Omu, 1978: 149).

The press proved to be a very useful instrument in voicing out the views of the masses during the colonial period. It facilitated the political enlightenment of the people, and became an instrument of political agitation by the educated elite and others who had no say in the running of the country’s affairs. Newspapers became outlets for electoral mobilization and campaign against colonial rule. Journalists were turning into politicians, and they were aggressively opposing the government. Ibrahim (1992: 112) observed that:

Between 1862 and 1913 these journalists-cum-politicians such as James Davies of the *Nigerian Times*, John Jackson of *Lagos Weekly Times*, Sapara Williams of *Lagos Weekly Records*, and E.D Morel of the *African Mail*, became the pioneers of the struggle for public liberties as they fought against the excesses of the colonial laws, racial segregation, land alienation, and taxes.

It could be observed that it was not all the newspapers established at this period that were anti-colonial outlets. The first pro-colonial newspaper to be launched was the *Nigerian Pioneer*. Established by Sir Kitoye Ajasa, a Nigerian, it operated between 1914 and 1936 (Ibrahim, 1992: 112). Another newspaper that was considered an imperialist organ was the *Daily Times*, established in 1926 by the Lagos Chambers of Commerce.<sup>17</sup>

The anti-colonial press received a boost with the establishment of the *West African Pilot* in 1937 by Nnamdi Azikiwe. The militant anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist stance of the paper and its concepts of news not only made it an instant success but also gave an impetus to the agitation for immediate and total independence (Dare, 1997: 536; Ibrahim, 1992: 113). For instance, the paper served as a platform for making the voice of workers heard during the period and events that led to the general strike of 1945. Commenting on the role of the press in the struggle for political freedom, Tony Momoh (1983: 7) wrote:

It may be conceded that the performers in the press were more of nationalists than journalists. But what does it matter? Fact is, they were the agents of their various media and they were aware that the media had a battle to fight: one, which would make their country free.

The colonial government put in place several measures to curtail press freedom. Several laws and policies were enacted to this effect. One of such laws was the 1903 Newspaper Ordinance. Its essential features included: (i) the mandatory deposit of £250 by proprietors wishing to start newspapers; (ii) publishers were to deliver one signed copy of each newspaper to the Chief Registrar, failing which they paid a fine of £5; (iii) it became an offence to publish a newspaper which did not carry on the front page the address of the printer and publisher, violation carried a fine of £50 (Omole and Olukotun, 1999: 246).

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<sup>17</sup> In 1948, the London Daily Mirror group bought the *Daily Time*. In 1975, it changed hands once again when the Federal Government of Nigeria acquired it. The *Daily Times* remains in operation as a government newspaper.

There was also the 1909 and 1942 Sedition Offences Ordinance, which empowered the judiciary to apprehend an offender as a precautionary measure, and to sentence, any journalist found guilty of incitement. The colonial government also banned newspapers accused of fueling anti-colonial dissent. For instance, the *Pilot* and *The Comet* were banned for allegedly contributing to the events that led to the workers strike of 1945. But despite occasional suppression, the British colonial government was generally tolerant of press activities.

The press, therefore, was used as an instrument of discourse, political awareness, and protest. As such, the vibrancy of the Nigerian press at this period could be attributed to the need for a practical response to the colonial situation, which had excluded the indigenous population – both the elite and the masses – from participation in government. In this sense, the robust press not only provided an avenue for the voice of the emergent modern elite in public affairs but also, simultaneously, helped to arouse racial consciousness and the idea of nationalism among the masses, in order to stimulate them to stand up for their ‘rights’. The press was able to achieve this by often projecting colonialism in its most grotesque form.

### **3.2.6 The Nationalist Movement**

The amalgamation of 1914 had a positive effect on the new country that was formed. It “created the initial basis of the struggle for self-rule as it brought the protectorates together and thus created a new political unit” (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 16). It made it easier for better coordination of the activities of the people in their agitation for Nigeria’s independence. The nationalist movement also effectively mobilized the press to arouse widespread discontent and civil disobedience. The youth/students associations, and political parties were the most politically conscious segments of the

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Nigerian civil society during the colonial period. They were the vanguard of the nationalist movement.

The growth of the nationalist movement was a direct consequence of the growing feeling of discontent among the new emerging classes who could not find adequate opportunities for their aspirations under the colonial rule, as well as a feeling of alienation from participation in governance by the new emerging elite. The nationalist movement was largely made up of the young educated Nigerians, who found it difficult to gain employment because the best civil service jobs were reserved for expatriates, and if they were fortunate to secure these appointments, were offered lower remuneration than expatriates of identical grades; the aspiring African merchants who had great difficulty in fulfilling their dreams of entering the circle of importers and exporters as a result of the dominance of economic life by foreign enterprises; many Nigerians who felt the impact of the racial segregation that characterized the relationship between the Europeans and the populace; and also a growing numbers of Nigerians who began to question the right of a group of foreigners to rule the indigenous people.

The West African Students Union (WASU), formed on 7 August 1925 in London by a Nigerian called Ladipo Solanke, could be considered the first organized platform for students' political activism in the quest for political independence from colonial rule. It was formed as a platform for providing a center for West African students in London, as well as an avenue for promoting the understanding of African culture (Crowder, 1966: 265). Though membership was initially restricted to students from British territories in West Africa, starting from 1928, under the influence of the Pan-African ideology, WASU opened its membership to all students of African origin. However, students from West Africa, and especially from Nigeria, dominated the WASU and its activities.

With the introduction of western education to Africa, and due to the small number of higher educational institutions on the continent then, aspiring students had to travel abroad for higher education. However, these students abroad pioneered unionized political activism. As Walter Rodney (1982: 303) noted,

Students who were taken to the metropolis were the most favored and most pampered of Africans selected by the white colonial overlords to become Europeanized; and yet they were the very first to argue vocally and logically that the liberty, equality and fraternity about which they were taught should apply to Africa.... After all, most of them were sent there to study British Constitution and Constitutional Law.

WASU actively criticized British colonialism and was instrumental in raising political and national consciousness of the people of West Africa, especially among the students.

Also, the formation in 1939 of the Nigerian Union of Students (NUS) in Abeokuta served as another step forward in students' political activism. The organization was formed out of the burning desire of Nigerian students to fire the tempo of the struggle for independence (Yusuf, 1998: 101). NUS actively put pressure on the government to decolonize. Through protests and demonstrations they were able to awaken the consciousness of the masses, and to mobilize the people for the struggle for independence.

Some radical organizations were formed at this period. One of these was the Zikist movement. Formed in 1946, the Zikist movement particularly agitated for the immediate liquidation of colonialism and the redemption of Africa from social wreckage, political servitude, and economic impotency (Olusanya, 1966: 325). The movement was violently anti-colonial, calling on workers to strike and to refuse to pay tax (Crowder, 1966: 279). The Zikist movement was quite successful in wakening the political consciousness of the youth. It organized mass demonstration,

rallies, boycotts, and public lectures as part of its militant and radical activities against British colonialism. It distributed quite a number of inciting pamphlets and leaflets to members of the public, and was able to convince many Nigerians about “the bankruptcy of colonial rule and the desirability of achieving independence at the earliest possible date” (Olusanya, 1966: 329).

The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was also a very strong instrument in the agitation for the eradication of colonialism. Formed in 1938 by Samuel Akinsanya, H.O Davies, Ernest Okoli, and J.C Vaughn, the NYM grew out of the Lagos Youth Movement. The movement began as a pressure group concerned with the status of the Yaba Higher College, which they felt, should have been of university standard. With the arrival of Nnamdi Azikiwe from America in 1937, the movement became more active and representative, justifying its title of ‘Nigerian’ (Crowther, 1966: 266), as branches of the movement were later established in urban areas all over the country to make it nationalistic. Azikiwe’s membership went a long way in transforming the party. At the time, he was one of the very few Nigerians to have studied abroad, and also, the chain of newspapers he established served as an avenue for disseminating the ideas and activities of the movement.

The provision for democratic elections in the Clifford Constitution of 1922 prompted the formation of political parties. The Nigerian National Democratic Party (N.N.D.P), formed in 1922 by Herbert Macaulay, was the first party to be formed. The NNDP repeatedly won the three elective seats of Lagos in the Legislative Council, as it was contesting alone, until 1938 when the NYM contested in the election and won 1 of the seats. But between 1944 and 1947, the NNDP again won the three seats (Tamuno, 1972: 7). This was due to a conflict and split up of the NYM in 1941, largely as a result of ethnic loyalties and rivalry. With the split up, the NYM was left with an almost entirely Yoruba membership. The crisis that led to the break up of the NYM

could be identified as one of the starting points of the political tension between the Igbo and Yoruba that exists today. Later on as the level of political awareness within the country increased and more people became educated, several other political parties were formed. These included the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, which was formed in 1944 by Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Northern Peoples Congress in 1949 by Ahmadu Bello, the Northern Elements Progressive Union in 1950 by Aminu Kano, and the Action Group<sup>18</sup> in 1951 by Obafemi Awolowo.

The upsurge in political activities could also be attributed to the impact of the Second World War. As in several parts of Africa, the war raised hopes amongst Nigerians of a new order in which foreign oppression would give way to equality and liberty. This could be attributed largely to the Atlantic Charter signed in August 1941 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, in which there was an affirmation of the right of all people to determine their own destiny (Ade-Ajayi, 1982). The reasoning was that if the British and the allied forces could go to war to defend their countries against the tyranny of Adolf Hitler, then the colonized needed to arise against the tyranny of colonialism. Also, the independence of India in 1947 triggered the momentum for independence in many African countries. Everywhere the mood was hopeful as people were inspired by the vision of a new society free of European control.

### **3.2.7 Women's Associations**

Ihonvbere and Shaw observed, “women have perhaps been the most exploited and marginalized group in Nigerian society. In both pre-colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, women have remained oppressed and ignored in both political and economic terms” (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 149). Therefore, many of the women's

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<sup>18</sup> The Action Group was a transformation of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* (a Yoruba cultural group formed in 1948 by Obafemi Awolowo) into a political party.

organizations in Nigeria are cultural organizations whose functions are restricted and limited due to traditions and constraints imposed by men. However, women's organizations did play a very prominent role in the struggle for Nigeria's independence. From the Aba women's riot of 1929 to the 1949 protest following the massacre of twenty-one protesting mine workers by the colonial government troops at Enugu, and to the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigerian women became a force to be reckoned with. The uprisings by women at this time were significant as a catalyst for women's organized mass protest against the injustices of colonial administration. The women's organizations fiercely opposed colonialism, and advocated for the same civil rights that European women had for Nigerian women. Women activists, most especially in Southern Nigeria, engaged in vigorous struggles against the infringement on their interests and those of their communities. They fought against the imposition of unfair and unjust taxation; canvassed for education for girls, equal pay for equal work, increased employment opportunities, and political representation for women.

The political role of women's organization came to the limelight with the formation of the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU), an offshoot of the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) in 1949, as an organization to unite all Nigerian women (Amadiume, 2000: 46). The organization had branches all over the country. As pointed out by Mba (1982: 173),

NWU was in effect a federation of autonomous branches: each branch was concerned primarily with the interests of the women in its area, with only a national executive committee which was more concerned with national issues affecting women. Mrs. Kuti was the president of the NWU while remaining president of the Abeokuta branch, with Mrs. Ekpo serving as national secretary while remaining president of the Aba branch.

The women went a step further in their political activities with the formation of the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS) in 1953. The objectives of the organization included:



- To encourage the womenfolk of Nigeria to take part in the political, social, cultural and economic life of Nigeria;
- To create the facilities for female education;
- To raise the status of women generally and to win for them equal opportunities with the men (Amadiume, 2000: 48).

Also, Njideka Nwokolo founded the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) in 1959. It was formed as an umbrella body embracing all women's organizations, in order to enable women exchange ideas and articulate their common interests.

Although, women did not feature prominently in the leadership of political parties during the colonial period (and thereafter), they contributed in no small way to the eventual attainment of independence in 1960.

Thus, the vibrancy of civil society in Nigerian during the colonial era was a direct consequence of the perception of a large majority of Nigerians about the need for a quick end to colonial rule. Each strand of civil society served as an avenue for individuals within the Nigerian society to positively construct and manage the frustration felt on the continual oppression being experienced during these years of colonial rule. Various associations and groups channeled their efforts to ensuring that the colonial authorities heard the voices of the people in their quest for self-determination.

### **3.3 Civil Society and the State after Independence to 1979**

#### **3.3.1 The Post-Colonial Era: The First Republic (1960-66)**

The struggle of civil society in Nigeria against colonial rule was rewarded with independence in 1960. The move towards independence involved gradual processes. The Western and Eastern Regions were granted self-government in 1957, and the Northern region became self-governing in 1959. Federal elections, the first to cover

the whole of Nigeria, were held in 1959. On 1 October 1960, Nigeria gained independence under an Independent Constitution that provided for a federal system of government. The constitution made provision for a ruling government and an alternative government in opposition. A Nigerian, Nnamdi Azikiwe, became governor-general and another Nigerian, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, who had become Prime Minister in 1957, continued as Prime Minister, signifying officially the end of colonial rule.

The colonial state had been constructed to protect the interests of the British in their acquired territories. Its primary concern was with maximizing profits and the general extraction of surplus to satisfy the interests of the metropolitan state and dominant classes (Ihonvbere, 2000: 17). Combining the powers of the three arms of government, it imposed taxes, levies, fees, and laws at will without consultation with the people. It controlled the apparatus of force and used extreme violence in ensuring the compliance of the people. This was the state that was inherited at independence.

At independence, the new Nigerian State looked promising. With a federal constitution that guaranteed a large measure of autonomy to the three (later four) regions, a parliamentary system that emphasized majority rule, and a multiparty system, unlike in other newly independent African states, the state seemed on the road to a smooth journey ahead. Legislative power was vested in an elected parliament, made up of a powerful House of Representatives and the Senate. There was also a clear separation between the three arms of government – the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. The citizens' participation was ensured by direct election of the members of the parliament. Fundamental human rights were guaranteed in the constitution. There was freedom of speech for the press, although most of them tended to be partisan (Schwarz, 1965: 162). Government at the center was made up of a coalition of two parties – the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National

Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), while the Action Group (AG) was the main opposition party at Parliament.

However, despite the promising outlook of the new independent Nigeria, the First Republic seemed doomed from the start. With the exit of the colonial masters, “the interests of the nationalist leaders who inherited power changed somewhat. And their ideas and dispositions to power changed correspondingly” (Ake, 1976: 204). The excitement and opportunity of the change from being an oppositional group to being the group in power as a result of independence overwhelmed the new ruling elite, revealing its greed for power and its insensitivity to the needs of the ordinary citizens. The new members of the ruling elite proceeded to overlook their commitment to the Nigerian people, and instead used much of the resources within their power to enrich themselves, to satisfy their own interests and to squash the pressure for participation from other groups.

The First Republic was characterized by the use of public office for personal gains and accumulation. The ruling elite utilized all the repressive apparatus, now within their reach, to consolidate their power. It systematically dismantled alternative sources of power, traditional or otherwise, thereby leaving the citizens alienated and remote to any decision-making processes. Therefore, the members of the society did not see what they had fought for in the post-colonial state. It was only the few that were benefiting from the state that continued to see the relevance of government.

The apparatuses for the control of the state by the citizens were underdeveloped; therefore, the state was well insulated from public control. This enabled the state to be captured by a hegemonic class and some other groups to benefit their own personal and selfish ends. Power became everything, and those who controlled the instrument of force used it to promote their interests. According to Ake (1985: 4),

In the absence of autonomizing mechanisms in the post-colonial state, the resources of physical coercion became the tools of particular groups, especially the hegemonic factions of the ruling class... Also, the only effective check on the use of the coercive resources becomes merely the prudence of enlightened self-interest of those who control them. So we have essentially relations of raw power in which rights tend to be coextensive with power and security depends on the control of power. The struggle for power, then, is everything and is pursued by every means.

Public funds were diverted to private purses, and possible opposition was suppressed.

The people's hope that the end of colonial rule will bring about the much-expected relief and poverty alleviation was dashed:

As poverty remained unrelieved, in some cases deepening, the flaunting of opulence by intemperate politicians became insufferable. The hostility they provoked extended beyond the individuals to the system they had used for their personal gain. The political institutions themselves became identified with the activities of those who had misused them; parliamentary democracy became tainted in the eyes of many Nigerians (Hatch, 1974: 39-40).

The First Republic was characterized by ethnic politics and wrangling within the political class. The political parties that emerged at this time were formed along ethnic and regional lines. The major parties that emerged were in control of power in their regions. Jackson (1972: 280-281) noted that:

The Nigerian party system from 1960-1966 may be characterized as having been dominated by the principle of "regional security". From this principle flowed many of the disintegrative pressures that in the first republic proved stronger than comparable integrative pressures.

The Northern People's Congress (NPC) was in control of the Northern Region.

Regional security in the Northern Region implies not only regional political organization but also the preservation of the region with its cultural minorities. The NPC rigidly opposed any southern attempt to penetrate the region. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) started out as a 'national party'<sup>19</sup> but

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<sup>19</sup> The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), later known as the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), embarked on an extensive campaign and countrywide tour in 1947 to enlist the support of all Nigerians against colonialism, and to raise funds to take a delegate to London to press for constitutional changes in the same year (Lloyd, 1955: 697). The delegation's missions proved successful, as there were various constitutional changes in Nigeria between 1948 and 1954.

after 1961, it became increasingly identified with the Eastern Region. It controlled the Eastern Region (and the Midwestern Region after it was created in 1963 from the Western Region). In the Western Region, the Action Group was dominant. These parties were based on, and derived their support from, the major ethnic groups within their regions: AG (Yoruba), NPC (Hausa/Fulani), and NCNC (Igbo).<sup>20</sup>

Many of the civil society organizations formed during the First Republic were social in outlook. They were basically extensions of the organizations formed during colonial rule. They promoted the interests of their members while also addressing developmental needs in their jurisdictions. After independence, the Nigerian press continued to enjoy relative freedom. During the First Republic, no newspaper was proscribed and no media house was closed down. Hachten (1971: 165) observed that “the Nigerian press was almost unfettered”, and Ostheimer (1973: 92) also comments, “the lack of restrictions on Nigerian journalism until the mid-1960s was quite remarkable”. However, the press during this period was largely partisan and ethnically inclined. In 1959, on the eve of independence, 25 of the thirty Nigerian newspapers in operation were controlled by, or connected to, political parties (Faringer, 1991: 28). The press was highly politicized, and the newspapers were often locked in vicious confrontations. As Omu (1978: 248) lamented, “the newspaper press provided a remarkable example of overzealous and irresponsible partisanship and recklessness”.

The most politically inclined associations during the period of struggle for political independence were the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) and the labor movement. The NUNS was a very militant and articulate student union. Its main

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<sup>20</sup> There were other minor parties formed at this time. These parties attempted to defend particular interests, personal or local, within each major group; some attempted to oppose the political hegemony of the majority ethnic groups within each region. For a comprehensive account of the activities of political parties in the First Republic, see: Lloyd, 1955; Sklar, 1963; Dudley, 1968; Jackson 1972.

focus was the promotion of students' welfare, sustenance of the ideals of nationalism, and the attainment of total independence for the country. NUNS strongly protested against the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact signed by the newly independent state and the British Government in 1960. The pact would have converted Nigeria into a British military base and possibly drawn the country into the ongoing Cold War politics (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 142). According to Osita Okeke, the President of NUNS at the period,

The Defense Pact granted Britain unlimited overflying rights across Nigerian territory. It did more, it also allowed British troops to be stationed in Nigeria and to be guaranteed landing rights within hours of the placement of a telephone call by the Prime Minister of Defense (sic) requesting such... What is more, the colonial masters now had an avenue for re-emergence-neo-colonialism and imperialism *par excellence* (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1991: 35).

The student body organized a strong protest, which led to the abrogation of the pact. The student body also coordinated various student demonstrations, boycotts of lectures, and protests over issues on government policies on education, as well as in relations to the general welfare of Nigerian students.

By the third year of Nigeria's independence in 1963,<sup>21</sup> trouble had already started brewing in the country. For instance, in August 1963, the Federal Government initiated a proposal for a preventive detention measure and the abolition of the independent Judiciary Service Commissions, which before then had controlled the appointment of Nigerian judges. When the proposal was made public, there were public outcries against it, especially in the south, and several editorial comments were written against it. The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) denounced the move by the government as a measure to starve out liberal democracy in Nigeria. In the absence of an independent judicial commission, it would be easier for the government to

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<sup>21</sup> Officially, Nigeria became a Republic on 1 October 1963. A new constitution took effect under which the governor-general, Nnamdi Azikiwe, officially became the President and Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister. This translated into the formal transfer of power from the British to Nigerians.

influence judicial processes, as well as to appoint its own stooges as judges. There were also protests by students and youth groups against this proposal, thereby forcing the government to abandon it (*West Africa*, 1963: 853-854, 871).

The unity of the nation suffered a set back with the provisional result of the census conducted in 1962. Conflicting figures were released for each of the regions, but in all the reports, the northern region had the highest figures. The Ministry of Information published a pamphlet in December 1962 putting the figures as 22 million for the North, 12 million for the East, and 8 million for the West (including the mid-Western Region) with the sum total at 42 million. On 30 January 1963, the *Daily Times* quoted the figures submitted to the Cabinet as 30 million for the North, 12 million for the East and 10 million for the West and mid-West, with the total at 52 million. Because the government denied neither of these reports, the southerners believed that the northern politicians were inflating their own figures (Aluko, 1965: 382).

The census results generated a lot of crises principally because allocations of parliamentary seats were determined on population basis. The results showed the North having a substantially larger population than the three other regions combined, thereby forming the basis of the fear by southerners that Northerners would perpetually dominate Nigeria. Those fears coupled with concerns about impending political crisis forced the government to announce the cancellation of the results on 19 February 1963 without releasing any official results, and also that a fresh census would be conducted later in the year. The 1963 census was an even greater failure. The original results were never officially released, but according to speculative reports, the inflation of this new count were "of such astronomical proportions that the

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figures obtained, taken as a whole, are worse than useless” (Nwankwo and Ifejika, 1969: 50).

The relationship between the government and the labor movement during the First Republic was antagonistic. After independence, many workers (especially junior workers) had begun to feel that the government was not making adequate effort in bridging the gap of the inequalities of the colonial wage and benefit structure. Corruption and wasteful spending were perceived to be widespread among politicians. A pay rise for ministers and members of parliament in April 1963 further fueled the anger of civil servants, as workers’ salaries had not been increased since 1960. The workers, under the umbrella of a Joint Action Committee (JAC), therefore, embarked on a strike action on 27 September 1963 to press home their demand for an improvement in the living conditions of Nigerian workers. The strike was called off on October 3, however, due to government’s agreement to negotiation with the workers. Nevertheless, the action in itself exposed the general discontent of the labor movement and foreshadowed a much more spectacular crisis. Despite promises to labor workers by the government to raise wages, by 1964, the government had not addressed the issue. The workers therefore embarked on another general strike in 1964.<sup>22</sup>

The impact of the 31 May 1964 strike was greater than the one of 1963. Dockworkers and railway workers were the first to start, thereby paralyzing both ports and railways. The following day, workers in government offices proceeded on a sit-down strike, which spread to other state institutions and parastatals, including the University of Ibadan. Bus crews joined the strike on June 3, and also all the cities main departmental stores were shut down (West Africa, 6 June 1964: 614). Within a few days, activities in Lagos and Ibadan, the nations biggest commercial cities, had been

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<sup>22</sup> See: Melson, 1970.



paralyzed (Robert, 1965: 59). The workers were demanding an increase in trade union power and increase in salaries and allowances, among other things. The strike ended on 15 June 1964 following an agreement between the workers and the government for a new wage scale of between 25-30 percent increase. By the time the agreement was reached, however, the workers had successfully undermined the authority of the government by demonstrating its weakness when faced with well-organized revolt. As Diamond (1988: 162) observed,

What began as protest over wages quickly widened into an attack on the very basis of the regime's authority. Spanning the latter stages of the census crisis and the preliminary maneuvering of the Federal Elections, the conflict peaked in a thirteen-day general strike that brought the economic life of the nation to a standstill. In the confrontation, Nigerian workers scored a significant victory, while the regime was discredited across a wide and crucial segment of public opinion.

But the increment was to have a negative effect on the society. It led to a "rise in prices – market women raised their food prices even before the settlement was announced – which more than offset the benefits. Many small firms with semi-redundant staff dismissed surplus workers, thus aggravating unemployment" (Schwarz, 1968: 157).

The strikes and civil unrest that took place further eroded the credibility of the Tafawa Balewa administration. On the political front, the government was also experiencing a major crisis. In 1962, a split occurred in the Action Group, which also formed the government in the Western Region. The Governor of the region, the Ooni of Ife, Sir Adesoji Aderemi, dismissed its premier, Chief S.L. Akintola (\* not in anyway related to this researcher\*), replacing him with Alhaji Dauda Adegbenro, a strong supporter of Chief Awolowo, the leader of the Action Group. This led to disturbances in the Western House of Assembly, and also within the region. These disturbances caused the federal government to suspend the premier and declare a state of emergency in the

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Region. The federal government then appointed Dr. M.A. Majekodunmi as the Administrator of the Region.<sup>23</sup>

On 2 November 1962, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the AG was arrested along with 27 members of his party and associates, and was charged with treasonable felony. Six weeks before then, Awolowo had been placed under house arrest in relations to the crises in the Western Region. On 11 September 1963, Awolowo and the others were convicted of plotting to overthrow the Federal Government, smuggling arms from Ghana, and training revolutionaries in Ghana (Schwarz, 1965: 138). All but three of the accused were found guilty and sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to ten years. Awolowo was sentenced to ten years imprisonment with hard labor. The outcome of the trial further ignited the crisis that was already brewing in the Western Region.

Meanwhile, Chief Akintola led a breakaway faction of the AG to form the United Peoples' Party (UPP), which was later converted to a new party called the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The NNDP allied with the ruling NPC, while the NCNC, on its part, allied with the AG to contest the 1964 Federal Elections. The campaign period was characterized by violence and destruction of lives and property. There were several allegations of harassment and irregularities in the filing of nomination papers. By the time the elections were conducted in December of 1964, the situation had deteriorated to the point that it had "become accepted practice for party politicians to go about campaigning with the protection of paid personal body guards, usually armed with a variety of offensive weapons. Electoral officers were terrorized into absconding their offices" (Dudley 1984: 68). Mass rigging of elections and falsification of election results took place in all the regions (Ihonvbere and Shaw,

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<sup>23</sup> Chief Akintola was restored to the office of the Premier by the Federal Government six months later at the end of the emergency period.

1998: 39). The United Peoples Grand Alliance (UPGA), led by Dr. Michael Okpara, the premier of the Eastern Region, called to its members to boycott the elections on the grounds that the election was a farce. The boycott was only successful in the East. The results of the elections showed the NPC and its allies won about 80 percent of all the seats.

The events that followed the elections placed the nation on the verge of collapse. Disaffection over the elections later degenerated to full-scale violence in the country, especially in the Western Region,<sup>24</sup> which became the 'theater of war'. In many instances, houses and properties were destroyed, a large number of people were killed, and there was a general disquiet in the region. The situation gradually worsened and was further aggravated by the 1965 regional elections, which were also violent. By December 1965, there was a total breakdown of law and order in Western Nigeria. It had gone beyond the control of anti-riot police. The federal government refused to declare a state of emergency, with the Prime Minister announcing that the situation was under control. These crises eventually led to the collapse of the First Republic, with a seizure of power by the military on 15 January 1966.

### **3.3.2 Military Rule and Civil Society (1966-79)**

By January 1966, the country was already at a boiling point. Taking advantage of the lingering crises that followed the 1964-65 elections, the military overthrew the First Republic on 15 January 1966. Though the coup was planned and executed by junior military officers, the leadership of the country was thrust on the most senior military officer at the time, Major General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi. Ironsi (a southerner) thus became the first Nigerian Military ruler. The coupists defended their action by claiming their desire to eradicate problems such as tribalism, nepotism, retardation of

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<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the crisis during this period see: Post and Vickers, 1973; Schwarz, 1965; Sklar, 1966; Dudley, 1973; Worrall, 1965.

social integration, bribery and corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiency, and to return the country to civil rule as soon as possible.<sup>25</sup>

Although the coup was widely welcomed by the masses -- especially southerners -- many Northerners were infuriated. To many Nigerians from the north, the pattern of killings in the coup gave it an ethno-regional appearance. Those killed included the two most powerful men in Nigeria's First Republic -- the Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa and the Premier of the Northern region, Sir Ahmadu Bello -- who were both Northerners. Also killed was the Premier of the Western Region, Chief S.L.A Akintola, who was closely allied with the NPC. Furthermore, although numerous senior military officers killed in the coup, only one Igbo was among them; the others were Northerners and Westerners. The January 1966 coup was thus seen by many Northerners as an attempt by the Easterners to dominate the federation.

Ironsi was a good military officer but a bad politician (Elaigwu, 1985: 184). On assuming office, he failed to put the coupists on trial as was demanded by some sections of the Nigerian army. Also, Igbo officers were rapidly promoted; of the 21 officers promoted to the rank of Colonel, 18 of them were Igbo. In May 1966, Ironsi promulgated Decree 34 of 1966, which abrogated the federal system of government, replacing it with a unitary system, arguing that it was the only way the military could govern. The decree also unified the federal and regional civil service. These further heightened the fears of the Northerners. Since the north was less developed than the south, the Northerners believed that with the operation of a unitary system of government, the south would always be in control of the country.

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<sup>25</sup> Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, the leader of the coup, said neither he nor his co-plotters "was in the least interested in governing the country" (*The Nigerian Tribune*, 2 July 1967). According to him, all they wanted to do was to identify and shoot all the "political big-wigs" and other "undesirable elements" and after that, handpick some "civilians of proven honesty and efficiency" to govern Nigeria. After accomplishing this task, Nzeogwu and the other military officers would stand behind the new rulers with their "fingers on the trigger" daring this new set of rulers to misbehave.

Ironsi's regime lasted for seven months before it was overthrown in a bloody coup on 31 July 1966. Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon succeeded Ironsi and ruled Nigeria for nine years, 1 August 1966 – 29 July 1975. This time round many Northerners were overjoyed, such that the people took a day off to celebrate the success of the coup and the fact that, according to them, "God, in his power, has entrusted the responsibility of the great country (of ours), Nigeria, into the hands of another Northerner" (*New Nigeria*, 30 September 1966).

On assuming office, Gowon quickly suspended the unitary system that had been imposed by Ironsi, reinstating the federal system of government. As a way of increasing his popular support, he released Chief Obafemi Awolowo and other top politicians that had been in prison or in detention since the First Republic or the coup of January 1966 (Osaghae, 1998: 61). However, many of the military officers from the eastern part of the country refused to accept Gowon's accession to power. The September 1966 massacre of Easterners in the North resulted in a total withdrawal of support for the Federal Government by Easterners, prompting a mass exodus of the Igbo from the North and West (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 63). The relations between the federal government and military governor of the Eastern Region, Col. Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu became very strained. Gowon, therefore, called an ad-hoc constitutional conference to discuss the country's political future. While some of the delegates recommended a confederal system (one in which each region is sovereign but connected to a weak center), those from the East insisted that opportunity should be given to the region(s) that want to secede to do so.

Due to the continued killing of the Igbo in the North, the conference had to be abandoned. In a bid to resolve these disagreements, a summit of military rulers was

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held in Aburi, Ghana. The agreement reached at Aburi again became a bone of contention, due to different interpretations given it by the parties concerned. This led to the declaration of the Republic of Biafra by the Eastern Region and its attempt to break away from the Nigerian Federation. The result was a 30-month civil war between the forces of Biafra and the Federal Government, ending in January 1970.<sup>26</sup>

Preempting the eastern secession, Gowon quickly weakened the support of the region by decreeing the creation of twelve new states to replace the existing four regions. Banking on the fact that with the split of the regions and creation of states for minority groups in the East, the Biafran army would not have the total support of the East, six of the newly created states contained the minority groups that had been pressing for state creation since the 1950s. In a nation-wide broadcast, and declaring a state of emergency, Gowon declared the federal government's intention to fight to keep Nigeria one. He concluded this broadcast by stating:

If it were possible for us to avoid chaos and civil war merely by drifting apart as some people claim, that easy choice may have been taken. But we know that to take such a course will quickly lead to the disintegration of the existing regions in condition of chaos and to disastrous foreign interference (Cited in Osaghae, 1998: 65).

Although Biafra had foreign supporters like France and Portugal, the secession bid failed largely due to the support the Federal government was able to get from Britain and the Soviet Union, who had considerable economic and industrial interests in the country, and felt a breakup of the country would jeopardize these interests<sup>27</sup>.

Before the end of the civil war, there began agitation for a return to civil rule. In 1969, the *Nigerian Tribune* carried an editorial calling for a return to civil rule. Captioned 'The way forward', the editorial argued:

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<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive account of the civil war see: Stremmlau, 1977; Schwarz, 1965; Panter-Brick ed. 1970; Kirk-Greene, 1971; Dudley, 1974.

<sup>27</sup> See, Ekwe-Ekwe, 1990.

The present mood of the country, which has been reflected in all spheres of our national life, calls for much more than a realistic reassessment of our situation. It demands certain immediate actions, which alone can give this country the necessary change of direction. We offer no apologies to anyone for saying that in our view the time has come for a civilian government. This is a suggestion, which will not be well received in certain quarters and will be greeted with suspicion in others. But we are convinced that if we are to steer ourselves out of the present morass, a civilian government is not only desirable but imperative (*Nigerian Tribune*, 19 March, 1969).

This article led to the detention of the editor of the paper, Lateef Jakande, for seventeen days. Shortly after the war, Gowon indicated his intention to hand over power to the civilians within two years. But he later changed his mind, and in October 1970, Gowon announced that the military would exit in 1976. The press, trade unions, and universities continued to demand for a quick return to the democratic process. Thus, in 1972, Gowon partially lifted the ban on political activity that had been in force since 1966 in order to permit a discussion of a new constitution that would prepare the way for civilian rule.

With the oil boom and economic surplus in the 1970's, Gowon's regime became riddled with corruption. The country's resources and economy were poorly managed and misappropriated. According to Dudley (1982: 116),

...with no constituents to conciliate and no electorate to be accountable to...the effect of the oil boom was to convert the military political decision-makers and their bureaucratic aides into a new property-owning, rentier class working in close and direct collaboration with foreign business interests with the sole aim of expropriating the surpluses derived from oil for their private and personal benefit.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, when the promised date for returning the country to civil rule approached, Gowon changed his mind again. In a nation-wide broadcast on 1 October 1974, marking the nation's fourteenth independence anniversary, Gowon dismissed plans for civil rule as "unrealistic" – since "it would be utterly irresponsible to leave the nation in the lurch". He argued that "civil government would throw the

nation back into confusion”, because it was evident that “from the general attitude, utterances and maneuvers of some individuals and groups and from publications during the past few months, it was clear that those who aspire to lead the nation on the return to civilian rule have not learnt any lesson from the past experiences” (Cited in Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 80).

This announcement drew sharp criticisms from members of civil society, and especially politicians-in-waiting. The Gowon regime was condemned and attacked in several newspaper editorials and articles. By 1975, there was a strong body of public opinion against continued military rule. Members of civil society continued more than ever to agitate for the return of the country to civil rule. In response, “Gowon became extremely repressive, employing all available coercive weapons to deal with his critics whom he treated as subversive agents” (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985: 21). University students boycotted classes between January and March 1975 demanding a reform of the social order in Nigeria (*Africa Contemporary Record*, 1975: B27). Some of their demands included a return of the country to civil rule in 1976; the introduction of free education; lifting of emergency powers and the release of people detained without trial; and a decree against corruption and the penalizing of corrupt rulers. The Universities of Ife, Lagos, and Ibadan were closed down as a result of the continued boycott. The closure resulted in both the Lagos and Ibadan universities in violent protests and demonstrations to back up their demands. Rather than capitulate, the Gowon regime hardened its position by insisting that none of the three closed institutions would be reopened until the federal government was convinced that normalcy would return to the universities.

The press also came under the heavy hand of the military during this period. The Federal Commissioner of Internal Affairs accused the press of ‘mounting a campaign of blackmail against the ruling Federal Military Government’ (*Africa Contemporary*



chief executives, cleaners, judges, soldiers, policemen and clerks for indolence, indiscipline, corruption, lateness to work, inefficiency, irresponsibility, mismanagement and other crimes (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 81).

The Muhammed regime gained great popularity among the masses. The regime gave the country hope that things may really change for the better after what the nation had gone through since independence. An additional seven states were created, bringing the number of states to nineteen. As part of its plan to return the country to civil rule, a Constitutional Drafting Committee was constituted to draft a constitution for the country. However, on 13 February 1976, Murtala Muhammed was assassinated in an unsuccessful *coup d'etat*. His Chief of Staff and deputy, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo, succeeded him in office. The coup was strongly condemned by large sections of the general public, with some (particularly university students) demonstrating in solidarity with the slain military leader and his regime.

On taking over the reins of government, Obasanjo assured the people that he was committed to the transition program already laid out by Muhammed. However, as with his military predecessors, the Obasanjo regime also constrained civil society. For instance, during the 1977/78 academic session, the National Union of Nigeria Students (NUNS) was banned, and several of its leaders including its president, Segun Okeowo, were arrested. The student body was agitating for campus reforms, improved welfare for students, and an immediate reversal of a new policy meant to increase the cost of education. The proposed increase was to have affected meal fees by 400 per cent and accommodation by 50 per cent. The nation-wide revolt by the students that ensued known as 'Ali must go',<sup>30</sup> resulted in the death of nine students, seven academic staff, two university administrators, and a journalist (Shettima, 1997: 133). Several university lecturers were sacked for supporting the cause of the

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<sup>30</sup> The students were calling for the resignation of Colonel Ali, the Education Minister.

students. The regime also clamped down on the press. *Newbreed* magazine was proscribed on 4 June 1978 for its publication of an interview with former secessionist leader, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu who was then in exile in Abidjan. Several journalists were also arbitrarily detained for press criticism and opinions on the policies of the regime.

### **3.4 Civil Society and the State (1979-85)**

#### **3.4.1 The Second Republic (1979-83)**

The Obasanjo regime carried on with the implementation of the transition program put in place by Muhammed before his death. The five political parties that contested the 1979 elections were more or less reincarnations of the political parties of the First Republic. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was a reincarnation of the old NPC; the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) emerged from the old AG; the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) was an offshoot of the NCNC; the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) was a breakaway faction of the NPP; while the People's Redemption Party (PRP) was an off-shoot of the Nigerian Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). Alhaji Shehu Shagari won the presidential election and was sworn in as the President of Nigeria on 1 October 1979.

In the Second Republic, the state was tolerant of associational life. Many organizations were allowed to form and many of these associations principally promoted issues of particular interests to their members. However, the government of Shehu Shagari was characterized by gross mismanagement of the economy and great hardship for the masses (see chapter 4). The situation of the working class at this period was particularly pathetic. Workers were owed several months' salaries and faced mass retrenchment. The country experienced a very high rate of unemployment, increased crime rate, scarcity of goods and services, and high cost of

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living. The four years of the regime witnessed protests from almost all sections of civil society. There was a general strike by the workers in May 1981, and there were several work stoppages before and after the general strike. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) went on a strike of over ten weeks, totally disrupting the University calendar. Medical doctors, magistrates, oil workers, students, nurses, and teachers all over the country went on several strike actions (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985: 162). The situation in the country deteriorated to a point that the masses lost faith in the government. As Sunmonu (1983: 2) summarizes:

It is now incontrovertible and manifestly evident that the real aspirations of our people for life more abundant and the provision of their basic needs and necessities of life, such as food, pipe borne water, electricity, decent housing and clothing, are daily eluding them. The great expectations that heralded the dawn of the return to democratic rule in Nigeria are now irretrievably being seen to be nothing but forlorn hopes.

By the time the regime was overthrown through a *coup d'etat* on 31 December 1983, the country was on the verge of total collapse. This coup, which brought Major-Generals Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon into power, did not come as a surprise to many people because of the tension that followed the 1983 elections and the return of Shagari administration for a second term of office on 1 October 1983. Violence and loss of lives and property had characterized the elections. During the campaigns, violence graduated from verbal attacks on individuals to the formation and equipping of armed groups of thugs. These thugs were initially used to frighten, beat up or murder political opponents, but during the elections, they were used to frighten away voters from areas seen as stronghold of opponents and to change real ballot boxes with fake ones (Ayeni and Soremekun, 1988: 41). Not surprisingly, the results of the election generated much controversies, outcries, and litigation, which resulted in another round of violence, and the return of the military to the leadership of the country.

### 3.4.2 The Buhari/Idiagbon regime (31 December 1983-27 August 1985)

Thus, the state the Buhari/Idiagbon regime took over was “characterized by moral decadence, economic paralysis and political decay” (Adamolekun, 1985: 75). The regime’s initial acts of punishing corrupt politicians and officials of the Second Republic and the elimination of wasteful spending were met with great approval from the masses. In an effort to deal with the problems of ‘indiscipline’ in all spheres of the life of Nigerians, the regime launched a War Against Indiscipline (WAI) campaign.<sup>31</sup> Ostensibly, WAI sought principally to instill in the minds of Nigerians the ideals of national consciousness, and a sense of nationhood and discipline. The campaign, which had the net effect of seeking to militarize Nigeria, did not go down well with the populace.

Not surprisingly, disenchantment soon replaced the initial rapturous welcome the regime received from many Nigerians. This was largely due to the regime’s seemed highhandedness of the society, and its violation of fundamental human rights. The regime handed down draconian decrees, imprisoned a lot of people, and repressed civil society in an unprecedented manner (Dike, 1990; Ekwe-Ekwe, 1985; Olukoshi and Abdulraheem, 1985). The government promulgated a series of decrees, such as Decree No. 2 of 1984, which facilitated detentions without trials of up to six months for ‘acts prejudicial to state security’. The Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusations) Decree No. 4 was also introduced to restrain the press from publishing disagreeable information. Two journalists with *The Guardian*, Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor were convicted and jailed under this decree. The Special Tribunal (Miscellaneous Offences) Decree No. 20 provided for the execution of cocaine dealers and carriers. Horsewhip carrying soldiers were a regular feature of the

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<sup>31</sup> The five phases of WAI and the dates of their launch are: Queuing culture (March 20, 1984); Work Ethics (May 1, 1984); Nationalism and Patriotism (August 21, 1984); Anti-Corruption and Economic Sabotage (May 14, 1985); and Environmental Sanitation (July 29, 1985).

country, as people were whipped on the streets for violations of aspects of the WAI program. The duo of Buhari and Idiagbon were, thus, perceived as arrogant and disdainful of public opinion.

The economy of the country continued to deteriorate, and it seemed the government could not find any solution to the problems (see chapter 4). In an attempt to salvage the situation, the regime imposed fiscal discipline and curtailed government spending by retrenchment and imposition of fees on health and education. But the continuing fall in oil prices led to further accumulation of debts, and a further deterioration of the economy. The regime introduced a package of austerity measures, leading to mass unemployment, high inflation and acute food shortage.<sup>32</sup> It was against this background that General Ibrahim Babangida overthrew the Buhari regime on 27 August 1985.

### **3.5 The Quest for Hegemony: The Colonial and Post-Colonial Nigerian State and Civil Society (1914-1985)**

Gramsci's conception of hegemony whereby subordinate classes accept their subordination based on certain compromise equilibrium did not exist in the relationship between the Nigerian State and civil society. To Gramsci, apart from the ability of a dominant class to impose itself on other classes by the use of the coercive instruments of the state, it could also do so without the use of force by manipulating the society's moral and intellectual leadership (Carnoy, 1984: 70-71). In this regard, civil society "encompasses the educational, religious, social and cultural institutions through which the dominant class 'releases' into the social formation ideas and beliefs which in actuality reflect and encompass its interests but are presented as the interests of the society at large" (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985: 238). It is this form of

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<sup>32</sup> The structural adjustment programs undertaken by the various regimes are discussed in chapter 4.

imposition based on consent and devoid of force that constitutes hegemony.

According to Williams (1960: 587), hegemony refers to an

order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society, in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all tastes, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations.

In other words, when a hegemonic order is in place in a social formation, the hegemonic class establishes and maintains its supremacy over other social classes through “consent” and not by coercion.

The Nigerian State has faced a crisis of hegemony since inception. The seeming control the state enjoyed was not based on voluntary consent. In the construction of the colonial state, hegemony was established by colonial conquest, supported by a network of collaborating intermediaries. The colonial state had to fashion for itself a great administrative and coercive power as a necessity for subjugating locally dominant classes (Leys, 1976). The colonial state was supreme and it controlled the use of force. It was successful in subjugating the people and in the imposition of the interests of the British ruling class. But this hegemony was contested through the various anti-colonial struggles that characterized the colonial period.

The post-colonial state under the two civilian regimes was faced with a greater crisis of hegemony, and had to resort to the use of force to keep the society in order. While the colonial state was able to maintain its hegemony through its asserted role as benevolent protector and disinterested arbiter for the Nigerian people, the post-colonial state could not achieve it due to the plurality of the nation and its patronage networks. The state apparatus was used to further the interests of the dominant groups while the majority was excluded from governance. This has aggravated the intensity of the struggle for the control of the post-colonial state, as no single class has

been able to establish effectively its economic, political, and ideological hegemony over other classes. To consolidate their rule, therefore, the ruling classes of the post-colonial state needed to suppress strong pressures from other fractions of the society. They continuously depoliticized the opposition. This entailed:

Reducing the effective participation of the masses and of non-hegemonic factions of the ruling class, and preventing some interests and points of views from finding political expression. The point of reducing the effective participation of the masses is to render them impotent... and to render the masses less available for socialization into radical political or oppositional behavior by non-hegemonic fractions of the ruling class (Ake, 1978: 78).

Since it is most unlikely that hegemony will go unchallenged, the state thus became delinked and alienated from the society, impeding mobilization for socio-economic development. The post-colonial state was also faced with hegemonic crisis due to ethnic strife, insensitivity to the feelings of the people, and gross mismanagement of the country's resources that characterized its activities. The state became in effect a 'totalizing' state, usurping and monopolizing social and political space, and attempting to snuff civil society out of this space. In its search for hegemony, the ruling class used political office and material reward to build for itself a coalition of supporters.

The military regimes on their part could only sustain their legitimacy and hegemony through coercion. The military has not been able to prove itself to be better than the civilian regimes they overthrew in terms of corruption and effectiveness. On taking over power, the military used all within its power, including the use of brutal force, to contain and suppress possible opposition. For example, the Agbekoya Farmers' revolt of 1968/9 against high taxes was suppressed violently, and unarmed students were shot at and killed in various higher institutions of learning during demonstrations over huge increases in fees. Consequently, a counter-hegemonic force is usually formed as a result of the coming together and articulation of several organizations within civil society to jointly resist military rule. The military, on its part, tried to

ensure a passive civil society by direct involvement in the activities of the most vocal and articulate segments of civil society, and also by the use of force.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The problem of the Nigerian State started from inception. Colonialism lumped together people from diverse cultures, many whom did not share similar attitudes, values, and aspirations. The structure put in place by the colonial masters for the post-independence leaders was such that it did not take into consideration these differences. The post-colonial power holders, intent on protecting and consolidating their grip on power, did little to (or could not) redress the structural problems facing the country. Consequently, the Nigerian political order has been ravaged severely by conflicts and competing claims between cultural groups seeking survival or hegemony. Although underdeveloped, civil society has remained an important buffer between the post-colonial state and the Nigerian people, serving not only to prevent the development and entrenchment of state hegemony but also to encourage the full flowering of its forces as a bulwark against state impunity and tyranny.

However, civil society itself has been full of contradictions. It has suffered largely due to the role played by the individual regimes to breed disaffection among civil society organizations and also by the internal rancor that has characterized the relationships among civil society organizations themselves. During the colonial period, civil society was able to coordinate its members to see to the end of colonial rule. However, in the post-colonial era, apart from the occasional strikes and demonstrations, usually by the student and labor bodies that seemed national in outlook, civil society was not able to hold a common front and to establish itself as a counter-hegemonic force against the continual suppression by the Nigerian state. Many civil society organizations were co-opted into the state system, and any visible opposition was contained or smashed.



Nonetheless, civil society has proved, both in the colonial and post-colonial periods, its capability to resist and stand up to even the most authoritarian regimes. As chapter four demonstrates, civil society is best able to carry out its role of buffer between the state and the people through the formation of coalition and joint actions. By so doing, civil society organizations were able to mobilize the populace against military hegemony.

## Chapter 4

### Season of Revolt: Civil Society and Opposition Politics in Nigeria (1985-1999)

*“I, therefore, call on all our people who have yearned and worked for a speedy return of our beloved country to civilian democracy to reject any act by anybody which takes away their inalienable and fundamental human right to decide who governs them” – M.K O.*

Abiola, the presumed winner of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, in a speech titled: “I have the People’s Mandate” (*Sunday Sketch*, 27 June 1993: 10).

#### 4. 1 Introduction

Since the creation of the Nigerian state about a century ago, the period between 1985 and 1999 has been the most turbulent for civil society in that country. Three military governments -- the Ibrahim Babangida regime (1985-1993), the Sani Abacha regime (1993-1998), and the Abdusalam Abubakar transitional regime (1998-1999) – ruled Nigeria during that period. Two of those -- Babangida’s and Abacha’s – are widely regarded as the most autocratic post-colonial regimes Nigeria has ever had. (It should be noted that the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election by General Babangida led to the institution of an interim government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan that lasted for only two months -- September - November 1993.)

Between 1985 and 1999, there was a proliferation of civil society organizations as a result of the presumed autocracy of the military regimes during this period. Many of the organizations were constantly at loggerheads with the state over various issues of rights, liberties, and good governance. They sought to mobilize the populace not only against military rule but also against specific policies and measures such as the increases in fuel prices and the imposition of structural adjustment programs. The military, on its part, employed different strategies to restrain and to ensure a passive

civil society. To this end, members of civil society were routinely arrested, harassed, and intimidated by state agents.

This chapter examines the role of civil society in the struggle against military rule between 1985 and 1999. An attempt is made to examine the main players in the opposition, who and what they represent, their programs and methods of mobilization, and the usefulness and impacts of their tactics and strategies. Specifically, this chapter has three main but closely related objectives. Firstly, it will analyze the activities and aspirations of the military regimes between 1985 and 1999. Secondly, it seeks to examine the sections that made up civil society of this period, with an eye on understanding the nature and roles played by civil society organizations in the struggle against military rule. Specifically, much attention would focus on the reactions of civil society to the policies, programs, and the activities of the military during this period. Thirdly, the chapter will analyze critically the relationship between the state and civil society during this period.

#### **4.2 The Ibrahim Babangida Regime (1985-1993)**

On 27 August 1985, Major-General Ibrahim Babangida, the country's Chief of Army Staff overthrew the Buhari/Idiagbon regime. In contrast to the title of Head of State that had been used by previous military rulers in Nigeria, Major-General Babangida took up the title of President, making him the first military President of Nigeria. The new president warmed himself into the hearts of Nigerians. Whereas Nigerians perceived Buhari and Idiagbon (most especially Idiagbon) as being stern and insensitive, Babangida faced the people with a broad smile.

President Babangida justified the take-over by accusing the Buhari/Idiagbon regime of assorted transgressions: misuse of power; gross violations of human rights by key officers of the regime; failure to find a solution to the country's deepening economic

crisis; failure to return the country to civil rule; and high-handedness by the National Security Organization (NSO).

On assuming power, Babangida presented himself as a champion of human rights. In his first broadcast to the nation on 25 August 1985, he declared:

We must never allow ourselves to lose our sense of natural justice. The innocent cannot suffer the crimes of the guilty. The guilty should be punished as a lesson for the future...this government's intention is to uphold fundamental human rights...we do not intend to lead a country where individuals are under the fear of expressing themselves...the responsibility of the media to disseminate information shall be exercised without undue hindrance...the issue of decrees has generated a lot of controversies. It is the intention of this government to review all other decrees (Babangida, n.d.: 23).

As a way of legitimizing the regime, Babangida abrogated the controversial Public Officers (Protection Against False accusation) Decree 4 of 1984, exposed the NSO as an agency that had been used to brutalize Nigerians and promised to reorganize it, and released most of the politicians that were incarcerated without trial by Buhari (Peters, 1997: 201). He also reinstated the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD), and the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), which were proscribed by the Buhari/Idiagbon regime.

In a bid to enhance ministerial and bureaucratic performance and contain dissension, Babangida assembled a team of technocrats and professionals in his cabinet, and as advisors and directors of special programs and commissions (Jega, 1997:556). The selection was largely made up of distinguished members of the vocal opposition of the Buhari/Idiagbon regime.<sup>33</sup> As a means of further endearing itself to the public, the regime announced a strong commitment to return the country to civil rule as soon as possible. It also announced its commitment not only to the protection of human rights

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<sup>33</sup> These included Wole Soyinka, Ada Ugeh, Emeka Enejere, Goodwill Ogbogodor, Eme Ekekwe, Jerry Gana, Jonathan Zwingina, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Ikenna Nzimiro, Tai Solarin, Beko Ransome-Kuti, and G.G. Darah (Ihonvbere, 1991: 64).

but also the rule of law. At the early stage of the regime, it incorporated the process of public debates on national issues. There were public debates on whether Nigeria should accept the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan and its conditionalities, the new form of civilian government for the country, and the shape of Nigeria's foreign policy (Peters, 1997: 201).

Babangida's populist posture and apparent pandering helped the regime to gain significant support from civil society. The IMF debate served as a platform for civil society organizations to air their views and opinions about the structural reform program and to galvanize the general public in support of their particular views. Although the outcome of the debate indicated that Nigerians did not want the government to take the loan, the slyness of the regime was soon revealed when it simultaneously rejected the IMF loan while also letting the IMF in through the back door. Rather than the IMF program, the regime now offered its own "home-grown" program of economic reform. In addressing the nation on the outcome of the debate, President Babangida said:

After due consideration of all the opinions expressed by Nigerians...government has come to the conclusion that for now, the path of honor...lies in discontinuing the negotiations with the IMF for a support loan. We have therefore decided to face the challenge of restructuring our economy, not through an IMF loan, but a determination of our own people to make all the sacrifices necessary to put the economy on the path to sustained growth; doing so at our own pace and on our own volition (quoted in Olagunju, Jinadu, and Oyovbaire, 1993: 83, emphasis added).

Explaining the rationale behind the decision taken by the government, Victor Odozie, a deputy governor of the Central Bank, pointed out that the government had three options open to it in its effort to find a lasting solution to the country's economic problems. These options were: to continue the austerity measures introduced by the Buhari/Idiagbon regime without structural adjustment reforms; accept IMF structural adjustment facility including its conditionalities; or reject the IMF loan proposal but

adopt a modified variant of the traditional structural adjustment package, designed and implemented by Nigerians (Obadan, 1993: 17).

Ostensibly, the first option of maintaining the status quo was rejected since the new regime wanted to break away from the legacy of its predecessor. The second option was rejected as a result of the overwhelming negative view of most Nigerians who participated in the public debate initiated by the government. The only option left was the adoption of a modified structural adjustment program designed by Nigerians. The government thus embarked on a program of structural adjustment aimed at turning around the economic situation of Nigeria. The implementation of this program not only decimated a major proportion of the middle class but also brought significant hardship to much of the underclass. Not surprisingly, it also stirred a massive opposition from various quarters of civil society.

#### \* 4.2.1 Economic Stabilization and Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in Nigeria: The Position of Civil Society

The implementation of the 'home-grown' structural adjustment program by the Babangida regime did little to make life easier for the Nigerian masses. Many of the aspects of the SAP policies encountered general resistance from the Nigerian populace, most especially from within civil society. Before delving into the mode and direction of SAP under the Babangida regime, there is the need to take a brief look at the history of economic stabilization policies in Nigeria up till that point.

The Nigerian economy experienced a severe downturn in the early 1980s under the Shagari government (1979-1983).<sup>34</sup> The country had previously experienced a massive oil boom in the 1970s, which brought about a petrol-dollar windfall.

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<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of the origin of the Nigerian economic crisis, see Onoh, 1985; Usman and Bangura, 1984; Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985.

Revenues from oil exports rose from N4 733 billion in 1975 to N15 234 billion in 1980 (Olukoshi, 1995a: 138). The oil boom had both positive and negative effects.

**Table 1: Nigerian Import Profile (N Million)**

	1974	1975	1976	1977
Consumer Goods:				
1. Non-durable				
a) Food	166.4	353.7	526.7	912.6
b) Textile	31.5	81.3	65.0	38.9
c) Others	173.6	353.5	476.7	612.1
2. Durable	65.8	191.3	282.0	421.7
Sub-total	437.3	979.8	1,350.4	1,985.3
Passenger Car	97.0	220.3	261.0	297.4
Capital Goods:				
Capital Equipment	490.1	1,136.6	1,515.0	2,129.8
Transport Equipment	124.9	371.1	729.6	1,012.5
Raw material	519.3	903.0	1,094.0	1,543.0
Fuel	55.4	100.2	175.0	128.6
Sub-total	1,289.7	2,731.2	3,774.6	5,111.3
Grand total	1,727.0	3,711.0	5,125.0	7,096.6
	1978	1979	1980	1981
Consumer Goods:				
1. Non-durable				
a) Food	1,004.1	1,040.1	1,416.8	2,198.3
b) Textile	41.9	73.2	92.4	202.6
c) Others	720.5	705.8	567.4	822.0
2. Durable	370.2	380.7	473.7	674.1
Sub-total	2,136.7	2,199.8	2,550.3	3,897.0
Passenger Car	350.1	1 69.7	206.1	1,316.9
Capital Goods:				
Capital Equipment	2,529.8	1,576.0	2,228.0	2,661.3
Transport Equipment	1,233.8	988.7	1,770.2	1,818.7
Raw material	1,880.1	1,115.7	2,166.9	3,038.5
Fuel	156.7	116.4	173.4	187.2
Sub-total	6,150.5	3,966.5	6,545.3	9,022.6
Grand total	8,287.2	6,106.3	9,095.6	12,923.6

Source: *National Economic Council Expert Committee Report, The State of the Nigerian Economy, 1993.*

While it boosted the country's economy by generating a huge profit through the exportation of oil, it also enabled the political leadership to neglect agriculture, which was one of the main sources of Nigeria's income before the 1970s. The net effect of the neglect was that many food items that were produced in the country before the oil boom were now being imported. For example, the import bill for food rose from N166.4 million in 1974, a mere one-year after the increases, to N353.7 million – a more than 100% increase. In 1981, the food bill had risen to a staggering N2, 198.3 – a more than 1,300% increase. Such increases and reliance on imports were also reflected in some other key sectors of the Nigerian economy (see Table 1). In other words, though oil exports led to a considerable expansion of the country's economy, it also resulted in the reduction of the country's self-reliance on local goods and services.

However, with the collapse of the world oil market in the early 1980s, which led to a decrease in the demand for crude oil, the Nigerian economy entered a period of rapid decline.<sup>35</sup> This was further aggravated by the frittering away of the huge resources made from the oil boom by corruption, misplaced priorities, and failed policies under President Shagari. Beginning in 1981, large fiscal shortfalls, accumulating trade deficits, and falling external reserves<sup>36</sup> generated growing pressures on Nigeria's balance of payments. The government thus resolved to implement austerity measures in the budget of 1982. The government increased custom duties, reviewed the Basic Travel Allowances (BTA), and increased import duties on various items from food to spare parts. The government financed its external and fiscal imbalances by incurring

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<sup>35</sup> With the collapse of the oil market, oil production declined from 2.09 million barrels per day (bpd) in January 1981 to 1.86 million bpd in March, 1.16 million bpd in May, 0.64 million bpd in August 1981, and down to 500,000 bpd in early 1982 (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985: 116). Government revenue from oil thus fell from N12.4 billion in 1980 to an estimated N8.6 billion in 1981, and only N6.7 billion in 1982 (*National Concord*, 9 December 1983).

<sup>36</sup> External reserves, which were \$10 billion in January 1981 declined to \$1.7 billion by March 1982, fell to about N844.9 million in July 1983 (Central Bank of Nigeria, *Statement of Assets and Liabilities for August 1983*).



debt, depleting international reserves, and going into arrears in external payments (Faruquee, 1994: 241). However, by 1983, the economy of the country was in great distress. All the nineteen state governments incurred heavy external debts, totaling about \$8 billion by March 1983 (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1995: 113).

By the time austerity measures were introduced, Nigeria had fallen behind in its short-term debt repayments, with its trade arrears increasing. Also, the extravagant lifestyles of government officials and the mismanagement of the country's resources did not match the belt-tightening measure that the government imposed. The recklessness of the officials was considered shocking by some observers:

Displays of wealth that were stupidly insensitive to the economic realities of recession, scarcity and suffering. Nairas were sprayed around at social functions and donated to political causes by ministers and legislators in amounts that exceeded and often dwarfed their legitimate annual income. Draped in gold and magnificent dress, they assumed the bearing of aristocracy, and became considerably more distant from the people (*West Africa*, 23-30 October 1985: 2677).<sup>37</sup>

All arms of government were involved in the spending spree. According to Falola and Ihonvbere (1985: 108-109), the governors and the president obtained large sums of money as security votes. The president alone obtained a contingency vote of N150 million annually except in 1983 when he obtained N300 million for reasons best known to him and his associates. Legislators, outside of receiving enormous salaries and fringe benefits, spent a lot of the nation's money buying flashy cars, furniture, and taking holidays overseas.

As a means of solving the country's economic problems, the Shagari government approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1983 for a loan to cover

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<sup>37</sup> See also a *Newswatch* cover story titled "The Lawbreakers" (*Newswatch*, July 1985).

balance of payments shortfalls.<sup>38</sup> The IMF tied the loan to certain conditions, which included:

Reduction in government expenditure and the budget deficit, introduction of stricter budgetary discipline, review of on-going projects, reduction of subsidies to parastatals, restructuring of parastatals with commercial potentials to make them more profit oriented, stoppage of grants to state government, rationalization of custom tariffs, an increase in interest rates and reduction of monetary expansion, phased removal of fertilizer subsidies, a review of industrial incentives and policy, and export drive to broaden the export base, an upward adjustment of producer prices for agricultural commodities, strict external debt control, management and improvement in the efficiency of the revenue collection agencies, devaluation of the naira, trade liberalization, and a removal of petroleum subsidies (*West Africa*, 26 October 1984).

The argument of the IMF in support of these conditions was that the economic problems characteristic of many African countries were basically a result of domestic policy shortcomings, and not really from the state of the world economy nor the economic structures inherited at independence. It is believed that if African governments improve on their domestic policies, they would be able to overcome short-term imbalance, and improve their economic bases. The Shagari government did not agree in totality with the IMF conditions. There was a stall in the negotiations as a result of the government's refusal to agree to three critical IMF's conditions. These were, devaluation of the naira, trade liberalization, and a removal of petrol subsidies (Biersteker, 1993: 80). The argument of the government was based on the premises that devaluation would not solve Nigeria's problems, and also that implementing these three conditions would bring untold hardship on the people. As a result of government's unwillingness to devalue the naira, creditors refused to either roll over short-term debts, or provide fresh capital.

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<sup>38</sup> Apart from a N2.5 billion loan the federal government requested from the IMF, it also signed a N1.5 billion loan agreement with a consortium of 25 European, American, and Middle East banks in July 1983, and it was also reported in November that the United State granted it credit loans totaling \$180 million (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985: 113).

The masses bore the full brunt of the economic problems that ravaged the country under the Shagari government, particularly in 1983. There were reports in newspapers of the great hunger and starvation, unemployment, inflation, and general hardship the people experienced during this period.<sup>39</sup>

The Buhari/Idiagbon regime that overthrew the Shagari government inherited the country's economic problems and was faced with a daunting task of finding a solution fast. The regime responded to this by launching a radical and deflationary stabilization program of austerity measures designed not only to raise additional foreign exchange earnings but also to reduce the huge negative balance of payments created by the Shagari government.<sup>40</sup> The regime introduced tight fiscal and monetary policies, drastically reduced public expenditures, increased interest rates, introduced new taxes, and also increased the cost of many social services, including the introduction of user fees in hospitals, increases in tuition and boarding fees in secondary schools, and also increases in the charges for water and electricity consumption. The regime also began loan negotiation with the IMF but the negotiation stalled again because the regime was not prepared to accept the conditionalities of IMF. The government did not want to devalue the naira, nor was it ready to remove subsidy on petroleum products and to relax export controls on the grounds that such measures would be detrimental to the already ailing economy (*New Nigeria*, 4 April 1984: 16).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See *The Guardian*, 24 December and 29 December 1983; *Sunday Sketch*, 25 December 1983; *Concord*, 21 December and 25 December 1983.

<sup>40</sup> The Shagari regime was believed to have left a total external debt of N17.7 billion (Okolie, 1995: 202).

<sup>41</sup> Earlier in March 1984, labor leaders had warned the government that the IMF conditionalities will only lead to higher prices of many consumer goods and services such as food items, gasoline, electricity, and transport, as well as the closing of more factories, and greater foreign domination of the economy (*Daily Times*, 2 March 1984: 4-5).

As a result, the regime opted to continue with its stabilization measures without assistance from foreign bodies. It introduced foreign exchange control regulations, and other measures aimed at reducing inflation, increased oil production levels by exceeding its OPEC production quota, thereby improving external balance of payments, and reducing the accumulation of the nation's debts. Some other measures implemented by the regime included reduction in salaries and wages, and freezing of appointments and promotions in the public service (Osaghae, 1998: 176). As might be expected, these measures imposed tremendous hardships on most segments of the Nigerian population and classes. Foreign exchange restrictions resulted in a drastic reduction in the supply of raw material and spare parts, forcing several industrial plants to shut down or reduce production, leading to massive lay-offs of industrial workers. Thousands of civil servants were retrenched<sup>42</sup> (see Table 2); workers salaries were unpaid for months; parents were unable to provide for their families, leading to an increase in crime rate.

**Table 2: Some Of The Workers Retrenched By The State Governments Agencies Between 1 January And 30 September 1984.**

State/Government Agency	Number of workers sacked
Bendel State	21,000
Kwara State	7,000
Benue State	6,850
Anambra State	4,177
Bauchi State	4,133
Sokoto State	2,545
National Assembly	2,100
Niger State	2,144
Ogun State	900
Federal Ministry of Finance	369
Nigerian Telecommunication	184

Source: Anunobi, 1992: 231.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, in Plateau State, people employed between December 1981 and December 1983 were laid off, while those aged 50 and above were compulsorily retired (*Daily Times*, 21 March 1984).

#### 4.2.2 Babangida's SAP<sup>43</sup>

By the time Babangida took over power, it had become obvious that the economic measures adopted by the Buhari/Idiagbon regime were not adequate to deal with the economic crisis facing the country. Babangida condemned the approach used by the Buhari/Idiagbon regime and described it as "austerity without adjustment" (West Africa, 2 September 1985). The introduction of the 'home-grown' (meaning virtually all the IMF SAP conditions would be implemented without necessarily taking the IMF loan) and 'short-lived' Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) was expected to provide a sweeping reversal of the economic situation of the country. Thus, on 1 October 1985, the president declared a 15-month state of national economic emergency. According to him, this was to:

Serve probably three main primary (sic) objectives. First, it will afford us time to be able to have a good stocktaking of the problems as far as the economy is concerned. Secondly, it will also give us time to plan on the economy; and thirdly, to reflect on the last development plans of this country (*Daily Times*, 24 December 1985: 5).

In July 1986, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) was implemented. The objectives were manifold: to help restructure and diversify the productive base of the economy in order to reduce dependence on the oil sector and on import; to achieve fiscal and balance of payments viability over the medium term; to lay a foundation for a sustainable non-inflationary growth; and to lessen the dominance of unproductive investment in the public sector and, also to improve the sector's efficiency and intensify the growth potential of the private sector (Okongwu, 1987: 6). The features of SAP included:

- Strengthening of the hitherto strong and relevant demand management policies;
- Adoption of measures to stimulate domestic production and broaden the supply base of the economy;

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<sup>43</sup> For a comprehensive assessment of SAP under Babangida, see Agbaje (1992), Olukoshi (1991, 1993, 1995), Mkandawire and Olukoshi (1995), Adejumobi and Momoh (1995), Mustapha (1992), Faruqee (1994).

- The setting up of a Second-Tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM) as a mechanism for the achievement of realistic exchange rate and consequently, the alteration of relative prices to enhance efficiency in resource allocation, and to promote domestic-based production and non-oil exports;
- Further rationalization and restructuring of tariffs in order to aid industrial diversification;
- Trade and payment liberalization – dismantling of prices, trade and exchange controls;
- Adoption of appropriate pricing policies, especially for petroleum products and public enterprises;
- Rationalization and privatization of public enterprises; and
- Overhauling of the public sector and administrative sector (Obadan, 1993: 20).

As such, though the Babangida government accepted the public's objection to taking the IMF loan, some form of accommodation of the institution's demands had to be met for Nigeria to reschedule its debt with the Paris and London Clubs. The regime thus eventually succumbed to pressures from the creditors, and had to implement most of the conditions laid down by the Bretton Woods institutions, including the three thorny issues (namely: devaluation of the naira, trade liberalization, and removal of petrol subsidies) that had blocked previous attempts to reach agreement with the IMF. With the introduction of SFEM, the import licensing system was effectively abolished, and the large depreciation of the real exchange rate substantially reduced the black market premium on the naira. These changes were considered important steps towards a more open trade regime.

The government also embarked on the liberalization of the country's financial sector in 1986. After opening financial services to new entrants, the government eased restrictions on interest rates, bank ownership, foreign exchange, and capital movements (Lewis and Stein, 1997: 5). For example, interest rates on loans went up

from a minimum of 8% in 1985 to 25% in 1992, and further to 31% in 1993, while the maximum rate rose from 13% in 1985 to 31% in 1993, and to 58% in 1993. This resulted in an explosion and proliferation of financial services and outlets such as banks, finance houses, mortgage banks, community banks and *bureau de change* (See Table 3). Top government officials and many retired and serving military officers floated some of the new financial institutions.<sup>44</sup> Although the new institutions used various tactics to entice customers, some of them collapsed within two years due to improper management, resulting in financial losses for many of those customers.

**Table 3: Changes In The Financial System (1985-1993).**

S/N	ITEM	DEC.1985	DEC.1992	DEC.1993
1.	Number of Commercial Banks in Nigeria	28	66	66
2.	Number of Commercial Bank Branches in Nigeria	1,297	2,275	2,280
3.	Number of Merchant Banks in Nigeria	12	54	55
4.	Number of Merchant Bank Branches in Nigeria	26	116	120
5.	Number of Central Bank Branches excluding CBN Head Office in Lagos and Abuja	19	27	27
6.	Number of Mortgage Banks	1	146	148
7.	Number of Mortgage Bank Branches	5	156	177
8.	Number of Community Banks	Nil	401	490
9.	Branches of Peoples Bank of Nigeria excluding Head Office	Nil	226	252
10.	Number of Bureau de Change	Nil	132	138
11.	Number of Finance Houses in Nigeria	Nil	618	644
12.	Number of Stock Brokerage Firms in Nigeria	19	140	155
13.	Banks Annual Interest Rates:			
	Minimum	8%	25%	31%
	Maximum	13%	31%	58%

**Source:** Adapted from: Sam Aluko "Democracy and Economy". A keynote address at the Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife. February 28, 1994. pg.3.

<sup>44</sup> A list of these new financial institutions and their owners was published in *The News*, 24 January 1994, p.33.

One of the arguments of the IMF was that the nation's currency was overvalued and that this was largely responsible for the economic distortion that the country was experiencing. The institution called for a devaluation of the currency in order to allow the naira to float and achieve a more realistic exchange rate in the international market. The Babangida regime therefore established a floating exchange rate mechanism tied to market-determined forces. The exchange rate system was introduced in two phases, and consisted of two tiers. The first tier was an officially administered rate used to temporarily handle debt servicing and official businesses with international organizations at the prevailing nominal exchange rate of the naira to the dollar. The second-tier rate – the Second-tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM) – applied to all other market transactions, and was determined by weekly auction under the aegis of the central bank and funded by oil revenue (Faruqee, 1994: 255; Olukoshi, 1995a: 148-149). The devaluation of the nation's currency was aimed at curbing the demand for imports, encouraging non-oil export and inflow of foreign capital, the elimination of the distortions resulting from the import licensing system, and more importantly, to provide a realistic exchange rate for the naira (Sanusi, 1988: 36).

With the implementation of the second-tier foreign exchange (SFEM) system in September 1986, the naira was devalued by 66 percent, but by December 1986, the value of the Naira had stabilized at between N3 and N3.5 to the dollar, yielding an effective devaluation of 57 percent (Biersteker and Lewis, 1997: 342). The two-tiers of exchange rates were however unified in July 1987 in an enlarged Foreign Exchange Market (FEM) so as to reinforce the market determination of the exchange rate. However, between 1987 and 1990, the value of the naira fell from an average of N4.03 in 1987, N4.52 in 1988, N7.36 in 1989, to about N9.0 in 1990 (Fadahunsi: 1992). According to the World Bank, "from 1988 to 1992, the quarterly average of



the naira exchange rate per U.S. dollar depreciated by 27 percent, 58 percent, 61 percent, 67 percent, and 83 percent over the 1987 base period” (Faruqee, 1994: 256).

As part of its SAP activities, the Babangida regime also liberalized trade, which entailed not only the removal of tariff barriers to imported goods but also the removal of restrictions against foreign investments. Liberalization of trade has been justified on a number of grounds. For instance, the World Bank’s rationale for liberalization rests on three principles; (a) an ideological attachment to open market; (b) the inefficiencies which arise from protected markets and protected producers; and (c) the discouragement of rent-seeking and opportunities for corruption which arise from import and foreign exchange licensing system (Browne, 1992: 80). Before the introduction of SAP, trade policy was made up of quantitative import controls imposed by comprehensive licensing systems, and prohibitions. During SAP, import licensing was abolished, and the list of banned goods was reduced from 74 to 16 (UNIDO, 1988:60).

The Babangida regime wholeheartedly embraced the policy of privatization and commercialization (Newswatch, 13 April 1987: 33). The government defined privatization as the “relinquishment of part or all of the equity and other interests held by the [federal government] or its agency in enterprises whether wholly or partly owned by the [federal government]” (Official Gazette, 1988: A673). In other words, privatization involved the outright sale of government shares to the public, while commercialization entailed the operation of some government enterprises for the purpose of generating profit. These enterprises were still owned by government, but were expected to be weaned of government subsidies and were expected to operate on a profitable basis. Therefore, government saw the need to privatize because it was getting little returns from the huge investment in public enterprises.

Also, according to privatization advocates, government-owned companies were being run by incompetent people who weakened the capacity of the companies to serve national interest, thereby creating unnecessary societal waste (Oghene-Omoru, 1987: 20-23). The advocates of privatization, on the one hand, believed that it will lead to eradication of corruption, promotion of rapid economic development, as well as the elimination or reduction of waste (Agbese, 1992: 343). On the other hand, the opponents of privatization argued that it would only sharpen the divide between the rich and the poor. For instance, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) contended that, “privatization will give the capitalist class more economic sinews to cheat, exploit, and oppress the popular classes” (*New Horizon*, June 1986: 15).<sup>45</sup>

To facilitate the goal of privatization and commercialization, the government set up the Technical Committee on Privatization and Commercialization (TCPC), through Decree No.25 of 1988. The decree empowered the Committee to handle the process required for the issue and sale of shares in enterprises to be privatized and make all the necessary arrangements for the others that were to be commercialized. The privatization decree classified government enterprises into four categories. The first category comprised those in which state equity interests were to be fully privatized. Those in this category included hotels and agro-allied industries. The second category comprised those in which state equity interests were to be partially privatized. This included oil companies, steel rolling mills, banks, and fertilizer companies. The third category of which state equity were to be partially commercialized included Nigerian Railway Corporation, National Electric Power Authority, and Federal Radio and Television Stations. The fourth category, which was slated for full commercialization, included the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Nigerian Telecommunication Limited, and the Nigerian Ports Authority.

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<sup>45</sup> Others like Ibrahim Ayagi, a Nigerian banker (*Newswatch*, 28 November 1988), Eme Awa, former chairman of the National Electoral Commission (*Newswatch*, 8 August, 1988) also criticized privatization on the ground that it will only serve the interest of wealthy Nigerians.

The TCPC devised three methods to carry out the privatization exercise.<sup>46</sup> First, government-owned equities in the enterprises scheduled for privatization were offered to the public through the Nigerian Stock Exchange. Second was the private sale of the shares to ‘institutional investors, core groups with demonstrated management/technical skill’, and employees of the particular enterprise being privatized. Thirdly, an enterprise deemed not saleable by either of these methods was stripped of its assets and the assets were then sold either privately or by public offer.

#### **4.2.3 Responses and Reactions of Civil Society to Babangida’s SAP<sup>47</sup>**

The consultative approach of the Babangida regime on assuming power gave Nigerians hope that the regime, unlike the Buhari/Idiagbon regime, was going to be guided by, and responsive to, public opinion. The decision of the government to refuse the IMF loan as a result of public opinion seemed to demonstrate the sincerity of the regime. However, the “home-grown” structural adjustment introduced by the government in place of the IMF loan proved to be a burden too great for the people to bear. The general expectation among the populace was that the hardship resultant from the introduction of SAP was temporary, with the hope that the economy would bounce back, and Nigerians would be able to live in prosperity after that.

Contrary to those hopeful expectations, the hardship became even more unbearable, arousing opposition from civil society against the stringent economic programs imposed by the government. There was massive retrenchment of workers, rise in

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<sup>46</sup> Technical Committee on Privatization and Commercialization (1990). *Second Annual Report and Audited Accounts, 1989/1990*. Lagos: TCPC. p 12.

<sup>47</sup> The activities and responses of some civil society organizations would be examined in greater details in the next chapter.

unemployment, soaring of crime rate, and drug trafficking<sup>48</sup> (Ihonvbere, 1994). As a result of rising cost of spare parts, many transport vehicles were forced off the roads, while many private car owners were forced to turn their cars into taxicabs in order to make ends meet. Such was the devastating effect of SAP that Nigeria was ranked the thirteenth poorest country in the world in the 1991 World Bank Report. Describing the plight of the masses at the end of 1991, *The African Guardian* wrote:

For the citizens, the chaotic mass transport system appears to be worsening each day, despite guzzling more funds. Food, man's basic need, also appears to be getting more expensive. So are many other items such as housing, health care and even education. Income and cost of living of workers continue to go in opposite direction. Real income had declined sharply, while cost of living had risen astronomically....The exchange value of the naira has so diminished, that economic operators are beginning to wonder, whether devaluation will justify the trouble. Only about 65 kobo<sup>49</sup> exchanged for \$1 in the early 1980s, it declined to roughly N11.96 to \$1 in June this year (*The African Guardian*, 2 December 1991: 28-29).

Many segments of civil society were opposed to varying aspects of SAP. For instance, the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN)'s opposition was centered on the cost implications of the drastic devaluation of the naira, which was affecting production, most especially because a majority of the industries in Nigeria relied heavily on the importation of raw materials. Furthermore, devaluation reduced the ability of much of the populace to purchase the goods being produced. In turn, this helped to worsen not only the liquidity problems caused by credit squeeze introduced by the Central Bank but also the competitive difficulties, which MAN associated with the negative effect of trade liberalization. MAN lamented that:

...the consistently high Foreign Exchange Market has been responsible for the high cost of business operations. In response to the rising cost of living, the quality of life of Nigerians has declined considerably while their income has either been static or depressed (*Business Concord*, 12 December 1987: 1).

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<sup>48</sup> See *Newswatch*, 20 August 1990; *This Week*, 2 April 1990; *West Africa*, 19-25 November 1990; *Tell*, 7 October 1990.

<sup>49</sup> 100 kobo equals to N1.

Other segments of civil society, most especially the working class under the auspices of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), students, and academics represented by National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), and Academic Staff of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) respectively, opposed many aspects of the economic programs. These groups argued that the decline in the living conditions of their members and a large section of the Nigerian populace was a result of devaluation. The NLC most especially campaigned for a generalized upward review of wages in line with the rate of inflation in the economy (Mkandawire and Olukoshi, 1995b: 176). The NLC and many other civil society organizations were also opposed to the withdrawal of subsidies on basic consumer goods (most especially petroleum products), the introduction of, and increases in, user fees for services such as education, health, water, and electricity. They criticized the privatization program on the ground that public enterprises are being sold to members of the Nigerian bourgeoisie who in most cases serve as fronts for foreign interests (Ihonvbere, 1993: 144). The NLC claimed that privatization would result in a massive lay-off of workers.

To press home its point, the NLC mobilized its members to organize a series of mass rallies in protest against the removal of oil subsidy, and 'the entire economic recovery program' (*Newswatch*, 11 March 1988). The reactions of student bodies were more negative and violent to SAP than those of other groups of civil society.<sup>50</sup> The frequency and intensity of protest and resistance by the students became unprecedented. As NANS noted:

The people of Nigeria have witnessed consistently and almost on a yearly basis, protests, demonstrations, and other forms of crises. However, none has been as endemic and perennial as the crises in institutions of higher learning. Between 1985 and 1992, for instance, there occurred over three hundred major uprisings in various schools in the country. In fact, only an Ostrich would argue that the crises in the educational institutions are not direct manifestations of the collapsing socio-economic structure of our time (NANS, 24 September 1992).

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<sup>50</sup> See Albert, 1995; Adejumobi, 2000.

There were series of riots by students between 1985 and 1992; of these, the most violent was the one of May 1989. It was well organized both in its planning and implementation, and it had a very high death toll.<sup>51</sup> Many organizations, workers, market women, unemployed youths, and some other members of the society joined the students in the protest. The riot was interpreted by the regime as “an excuse to wage war against the government in order to destroy the credibility of the military institution” (*The Guardian*, 6 June 1989: 1-2).

The government’s response to the crisis was to close down six universities (all located in the southern part of the country, whose students were believed to have spearheaded the riots) to forestall further unrest by the students. The institutions were shut down for about six months and were only reopened after appeals to the government by traditional leaders. The regime also promulgated the Student Union Activities (Control and Regulation) Decree No. 47, which made national student unions illegal, and the unions in individual universities subject to proscription if found to act contrary to national interest, security, public safety, morality, and health. Violators of the decree were subject to prosecution by the Special Miscellaneous Offences Tribunal, and could be sentenced to five-years imprisonment, and/or fined N500, 000.

The government also made it clear that there was no viable alternative to SAP (*African Concord*, 3 July 1989: 24), a claim that many critics of the program disagreed with. Police and security agents disrupted a conference organized by a coalition of human rights activists on “The Alternative to SAP”, and three prominent Nigerian activists, Gani Fawehinmi, Michael Imoudu, and Tai Solarin were arrested

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<sup>51</sup> The death toll could not be ascertained. There were unconfirmed reports that about 50 people died. For instance, see *Newswatch*, 12 June 1989: 18.

and detained for many days. Also, many activists had their passports confiscated several times by the regime to prevent them from traveling outside the country.<sup>52</sup>

Caught between sustained domestic opposition to adjustment and pressure from the international financial institutions for it to stay on course, the Babangida regime, in addition to attempting to accommodate local demands, resorted to co-optation and repression. Attempts were made to co-opt leaders of trade unions and professional associations. The regime adopted a 'politics of settlement'.<sup>53</sup> Reputedly, large amounts of money were offered to these leaders to garner their support for the regime. Pressmen were enticed with 'brown envelopes' (money in envelopes) so as to influence their reports and comments on the regime. The aim probably was to implicate as many groups and individuals as possible in order to render them morally unjustified to condemn the regime after being drawn into the circle. Where this tactics failed, the regime embarked on arrests and intimidation.

Lecturers, student union leaders, journalists, and many activists were arrested and detained for many days. For instance, activists like Gani Fawehinmi, Beko Ransome-Kuti, Femi Aborishade, Etim Etim, and Femi Falana were constantly in and out of detention. Likewise, many media houses were closed down, with many of their staff detained, and several decrees were promulgated to intimidate the press.<sup>54</sup> Violent

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<sup>52</sup> Journalists and prodemocracy supporters reportedly faced harassment at the nation's airports by security officials. It seemed the security agents had lists of names. They were made to fill out a special entry and exit form detailing their movement abroad, reasons for making their trip and names of friends and associates overseas. Those who refused to fill such forms were harassed, delayed, or had their passports temporarily confiscated. The security agents were assigned to the international airports to screen departing passengers in order to apprehend prodemocracy supporters. Passengers were questioned extensively, and those with unsatisfactory responses had their passports seized, or were turned over to military intelligence and state security service personnel for additional questioning. Interview #5, Femi Falani (CDHR), Lagos, 31 January 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Peter da Costa (1993: 53-57) defined the 'politics of settlement' as "timely doses of cash to anesthetize the opposition, and buy off labor unions and other powerful grumblers".

<sup>54</sup> The Media Council Decree 31 of 1988 was perceived as a measure to constrain the press from opposing the structural adjustment policies (Biersteker and Lewis, 1997: 349). Decree 35 of 1993 gave

police and military actions were used in quelling demonstrations and riots, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of demonstrators in many parts of the country (Osaghae, 1998: 244). However, many civil society organizations such as the Committee for the Defence of Human Right (CDHR), the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) continued to be undaunted, as they were relentless in mobilizing the society to reject many government policies, as well as the abuse of human rights.

### **4.3 Babangida's Democratic Transition Program**

Apart from economic reforms, the Babangida regime also embarked on an elaborate political reform. According to President Babangida,

...the reform package of (this) administration is constructed on two pillars. The first is the economy which some have seen as being concretized in SAP. The second is the political program, which we have articulated in the transition to civil rule program. These two elements are mutually reinforcing; and both must be faithfully implemented for us to be able to construct a new social order that is democratic, viable and self-reliant (emphasis added) (Olagungu and Oyovbaire, 1991: 107).

Thus, on 13 January 1986, President Babangida announced that the regime would hand over to a democratically elected civilian government on 1 October 1990. As a means of achieving this objective he announced the setting up of a 17-man Political Bureau. In his nation-wide broadcast, the president stated the objective of the debate as a:

...collective search for a new political order. It is a call for a countrywide debate in order to illuminate our path toward the search. It is neither a call for political party formation, nor the assertion of claims and pleas for leadership on behalf of the operations both of which have failed us as a nation. The exercise is a call to all Nigerians to search, identify and select options that can lead this country to better heights...Furthermore, the Bureau must ensure that Nigerians collectively secure for themselves a more meaningful political future through open and free debate (Babangida, N.D.: 31).

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government power to proscribe newspapers; Decree 41 created the Newspaper Registration Board whose approval must be secured before the publication of a newspaper or magazine.



The task of the Political Bureau was to gather, collate and evaluate the contributions of Nigerians to the search for a viable political direction for the country. It was also to come up with recommendations based on its findings. The national political debate lasted from February to September 1986. The Bureau conducted long sessions in different parts of the country and received thousands of memoranda from individuals, groups, and associations. The Bureau received altogether 27,324 contributions (Osaghae, 1998: 209) and the consultations touched on almost all aspects of Nigeria's social, political, and economic problems. After completion of its task, the Bureau submitted its report in March 1987. Based on its findings, the bureau recommended the adoption of socialism as the state ideology, the nationalization and socialization of the "commanding height of the economy" instead of privatization and commercialization, the ban of 'old breed' politicians from the new dispensation and the allocation of 5% of legislative seats to women and labor candidates. It recommended a presidential system of government and the creation of two political parties. The Bureau advised the government to map out strategies for social mobilization and political education. The Bureau also drew up an election timetable terminating on 1 October 1990 (Report of the Political Bureau. Cited in Olagunju, Jinadu and Oyovbaire, 1993: 58).

The government white paper on the recommendations of the Bureau, based on the deliberations of a nine-member panel set up to review it, rejected almost all the 'radical' recommendations – socialism, nationalization, and termination of privatization – as well as a unicameral legislature and restriction on the tenure of president and governors (FGN, 1987). The government accepted the presidential system and a two-party structure. It replaced the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), put in place in 1979, with the National Electoral Commission (NEC). Also, the transition program drawn up by the bureau was rejected. In its place, the

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government drew up a transition timetable (see Table 4), which shifted the handing over date to 1992 instead of the promised date of 1990.<sup>55</sup>

**Table 4: Transition Timetable For Transition To Civil Rule (1987-1992).**

SCHEDULE 1

PROGRAMME FOR 1987

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter - 1987

Establishment of the Directorate of Social Mobilization.

Establishment of a National Electoral Commission.

Establishment of a Constitutional Drafting Committee.

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter - 1987

Elections into local government on non-party basis.

SCHEDULE 2

PROGRAMME FOR 1988

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter – 1988

Establishment of National Population Commission

Establishment of Code of Conduct Bureau.

Establishment of Code of Conduct Tribunal.

Establishment of Constituent Assembly.

Inauguration of National Revenue Mobilization Commission.

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter – 1988

Termination of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP).

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter – 1988

Consolidation of gains of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP).

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter – 1988

Consolidation of gains of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP).

SCHEDULE 3

PROGRAMME FOR 1989

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter – 1989

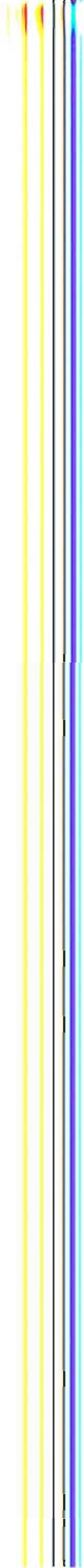
Promulgation of a new constitution.

Release of new fiscal arrangements.

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<sup>55</sup> However, this timetable was amended many times and the date of disengagement was shifted many times. In fact, the hand over date was shifted four times: October 1990, to October 1992, to January 1993, to August 1993.

1989



2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter – 1989

Lift of ban on party politics.

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter – 1989

Announcement of two recognized and registered political parties.

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter – 1989

Election into local governments on political party basis.

#### SCHEDULE 4

##### PROGRAMME FOR 1990

1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter – 1990

Election into state legislatures and state executives.

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter – 1990

Convening of state legislatures.

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter – 1990

Swearing-in of state executives.

#### SCHEDULE 5

##### PROGRAMME FOR 1991

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter – 1991

Census

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter – 1991

Census

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter – 1991

Census

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter – 1991

Local government elections.

#### SCHEDULE 6

##### PROGRAMME FOR 1992

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter – 1992

Elections into Federal legislatures and convening of National Assembly.

3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter

Swearing-in of new president and final disengagement by the Armed Forces.

In May 1989, the president announced the promulgation of the 1989 Constitution, and lifted the ban on political activities. In his speech, President Babangida announced the creation of additional 149 local government councils, bringing the total to 449.

He then outlined the basic features of the government's expectations of the whole political process. Each state was to have only three senators. Legislative Assemblies would meet for only 181 days on part time basis, and state governors were to have a maximum of 10 commissioners. Also, only two political parties were to be recognized and registered.

With the lifting of the ban, many political associations were formed with the hope of being transformed into political parties. However, NEC laid very stringent conditions for these associations, and they had only two months (2 May- 25 July 1989) to comply with NEC's conditions and to submit their registration forms. Describing the conditions imposed by NEC, *The Week Magazine* wrote:

The guidelines run a wide gamut; from a registration fee of N500, 000 to a lucid profile of the association, containing its philosophy, symbol, emblem and manifesto, to a declaration of its assets and sources of funds. The harder and more substantive part had to do however with proofs that the association has at least 40,000 members in every state and 15,000 in the Federal Capital Territory. NEC had ruled that such claims must be authenticated with members' names, and passport photographs, as well as evidence of identifiable administrative and organization structures in at least 395 local government areas, all before July 25 (*The Week*, 2 July 1990: 8).

In the same vein, Alao Aka-Bashorun, the former president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) commented:

The guideline is the biggest joke of the year. If the associations are given one year, they won't be able to meet up with what is in the document. The Conservative Party in Britain cannot produce one million committed membership cards ... Even if the associations are given one year they would never meet the guideline (*Newswatch*, July 1 1989: 15).

Part of the requirements was for the associations to establish an office in all state capitals and local government headquarters. In addition, the association's membership was to be open to all Nigerians, its headquarters must be in the federal capital and its organization at all levels must reflect the federal character of the country. In all, only thirteen of the political associations met the submission deadline

and of these, only 6 were recommended<sup>56</sup> to the Armed Forces Ruling Council, of which it would pick two (Peters, 1997: 207). However, the six parties were rejected for various reasons. Instead, the government created two political parties, the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP).<sup>57</sup> Babangida described the NRC as being “a little to the right” and the SDP as “a little to the left” (Oyediran and Agbaje, 1991: 228). The electoral body, NEC, wrote the constitutions and manifestos of the two parties, and the government took responsibility for their financing.

By 11 June 1993, the local governments, State House of Assembly, House of Representatives, Gubernatorial and Senatorial elections had all been conducted. And on 12 June 1993, the presidential election, which was contested by Alhaji Bashir Tofa (NRC) and Alhaji Mashood K.O Abiola (SDP), was conducted.<sup>58</sup> However, the president annulled the election, adjudged by many as the fairest and freest election in Nigeria.<sup>59</sup> In an address to the nation on 26 June 1993, Babangida declared:

It is true that the presidential election was generally seen to be free, fair and peaceful. However, there was in fact a huge array of alleged malpractice virtually in all the states of the federation before the actual voting began. There were authenticated reports of electoral malpractice against party agents, officials of the National Electoral Commission and also some members of the electorate... To continue action on the basis of the June 12, 1993 election, and

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<sup>56</sup> The six were the People’s Solidarity Party (PSP); the Nigerian National Congress (NNC); the People’s Front of Nigeria (PFN); the Liberal Convention (LC); the Nigerian Labour Party (NLP); and the Republican Party of Nigeria (RPN).

<sup>57</sup> Commenting on the two parties, Ihonvbere and Vaughan (1995: 78) noted that the two parties were soon hijacked by the rich and powerful in society. “The two parties failed to introduce anything new into the political process; once again, competitive politics was seen as a political enterprise in which contestants invest only with the intention of controlling patronage and a system of economic rewards”.

<sup>58</sup> The ability of these two millionaires without any credible political experience and who had not been active members of either of the political parties to capture the presidential tickets leaves room for questioning. A plausible reason could be that many Nigerians were more interested in seeing the military leave the political scene than in the two candidates and what they stood for.

<sup>59</sup> For instance, see Agbu, 1998; Diamond, Kirk-Greene and Oyediran, 1997; Momoh and Adejumobi 1999; CDHR, 1995; Lewis, 1994. Also, many of the national and international Observers of the election felt it was the ‘freest, fairest and most peaceful election ever held in Nigeria’ (*The Guardian*, 16 June 1993: 1).

to proclaim and swear in a president who encouraged a campaign of divide and rule amongst our various ethnic groups would have been detrimental to the survival of the Third Republic. Our need is for peace, stability and continuity of policies in the interest of all our people (Sunday Sketch, June 27 1993: 2).

As shall be seen in the next section, serious resistance both from within and outside the country greeted the annulment of the election. Within the country, there were spontaneous demonstrations and riots in many cities of the southern part of the country.<sup>60</sup> While on the international front, the United States of America, Britain, and France imposed military and economic sanctions against the military aimed at forcing the government to change its mind on the annulment (*Sunday Sketch*, 23 June 1993: 13). Britain, for instance, stopped military training courses for the Nigerian Armed Forces, withdrew the British Advisory team in Nigeria with immediate effect, suspended the issuance of visas and other traveling documents to all Nigerian military personnel, and reviewed special aid to Nigeria. Babangida, thus, had to bow to pressure from civil society and the top echelon of the military by 'stepping aside'. In an emotion laden speech to the members of the National Assembly on August 27 1993, Babangida complained:

I have been portrayed as the issue and obstacle to civil democratic rule by those who are supposed to know better. I do not believe so. I know as a matter of fact that this perception of me is not correct. But that does not really matter now. What matters the most is peace, stability and progress of our dear country (Babangida, 1993: 13).

He then concluded:

Following lengthy deliberations with my service chiefs, I offered as my personal sacrifice to voluntarily step aside as the president and commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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<sup>60</sup> The reason the reactions were mainly from the south, most especially the south western states, could be attributed to a sense of ethnic injustice the people from this part must have felt owing to the fact that M.K.O. Abiola was a Yoruba candidate whose election was annulled by a Northern-led government. See for instance, Suberu, 1997: 312.

Regardless of the overall merits of Babangida's reasons for the annulment, it should be noted that contrary to claims that the 12 June 1993 election was free and fair, there were serious incontrovertible cases of rigging and electoral malpractices that were either not documented or scholars and observers have preferred to turn a blind eye to. For instance, in several parts of western Nigeria, there were serious irregularities. In a particular case, someone admitted to voting up to ten times.<sup>61</sup> Party stalwarts connived with electoral officers to ensure that these irregularities were allowed to take place. Money and food items were distributed to potential voters to influence their voting decision. Given the extent of these activities in the western part of the country, it would be fatuous to believe that some of the same type of occurrences could be reasonably ruled out in other parts of the country.

Therefore, several basic questions come to mind: Why did scholars and civil society organizations prefer to turn a blind eye to these irregularities? Why were they so determined to rid the country of the military that they preferred a flawed election? Was Babangida being opportunistic in rejecting the outcome of the election as a result of the flaws? The answers to some of the questions most likely lie in the electoral history of Nigeria. Though the allegation of irregularities in the election used by the regime in justifying the cancellation of the election was possibly true, it still was not enough ground for the annulment. The history of elections in Nigeria is such that the country is not able to boast of a 'free and fair' election. And taking into account that the regime itself was an imposition on the people through undemocratic means, this particular election was crucial, as it meant a definite move towards 'democracy'.

Then, the question is, what was the 'real' reason for the cancellation of the election? For one, many southerners believed the election was cancelled because the

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<sup>61</sup> Interview #10, Ibadan, 10 January 2001.



Northerners did not want to relinquish power to the Southerners.<sup>62</sup> Abiola's presidency might have been perceived as a threat to the hegemony of the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy. Abiola, voicing out this sentiment, declared that Babangida did not want him to win the election because he (Abiola) is "not from his (Babangida's) own part of the country" (Akinterinwa, 1996: 301). Secondly, it is believed that Abiola was not acceptable to some important segments of the military (obviously Northerners) that felt that they would not be able to control a Yoruba civilian president. Thirdly, Babangida was believed to have had his own 'hidden agenda'. It was possible that even if another election was conducted as he proposed, the result may be cancelled too, and he will continue as president on the ground that there was no other person 'fit' to rule the country.

#### **4.4 The June 12 1993 Crisis and Opposition to Military Rule**

The attempt by the Babangida regime to abort the transition to civil rule it had put in place culminated in the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election. Judged to be free and fair by both local and international observers, the election was reputedly won by M.K.O Abiola<sup>63</sup> of the Social Democratic Party. Babangida's cancellation of the election threw the nation into complete disarray as violent demonstrations and riots followed. Hundreds of lives and property were lost in the process.

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<sup>62</sup> The Hausa-Fulani of the northern part of the country had accused the Yoruba of the western part of controlling both the economy and the bureaucracy (*Newswatch*, 12 July 1993).

<sup>63</sup> Who was M.K.O Abiola? Abiola entered the political consciousness of the Nigerian public in the early 1970s when he became the of the US communications giant ITT's African and Middle Eastern operations from 1971 to 1988. He contracted a very lucrative relationship with the dominant figures of the northern dominated Nigerian Army. He was a bosom friend of Murtala Mohammed who was the commissioner for Communication under General Gowon (1966-1975) and later Nigeria's Head of State between 1975 and 1976. The *New York Times*, 17 August 1980, reported that the ITT made payments of millions of dollars to Nigerian government officials beginning in 1975 to gain huge telecommunication sales contracts in Nigeria. Abiola was believed to have made so much money from the ITT, and later became a big business tycoon with an empire which ran in multimillion of dollars. He was also believed to be a very close friend of General Babangida.

In an address to the nation on 26 June 1993, the President announced a fresh process of selection and election of new presidential candidates, insisting he remained committed to the transition on 27 August 1993. In order to meet this schedule, a reconstituted NEC was to supervise the selection of two new presidential candidates by the SDP and NRC. New electoral regulations required that the candidates must:

be no less than fifty years old; have not been convicted of any crime; believe by act of faith and practice, in the corporate existence of Nigeria; possess records of personal, corporate and business interests which do not conflict with the national interests; and have been registered members of either of the two political parties for at least one full year (*Sunday Sketch*, June 26 1993: 10).

These moves by the regime were seen as an attempt not only to create confusion among the political elites but also to create divisions and conflicts among the political parties. The new conditions for contestants disqualified M.K.O Abiola of the SDP and Bashir Tofa of the NRC, who had contested the annulled election. Firstly, both of them had not been members of their respective parties for up to one year. Secondly, they were both successful businessmen with extensive foreign business connections, and could possibly not boast of their business interests not conflicting with national interest (for instance, tax evasions, repatriation of foreign exchange, and such likes). In addition, 23 presidential candidates that were previously banned from participating in the last presidential election were unbanned.

The initial protests, which greeted the annulment, were spearheaded by a civil rights organization called Campaign for Democracy (CD). The CD, made up of a coalition of about 43 unions, associations, and organizations, had warned the nation earlier that the Babangida regime was not likely to keep faith in returning the country to civil rule in 1992. In a speech delivered at the inauguration of CD on 11 November 1991, the Interim Chairman, Alao Aka-Bashorun stated:

From its very foundation, the Transition Program is informed and characterized by usurpation of the rights and sovereignty of the people. The unilateral and reckless way the program had been tampered with, the rule

changed and the wish of the people expressed through elections disregarded, have not only perpetuated massive and gross abuses of human rights of the Nigerian people, but has created serious doubts as to the sincerity and capacity of the present regime to see the program through and to hand over to a democratically elected civilian government on 1 October 1992 (Quoted in Momoh, 1995: 48).

This led the organization to conclude that Babangida had no intention of returning the country to civil rule. The CD therefore decided to take the lead in making the government know that Nigerians were not ready for another election. In the event of the annulment of the election, the results were only partially announced. The CD made good its promise of publishing the results of the election on 18 June 1993.<sup>64</sup> The result showed a total of 14,293,396 votes, with SDP winning with 58.36 percent and NRC with 41.64 percent (*African Guardian*, 28 June 1993: 25). The CD's calls for mass protests, boycotts, and civil disobedience received wide support in the country, especially in the urban areas, and most especially in the southwestern part of the country where Abiola was from. The CD promised to make the country ungovernable for Babangida, and to let the world know what was happening in the country. It took advantage of the presence of the large crowd of football fans that came to watch the World Cup qualifying match at the National Stadium, Lagos on 3 July 1993 to distribute pamphlets calling on Nigerians to participate in a 5-day protest to force the Babangida administration out of office (Ihonvbere and Vaughan, 1995: 81).

In the pamphlet titled "Be Ready for More Action As from Monday July 5 1993", the organization urged Nigerians to participate in "rallies, demonstrations and other actions". Workers were requested to stay off work; traders were called upon to lock up their shops; youths were asked to "block roads with barricades and burn tires on the roads and streets to ensure that vehicles do not move", while drivers were to keep

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<sup>64</sup> See the published results in chapter 5.

their vehicles off the road. Other similar pamphlets were distributed by the organization urging people to openly resist military rule, not to participate in a new election, and to ask for the installation of Abiola as the president of Nigeria.<sup>65</sup> The CD painstakingly emphasized that the struggle was not just for Abiola's presidency but rather a struggle for the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria. The clarification was seen as necessary due to the fact that two regional candidates contested the annulled election and, as such, there was the possibility that the protests might be interpreted as representing "divisions between north and south, or between ethnic or religious groups or political parties" (Ihonvbere and Vaughan, 1995: 81).

Before 5 July, sporadic protest matches had broken out in some parts of the country, and on July 5, the breakdown of law and order was almost total in many parts of the country, especially in major cities of the southern part of the country. There were bonfires in the streets, with large groups of people carrying placards and chanting 'war' songs. Major highways were barricaded, many vehicles were set ablaze, and some government officials were harassed. Hundreds of people were killed and several properties destroyed during these riots. By the third day of the protest,

...over a hundred persons had been killed, from Lagos to Kwara and Delta states. In Lagos alone, about 75 persons were reported killed. Over 200 persons were wounded and undergoing treatment (CLO Report, 1994: 178).

Determined to force the military out of government in August 1993, the CD organized another round of demonstrations and protests between 12 and 14 August. This time it took the form of a stay-at-home protest. Workers did not report at their offices and the streets were empty of people. Describing the situation in Lagos, *Time Europe* magazine wrote:

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<sup>65</sup> Two of these pamphlets were titled "Nigerians, How Long Shall we continue to Suffer? Stand Up and Fight for Your Lives, Now!" and "Special Message to the Police and Armed Forces".

...the city of Lagos, a boisterous, sprawling metropolis of more than 6 million, stood empty and silent. Businesses were shuttered, railway and bus transport brought to a standstill, the normally congested streets deserted. Thousands of police and riot-control troops out on patrol had the silent city to themselves. Citizens were staying home to protest the ruling military's refusal to hand over power to the man elected President on June 12 in the freest, fairest balloting in decades. For a people accustomed to rule by force, the three-day strike was a brazen act of defiance (*Time Europe*, 23 August 1993).

Many civil society organizations such as the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL), the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) supported the demonstrations and protests for varying reasons. The NUJ particularly supported the opposition as a result of the repression it faced at the tail end of the Babangida regime. In June 1993, two decrees, Decree 43 and Decree 53 were promulgated to restrain press freedom. Decree 43 spelt out new stringent registration requirements for newspapers including those already in circulation (Omole and Olukotun, 1999: 225). An editorial in *The Guardian* described Decree 43 as:

Without question the greatest menace that the Nigerian press has had to face in its 134-year history. Combining elements of the 1964 Newspaper (Amendment) Act, Decree 11 of 1976 (the so-called Ohanbamu Decree) and Decree 4 of 1984, it makes newspaper publishing an activity so risky that only proprietors or journalists with little regard for self-preservation and even less commitment to serving the public will venture it (*The Guardian*, 20 August 1993).

In the final days of the regime, four media organizations were closed down, over ten magazines were proscribed, security agents impounded thousands of printed copies of publications, and several dozens of media practitioners who had openly criticized the government were detained.

While civil society organizations struggled to uphold the election results in order to ensure the installation of Abiola, the regime utilized different strategies in suppressing these agitations. Many activists were arrested and detained for several days. The

regime resorted to the use of massive campaign of subversion and misinformation, which proved successful in weakening the national agitation for restoring the mandate of Abiola. In no time, there was a resurgence of the sectarian sentiments and resentments that had characterized the country before the elections. The June 12 struggle soon degenerated into a north-south regional conflict, with ethnic violence rocking the nation. *African Watch* described the situation thus:

The tragedy of the present crisis is that Nigerian citizens, who in the election seemed to have overcome a legacy of ethnic conflict by crossing ethnic and regional barriers to vote for Mr. Abiola have been forced once again to narrow their sights and put their ethnic identities first, rather than their citizenship as Nigerians... In the past few weeks, tens of thousands of Nigerians have fled the cities for their home villages, fearing the outbreak of widespread ethnic violence. Southern rage has been ignited, and anti-Hausa sentiments are increasingly given void. In the north, Hausas who supported Mr. Abiola have been stung by the recent anti-Hausa backlash and are withdrawing back into their ethnic and regional identities (*Africa Watch*, 4 August 1993: 6).

Thus, what started as a front for forcing out the military from power became primarily reduced to sectional and ethnic conflicts. This, however, did not deter civil society as many organizations continued to pile pressure on the military to exit from political power. The exit of Babangida on 26 August 1993 marked a great victory for civil society. It was the first time since independence that a large portion of civil society came together to form a common front to face a common enemy.

Ironically, while a segment of civil society was bent on seeing the military out of office, another segment was busy advocating the continuation of military rule. The protagonists of the "Babangida must stay" campaign also worked very hard to accomplish their mission. One of them, Francis Arthur Nzeribe, was one of the twenty-three disqualified presidential aspirant of one of the botched attempts of the regime's transition to civil rule. He launched a movement, which he called 'Babangida for President Movement' on 30 November 1992. The name of the

movement was later changed to the 'Association for Better Nigeria' (ABN).

According to him, the purpose of the movement was to:

...ask Ibrahim Babangida, the president, to resign from the army and run for the presidency...This is not a political party. This is not a political movement. It is just getting people together to create a pressure group to say, "hey, run!" As simple as that. Not to say continue, but run. The day he agrees to run, the work of the committee is finished (*Newswatch*, December 7 1992: 22).

On 10 June 1993, the ABN asked an Abuja High Court to postpone the June 12 election until 1997 on the ground that "civil rule is cruel" (*The Guardian*, 11 June 1993: 1). However, NEC ignored the court injunction ordering that the election should not be held, and the presidential election took place on 12 June 1993. NEC's disregard of the injunction could be attributed to its obeying Section 7(1), Section 7(3), and Section 8 of Decree 19 of 1992 governing the Transition Program. These sections obliged the government and all its agents to ensure that the program is not derailed, by ensuring its successful implementation (Akinterinwa, 1999: 298). In particular, Section 8(1) provided:

Any person who organizes, plans, encourages, aids, co-operates or conspires with any other persons to undermine, prevent or in any way do anything to forestall or prejudice the realization of the political program as set out in the schedules of this Decree shall be found guilty of an offence punishable under the provisions of subsection 4 of this Section.<sup>66</sup>

Despite this, the ABN did not give up. The ABN went back to the Abuja High Court, seeking an injunction restraining NEC from announcing the results of the election. A restraining order was again granted on 15 June 1993. But NEC had started announcing the results of the election, which indicated that M.K.O Abiola was having a clear lead. However, NEC stopped the announcements in response to the restraining order by the Abuja High Court. The question that comes to mind is: Why would NEC decide to obey the restraining order on the announcement of the results, when it

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<sup>66</sup> Subsection 4 provided for a jail term not exceeding five years without an option of fine.

ignored the restraint on the conduct of the election in the first place? The provision in Section 19 of the Presidential Election (Basic Constitutional and Transitional) Provisional Decree No. 13 of 1993, which NEC had cited when it proceeded with the conduct of the election despite court injunction to the contrary, was that:

Notwithstanding the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979 as amended or any other law, no interim or interlocutory order or ruling, judgment or decision made by any court or tribunal before or after the commencement of this Decree in respect of any inter-party dispute or any other matter before it, shall affect the date or time of the holding of the election, or the performance by the Commission of any of its functions under this Decree or any guidelines issued by it in the pursuance of the election (Quoted in *The Guardian*, June 17 1993: 2).

One plausible reason for the action of NEC could be that the electoral body had to succumb to pressure from the presidency to withhold the result, since the body itself was a creation of the regime and it could be dissolved by the regime if it so wished. There began a series of litigations on the announcement of the election results. Several individuals and associations took NEC to court, seeking injunctions for the release of the results.<sup>67</sup> But NEC did not continue with the announcement. The litigation was part of the reasons given by the government for annulling the election. In a statement read by the press secretary to the Vice-President, Mr. Nduka Irabor on June 23, the basic reason for the annulment of the election was to save the Nigerian judiciary from 'intra-wrangling' and 'ridiculous charade' (*Daily Times*, 24 June 1993: 1).

However, there was soon a crack within the ranks of the ABN. In a confessional statement made by Abimbola Davies, one of the strong members of the association, he disclosed that:

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<sup>67</sup> Benin High Court (*Daily Times*, 17 June 1993: 3) and Jos High Court (*Sunday Times*, 20 June 1993: 7) were amongst the courts that granted the injunctions for the release of the election result.



...the plan to stop Bashorun M.K.O Abiola from becoming the nation's president was hatched in Oguta, Imo state by some members of the ABN working in concert with certain top-placed government functionaries (*Punch*, 18 July 1993: 2).

Claiming that he was spilling the beans because he joined the 'racket of confusion' out of ignorance and was now feeling guilty, Davies also revealed that the whole process was to ensure the introduction of a parliamentary system of government, with Babangida as President and Francis Arthur Nzeribe as Prime Minister (*Punch*, 18 July 1993: 2). However, Davies' 'confession' did not save the day. The election was annulled, and the country was thrown into chaos.

#### **4.5 The Travails and Fall of the Interim National Government**

The Interim National Government (ING) came into being in September 1993 as a result of the crisis that rocked the nation after the 12 June 1993 election. As a result of the crisis, the military ruler, President Babangida was forced to step down from office. He handed over to a number of handpicked Nigerians headed by Ernest Shonekan, a prominent businessman from the western part of the country. The annulment of the election was initially condemned by a great section of the Nigerian populace. While the NRC, on its part, accepted defeat, supported the annulment, and agreed to a re-election process, a large number of SDP members, insisted on a de-annulment of the election, calling for the announcement of the results. The situation later changed, however, as a result of a division among the political elite. Some notable leaders of the SDP along with many from the NRC decided to make the best of the situation. Many of them "trooped to Abuja to negotiate a better deal for themselves in whatever new arrangement the government would allow" (Afolayan, 1997:56). Claude Ake captures the situation:

The National Republic Convention (NRC) decided to abandon the democracy for a chance of getting into power at another election... Most leaders of the winning Social democratic Party (SDP) heartily supported the annulment of

their own victory. A few of the most powerful among them did so on the calculation that the annulment would allow them to resume their presidential bid. Many more supported it in order to corner some of the fortunes on offer. Others did so fearing a trend, which would destroy the parochial basis of their political power (*The News*, 21 November 1994: 10).

While the SDP leadership chose to trade off the party's victory at the polls, an alternative power structure, the SDP Consultative Forum emerged to advance the cause of reclaiming the electoral mandate of the party (Momoh and Adejumobi, 1999: 244). In a bid to reclaim the mandate, the SDP instituted two suits, one by the president-elect and his running mate, and the other by the 14 elected governors of the party. Meanwhile, the government pre-empted the ruling of the courts by promulgating The Presidential Election Validation Order Decree No. 41 of 1993. The decree rejected the jurisdiction of the courts over any complaint arising from the annulment of the election. Therefore, delivering judgment on the suit filed by the SDP governors, Justice Mohammed Bello of the Supreme Court in Lagos, stated:

Under our present condition, decrees are the supreme laws in Nigeria and all other laws including the current constitution are inferior to the decrees... for this reason, I hold that the court lacks original jurisdiction to entertain the suit (*The Guardian*, 23 July 1993: 21).

In what seemed like a bid to find a solution to the evolving crisis, the government offered the two political parties two options to choose from. The first option was for the conduct of a new presidential election, while the second was the formation of an Interim National Government (ING). The two political parties had a meeting with NEC on 28 July 1993, and a concession was reached on the ING. In a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, it was stated:

Following our continuing resolve to find an acceptable political solution to the present political impasse and the need to avoid further violence and bloodshed, the end of which may be unpredictable and unimaginable, we the two political parties, after due consultations with the leadership of our parties, have resolved to revisit the option of Interim National Government as a way out of the present crisis in the greater national interest (*The Guardian*, 29 July 1993: 1-2).

The ING, therefore, was “a consensus arrangement to fill the vacuum of the Executive branch of government which was created as a result of the annulment of the June 12 election” (Babangida, 1993). The ING was made up of 32 members, picked by the government. The functions of the ING included overseeing the conduct of a new election and running the affairs of the country until a new civilian president was sworn in.

The ING faced several challenges from the start, the greatest being that of legitimacy. It was deemed illegal by many Nigerians, who considered it an extension of the military regime of Babangida. Decree 61 (the Interim Government Basic Constitutional Provisions Decree of 1993, on which the legitimacy of the ING was based, pointedly contradicted Decree 59 of 1993, which effectively ended the authority of the military and/or President Babangida to make laws for the order and governance of Nigeria (Suberu, 1997: 320; Fawehinmi, 1993). Thus, this plunged the ING into a legal void and provided the opportunity for contesting its legality.

To this end, civil society did not give the ING any respite. There were several press releases, newspaper articles and leaflets by civil society organizations, dissociating themselves from the ING. Pro-democracy movements of civil society persisted in demanding the installation of Abiola, and in challenging the legality and legitimacy of the ING. Commenting on the capability of the ING to solve the country’s problems, Obasanjo lamented that; “the ING headed by Ernest Shonekan can never successfully lead the country to democracy as its members were hand-picked by former President Babangida” (*Newswatch*, November 8 1993: 20). Shonekan himself faced opposition from some advocates of the Abiola mandate. Being an Egba Yoruba like Abiola, he was seen as a ‘sell-out’ (Osaghae, 1998: 262), thereby increasing the opposition he and the ING faced.

The Shonekan-led ING solicited the assistance of the international community in solving the crisis the nation was plunged into (Osaghae, 1998: 264). Missions were

sent to various capitals abroad to 'explain' the situation in Nigeria, persuade Western countries to lift the limited sanctions already imposed, and bring back foreign investors. Shonekan also attended the Commonwealth summit in Barbados to assure the international community that things were returning to normalcy.

The second challenge faced by the ING was the economic situation of the country.

The ING had inherited from the Babangida regime:

an economy that was reeling from collapsing petroleum export revenues, heavy international indebtedness and debt arrears, huge budgetary deficits, unprecedented inflation (approaching an annual rate of 100%), massive undervaluation of the national currency, deteriorating socioeconomic services and public infrastructures, and growing unemployment and social immiseration (Suberu, 1997: 324).

The ING had to find a way of going around the contentious issue of removing the subsidy on petroleum products, which a large portion of the populace kicked against. According to Shonekan's Chief Adviser and National Planning Commission Chairman, Isaac Aluko-Oluokun, "the issue (was) the greatest challenge of economic policy-making since the end of the 1967-70 civil war" (*West Africa*, 22-28 November 1993: 2108). One of the greatest tests of the administration came on 8 November 1993, when the ING raised the prices of domestic fuel by over 600%. With this, the price of petrol rose from 70kobo to N5, gas oil from 50kobo to N4.50, and kerosene from 55 kobo to N4.75 (Suberu, 1997: 324). This led to an astronomical hike of about 200-300% in transport fares. This provoked protests and riots in major cities of the federation. The NLC promptly gave the ING a seventy-two-hour ultimatum to either withdraw the increase or face an indefinite strike action.

The downfall of the ING eventually came with the judgment by the Lagos High Court on the suit filed by Abiola and his running mate, Baba Gana Kingibe. On 10 November 1993, two days after the fuel price increase, the Lagos High Court proclaimed the ING illegal. Although, the ING challenged the verdict at the Court of

Appeal, General Abacha seized power from Shonekan on 17 November 1993, a day to the ruling of the Court of Appeal.

#### **4.6 The Abacha Regime (1993-1998)**

The manner in which General Sani Abacha came into power was different from all the other military coups Nigeria had witnessed since 1966. Shonekan claimed to have voluntarily relinquished power to the military, but it is widely believed that he was forced to resign by Abacha. It is also widely believed in several quarters that it was indeed Abiola that prevailed on Abacha to intervene with the hope that Abacha would revisit the June 12 election issue and handover power to him. However, these expectations were dashed. In his maiden speech to the nation on November 18, Abacha gave no indication of handing over to Abiola. Instead, he announced the scrapping of all democratic institutions, a ban on party politics and political activities, and the replacement of the ING with a Provisional Ruling Council (PRC), and a Federal Executive Council (FEC). He also announced the establishment of a Constitutional Conference meant to promote genuine democracy in Nigeria. The regime went on to promulgate ten new decrees to consolidate its power.

Meanwhile, the country's economy continued to plummet. The regime continued with Babangida's SAP. In January 1994, the regime imposed new petroleum product prices,<sup>68</sup> with the price of petrol increased from N5 to N11 per litre, diesel oil to N9, aviation fuel to N7, and kerosine to N6. This created a lot of hardship, as transportation fares escalated, and workers and many average Nigerians were forced to trek to their places of work and to various destinations. Many vehicle owners were forced to take their vehicles off the road as they could either not afford to fuel or maintain the cars. Prices of other commodities like food items and services also went

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<sup>68</sup> The petroleum pricing was a major bone of contention under the ING's brief regime (see above).

up, forcing many people to scavenge rubbish dumps to find something to eat or sell to make a living.

Civil servants and industrial workers were owed several months salaries, and thousands of workers were retrenched. For instance in 1995 alone, the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing sacked 307 employees, the Kwara State Government retrenched 7,000 civil servants, about 10,000 workers in Cross Rivers State, and 7,000 were sacked in Benue State (CDHR, 1996). As a result of the economic repression and scarcity of raw materials, many industries were forced to close down, leading to massive unemployment. For instance, in 1996 alone, about 115 industries affiliated with MAN shut down operations, while most of the remaining that were functioning had to adopt degrees of rationalization strategies to shore up their profit margins which were been eroded by rising costs and poor sales (MAN, 1996: 5). According to the 1996 half-yearly report of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), industrial production was hampered by several debilitating factors, including:

- Inadequate and poorly delivered infrastructural services;
- Flagging consumer demand which had persisted over the last few years;
- Protracted delays in clearance of goods at the ports, leading to massive demurrage charges that effectively raised the cost of industrial operations; and
- High cost of compliance with government regulations including harassment by officials of various agencies (MAN, 1996: 2).

The consequences of the country's economic woes at the time were, as described by Ihonvbere (1996: 209):

unemployment, inflation, rural-urban drift, environmental abuse, smuggling, currency trafficking, and bankruptcies have reached new proportions. Political assassinations, gang-style murders, prostitutions, and armed robbery have become familiar to all in Nigeria. Thousands are making claims for political asylum in South Africa and Zimbabwe, as well as in parts of Europe and North America, and the universities have lost many of their qualified

professionals. Crime has taken over the major cities as the sale and consumption of drugs have reached unprecedented proportions. Life has really become 'nasty, brutish, and short'.

By 1997, the country's economy was in great distress. Despite the increase in fuel prices, the country experienced perennial fuel shortages, characterized by long queues at petrol stations, and exploitation by the few stations that had fuel. The scarcities were believed to have been artificial, as there were claims and allegations that the fuel was being diverted to neighboring countries by oil marketers from government quarters and officials of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to be sold at exorbitant prices. It was also alleged that oil marketers were selling fuel to individual businessmen and petrol stations at higher prices. Black markets sprung up everywhere, with fuel being sold at exorbitant prices to motorists who were fed up with the queues at the petrol stations. In order to beat the scarcities, many motorists resorted to storing petrol in jerry cans in their homes whenever they were fortunate to get to buy at the fuel stations.

As a result of the fuel scarcity, transport fares rose astronomically, likewise the prices of food items and other essential items, since these items needed to be transported to the markets for sale (*National Concord*, 6 June 1997: 3). Furthermore, an erratic electricity supply coupled the dire fuel shortage in the country, crippling manufacturing activities. Many medium and small-scale industries were forced to close down as a result of the energy crisis, which also severely constrained the operations of larger industries, thereby increasing production costs. This situation forced many of them to retrench some of their workers, and also to raise the prices of their products. Small-scale businesses such as hairdressers, welders, electricians, and ice block makers that depend solely on electricity had to resort to the purchase of generators to keep their businesses going. But the generators were run on diesel or petrol, and with the scarcity of petroleum products, it became increasingly difficult for them to keep their businesses functioning.

By 1998, the country was almost at a boiling point. As shall be seen below, the situation continued to degenerate to the point that there was every indication that if things continued the way they were going, a bloody revolution was imminent in Nigeria.

#### **4.6.1 Abacha and Civil Society**

From inception, the Abacha regime faced opposition from civil society. This was largely because the regime's promises of a quick return to democracy were widely disbelieved at varying quarters in the society. Several pro-democracy activists believed that Abacha was hungry for power and was only out to subvert the people's aspirations like the Babangida regime did. The CD contended that the regime was a confirmation of the fact that "the military is bent on maintaining an eternal grip on the affairs of the Nigerian nation to the detriment of all genuine efforts at self-determination and democratization" (CD, n.d).

The regime, therefore, utilized a strategy of co-optation of some prominent members of pro-democracy groups in a bid to break the ranks of civil society. Notable members of the society were co-opted to serve in the administration so as to give the regime a semblance of credibility (Momoh and Adejumobi, 1999: 259). Among them were Olu Onagoruwa, a reputable constitutional lawyer; Iyorchia Ayu, the former Senate President of the disbanded National Assembly; Ebenezer Babatope, a political activist; Alex Ibru, the publisher of *The Guardian* newspaper; Baba Gana Kingibe, Abiola's running mate in the annulled June 12 election; former state governors Lateef Jakande and Abubakar Rimi, who were both strong advocates of the restoration of the June 12 mandate. This arrangement was to give the impression that the regime was serious in handing over power to civilians soon, and also to increase its acceptability and legitimacy. The ploy was unsuccessful, however, as the regime only increased its unpopularity, and also encouraged the formation of new pro-democracy groups. For



instance, a group of pro-democracy groups<sup>69</sup> and prominent individuals<sup>70</sup> united to form a new organization called the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) on 1 May 1994. This organization campaigned relentlessly for the return of the country to civil rule. In response, many of its members were routinely arrested, and many were forced to go into exile.

Meanwhile, using the NADECO platform as a front, on 11 June 1994, Abiola declared himself president of the country. However, on 23 June 1994, he was arrested, charged with treason, and imprisoned by the government. On 4 July 1994, two petroleum workers' unions, National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) went on strike, demanding the release of Abiola and also the restoration of his mandate. The strike was soon joined by other sectors, leading to the disruption of domestic fuel, electricity, and water supplies. The NLC called a general strike on 3 August, which was called off the following day as a result of the government's promise to release Abiola.

The oil sector refused to call off its strike actions, however, and the government went on to dissolve the executives of the two oil workers' unions as well as that of the NLC, replacing them with administrators. Many labor leaders, pro-democracy leaders, and activists were arrested and incarcerated. These included Frank Kokori, the secretary-general of NUPENG, Olu Aderibigbe, the chairman of the Edo State branch of the NLC, Francis Addo, a vice-president of PENGASSAN, Fidelis Aidelomon, chairman of the PENGASSAN branch of the Pipeline and Products

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<sup>69</sup> These included *Egbe Afenifere*, the Movement for National Reformation (MNR), Campaign for Democracy (CD), fragments of the Middle-Belt Forum, and the Eastern Mandate Union (EMU) (*Champion*, 5 February 1995: 11).

<sup>70</sup> These included Anthony Enahoro, Michael Ajasin, Bolaji Akinyemi, Abraham Adesanya, Bola Ige, Bola Tinubu, and Ndubuisi Kanu.

Marketing Company, E. Iregha, branch chairman of PENGASSAN, and Wariebi Kojo Agamene, president of NUPENG.<sup>71</sup>

The press was not spared in the wide and violent suppression of popular dissent and opposition. Journalists were frequently detained for long periods without charge or trial. For instance, Nosa Igiebor, editor-in-chief of *Tell* magazine was detained between December 1995 and June 1996. In 1995, four journalists: Kunle Ajibade, editor of *The News* magazine; Chris Anyanwu, editor-in-chief of *The Sunday Magazine*; George Mba, assistant editor of *Tell* magazine; and Ben Charles Obi, editor of *Weekend Classique* magazine, were sentenced to life imprisonment – later commuted to 15 years' imprisonment – by a Special Military Tribunal for concealing information in an alleged coup plot. John Bagu, the deputy National Secretary of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), was arrested on 13 August 1996, and was detained for several days. Richard Akinnola, the judicial correspondent for *National Concord* was arrested and detained without charge on 13 October 1996, and was released on November 20.<sup>72</sup> Mohammed Adamu, the Abuja editor of *African Concord* magazine was detained without trial for several months, and Moshood Fayemiwo, the exiled publisher of the defunct *Lagos Weekly Razor*, was abducted from Benin Republic and detained in February 1997. Security operatives seized several publications and newspapers, and many media houses were also shut down. In February 1994, *The Guardian*, *The African Guardian*, *Punch*, and *Concord* were proscribed for six months, and by the expiry of the duration, the proscription was further extended for another six months by the government (CLO, 1995).

The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), a minority grassroots organization was also perceived as a threat by the Abacha regime (see chapter 5). In

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<sup>71</sup> Agamene, Addo, Iregha, and Aidelomon were later released on 4 January 1996 after about sixteen months, while Kokori remained incarcerated until June 1998.

<sup>72</sup> Interview #20, Lagos, 5 February 2001.

late 1994, an Ogoni Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal was set up to try prominent writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists from MOSOP, for their alleged involvement in the killing of four Ogoni Chiefs in May 1994. The tribunal found them guilty of the charges and they were sentenced to death by hanging on 30 and 31 October 1995. Abacha and the PRC ratified the death sentences on November 8, and Saro-Wiwa and the eight others were executed on 10 November 1995. The execution drew great condemnation from the international community. The United States of America expanded its sanctions on the regime, and Nigeria was suspended from its membership in the Commonwealth (Diamond, 1999: 578).

The regime continued to harass, arrest, detain, torture, and dehumanize members of civil society. Workshops, seminars, rallies, and various programs organized by pro-democracy organizations of civil society were often disrupted and the participants forcefully dispersed. For instance, on 8 May 1996, Tunde Oladunjoye, the national secretary of the Committee for the Defense of Human Right (CDHR), Tunde Olugboji of the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), and three members of the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) were arrested at the venue of a workshop on the relationship between churches and human rights. They were detained and released after three days. On 9 May 1996, security operatives disrupted a seminar organized by the Third World Forum (Nigeria Network) in conjunction with Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which was to have taken place at the Conference Hall of the University of Lagos.<sup>73</sup> On 3 August 1996, security forces also disrupted a one-day forum organized by Amnesty International (AI).

The repressive tactics of the Abacha regime to muffle civil society had varying degrees of success. On the one hand, the regime succeeded in forcing a large number of pro-democracy activists, especially NADECO members, into exile. NADECO

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<sup>73</sup> For a comprehensive list of disrupted programs of civil society, see CDHR's 1995 Annual Report on the Human Rights Situation in Nigeria; 1996 CLO's Report on the State of Human Rights in Nigeria.

leaders alleged that the regime had a special squad charged with assassination and intimidation of its opponents (*Tell*, 17 June 1996: 14). This was as a result of a spate of assassinations, assassination attempts, and arsons directed at pro-democracy activists. Alfred Rewane, a top-notch of NADECO, Kudirat Abiola, wife of MKO Abiola, and Olu Omoterinwa, a retired real admiral (a close friend of Alani Akinrinade, a NADECO leader who was in exile at the time) were among those assassinated between 1995 and 1996. Attempts were also made on 4 February 1996 on the life of Alex Ibru, publisher of the *Guardian*; on 30 August 1996 on the life of Beko Ransome-Kuti of the CD; and on 14 January 1997 on the life of Abraham Adesanya, a leader of NADECO.

On the other hand, however, despite increased crack down on pro-democracy activists, civil society gained strength. The period witnessed an increase in riots and violent protests, and activities aimed at frustrating the military out of office. The buoyancy of civil society organizations could be attributed to the tremendous international support many of them received. Several governments and independent foundations focused on the entrenchment of democracy, civil society development, and the protection of human rights provided them with financial and organizational assistance to further the democratic agenda. These included the Swedish, Danish, Netherlands, Canada, and Irish governments, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Ford Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the European Union (EU).

#### **4.6.2 Abacha's Transition Program**

Just like General Babangida, General Abacha created an elaborate program for a return of the country to civil rule. On 1 October 1995, in an Independence Day

address to the nation, Abacha announced the timetable for a 3-year transition to civil rule (see Table 5). The timetable was similar to that of the Babangida regime. The regime constituted a new electoral body called the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). Like its predecessor, NECON also imposed stringent measures for the registration of political parties. These included payment of N500, 000 registration fees, a minimum membership of 40,000 per state and 15,000 in Abuja (Osaghae, 1998: 291). All these were to be done in two months. After these, NECON undertook a verification exercise, assessing the parties and ranking them according to their levels of fulfilling the requirements. It recommended only those who ranked above 50%. Of all the political parties that applied for registration, only five met the 50% mark and were promptly registered. These parties were the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP); Committee for National Consensus (CNC); National Center Party of Nigeria (NCPN); Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) and Grassroot Democratic Movement (GDM).

**Table 5: Timetable For Transition To Civil Rule (1995-98).**

- 1995: LAST QUARTER (OCTOBER-DECEMBER)
  - Approval of draft constitution.
  - Lifting of restriction on political activities.
  - Establishment of National Electoral Commission (NECON).
  - Creation of Transitional Implementation Committee, National Reconciliation Committee, and Federal Character Commission.
  - Appointment of panel on states, local government, and boundary adjustment.
- 1996: FIRST QUARTER (JANUARY-MARCH)
  - Elections and inauguration of local government councils on a non-party basis.
- 1996: SECOND QUARTER (APRIL-JUNE)
  - Creation of new states and local governments.
  - Commencement of process of registering political parties.
- 1996: THIRD QUARTER (JULY-SEPTEMBER)
  - Registration of political parties.
  - Delineation of electoral constituencies.
  - Production of authentic voters register.
- 1996: FOURTH QUARTER (OCTOBER-DECEMBER)
  - Election of local government election on party basis.
- 1997: SECOND QUARTER (APRIL-JUNE)
  - Party state primaries to select candidates for state assembly and governorship elections.
  - Screening and approval of candidates by NECON.

- 1997: THIRD QUARTER (JULY-SEPTEMBER)  
State Assembly Election.
- 1997: FOURTH QUARTER (OCTOBER-DECEMBER)  
Election of state governors.  
Sittings of state election tribunals and conduct of by-election.
- 1998: FIRST QUARTER (JANUARY-MARCH)  
Inauguration of state assemblies and governors.  
Party primaries to select candidates for National Assembly election.  
National Assembly election campaign.
- 1998: SECOND QUARTER (APRIL-JUNE)  
National Assembly elections.  
Party primaries to select candidates for the presidential election. Commencement of nation-wide campaigns for the presidential election.
- 1998: THIRD QUARTER (JULY-SEPTEMBER)  
Presidential election.
- 1 OCTOBER 1998  
Swearing-in of newly elected president and final disengagement.

The transition timetable above, however, witnessed several changes. The governorship elections scheduled for the last quarter of 1997 was shifted to 1 August 1998. The elections to the legislature of each state were held on 5 December 1997, but swearing-in of the elected parliamentarians was shifted to 21 September 1998, on the same day as the state governors. These changes were perceived by critics as vindicating their skepticism about the Abacha regime's transition to democracy, due to culminate in the handing over of power to an elected president on 1 October 1998.

Furthermore, the five registered political parties organized party primaries to select candidates for the presidential election scheduled for 1998. Ostensibly, due to arm-twisting by the regime, all the political parties dropped their presidential hopefuls and nominated General Abacha as their sole candidate. Alhaji M.D. Yusuf, a presidential aspirant under the GDM alleged that:

people were imported to Maiduguri (venue of the GDM convention), people who were not party members and they were accredited as delegates. They did this so they could vote for General Abacha. And they succeeded (*The Tribune*, 8 August 1998: 29).

The constitutions of the political parties had to be modified to accommodate the Abacha nomination. By this act, he was widely expected to succeed himself as a civilian president on 1 October 1998. This was a strange turn of events for many reasons. Firstly, Abacha was not a declared member of any of the political parties; therefore all the parties had to amend their constitutions at the last minute to 'accommodate' non-party members. Secondly, while inaugurating the transition to civil rule program, Abacha had told all his ministers interested in political office to quit his cabinet first, and subsequently, some prospective candidates for nation-wide office were disqualified for not being members of the various political parties for up to one year before their nomination. Thirdly, it was strange that the 'independent' electoral body (NECON) that was to midwife a democratic election could go along with the decision of the five political parties in their 'agreement' to adopt a military person as a 'consensus' presidential candidate.

As it was the case during the Babangida regime, several organizations rose up to help Abacha on his self-succession bid. These organizations, which many believed to have had the backing of the Presidency, included:

*\*Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA) –led by Daniel Kanu*

*\*National Mobilization and Persuasion Committee – led by Dr. Godwin Dabo Adzuana*

*\*Abacha Solidarity Movement (ASOMO) – led by Chief Abayomi Owulade*

*\*Peoples Movement for Vision 2010 – led by Dr. George Ekim*

*\*National Movement for Abacha Presidency – led by Prince Arthur Eze*

*\*Movement for Indigenous Democracy (MIDIA) – led by Alhaji Mohammed Hassan*

*\*Nigeria-British Youth Association (NYA) – led by Segun Adeyemi*

*\*21<sup>st</sup> Generation Insists on Abacha – led by Ladi Alao.*

All these organizations, complemented by other substantive civil society organizations such as Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria (PMAN), National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), arranged a two-day rally tagged “2-million-man-march” in support of Abacha’s civilian presidency. Also, Francis Arthur Nzeribe, a major actor in the 12 June 1993 drama, and an ardent advocate of the Babangida for president bid, joined force with the ‘Abacha-for-President’ advocacy (*The Guardian*, 9 May 1998: 5-6). The rally went peacefully without any disturbance from government operatives. Ironically, a counter rally organized in Lagos by twenty-six pro-democracy groups of civil society under the umbrella of the United Action for Democracy (UAD) calling for the rejection of the Abacha candidature, was declared illegal and disrupted by the police (Bande, 1998: 23).

The regime continued its repression of civil society, until Abacha died suddenly on 8 June 1998.

#### **4.7 The Abubakar Transitional Regime (June 1998-May 1999)**

After the demise of Abacha, General Abdusalam Abubakar took over as President. He subsequently took important steps towards releasing civil society from the bondage it had been subjected to by the Abacha regime. He released several political detainees including the two petroleum union leaders that were imprisoned and General Olusegun Obasanjo who had been imprisoned in 1995 for an alleged involvement in a coup plot against the regime. He also abolished the two decrees that removed the leadership of the NLC and the petroleum unions. Significantly, however, Abiola was not among those released, and he died in detention on 6 July 1998.

On 20 July 1998, General Abubakar announced a new transition to civil rule program of eight months from start to finish (See Table 6 below). In August, Abubakar



appointed an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct new elections. Nine parties were provisionally registered to contest the local government elections in December 1998, but only three of them<sup>74</sup> met the requirements for contesting in the legislative, gubernatorial, and presidential elections. Obasanjo, who contested under the platform of the People's Democratic Party, won the presidential election and was sworn-in as a democratically elected civilian president on May 29 1999.

**Table 6: Timetable For Transition To Civil Rule (1998-1999)**

YEAR	DATE	ACTIVITY
1998	24 September	Release of provisional registered political parties
	5 October	Start of voters' registration. Ends 19 October
	25 November	End of production of voters' register
	5 December	Local government council elections
	23 December	Submission of names for governorship and state assembly elections
1999	9 January	State governorship and assembly elections
	20 January	Release of guidelines for presidential and national assembly elections
	12 February	Submissions of names of presidential candidates
	13 February	Start of screening of presidential candidates
	19 February	End of election campaign for national assembly
	20 February	National assembly elections
	26 February	End of election campaign by presidential candidates
	27 February	Presidential elections
	6 March	Run-off elections if needed for national assembly and presidential elections
	29 May	Swearing-in of elected president

## 4.8 Conclusion

The period studied (1985-1999) witnessed massive opposition between the state and civil society. It brought about the emergence of vibrant civil society organizations. Also, the interests and activities of many civil society organizations broadened beyond their traditional objectives to incorporate political interests. Despite the effort

<sup>74</sup> The three parties were the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All People's Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD).

of the state to suppress civil society and snuff it out of the political space, the political and economic difficulties faced only helped in the encouragement of mass mobilization, creation and strengthening of new social, political, civil liberties, and general interest civil society organizations. The state tended to respond to the vibrancy of these organizations in three major ways. Firstly, the state used force to repress mass protest, and also proscribe groups critical of the regime. The NLC, NANS, ASUU, NBA were some of the associations that were proscribed one time or the other under different regimes. Media houses were shut down; some were proscribed, with their members harassed, arrested, and tortured. Secondly, the regimes tried to pitch the entire military force against civil society by portraying the opposition of civil society as attempt to frustrate and humiliate the military out of office. Thirdly, the regimes tried to pitch civil society against the political elite. The activities of civil society were depicted as attempts to derail the transition to civil rule programs. And within civil society itself, the state substantially penetrated the ranks of civil society by causing divisions among the organizations.

The programs and policies of the state at this period generated violent reactions and confrontations from civil society groups, which sometimes responded through mass action campaigns and activities such as demonstrations, strikes, and riots. Civil society organizations were able to effectively mobilize members of the public to participate in these demonstrations and strikes beyond the expectations of the state. The fact that these demonstrations tended to be spontaneous and attracted widespread support made them more dangerous to the military regimes, which were forced to worry about the possibility of being overthrown.

In sum, many civil society organizations were able to influence several policies of the state, in some cases through dialogue, and when dialogue failed, through joint actions, they fearlessly confronted the state in order to ensure a better life for the average Nigerians. They were able to undermine the system and deconstruct the state of

militarism.<sup>75</sup> As the study shows, however, this is not suggestive of a homogenous civil society in Nigeria. It showed that not all civil society organizations were against military rule. For various reasons, ranging from material benefits to the quest for power or position, many organizations went along, or supported, the activities and policies of the military regimes.

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<sup>75</sup> Interview #1, Abdul Oroh (CDHR), 31 January 2000.

## Chapter 5

### CIVIL SOCIETY IN PERSPECTIVE: Case Studies

*...the military incursion and dominance of Nigerian politics ..... meant intolerance of civil society and restriction of the space for autonomous action, civil rights, and rule of law. The strategies of restructuring, control, and repression of labor, media houses, and social critics were utilized to weaken and undermine civil society. But the military did not succeed in fully subordinating civil society as elements of confrontation, peaceful and violent, persisted in the relations between state and civil society (Ikelegbe, 2001: 7-8).*

#### 5.1 Introduction

Civil society may be the greatest casualty of prolonged military rule in Nigeria. In the many years of military rule, civil society experienced extensive repression and subjugation by various military regimes. On taking over power, the military usually suspends the constitution, disbands democratic institutions, and enacts decrees that often suffocate and constrain the society at large and civil society in particular. However, despite the closure of political space as a result of military rule in Nigeria, civil society was able to produce vibrant and articulate organizations that tenaciously advocated for the protection of fundamental human rights, civil rule, good governance, and a general improvement in socio-economic development in the country.

Between 1985 and 1999, Nigeria witnessed a proliferation of civil society organizations in various sectors seeking to articulate and protect specific interests. Many civil society organizations educated, mobilized, and led popular struggle and mass political action for the protection of civil liberties. They challenged transition inconsistencies and economic policies of the various regimes, and also fought against

state repression and repressive laws by instituting legal actions. In response to the activities of these organizations, the various regimes subjected them to considerable harassment, arrests and detention, and brutalities. Some of them were proscribed, some media houses shut down for considerable periods, and security agents seized copies of newspapers and magazines.

All that notwithstanding, many civil society organizations that were at the forefront of advocating for good governance, accountability, and transparency had their credibility in doubt as a result of the lack of these values within their own organizations. There were cases of internal squabbles and externally generated problems within and among these organizations. These may have served to erode the credibility of civil society organizations in Nigeria.

This chapter focuses on three major civil society organizations in Nigeria. These are the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), and the Campaign for Democracy (CD). These organizations, representing different categories of civil society, played major roles in the struggle for good governance and protection of fundamental human rights in Nigeria. While the CD is a coalition of many civil society organizations out to promote democratic values; the NLC prides itself as a representative of the masses, especially the working class; and MOSOP is representative of the struggle of the minority groups in the southeastern part of Nigeria for a fair share of the country's resources. The chapter examines the activities of these organizations with particular emphasis on the period between 1985 and 1999. It focuses on the nature and character of their struggle as a representative sample of civil society's engagement and resistance to certain (or several) policies of the government, most especially the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank inspired structural adjustment program and the political transition program. It shows how the defense of some of these organizations'

interests first brought them into confrontation with the state, and how some of them went beyond the protection of their interests and objectives to advocacy for the return of the country to civil rule.

Furthermore, this chapter will highlight the major problems that have plagued civil society with an eye on identifying how they could be tackled to ensure the credibility and effectiveness of such organizations.

## **5.2 The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC)**

### **5.2.1 History and Activities**

The labor movement in Nigeria has played a significant role in the history of the country in standing as the voice for the working class in the realization of their aspirations and expectations both in the economic and political fronts. For instance, through its strong oppositional stances against aspects of the structural adjustment program (SAP), the movement contributed immensely to the shape of economic reforms embarked upon by different regimes in Nigeria. Also, either singly or in conjunction with other civil society organizations, the movement contributed to the democratization of the country through organized protests and civil disobedience.

This section examines the efforts of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in alleviating the sufferings of its members in the face of economic hardship that resulted from several years of economic reform programs. It explores the strategies employed by the congress in getting its voice heard, especially between the 1985 to 1999 period. It also looks at the problems facing the congress, which has proven to be detrimental to its effectiveness.

Historically, the relationship between the state and the labor body in Nigeria has always been one of intense confrontation and antagonism since the colonial era.<sup>76</sup> As the labor body agitated for improvement in the standard of living of Nigerian workers, the state constantly suppressed their agitation. Falola and Ihonvbere noted:

Through the enactment of draconian and very punitive laws and decrees, the frequent and brutal use of the police against protesting workers, intimidation, victimization, scapegoatism and blackmail, the Nigerian bourgeoisie and state have attempted to incorporate and domesticate labor in Nigeria (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985: 146).

The NLC was decreed into existence by the Obasanjo regime in 1978 under Decree No. 22 as the only central labor organization for Nigerian workers. The approximately 1,000-registered trade unions of the time were consolidated into 42 national industrial unions. The decree stipulated that only these 42 industrial unions specified by the decree were deemed to be affiliates of the NLC. All other unions were prohibited from operating (Beckman, 1995: 286),<sup>77</sup> and a subvention of one million Naira (N1 million) was given to the congress and the 42 unions as a take-off grant by the government. This act of government, received at first by many of these unions as a means of incorporation, was confronted by strike actions but it also generated conflicts between members of different individual unions (Fashoyin, 1980: 35-36). Therefore, as a result of the disunity among the unions, they were forced to back down and accept the new labor organization created by the government.

Despite the initial misgivings in some quarters, the NLC quickly set down to serious business of improving living conditions for workers during the civilian regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983) that followed its creation. To this end, the labor body launched in February 1980 a program of action tagged, "The Workers' Charter of Demands". The demands included:

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<sup>76</sup> See chapter 3 for details.

<sup>77</sup> The 42 were later reduced to 41 in 1989, and Decree No. 4 of 1996 merged the 41 to 29 unions.

- A national commission on employment and basic needs;
- Extension of public ownership of certain enterprises including transportation;
- A minimum wage of N300 per month;
- Housing allowance to every worker irrespective of grade;
- Restoration of vehicle loans and related allowance; and
- Declaration of Labor Day as public holiday (Tokunbo, 1985: 103-104).

In April 1980, the Shagari regime conceded a minimum wage of N100 per month instead of the N300, along with housing and transport allowances for government employees. The government also went on to declare 1 May as an official public holiday. According to the government, the country could not afford to pay workers N300 minimum wage, and also to meet their other demands. But the NLC, arguing that the N100 was not enough to meet the basic needs of the workers, tried to dialogue with the administration to reconsider its stance. However, all efforts to dialogue failed, as the government was not willing to meet with the leaders of the congress. Workers thus embarked on a nation-wide strike between 11 and 13 May 1981 to back up the N300 minimum wage, and other demands. While the strike action lasted, workers reported at their offices but did not carry out their duties, practically grounding all aspects of the society (*Daily Sketch*, 11 May 1981; *New Nigeria*, 12 May 1981; *Nigerian Tribune*, 14 May 1981). On 13 May 1981, the NLC and the government reached an agreement on an increase of minimum pension from N33 to N55, and the restoration of vehicle advance and basic allowances. The congress however rejected a minimum wage of N120 per month proposed by the government but agreed to allow the National Assembly to deliberate on a reasonable increase within thirty days (Tokunboh, 1985: 107). Before the expiration of the thirty days,



the National Assembly recommended N125 national minimum wage, which the NLC accepted.

Apart from joint strike actions by the NLC, individual unions also carried out independent forms of protest to decry the plight of Nigerian workers. In March 1982, members of the Electricity and Gas Workers' Union embarked on a strike action, plunging the nation into darkness for a whole week. They were later joined by the Civil Service Technical Workers' Union, Radio and Signals technicians in the civil aviation service, engineers and pilots of the Nigerian Airways, Water Corporation workers, and many others (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985: 162-163).

The antagonism between the state and the NLC persisted throughout the Shagari administration, as the civilian administration found itself increasingly unable to control organized labor due to the continued deterioration of the conditions of workers as the economy of the country declined. The economic decline could be attributed to the glut in the world oil market in the early 1980s, and a growing evidence of declining earnings in the agricultural and other non-oil sectors due in part to the vagaries of the global economy for less developed countries, and the poor management of, and endemic corruption within the Nigerian political economy. Workers bore the brunt of the decline, most especially with the introduction of austerity measures by the Shagari administration.<sup>78</sup>

The effects of the stringent economic measures were such that factories and companies had to retrench thousands of workers or were forced to shut down. According to the NLC, 20 000 textile workers, 1 000 chemical industry workers, 2 000 furniture, fixtures, and wood workers, 3 000 food, beverage, and tobacco industry workers, and over 2 000 oil workers were retrenched between 1979 and 1982 (Falola

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<sup>78</sup> See chapter 4 for details.

and Ihonvbere, 1985: 150). These retrenchments and job losses resulting from the closures not only contributed to skyrocketing unemployment but also to a reduction in worker morale and consumer confidence in the Nigerian economy. Civil servants were owed many months salaries, and many of them were forced to look for alternative means of survival. Not surprisingly, the NLC and its affiliates felt forced to agitate even more vigorously for the protection of jobs and worker interests. But the government was not able to stem the continuous job losses due to the continued plummeting of the economy.

Nevertheless, the NLC actively contested the administration's economic measures, and also pressurized other employers of labor to improve the living standard of Nigerian workers. It condemned the efforts of the Shagari administration to privatize public corporations, arguing that it would lead to the promotion of 'economic slavery and pauperization of the nation'. Also, this would allow for the enrichment of a few individuals at the expense of the nation. The NLC contended that:

what is needed is a radical re-organization under public ownership; to want to re-organize under private control is to ensure that accruing profit goes into private pockets and this will lead to retrenchment in the public sector and will bring untold hardships to the working people of this country (Sunday Times, 6 November, 1983: 1).

Although the NLC may not have achieved much during the Shagari administration, nevertheless, it was able to forge a common front for the workers in the face of the problems they faced during the Shagari regime. The NLC was able to sensitize and mobilize workers through public lectures, press releases, seminars, rallies, and workshops, and was able to mount pressure on various employers of labor and the state.


There was no respite for the congress during the Buhari regime that took over from Shagari. The Buhari regime (1983-1985) introduced stringent economic measures, which did not improve the lot of the Nigerian workers. The regime also made it clear that it was not going to tolerate opposition from the labor movement. It threatened that frivolous industrial actions, particularly strikes and lockouts, as well as lack of financial accountability of the unions would not be tolerated (*National Concord*, 19 March 1984; *Sunday Herald*, 18 March 1984). However, in defiance of the regime's threats, various labor unions embarked on strikes to demand better working conditions of service as well as improved living conditions for workers. The NLC opposed strongly the massive retrenchment of civil servants in 1984. In reaction, the regime detained for days several leaders of the NLC under Decree No. 2 of 1984, which allowed the indefinite detention of anyone deemed a threat to state security.

Unlike the Buhari regime, the Babangida regime (1985- 1993) made a deliberate attempt to co-opt the NLC leadership. For instance, under the regime, the NLC played an active role in the political system. In February 1986, the regime put together a commission called the Political Bureau made up of academic, labor, and business leaders as well as other prominent people in the society to discuss the nation's political future (See chapter 4). The NLC was given two of the seventeen seats of the commission. The two representatives were effective in guiding the commission in the formulation of key recommendations pertaining to:<sup>79</sup>

- a) The composition and the nature of the industrial sector;
- b) The privatization of state enterprises;
- c) The structure of industrial relations;
- d) The role of organized labor in national politics.

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<sup>79</sup> However, it should be noted that majority of the bureau's recommendations were rejected by the government. See chapter 4.



But it seemed the romance between the regime and the NLC was not destined to last long, for in June 1986 the NLC had a major confrontation with the government. This confrontation was suggestive of the NLC's unwillingness to be co-opted or remain silent in the face of substantive matters of principle. In solidarity with the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) over the killing of several students at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria on 23 May 1986, the NLC declared June 4 as a 'day of national mourning and solidarity' to be marked by rallies at its headquarters and the state capitals. The government, however interpreted the solidarity rally as a subversive move to overthrow the regime, and mobilized security operatives to disperse the rallies. The day before the rally, national leaders of the NLC were arrested and detained (Jega, 1994: 20). Mobile police occupied the NLC national secretariat and some other state secretariats for about two weeks. Although the regime threatened initially to lay treason charges against the labor leaders, they were released after about ten days.

The introduction of the structural adjustment program (SAP) in 1986 brought a new dimension to the struggle of the NLC. SAP was perceived as an attack on the general well being of workers and the Nigerian masses. Health services, education, transportation, and basic services became out of reach of the average Nigerians. Many workers were retrenched, and many other workers were forced to take up alternative jobs to make ends meet. The frustrations that accumulated from these led to a massive NLC-led anti-SAP strike action in 1987.

Apart from strike actions, the NLC resorted to the use of posters to depict SAP both in terms of its various aspects that directly affected the welfare of its members as well as in terms of the problems that affected other social groups (Olukoshi, 1996: 462). Pamphlets, leaflets, and posters graphically showing the drastic devaluation of workers' wages and salaries, the direct consequences of the inflationary spiral in the

economy, and the negative effects of the removal of subsidies to the masses were distributed by the labor union. In response, the regime frequently arrested and detained many union leaders for several days.

However, the radical antagonist stance of the NLC suffered a set back in the course of the Babangida regime. The congress was thrown into confusion as a result of ideological differences, and the government seized this opportunity to dissolve the leadership of the congress. The event leading to the dissolution was the election of the leadership of the congress held at a Delegates Conference at Benin between 23 and 26 February 1988. Historically, the congress has always been broadly divided into two ideological camps: 'Progressives' and 'Democrats'.<sup>80</sup> The two candidates that vied for the presidency were Takai Shamang, a 'democrat' and Ali Chiroma, a 'progressive'. The government allegedly was in support of the 'democrat's' nomination due to the seeming uncooperative attitude of the incumbent president, Chiroma with the Babangida government. Although Shamang lost the election, his NLC faction refused to accept the result. As a result of the crisis that followed, the regime evoked the National Economic Emergency Powers Decree of 1985 to dissolve the leadership of the congress. The government contended that two 'irreconcilable factions' existed within the NLC, and thereby declared the Benin election null and void (Adewumi and Adesina, 1999: 61). The government appointed a Sole Administrator to run the NLC, who later saw to another round of elections in December 1988, and Paschal Bafyau,<sup>81</sup> a 'progressive', became the president of the NLC.

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<sup>80</sup> For an exposition into the historical development of 'progressives' and 'democrats' in the NLC, see: Aborisade, 1992: 25-27.

<sup>81</sup> At the time, Bafyau was the secretary-general of the Nigerian Union of Railway men, which was a career office. His nomination contradicted the provision of the NLC constitution that bars a career officer from holding the NLC presidential office.

Bafyau was later to gain a reputation as an ally of the Babangida regime. The NLC under Bafyau was seen by many critics as being passive in confronting the Babangida regime on its various negative policies (for instance, see: Aborishade, 1992; Ihonvbere, 1997; Kukah, 1999). One of the earliest issues that fueled this criticism was a fuel price increase<sup>82</sup> announced by General Babangida in 1989, which the NLC did not oppose. Instead, according to Bafyau, the NLC “agreed that future increases in the price of fuel would take into account a marked improvement in the state of the economy and involved consultation with the trade unions, organized private sector, and other interests” (NLC, 1989). This was in contradiction to the earlier stance of the NLC towards the removal of oil subsidy and increase in oil product prices. For in November 1988, the government had detained four leaders of the NLC (Ali Chiroma, president; Lasisi Osunde, general secretary; Stephen Oshidipe, National Treasurer; and Salisu Mohammed, head of information department) for four days for the NLC’s powerful propaganda against the regime’s attempt to withdraw oil subsidy (Aborishade, 1992: 10). Another action interpreted by critics of the Bafyau leadership as co-optation was the foundation laying of the Labour House by President Babangida on 1 May 1992. At the occasion, the government presented the NLC with a cheque of N50 million for the construction of its proposed multi-storey building. It was suggested that the donation was to buy off the leadership of the NLC from criticizing the government.

In his defense, Bafyau declared that the NLC had to adopt the policy of co-operation with the government since 1989 for two main reasons:

- a) The fact that economic crisis which has engulfed the nation and persisted, needed co-operation on the part of principal actors in the economic scene;

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<sup>82</sup> The increase was by about 70%. Fuel price rose from 42 kobo per litre to 60 kobo.

b) The fact that the transition to civil rule as enunciated by government, though frequently altered and distorted, *called for moderation and tolerance on the part of strategic interest groups like the trade unions* in order to see it through (emphasis added) (NLC, June 1993).

Nevertheless, after General Babangida annulled the 12 June 1993 election, the NLC was forced to take a stand – at the very least, in order to remain credible to the public. The Central Working Committee (CWC) of the NLC met in Lagos on 28 June 1993 after the cancellation, and strongly blamed the military for derailing democracy in Nigeria (Ihonvbere, 1997: 83). The NLC warned, “Nigerian workers and the trade unions will challenge the legitimacy of the military by ways of a set of actions if the military extends its tenure beyond 27 August 1993” (NLC, July 1993). Also, in July 1993, the NLC reiterated its condemnation of the cancellation of the election. It rejected the call of General Babangida for a new election, demanded the release of the result of the annulled election, and also called for the release of all detained activists and leaders of pro-democracy movements (*Sunday Concord*, 16 July 1993: 2).

Also, in August 1993, many civil society organizations across the country rejected the setting up of an Interim National Government (ING) and insisted on the installation of M.K.O Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled election as president. The NLC also rejected the ING and directed all its members to embark on a nation-wide strike action with effect from 28 August 1993 until all its economic and political demands were met. The strike action was largely successful, and virtually paralyzed the economy. But on 2 September 1993, the NLC called off the strike action after a meeting with the ING. The workers, however, went back on an indefinite strike action on 11 November 1993 to protest against a fuel price increase announced by the ING. The strike continued till General Abacha toppled the ING on 17 November 1993.

Abacha, however, dashed the expectations that he was going to hand over power to Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled election. In reaction, the Campaign for Democracy (CD) organized in 7 May 1994 a sit-at-home protest. Though the NLC was an affiliate of the CD, the congress leadership dissociated itself from the protest and actually directed Nigerian workers not to participate in it. In a statement by Salisu Mohamed, the spokesman of the leadership of the NLC, the NLC warned that:

Nigerian workers should desist from following any association of dubious character, who capitalizes on the present difficult situation in the country to engage in unpatriotic acts, based on the commitment to get monetary rewards from local and external sources... The Congress would not be responsible for what happens to any worker who stays at home (*The Guardian*, 5 July 1994: 15).

By this time, many unions in the congress, most especially the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) had become frustrated with the stance of the NLC.<sup>83</sup> After a meeting of the NUPENG National Executive Council (NUPENG-NEC) at Warri, Delta State on 18 June 1994, the union decided to take action. In its communiqué, the union stated:

The union, will, in consonance with the historical role of labor and in solidarity with the suffering masses and the underprivileged people of this country, whose future has been mortgaged because of unending socio-political and economic crisis resort to a sit-at-home action from the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1994 pending the resolution of the national crisis in order to avoid a situation which may lead to a bloody revolt by the aggrieved people of Nigeria (*The Guardian on Sunday*, 3 July 1994)

Thus, on 4 July 1994, the two petroleum workers unions, NUPENG and PENGASSAN embarked on a strike action demanding the release of Abiola and also the restoration of his mandate. The strike went on for about ten weeks, and it disrupted domestic fuel supplies, and caused the closure of oil refineries, and eventually disrupted oil exports. Probably in a bid to save face, on 3 August 1994, the

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<sup>83</sup> Interview #8, PENGASSAN official, Ibadan, 24 January 2001.



NLC also called a general strike to pressure the government to release Abiola but it was called off the following day as a result of the government's promise to release Abiola, a promise the regime reneged upon. Unlike the NLC, the two oil workers' unions refused to call off their strike action despite threats from the government. The oil workers' strike dealt a great blow to the economy as about 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings come from the export of oil. Despite having called off its strike, the government went ahead to dissolve the leadership of the NLC along with that of the two striking unions, and appointed administrators to manage them. Five leaders of the workers' unions were arrested and detained without trial from 1994 to 1998 when a new regime came into power.

As the economy of the country continued to nose-dive (see chapter 4), the travail of the people worsened. The workers, now without a labor body had to bear the brunt of the deterioration. This prompted individual labor unions to agitate for the well being of its members. For instance, on 3 November 1995, after negotiations with the government failed, the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) began a nation-wide strike action. The doctors were demanding:

- 15% salary increase granted other workers in 1993 but which excluded doctors;
- Payment of inducement allowance to all doctors;
- Removal of the bar restricting the rise of general practice doctors on the Medical Salary Scale (MSS);
- Restoration of the relative gap between the allowances of doctors and other health workers; and
- Payment of journal and learned society allowances to deserving doctors (NARD, n.d).

The strike was suspended on 9 November following government's promise to implement their demands within two weeks (*The Guardian*, 10 November 1995). The NARD, however, had to resume the strike again on 1 February 1996 when the

government still had not fulfilled its promise. By February 4, health services nationwide were paralyzed in teaching and specialist hospitals. Patients whose conditions were considered not critical had to be discharged, and new patients were not admitted. Several deaths were recorded; including 5 at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) (*The Guardian*, 5 February 1996). The strike action was called off on February 6 after government acceded to all their demands except the 15% increment.

The victory of the doctors' strike encouraged other health workers to go on strike too. On 5 May 1996, workers in the health sectors under the aegis of the National Association of Nurses and Midwives (NANM), the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUN), the National Union of Pharmacists, Medical Technologists, and Professions Allied to Medicine (NUPMTPAM), and the Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research and Allied Institutes (SSAUTHRAI) embarked on a strike action demanding salary and allowance increases, paralyzing health services. Other associations such as the National Union of Banks, Insurance, and Financial Institutions Employees (NUBIFIE) and the Petroleum Tanker Drivers Association (PTDA) embarked on strike actions various times in 1996 to agitate for one thing or the other, disrupting business and social activities.

In a bid to reduce the impact of the NLC as well as that of the individual unions, in 1996, the Abacha regime merged the congress' 41 affiliate unions into 29. It also promulgated several decrees to curtail the labor body. Among them was Decree No. 29 of 1996, which prohibited the NLC and its affiliate unions from affiliating with any international labor organization or trade secretariat except the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) and the Organization of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA). It also de-affiliated them from all previous attachment with other

international organizations. In order to join any international organization, a “specific application” must be made to the minister of labor, and “ approval given by the Provisional Ruling Council”. This move denied workers the benefits of associating with international labor bodies, most especially technical assistance, trade union education, and networking. Also, Decree No. 26 of 1996 allowed the Minister of Labor to cancel the registration of any of the 29 NLC affiliates if he considered their activities to be at variance with the national interest. Union dues would no longer be checked-off<sup>84</sup> to a dissolved or de-registered union, and the union would be banned from collecting dues. A union that went on strike in breach of a collective agreement would also have its check-off facility removed.

The NLC hence remained in disarray until the congress got a little respite when General Abdulsalami Abubakar came to power in June 1998, after the demise of General Abacha. A caretaker committee was elected by the workers to take over from the sole administrator, and a new election to appoint the leaders of the congress was held in January 1999. In the interim before the January 1999 elections, the caretaker committee was able to convince the Abubakar government to back down on a fuel price increase it imposed in December 1998 as a result of a “ constructive negotiation” between the government and the workers union. Thus, instead of repression, the new regime resorted to dialogue, which forestalled any need for strike actions by the workers.

Thus, throughout the period between 1985 and 1998, the Babangida and Abacha regimes retained broad authority over labor matters, and intervened forcefully in labor disputes that seemingly contravened their essential political or economic programs.

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<sup>84</sup> The Labour (Amendment) Decree No. 21 of 1978 made provision for compulsory check-off, that is deduction of union contributions directly by employers from workers’ wages. In other words, workers’ automatically pay union dues to the NLC.

The NLC leadership was disbanded at will, and the human rights of workers were frequently infringed upon by the regimes.

Adams Oshiomhole, the Deputy President of the NLC under Paschal Bafyau was elected president in January 1999. Since his election, the NLC has continued to fight for the emancipation of Nigerian workers. His administration could claim credit for the implementation of N3, 500 minimum wage fixed by the then Abubakar military regime, the demonstrations at the National Assembly in Abuja against a outrageous furniture allowances of assembly members,<sup>85</sup> the protests in December 1999 against the attempt at that time to hike fuel price, and the successful five-day general strike in June 2000 when the Obasanjo regime eventually increased petrol price from N20 to N30 per litre. The strike was successful in forcing the government to drastically reduce the price to N22 per litre. Also, in May 2000, the Oshiomole leadership secured 53% and 83% increment in the minimum wage of federal and state civil servants respectively. Since then, the NLC has kept the government on its toes especially in relations to the removal of oil subsidies saying that it was detrimental to the country's socio-economic fabric, and on issues pertaining to the well being of Nigerian workers.

### **5.2.2 Challenges and Weaknesses of the NLC**

As indicated above, the NLC serves as the umbrella body for trade unions in Nigeria. Its membership is open to all workers in Nigeria. It has a National Executive, a National secretariat, and state councils in all the states of the federation. The association is maintained with subscription from members and donations from individuals within Nigeria, and external sources including the Fredrick Ebert

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<sup>85</sup> The new government under Obasanjo had allocated the sum of N3.5 million and N2.6 million as furniture allowance for the senators and members of the House of Representatives respectively. The NLC mobilized workers to stage a demonstration at the entrance of the National Assembly over what Oshiomole described as a wastage of the people's money for furniture allowance for lawmakers at the expense of poor salary packages for workers (*The Post Express*, 9 September 2000).

Foundation. The NLC was able to get back on its feet with the re-organization of the congress after the election of Adam Oshiomole in January 1999.

The state had tried to exploit the internal divisions among unionists as a basis to either tilt the internal balance of power in favor of its preferred candidates or to suspend the organization and blunt what it perceives to be a radical union orientation toward the reforms. The congress allowed itself to be 'bought' by the military regimes, most especially under General Babangida. Large amounts of money were given to the congress by the government for trade union projects like housing schemes, a lending bank, a transport service, and a Labor College. Large amounts of money were also allocated by the government to build a new national secretariat for the NLC in the federal capital of Abuja. As a result, the congress did not rely on the subscriptions of its members, and such handouts from government gave room for manipulation of the congress by the regime. The gifts were perceived as many as enticement to make the labor movement cooperate with the regime and go along with its policies and programs, whether it was in the interest of Nigerian workers or not.

The Babangida and Abacha regimes also used constant dissolution of the leadership of the NLC and the subsequent imposition of sole administrators on it as opportunities to maneuver the affairs of the congress, and to stifle the voice of the Nigerian workers in their call for better governance in the country. However, though the government controlled the NLC during the Abacha regime through the imposition of an administrator, many of the affiliated unions were able to successfully make their grievances known to the government. Some of them held meetings fairly regularly and conducted elections according to the stipulations of their constitutions without interference from the government.<sup>86</sup> Also, some of the activities of the NLC helped to raise the awareness about democracy among its members, and the society at large.

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<sup>86</sup> Interview #11, NLC official, Lagos, 25 January 2001.

In a nutshell, during the period under study, some of the activities of the leadership of the NLC, especially under Babangida often made it difficult to coordinate a common front for Nigerian workers to make themselves heard on political and economic issues. Human rights abuses, repression, and deplorable condition of living of the workers reached unprecedented heights during this period and the NLC was usually unable to help in alleviating these conditions. Consequently, many unions in the congress were forced to take independent steps of action as a result of the congress' inability or unwillingness to fight for certain issues that affected the Nigerian workers, and by extension, the underprivileged in the society.

For the congress to function effectively, it must first set its priorities right. Firstly, the NLC must try to rely on its own resources, instead of looking up to the government for handouts. Secondly, it must engage in capacity building programs like workshops, seminars, and lectures, alongside trade union education in order to equip its members. Thirdly, there is a need to establish accountability and transparency so as to build the confidence of its members, and the society at large, in the congress. It also needs to ensure the protection and promotion of democracy in the work place. Fourthly, the NLC must have clear and reasonable demands, which workers can relate to. Lastly, it needs to form alliances with other sectors of civil society who are fighting for the promotion of human and civil rights and for the enthronement of democracy in the country. This is because if these were in place, workers would most likely be able to enjoy a better life and a better working environment.

## 5.3 The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)

### 5.3.1 History and Activities

The Ogoni people are a group of about five hundred thousand people living in the Niger Delta area of southeastern Nigeria. The Niger Delta region comprises of present day Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States, with an estimated population of over 30 million. The Niger Delta has suffered gross neglect and deprivation over the years despite its enormous contribution to the economic prosperity of the country. This has resulted in widespread poverty, lack of social and economic infrastructure, lack of basic utilities, and a high rate of unemployment and crime.

The Petroleum Act of 1969 (amended 1991), the Land Use Act of 1978 (amended 1993), Land Title Vesting Decree of 1993, and the National Inland Waterways Authority Decree of 1997, are some of the laws being used to deprive the people of the area the rights to their land and resources, leaving the people without economic empowerment. Also, the continuous gas flaring, oil spills, and leakages from pipelines have continued to make the lives of the people in the area unbearable. Large portions of arable lands are destroyed by fire outbreaks, the environment is polluted, the lands are unproductive for agricultural purposes, and aquatic lives destabilized. The area suffers a dearth of potable water, educational facilities, electricity, telecommunication, and many other basic facilities.

Ogoniland, made up of six clans (kingdoms),<sup>87</sup> which hold 111 villages among them, is just one of the many minority communities of the oil producing area of Nigeria fighting for self-recognition and self-determination. The problems of the Ogoni people became complicated with the discovery of oil in the area in 1958, and the

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<sup>87</sup> These are Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyo-Khana, and Tai.

subsequent emergence of Shell Oil Company and Chevron as important players in the area.<sup>88</sup> Some of the major grievances of the people are:

1. Despite the tremendous wealth that accrues to Shell and the government from the proceed of the oil found in their area, the people are not enjoying the benefits from oil revenue;
2. The area does not boast of basic infrastructure and amenities such as light, water, and health facilities;
3. They have no access to political power due to the fact that they formed just one out of the about 300 other minority groups;
4. Also, their land suffers great devastation and pollution as a result of decades of oil exploration and extraction.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, a former spokesman and president of MOSOP, aptly summarized the Ogoni situation:

Ogoni has offered Nigeria an estimated \$30 billion and received nothing in return, except a blighted countryside; an atmosphere full of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon; ... a land of polluted streams and creeks of rivers without fish, and land which is, in every sense of the term, an ecological disaster. This is not acceptable (Cited in CDHR, 1994: 8).

The problem and conflict between the Ogonis and the Nigerian state lies in the:

flawed, unequal, and exploitative nature of center-periphery relations in the country, the domination and exploitation of the oil producing community by the state and capital, the neglect and marginalisation of minority communities, and in the insecurity, instability, and the general weaknesses of the neo-colonial state (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 228).

Enormous amount of natural gas is flared daily, and there are constant oil spills in the communities, which affect both wildlife and human beings. In 1983, the Inspectorate Division of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) drew attention to the impact of oil spills in the area:

We witnessed the slow poisoning of the waters of this country, and the destruction of vegetation, and agricultural land by oil spills which occur during petroleum operations. But since the inception of the oil industry in

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<sup>88</sup> For an expository on the oil crisis in the Niger Delta area see, Okonta, 2000; Bassey, 2000; Ashton-Jones, Arnott, and Douglas, 1998; Int. IDEA, 2000.



Nigeria more than twenty-five years ago, there has been no concerted and effective effort on the part of the Government, let alone the oil operators to control the environmental problems associated with the industry (Cited in CLO, 1995: 213-214).

The government, till now, did little to solve the problems in the Niger Delta area.

According to the World Bank, the failure of the government in finding a solution to these problems could be attributed to:

1. The conflict of interest for the federal government – being both a partner in oil activities and the regulatory body;
2. No requirement for community participation in planning and development of oil activities;
3. Very limited ability of regulatory institutions to monitor population;
4. Low compensation rates for damage to property;
5. Lack of enforcement of environmental regulations (World Bank, 1995: 53).

After careful evaluation of their problems, the Ogoni people came up with a line of action. This was in the preparation of a document that was called the Ogoni Bill of Rights in October 1990 and an Addendum to the Bill of Rights in August 1991 (see appendix 2 and 3) under the auspices of the Ogoni Central Union, which had Ken Saro-Wiwa as its president. The Bill of Rights graphically presented the economic, social, and environmental travails of the Ogoni people since 1958 when Shell began to operate on Ogoni land. In the Bill, the Ogoni people called for financial compensation from Shell and from the government, which according to them, had collaborated with Shell to appropriate oil revenue without consideration for the needs and aspirations of the people of the land. The demands in the Bill of Rights were:

- a) Political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people;
- b) The right to the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development;
- c) Adequate and direct representation as of right in all Nigerian national institutions;

- d) The use and development of Ogoni languages in Ogoni territory;
- e) The full development of Ogoni culture;
- f) The right to religious freedom; and
- g) The right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation (*Ogoni Bill of Rights*, 1990).

The people also called for the restructuring of the country based on equality of all its constituent nations and ethnic groups, and a revenue allocation formula based on the principle of derivation as provided in the 1963 Constitution when the country was still a proper federation comprising of four quasi-autonomous regions. The Ogoni Bill of Rights was presented to Shell, the Federal Military Government, and the people of Nigeria in a public ceremony presided over by Ogoni community leaders. The Ogoni people also went a step further by forming an organization – the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) – that will articulate and represent the general interests and grievances of the Ogoni People. MOSOP was thus formed in 1990 to equip the people from the grassroots level to fight for their rights by non-violent means. It is a broad-based grassroots organization, which cuts across gender, class, generation, and sub-ethnicity divides. It is also an umbrella organization comprising several associations and self-help groups in Ogoniland. These associations include: the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP); the Council of Ogoni Churches (COC); the Ogoni Central Union (OCU); the Conference of Ogoni Traditional Rulers (CONTRA); the Ogoni Teachers Union (OTU); the Council of Ogoni Professionals (COP); the Federation of Ogoni Women’s Associations (FOWA); the National Union of Ogoni Students (NUOS); and the Ogoni Students Union (OSU). All these organizations are represented in all villages of the six Ogoni kingdoms. MOSOP is maintained by the subscription of members, grants from

donors, and donations from members of the public, both nationally and internationally.<sup>89</sup>

Though, there was a history of sporadic burst of protests against oil companies in the Niger Delta area, the creation of MOSOP brought a new dimension to the Ogoni struggle. The organization organized the Ogoni protests around an explicit political project, which called for political autonomy, an end to environmental degradation, and a fair share of oil revenue for people of the oil producing areas. It resolved to adopt a strategy of non-violence, probably because of Ogoni's small number as against the powerful Shell and the government of Nigeria. MOSOP largely operated and presented their grievances through peaceful demonstrations, rallies, press releases, and petition writing.

As part of its effort to sensitize the people as well as proper co-ordination of its activities, MOSOP leadership conducted a two-day tour of Ogoniland on 14 and 28 November 1992, and meetings were held with the people of the six kingdoms, where a resolution was adopted to write a 'Demand Notice'. Therefore, on 3 December 1992, MOSOP issued a notice to oil companies operating in Ogoni demanding for rents and royalties as well as compensation for the devastation of their land; otherwise, the companies were told that they would have to terminate their operations in Ogoni lands. This drew no response from either Shell or the other oil companies. The government also did not respond to the Bill of Rights presented to it earlier by the Ogoni people. Thus, when no response was received from either side, MOSOP organized a peaceful demonstration and a mass rally on 4 January 1993<sup>90</sup> in which about 300,000 Ogoni men, women, and children took part (Okonta, 2000: 3). At the rally, Saro-Wiwa called on the international community to come to the rescue of the

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<sup>89</sup> Interview #13, MOSOP activist, Port Harcourt, 30 January 2001.

<sup>90</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> of January has since been celebrated as Ogoni Day.

Ogoni people before the multi-national companies and their protectors drove them to extinction (*Daily Sunray*, 6 January 1993: 1). Despite the fact that there was no reported incidence at the rally, Saro-Wiwa and other MOSOP leaders were arrested and detained for several days.

MOSOP's next line of action was to launch a fund raising drive tagged 'the One Naira Ogoni Survival Fund' (ONOSUF) on 27 February 1993 in which every Ogoni was encouraged to donate at least one Naira for the Ogoni cause, as a symbol of their will to survive as individuals and as one indivisible nation (Saro-Wiwa, 1993: 147). It also organized a mass vigil in churches throughout Ogoni land on 13 March 1993 at which prayers were held to ask God for the emancipation of the Ogoni people.

The Ogoni also took their campaign outside the Nigerian shores through various international campaigns. MOSOP took the Ogoni case to the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), the United Nations, and international NGOs (especially environmental and human rights organizations). It enlisted the support of foreign governments to put pressure on the Nigerian government and Shell to compensate the Ogoni for decades of exploitation and environmental abuse, lack of basic facilities, the destruction of the land and marine life, and increased investment in infrastructure and development in Ogoniland (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998: 212). The Ogoni cause was particularly attractive to many international organizations such as Green Peace, Sierra Club, the Body Shop International, and Friends of the Earth because of the alleged poor environmental record of Shell and other multinational companies in several parts of the world.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> An allegation which Shell refuted, saying that the adverse environmental impacts of its operations have been grossly exaggerated. See for instance: Shell. 1995. *The Ogoni Issue and Operations in Nigeria*. Shell Petroleum Development Company.

MOSOP's membership of UNPO greatly helped the Ogoni cause. UNPO served as a clearinghouse for MOSOP's numerous press releases and other forms of information, which it disseminated to the international community. It also helped in sensitizing the international press to amplifying the plight of the Ogoni. This was acknowledged by Saro-Wiwa in a speech to Ogoni leaders in October 1993:

Thanks to the efforts of the UNPO, the European press, BBC radio and television, CNN, Channel Four TV, and Voice of America have given us good coverage. The American press, particularly the New York Times and Newsweek have also covered our story (Saro-Wiwa, 1993).

UNPO also provided MOSOP leadership with opportunities for participating in training programs in relations to issues of non-violent struggle, international law, diplomacy, and media relations. These forums served as a platform for the leaders to meet and interact with other minority groups with similar objectives from other parts of the world. With the help of the international community, particularly Canada, MOSOP extended its campaign through the creation of a web site<sup>92</sup> that served as a medium not only for elucidating the struggles and oppression that the Ogoni were undergoing but also for a plea for help from the international community.

However, the seeming popularity of MOSOP is not suggestive that it had the total support of the entire Ogoni people. Some of the ideas and strategies of MOSOP were opposed by some sections of Ogoni, most especially conservative elites and elders.<sup>93</sup> Unlike some of the traditional elders, Saro-Wiwa was believed to have favored a more militant approach to the Ogoni cause, and his attitude was perceived as an ambitious drive for personal authority. In early 1993, Saro-Wiwa formed the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), in order to make MOSOP more politically active

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<sup>92</sup> The web site address is: <http://www.mosopcanada.org/index1.html>

<sup>93</sup> These included Chief S.N. Orage, Lekue Lah-Loolo, S.I. Kogbara, Chief J.K. Kponi, Chief Kemte Giadom, His Royal Highness (HRH) W.Z.P. Nziidee, HRH J.P. Bagia, HRH M.S.H. Eguru, HRH M.T. Igbara, HRH G.N.K. Giniwa, and Dr. N.A. Ndegwe. These leaders issued a press release on 5 May 1993 dissociating themselves from the activities of MOSOP. This step further angered most especially the Ogoni youths.

and to put effective pressure on the military government. The opposition elites perceived the formation of NYCOP as a move towards violent activism and intimidation, fearing that militancy would only result in violence and repression by the government.<sup>94</sup> In turn, they were accused of having been ‘bought off’ by the government, denounced as “vultures” and became targets of NYCOP members. Some of them had their houses and other properties destroyed, and were forced to flee to Port Harcourt, the capital city of Rivers State.

When Saro-Wiwa, the spokesman of MOSOP proposed the boycott of the 12 June 1993 presidential election at a meeting of MOSOP Steering Committee on 2 June 1993, there was a vote of 11 to 6 in favor of the boycott. As a result, Dr. Garrick Leton (MOSOP’s president) and (late) Chief E. Kobani (vice president) resigned their positions in protest, further broadening the rift between Saro-Wiwa and the elders. However, MOSOP successfully mobilized the Ogoni people to boycott completely the 12 June 1993 Nigerian presidential election. This was made possible by the presence of Ogoni youths at voting centers ensuring that nobody voted. They went as far as preventing the delivery of election materials at the polling stations, turning back vehicles carrying such materials (Saro-Wiwa, 1995: 181). In a press release on 3 June 1993, Ken Saro-Wiwa gave the reason for the boycott:

The Ogoni nation is boycotting the election because of the provision of section 42, sub-section 3 of the 1989 Constitution...which states that ‘...the entire property in and control of all minerals, mineral oils and natural gas in, under or upon any land in Nigeria or in, under or upon the territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone of Nigeria shall rest in the government of the federation and shall be managed in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly’... the Ogonis cannot afford to vote for a man who will swear to a constitution that will enslave us. That part of the constitution has robbed us of our mineral endowments, which is our right to have free hand to exploit and manage. If we vote, we vote for slavery and poverty (*Daily SunRay*, 5 June 1993: 1).

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<sup>94</sup> Interview # 15, Ogoni elder, Port Harcourt, 30 January 2001.

Meanwhile, MOSOP (especially NYCOP), contrary to its initial resolution for non-violence, resulted to violent confrontation and disruption of oil exploration activities. The Ogoni youths repeatedly barricaded Shell's oil sites in Ogoniland as well as damaging the company's facilities. Thus, due to the constant harassment of its staff by Ogoni youths and international pressure, Shell stopped production and withdrew its staff from Ogoniland in January 1993.<sup>95</sup> According to Shell,

During the period 1991-93, there was a distinct evolution in MOSOP's approach...The focus of the campaign shifted to emphasize demands for environmental compensation, targeted explicitly at Shell – presumably in a bid to raise the international profile of the issue. There was also a hardening of approach with some sections of MOSOP's leadership tending towards direct confrontation with the oil companies (*Shell, 1995*).

However, MOSOP's 'direct confrontation' with Shell continued. Despite closing down its plants in Ogoni, Shell contracted an American company, Willbros, to lay a pipeline, which happened to pass through Ogoniland. On 30 April 1993, the construction crews allegedly destroyed freshly planted Ogoni crops; in response, about 10,000 Ogoni demonstrated against this. Nigerian soldiers guarding the construction workers opened fire on the demonstrators killing one person and wounding eleven. This generated more demonstrations in the area, and as a result construction work was suspended.

Moreover, after Shell left Ogoni land, the environmental degradation continued. On 15 June 1993, a Shell pipeline in Ogoni spewed crude oil into the surrounding environment of Botem. It was a major spill, as the amount of crude oil spilled was over 2,000 barrels, affecting the Osadegha stream, which runs through several communities, farmlands, sacred places, and essential water sources. The spill continued for a total of six weeks before Shell did anything about it.<sup>96</sup> Shell's seeming

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<sup>95</sup> Several attempts by Shell to resume oil production in Ogoni land since then have met with resistance, rallies, and resolutions from Ogoni activists, refugees, and supporters internationally

<sup>96</sup> International Campaigns: Nigeria (ERA Monitor Report No. 8: Six Year Old Spillage in Botem-Tai) <http://www.sierraclub.org/human-rights/nigeria/background/spill.asp>

nonchalance may have been as a result of the company's frustration with the constant oil spills in the area. While environmentalists and people of the oil areas argued that the endemic and frequency of oil spills and burst pipelines in the Niger Delta area was a result of corrosion, equipment failure, and poor maintenance by the oil companies, Shell, though admitting a history of spillage, blamed many of the oil spills on sabotage and pipeline vandalism by the youths of the area. According to Shell,

[The] problem is sabotage. In the Ogoni area – where Shell has not operated since January 1993 – over 60% of oil spills were caused by sabotage, usually linked to claims for compensation. And when contractors have tried to deal with these problems, they have been forcibly denied access (Globe and Mail, 21 November 1995: A3).

Its critics, however, argues that Shell has constantly exaggerated the effects of sabotage on pipelines and its facilities to avoid compensating people affected by these spillages (e.g. Frynas, 1998: 464). But Shell and by extension other oil companies exploring in the area have considerable reason not to allow such spillages deliberately. Firstly, considering Shell's alleged environmental records, it would probably go through considerable pains in ensuring that most (if not all) pipelines are well maintained, if only to keep its critics quiet. Secondly, these spillages cost oil companies money. The amount needed in repairing burst pipelines would be most probably double the cost of maintenance of the facilities in the first place, and they usually have to pay compensation to those affected by the spills. Shell, therefore, argues that a considerable proportion of the spillages are caused by willful damages to pipeline by irate youths in the area to further their cause of seeking compensation from the oil companies, attracting public attention, or making the oil companies appear negligent in protecting the environment (for instance, see: Shell, 1995).

Meanwhile, as they were perceived as a threat to the stability of the country, Ken Saro-Wiwa and other leaders of MOSOP were frequently arrested and detained. In April 1993, Saro-Wiwa was arrested twice, and on 23 June 1993, he was arrested and



detained till 22 July 1993 alongside two other MOSOP activists, N.G. Dube and Kabari Nwice. On 24 December 1993, Ledum Mitee, the vice president of MOSOP and Dr. Owens Wiwa were arrested and detained without charge. Also, Saro-Wiwa was placed under house arrest along with some of his family members from 2-5 January 1994 without explanations.

The oppression of the Ogoni continued during the Abacha regime. On taking over power in November 1993, Abacha perceived not only that the activities of MOSOP was a threat and challenge to the regime but also that there was a need to contain this opposition before it got out of hand. One, the success of forcing out of Shell out of Ogoniland could turn out to be detrimental to Nigeria's oil wealth. This is because other major oil companies may decide to pull out of Nigeria because of insecurity or if oil production turns out to be too costly as a result of constant vandalism of their facilities by the Niger Delta youths. Again, the relentless campaign of MOSOP against political marginalization and socio-economic strangulation of the Ogoni people was not only threatening the *status quo* but also encouraging other oil producing communities in the Niger Delta area (which account for over 90% of Nigeria's annual revenue) to organize and challenge the state over their neglect (CDHR, 1995: 147). The regime, therefore, set up a Rivers State Internal Security Task Force (RSIS) in January 1994 to contain protests in the area, and to protect the operation of oil companies.

The unrest in Ogoniland culminated with the murder of four prominent Ogoni leaders<sup>97</sup> on 21 May 1994 by an angry Ogoni mob. The government seized this

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<sup>97</sup> The four Ogoni leaders were: Chief Edward Kobani, a former commissioner in the Rivers State government, and former vice president of MOSOP; Chief Samuel Orage, also a former commissioner of Rivers State; Chief Theophilus Orage, former chairman of Gokana Council of Chiefs; and Mr. Albert Badey, a former Permanent Secretary, and Secretary to the Rivers State government. They had been attending a chief's meeting at Gbenemene Palace Hall in Giokoo at the time they were attacked. They were among the elders tagged, "vultures" previously by the NYCOP member.

opportunity to arrest hundreds of Ogoni including the leaders of MOSOP, and security agents raided the organization's headquarters in Port Harcourt. The leadership of MOSOP was held responsible for the killings on the ground that they provoked and instigated the mob to carry out the action. They were thus charged for murder before a military tribunal. The accused were divided into two groups: those who were accused of organizing the murders, and those charged with carrying out the killings. Saro-Wiwa was placed in the first group. Of the sixteen MOSOP leaders that were charged, seven of them were discharged and acquitted, while Saro-Wiwa and eight others<sup>98</sup> were convicted and sentenced to death by hanging. With regard to Saro-Wiwa, the judge concluded, "although Mr. Saro-Wiwa was not directly involved in the killings, it was established beyond all doubt that he set up the machinery that consumed the four Ogoni leaders".<sup>99</sup>

Though some observers declared the trial unfair,<sup>100</sup> there are insinuations that Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP's top leadership were probably guilty as charged. There were indications that the murders were reflective of Saro-Wiwa's increased militancy and authoritarian direction since assuming the presidency of MOSOP and the creation of NYCOP as he struggled to control other Ogoni who worked against or objected to MOSOP's directions and strategies. For instance, at the trial, one of the "vultures", Miss Priscilla Vikue, testified that when her house was destroyed by NYCOP youths, she reported to Saro-Wiwa who allegedly told her: "Well, Priscilla, there is a revolution in Ogoni land; if you are no part of the revolution, you will go with the

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<sup>98</sup> Those sentenced were Ken Saro-Wiwa, Barinem Kiobel, John Kpuniem, Baribor Bera, Saturday Dobe, Felix Nwate, Nordu Eawo, Paul Levura, and Daniel Gbokoo.

<sup>99</sup> Extracted from the text of the judgment passed by the Ogoni Civil Disturbances (Special) Tribunal held at Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 31 October 1995.

<sup>100</sup> For instance, Michael Birnbaum, a leading international jurist had this to say: "The judgment of the Tribunal is not merely wrong, illogical or perverse. It is downright dishonest. The Tribunal constantly advanced arguments, which no experienced lawyer could possibly believe to be logical or just. I believe that the Tribunal first decided on its verdicts and then sought for arguments to justify them (Birnbaum, 1995: 2).

revolution. Look, I have asked you to come over. You better join now because heads will roll". Saro-Wiwa's counsel<sup>101</sup> did not refute the alleged statement but only referred the tribunal to page 576 of the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary for the meaning of the expression "heads will roll", which explains the expression to mean, "people will be punished".<sup>102</sup> However, Saro-Wiwa, in his last statement to the tribunal, denied ever having any such meeting or discussion with Miss Vikue.

Nevertheless, though the convicted men may have been guilty as charged, they were not allowed to appeal the judgment that was passed on the 30 and 31 of October 1995, thereby violating their fundamental human rights. Despite international and national outcries and pleas for clemency, the PAC ratified the judgment on November 8, and the condemned men were executed on 10 November 1995. This provoked significant international and local outrage. As a result, the Commonwealth of Nations suspended Nigeria's membership; with condition that readmission would only be subject to accelerated return to civil rule and human rights observance. European Union countries, the United States, and South Africa recalled their ambassadors from Nigeria. The United States, Britain, Germany, France, and several other European countries also imposed sanctions. Protests and rallies were organized by many civil society organizations to condemn the action of the Abacha regime, as the killing of the 9 Ogoni men was interpreted as part of the regime's attempt to silence the opposition and take control of the country (Osaghae, 1998: 306). Fearful of further reprisal by the government after the hanging of the Ogoni 9, many leaders of MOSOP

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<sup>101</sup> This was the defense counsel appointed by the tribunal. Saro-Wiwa's original counsel, Gani Fawehinmi withdrew out of frustration after the tribunal refused his applications to tender some videotapes and other documents as evidence (Osaghae, 1998: 304).

<sup>102</sup> Extracted from the text of the judgment passed by the Ogoni Civil Disturbances (Special) Tribunal held at Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 31 October 1995.

and several Ogoni activists fled into exile,<sup>103</sup> while hundreds of Ogoni activists were arrested and detained with many of them held for several years.<sup>104</sup>

The hanging of Saro-Wiwa raises some pertinent questions. Why did the Abacha regime refuse to heed the clemency appeals both from local and international quarters like it did with the sentences meted to the accused coup plotters?<sup>105</sup> Why was there a hasty ratification of the death sentences and the hanging two days later, even when the records of the trial, which ran into thousands of pages, were still being compiled? Was there any personal grievance between Abacha and Saro-Wiwa apart from the face-off between the government and the Ogoni people? It was alleged that Saro-Wiwa was a personal friend of Abacha during the Nigerian civil war days. On taking over government, Abacha was said to have offered Saro-Wiwa a ministerial appointment, which the latter refused (*Tell*, 17 June 1996: 19). Could it have been that Abacha felt slighted and held that against him? Even several years after the execution, the motive for the killings has remained elusive. What seems less ambiguous, perhaps, is that the hangings were seen as an attempt to pass across a warning message to opposition forces in the country. It was interpreted as part of the regime's plan to repress and, possibly, destroy civil society in Nigeria.

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<sup>103</sup> Interview #13, MOSOP activist, Port Harcourt, 30 January 2001.

<sup>104</sup> For instance, 19 Ogoni youths arrested in May and June 1994 were only freed on 7 September 1998.

<sup>105</sup> Between March and May 1995, 51 military officers and civilians (including four journalists accused of being accessories to the fact of treason) were arrested in connection with an alleged plot to overthrow the Abacha regime. Under section 6(1) of Decree No. 1 of 1996, the penalty for treason is execution by firing squad. The trial, which ran between 5 June and 14 July 1995, was a 'closed affair' as the press was permitted to cover the opening and closing proceedings only. Of the 51 charged, 7 were discharged and acquitted, 42 were found guilty and convicted. Of this, 14 were sentenced to death, 18 to life imprisonment; the rest got a range of prison terms. The convictions drew a lot of local and international outcry. Pleas for clemency and possible commutation of the sentences came from world leaders like Nelson Mandela, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Emeka Anyaoku, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, Pope John Paul II, and Margaret Thatcher. The coup trial attracted world attention because of the inclusion of General Olusegun Obasanjo, a former head of state, his former deputy, General Shehu Yar'Adua, and some journalists and pro-democracy activists including Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, the chairman of Campaign for Democracy (CD). Thus, following both local and international pressure, on 1 October 1995, General Abacha commuted the sentences from death to life imprisonment, and others to shorter jail terms.

As part of international reactions, on 28 March 1996, a UN fact-finding mission arrived in Nigeria to examine the circumstances and procedure of the trial and execution of Saro-Wiwa and the other eight Ogoni to see if it conformed to international standards, and also to appraise the transition program of the Abacha regime. When the team visited Ogoniland on April 9, the River State government attempted to prevent members of Ogoniland from meeting with the team. The government was alleged to have organized a group of Ogoni youths to present themselves as representatives of the Ogoni people in order to ensure that atrocities perpetuated by the government and the oil companies would not be exposed (*Tell*, 17 June 1996). However, MOSOP members and some other activists outwitted the state by 'hiding in bushes'. They emerged from the bushes to the surprise of members of the UN team, and a MOSOP representative narrated the ordeal of harassment and intimidation the people of Ogoniland was being subjected to in the hands of the River State Internal Security Task Force (RSIS), voicing its fear of further reprisal after the departure of the team. After the team left, the RSIS arrested 87 people – including a 15-month-old baby detained with its mother. This compelled MOSOP to write to the then UN Secretary-General, Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for his intervention in seeking their release (CLO, 1996: 187).

In 1997, MOSOP declared November 10 as Ogoni 'Liberation Day' to commemorate the hanging of the Ogoni 9, and announced a weeklong activity that was to have climaxed with a rally on 10 November 1997. However, on November 9, the chairman of Gokana Local Government (in which Ogoniland falls) announced a blanket ban on all public gatherings, threatening to deal with anybody caught violating the ban order (CLO, 1997: 197). Despite the ban order, MOSOP went ahead with the remembrance activities. According to MOSOP, 20 people were arrested and about 50 people were on a 'wanted list' compiled by the RSIS.

Thus, after the death of Saro-Wiwa, many MOSOP activists fled into exile but they continued the fight for the emancipation of the Ogoni people. They campaigned on the Internet, at international conferences, at international media events, and through protest actions at Nigerian embassies abroad. Several times, activists from international human rights, indigenous rights, and environmental networks joined MOSOP in these international campaigns. These activities kept the organization growing, and the Ogoni cause alive.

More often, the activities of MOSOP are far from being peaceful, as the Ogoni youths often utilized the opportunity of rallies organized by MOSOP to vandalize equipments and facilities of oil companies in the area.

### **5.3.2 Challenges Facing MOSOP**

Although MOSOP is a widely accepted and well-organized association in the Niger Delta area, it faces major internal crisis. From inception, the organization has experienced leadership crisis and fractionalization as a result of differences in opinion and power tussles. These manifested in several incidences that occurred in Ogoniland. One of such cases was the Willbros shooting of 30 April 1993 mentioned earlier, when soldiers shot at Ogoni protesters.<sup>106</sup> As a result, some of the protesters were injured and one was killed, sparking demonstrations throughout Ogoni.

Willbros and Shell decided to negotiate for compensation with the Ogoni people, facilitated by the then governor of Rivers State, Ada George, so that the pipeline project could continue. Willbros offered a one million naira compensation for the victims – the dead and the injured. The Ogoni negotiators, including the president of MOSOP, Dr. G. B. Leton, decided to accept the compensation in the interest of peace.

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<sup>106</sup> The Willbros issue discussed here is extracted from a paper by Ben Naanen, the general secretary of MOSOP from 1993-1999. <http://www.iisg.nl/~sephis/ogonipeople.pdf>

Ken Saro-Wiwa, had been away to Europe during the negotiation, and on his return, he was strongly against accepting the compensation on the ground that it was too small, and it amounted to an insult on the Ogoni people. He insisted that the pipeline project must be discontinued or at best suspended, pending an environmental impact assessment study, which was not done before the commencement of the project. Leton and others who participated in the negotiation felt belittled and insulted, arguing that Saro-Wiwa should have made his views known before traveling abroad, and not after MOSOP had committed itself to the arrangement, and they in particular had staked their own credibility in the negotiation. Furthermore, even if he did not like the terms of the agreement, he should have gone along with it as part of a collective leadership. Without a consensus reached, the project was discontinued and the money was not paid. This incident ended at the time but a seed of discord had been sown.

The boycott of the June 12 1993 election was another incident that fractionalized the organization. This culminated in the dissolution of the executive in 1993, and the adoption of Ken Saro-Wiwa as the new president in absentia.<sup>107</sup> According to MOSOP, the executive was dissolved as a result of “the resignation of some of the members. There was also a need to weed out those who have allegedly become unreliable members working against the Ogoni people’s interest” (*Guardian*, July 13 1993: 3). The boycott evidently created a power struggle within the organization, causing a division in the organization with the vast majority of the traditional elites on one side and the youths under Saro-Wiwa on the other. This statement by MOSOP may have further fueled the allegation that the killing of the four Ogoni chiefs in 1994 was premeditated.

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<sup>107</sup> At the time, Saro-Wiwa was been detained by the government for alleged sedition.

After the death of Saro-Wiwa, two factions of the organization emerged, with a growing misunderstanding between them. Ledum Mittee leads one of the factions (MOSOP in Nigeria), and late Saro-Wiwa's junior brother, Dr Owens Wiwa, leads the other (MOSOP International, a coalition of MOSOP groups abroad). The Wiwa faction alleged that Mittee was conniving with Shell in its bid to restart operation in Ogoniland. While the Mittee group is perceived as moderate and co-optable, the Owen's group is perceived as resolute, adopting a hard-line position that any dealings with the Nigerian government and Shell must only proceed from an independent judicial investigation into the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the others, including the killing of over 2000 Ogoni, with the application of proper sanctions on the culprits (Okonta, 2000: 8). There is a belief that through intervention of the elders, unity could still be forged between the two factions, which would bring the organization back to its former glory.<sup>108</sup> This is crucial in order for the organization to maintain credibility both in the grassroots and in the international community, and also for it to be able to achieve its goals of emancipating the people of the Niger Delta area.

Another problem being faced by MOSOP is that of inadequate financial resources. Although, the organization received a lot of international attention and publicity, this did not necessarily translate into funding. The organization has not been able to raise enough funds to carry out programs of capacity building. Some of their proposed activities and programs such as personnel training, workshops, environmental monitoring, and advocacy have not seen the light of day as a result of financial incapacity.

Yet, despite its problems, MOSOP succeeded in serving as a prototype for other minority ethnic movements, as a result of its determination to see to a better living condition for the people of Ogoni land. It has worked alongside several civil society

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<sup>108</sup> Interview #18, Ogoni indigene, Port Harcourt, 30 January 2001.



organizations in finding solutions to the environmental problems that are being faced by the people of the Niger Delta area. Its efforts, however, made it an enemy of the state, with the state's response being repression, and gross violation of human rights in Ogoniland, most especially the frequent detention of the movement's leadership, and the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa.

## **5.4 The Campaign for Democracy (CD)**

### **5.4.1 History and Activities**

The Campaign for Democracy (CD), made up of about 40 pro-democracy organizations, was formally launched on 11 November 1991. At inception, the CD started with 13 affiliate organizations including the Civil liberties Organization (CLO), Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL), National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Women in Nigeria (WIN), and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). The number of affiliates in 1993 increased to 42. The CD was formed as a result of the lack of faith of some civil society organizations in the transition to civil rule program of the Babangida regime. The objectives of the CD were:

1. The restoration of the sovereignty of the Nigerian people to self-determination, to choose how to be governed, who to govern them, and the procedure or process through which they will be governed;
2. The right of the people to form their own political parties without interference;
3. The termination of military rule for all time;
4. The replacement of imposed transitional agencies by independent and impartial transitional agencies including the immediate establishment of impartial electoral bodies;
5. The respect for Fundamental Human Rights, the rule of law and the abrogation of all decrees; and

6. The termination of economic policies, which have caused the people hardship, poverty, disease, hunger, unemployment, retrenchment and illiteracy (CD: Declaration and Objectives, N.D.: 1).

In pursuance of these objectives, the CD issued releases, pamphlets, and statements stating the position of the organization on the transition process. The organization constantly condemned the incessant raids on, and persecution of, human rights groups and their members, the ban on trade unions, the gagging of the press, the imposition of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), and the militarization of the transition program (Enemuoh and Momoh, 1999: 89).

The CD gained prominence with the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election by the Babangida regime. It served as an organized platform for protests against the cancellation and demand for the installation of the Abiola mandate. It effectively mobilized civil disobedience and mass actions aimed at making the Babangida regime rescind its decision.<sup>109</sup> The association demanded full release of the election results, which the National Electoral Commission (NEC) refused to comply with. It, therefore, went ahead and published the result. As table 7 shows, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was to have won the election by securing 8,341,309 votes as against the 5,952,087 votes of the National Republican Convention (NRC).

The CD mobilized members of the public to participate in a weeklong civil disobedience from 5 to 9 July 1993 in the form of a 'sit-at-home',<sup>110</sup> peaceful rallies, demonstrations, and protests. In a pamphlet titled "The Protest Continues", CD listed some of the activities slated for July 7-9. On 7 July, there was to be "burning of Babangida's decrees by lawyers and other democratic forces" at the Lagos High

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<sup>109</sup> Between June and October 1993, the CD was able to organize at least four successful anti-government strikes and demonstrations, which paralyzed business and social activities in some major cities in Nigeria.

<sup>110</sup> Workers did not report at their work places, and shops and markets were closed.

Court, Igbosere; on 8 July, “burning of voters’ cards” at the Lagos State Secretariat, Alausa; on 9 July, there was to be “solidarity rallies at various zones in Lagos state”, at various Local Government Headquarters and other ‘central places’.

**Table 7: Result Of The June 12, 1993 Presidential Election**

S/N	STATE	SDP SCORE	SDP %	NRC SCORE	NRC %	TOTAL SCORE
1.	Abia*	105,273	41.04	151,227	58.96	256,500
2.	Adamawa	140,875	45.72	167,239	54.28	308,114
3.	Akwa Ibom*	214,787	51.86	199,342	48.14	414,129
4.	Anambra*	212,024	52.11	159,258	42.89	371,282
5.	Bauchi	339,339	39.27	524,836	60.73	864,175
6.	Benue	246,830	56.94	186,306	43.06	433,132
7.	Borno*	153,496	54.40	128,684	54.60	282,180
8.	C/River	189,303	55.23	153,452	44.77	342,755
9.	Delta	327,277	69.30	145,001	30.70	472,278
10.	Edo*	205,407	66.48	103,572	33.52	308,979
11.	Enugu	263,101	48.09	284,050	51.91	547,151
12.	Imo	159,350	44.86	195,836	55.14	355,186
13.	Jigawa	138,552	60.67	89,836	39.33	228,388
14.	Kaduna*	389,713	52.20	356,860	47.80	746,573
15.	Kano*	169,619	52.28	154,809	47.72	324,428
16.	Katsina	171,162	38.70	271,077	61.30	442,239
17.	Kebi	70,219	32.66	144,808	67.34	215,027
18.	Kogi*	222,760	45.60	265,732	54.40	488,492
19.	Kwara	272,270	77.24	80,209	22.78	352,479
20.	Lagos*	883,965	85.54	149,432	14.46	1,033,397
21.	Niger*	136,350	38.10	221,437	61.90	357,787
22.	Ogun*	425,725	87.78	59,246	12.22	484,871
23.	Ondo	883,024	84.42	162,994	15.58	1,046,018
24.	Osun	365,266	83.52	72,064	16.48	437,334
25.	Oyo*	536,011	83.52	105,788	16.48	641,799
26.	Plateau*	417,565	61.68	259,394	38.32	676,959
27.	Rivers	370,578	36.63	640,973	63.37	1,011,551
28.	Sokoto	97,726	20.79	372,250	79.21	469,976
29.	Taraba	101,887	61.42	64,001	38.58	165,888
30.	Yobe	111,887	63.59	64,061	38.41	175,948
31.	FCT Abuja*	19,968	52.16	18,313	47.84	38,281
	TOTAL	8,341,309	58.36	5,952,087	41.64	14,293,396 <sup>111</sup>

Source: CDHR, 1998: 12.

\*States where election results were released by NEC.

<sup>111</sup> According to NEC's record, the total number of registered voters for the 1993 elections was 38,353,578 (figure provide by Akinterinwa, 1997: 290). The number of voters was 14,293,396. This indicated that more than half of the eligible voters boycotted the election, showing that only 37.27 percent of eligible voters voted, while 62.73 percent did not vote for whatever reasons.

The CD held meetings with market women, student representatives, road transport workers unions, and some other interest groups enlisting their support and cooperation for the success of the civil disobedience.<sup>112</sup> The demonstrations went as planned, and rallies were held in several cities, most especially in the southwestern part of the country. Many unemployed youths, thugs, and gangsters, however, hijacked the demonstrations, as they invaded and ransacked government offices, looted shops, molested drivers, and burnt government cars and public property.

Between 12-14 August and 25-27 August 1993, the CD organized similar rallies and demonstrations. It issued a "Guideline of Action" in early August, which was to lead to the 'termination of military rule and the enthronement of democracy'. Recognizing the need to widen the protests beyond its southwestern Regional base, the CD blamed the narrower base on inadequate time and resources. It reinforced its vow to rein in democratic change by resolving to: escalate the protests against military rule all over the country; and to stop the conduct of a fresh election proposed by the regime for 14 August 1993. In justifying its actions, the CD argued that the cause they were fighting for not only transcended a single individual but also was a struggle for the enthronement of the wish of the people. The CD declared:

It must be emphasized that this struggle goes beyond Abiola and June 12. The overthrow of military dictatorship must be on the basis of popular struggles by the people of Nigeria. The socio-economic dispensation that must replace military rule cannot be limited to the whims of Abiola or any party or parties. It must be based on the consent of the *PEOPLE'S POWER* in which the people having fought, made sacrifices and won the battle against dictatorship, will naturally have to sit down at a *Sovereign National Conference* to decide the new socio-economic order, future political arrangement, structure of the Federation, ethnic and religious balance and genuine democracy in the economic, political, cultural and other spheres of national life (CD, 1993b: emphasis in original).

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<sup>112</sup> Interview #7, Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, Lagos, 31 January 2000.

The CD's actions did not go unchallenged by the Babangida regime. After the demonstrations in July 1993, the regime arrested Beko Ransome-Kuti, Femi Falana, and Gani Fawehinmi, leading members of the organization. The government charged the three men with conspiracy and sedition and held them in an Abuja prison for almost 8 weeks. The regime ignored two court orders to produce the activists in court and, citing its powers under Decree No. 2, did not comply with a court order granting the detainees bail. The men were later released by the Interim National Government (ING), which succeeded Babangida regime.

Through the promotion of civil disobedience in the period between the annulment and the stepping down of General Babangida on 26 August 1993, the CD ensured the focus of international attention to the determination of the Nigerian military to hold on to political power. This brought about a strain in Nigeria's foreign policy and drew condemnations from all over the world. The organization succeeded several times in bringing much of the country to a stand still, making Nigeria difficult for the military to govern. The stepping down of General Babangida from power could be interpreted as a victory for civil society in Nigeria, most especially for the CD. It was able to prove that through concerted effort, the society can ensure a positive change of government.

The CD also organized a successful protest between 29 September and 1 October 1993 to challenge the constitution of the ING, and to demand that it hand over power to Abiola. However, instead of handing over to Abiola, it was another military regime under General Sani Abacha that came into power on 17 November 1993. At its second national convention held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 1994, the CD condemned the Abacha regime. In its communiqué, the association re-affirmed its opposition to the disruptive seizure of power by the military, given its inherent undemocratic nature

and the antecedents of large scale treasury looting and other forms of corruption by serving and retired officers.

As shall be discussed below, the CD suffered internal crisis at this particular convention. Despite this set back, it continued to challenge military rule, although its activities were not as effective as it was after the annulment of the June 12 election. Between 1994 and 1999, several of its members were frequently in and out of detention – usually, for undisclosed offenses. These included Sylvester Odion-Akhaine, Segun Mayegun, Shehu Sani, and Kabir Ahmed (CDHR, 1999).

#### **5.4.2 Challenges facing the CD**

The CD served as the vanguard of the move for democracy in Nigeria, and it served as a platform for joint action by many civil society organizations to fight a common cause. Nevertheless, it did not take long before the organization started experiencing the usual problems common to many civil society organizations: leadership crisis and fractionalization. By 1994, the organization became involved in internal wrangling with allegations and counter-allegations being thrown around by the competing factions. One faction led by the ex-secretary-general of the CD, Chima Ubani and Chom Bagu accused the chairman, Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, for a lack of internal democracy, accountability, and of dialoguing with the Shonekan-led Interim National Government (ING) without the mandate of the National Executive Council. The faction also complained about the location of the association's secretariat in the residential compound of Ransome-Kuti.<sup>113</sup> According to this faction, the fact that his private residence adjoins the secretariat gave him undue influence and control over the affairs of the CD. On the other hand, the Ransome-Kuti faction accused the Ubani faction of financial misappropriation while Ransome-Kuti was in detention. At the

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<sup>113</sup> The CD secretariat was previously used as Ransome-Kuti's office when he was still in medical practice.

second national convention of the CD on 5 February 1994, Ubani and the ex-treasurer, Ms Glory Kilanko could not render any accounts to the convention.

In addition, part of the allegation against Ransome-Kuti was that he was a party to the planning and execution of the overthrow of the ING by General Abacha. According to Bagu,

Ransome-Kuti was privy to the coup that ousted the Interim National Government.... He used CD's letter headed paper to engage in correspondences with General Abacha and did not keep his colleagues in the CD posted (*The Guardian*, 23 December 1993: 3).

Thus, at the convention, three motions were tabled as to whether or not sanctions should be imposed on the chairman, Ransome-Kuti. The motion failed by 21 votes to 45, which led to a walkout by the ex-secretary general and some others. The crisis within the CD continued even after the Ubani faction broke away in 1994. In his 1996 secretariat report, the secretary-general of the CD accused the chairman, Beko Ransome-Kuti, of contravening the constitution of the organization by adding two signatories to the account of the organization.<sup>114</sup>

Members of the association continued to throw around allegations and counter-allegations of tribalism, use of thugs, misappropriation, and stay-put stances. With these problems and internal wrangling, the CD lost its credibility and public trust in its sincerity and capacity to pursue and achieve set objectives.

With the split up in 1994, the Ubani faction formed an organization called Democratic Alternative (DA). The Ransome-Kuti faction continued with the programs of the CD, but the association is no longer as effective as it used to be. With the inauguration of a democratic government in 1999 translating to the exit of military dictatorship, the

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<sup>114</sup> Secretariat Report presented by the General-Secretary, Sylvester Odion-Akhaine at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Biennial Convention of the Campaign for Democracy held on 16 March 1996 in Lagos.

activities of the CD have moved from confrontation to dialoging with the state. Its activities also revolve around mobilization at the grassroots. The organization is carrying out programs of awareness among the people of the rural areas to familiarize them with political rights and the activities of government in order to enlighten them that their participation in government does not end with voting. Membership dues and funds from international donors (which have reduced since the transition to democracy in 1999) are used to run the organization.<sup>115</sup>

## 5.5 Conclusion

The associations under study played a significant role in the period between 1985 and 1999. They formed a bulwark of opposition against Nigeria's military dictatorship. The relative success of MOSOP in drawing both national and international attention to the plight of the minority in Ogoni land is indicative of the role civil society can play in promoting the rights of the marginalized in society, and also its role of sensitizing the marginalized themselves to taking actions that could change the course of their lives. The killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other members of the Ogoni 9 also engendered a progressive move towards democracy by the Abacha regime. Though, Abacha had the intention of making himself a civilian president, the international attention the case drew sensitized him into, at least, ensuring the pursuance of a transition to civil rule program.

However, the civil society organizations in Nigeria are faced with a variety of problems. These include personality clashes among the leadership, ideological differences, mutual distrust, and differences of opinion over method and direction of the organization, management of funds, and internal and external subversion. There

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<sup>115</sup> Interview #7, Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, CD Secretariat, Lagos, 31 January 2000. Many of the previous donors decided to divert their funding to government agencies in order to support the nascent democracy after 1999.



is a need for civil society to transcend its internal problems for it to be able to promote good governance, transparency, and accountability. Also, organizational structures and processes that will ensure members' full participation at meetings and elections, as well as in making leaders accountable to their members should be developed and put in place.

As mentioned in chapter 4, several civil society organizations received financial and organizational supports from the international community. Some of these donors included: the Swedish, Danish, Netherlands, Canada, and Irish governments, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Ford Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the European Union (EU). However, the possibility cannot be ruled out that these donors may have dictated many of the activities of the civil society organizations. Many of them may have supported the Nigerian civil society in ousting the military regimes in order to further their own agenda. Therefore, civil society organizations need to censor the motives of donors, especially foreign ones, before accepting donations or funding, which may make them embark on activities that may likely jeopardize their credibility.

Also, the organizations of civil society do not have a broad platform of alliance and coalition. There is a need for civil society organizations to form alliances on issue areas that are focused, targeted, and specific. It is obvious that civil society can achieve much through alliance formation. This is evident in the success that civil society recorded with the formation of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) to

monitor the 1999 elections.<sup>116</sup> The TMG, made up of about 63 civil society organizations, monitored the election, publicly reported abuses it witnessed and made recommendations for improvement. Organizations of civil society will be more effective if they embark on joint programs, sought joint funding on project of common interest, and work together to improve the condition of living of their members as well as members of the society in general.

There is a need for civil society organizations to transform their opposition to the state positively by engaging more in activities that will revolve around the people in order to contribute to socio-economic development of the country. In as much as civil society should function in limiting the power of the state and challenging its abuses of authority, it should not lose focus. There is a need for the recognition and identification of spheres of co-operation and collaboration with the state in order to ensure the consolidation of good governance in Nigeria. More effort should be geared towards building a culture of tolerance and civic engagement.

Most of the seemingly active civil society organizations in Nigeria have not been able to make much impact at the wider political arena. While many of them worked to see the opening up of democratic space, the strength of the civil groups was compromised by the virtual lack of participation of the peasant communities in the pro-democracy movement. Therefore, civil society organizations should endeavor to make themselves relevant to the people of both the rural areas as well as the urban areas. People need to be educated for them to know that their role does not end with participation in elections. There is a need to for them to be empowered to monitor the elected officials, and call them to account on a regular basis.

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<sup>116</sup> Many of the people interviewed agreed with this.

Finally, despite all their weaknesses, limitations, and divisions, civil society organizations remain Nigeria's best resource for sustaining democracy and good governance. They can effectively sensitize the populace to participate fully in social, political, and economic activities that would engender the positive development of the country. Therefore, the institutions of civil society need to be strengthened for them to effectively perform these roles.

## Chapter 6 *Responsible citizenship and Good Governance in Tang* Civil Society, Good Governance, and the Future of the Nigerian State

*... good governance demands the consent and participation of the governed, and full and lasting involvement of all citizens in the future of their nations. The will of the people must be the basis of governmental authority (UNDP, 1997).*

### 6.1 Introduction

The concept of good governance came into prominence in relation to discourse on development in Africa. It actually moved into center stage when donors concluded that it was not enough to institute economic reforms in Africa and that a reform of the way in which African governments carry out the business of governance is necessary. As one of its criteria for assistance, the World Bank raised the issue of good governance in the context of the Sub-Saharan Africa in a report covering over thirty years, which was published in 1989 (World Bank, 1989). The report emphasized the need for an enabling environment for economic activities by way of prudent monetary policies. To this end, the World Bank came up with a checklist of several features that are useful indicators of good governance which needed to be in place in the creation of this enabling environment (World Bank, 1992).

This chapter focuses on the concept of good governance. It seeks to examine such questions as: What is good governance? What are the elements of good governance? Who is responsible and accountable for good governance? What actions can citizens from various sectors take to ensure good governance? Specifically, the objectives of this chapter are: firstly, an examination of the origin and meaning of good governance. Secondly, there will be a critical evaluation of its core characteristics.

Thirdly, the chapter will analyze critically the roles of civil society and the state in relation to the question of good governance. Fourthly, it will also examine how civil society can make useful and positive contribution to the political system, and also how civil society organizations can be empowered to improve their role in the promotion of good governance. Governance is important because it impacts directly on the lives of people. It is the masses that bear much of the adverse consequences of poor governance and the ill effects of systems and structures of governance that do not reflect the promotion of their well being. It is believed that improved governance can go a long way in solving some of the problems being faced by the African continent.

## **6.2 The Origin and Meaning of Good Governance**

Although, the term governance has been used in several ways, but it only came into use by political scientists in recent years. There is no precise or widely accepted definition of governance. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines governance as “the act or manner of governing, of exercising control or authority over the actions of the subjects; a system of regulation”. In other words, the term governance may be used to denote how people are ruled, and how the affairs of a state are administered and regulated. The concept, however, has been interpreted in many different ways so as to encompass many different aspects of social organization and the institutional framework within which social and economic activities are performed (Osmani, 1999: 3). Thus, the concept can be used in the evaluation of not only the state but also the activities and management of civil society.

The concept of governance could be traced to the early post-independence years in Africa. Practitioners in international development agencies first adopted it, initially with limited emphasis on effective government performance. Shortly after political independence in the 1960s, African leaders turned to international donors and lending

agencies for assistance in setting up government agencies and training public officials to implement public policy. At that time, this type of assistance was called institution building rather than governance (Bratton and Rothchild, 1992: 264).

In the 1980s, the concept of governance came up in the World Bank's agenda, and has gained particular significance since then. The World Bank argued that underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of governance. To the Bank, this is manifested in "such phenomena as the extensive personalization of power, the denial of fundamental human rights, widespread corruption, and the prevalence of unelected and unaccountable government" (Hyden, 1992: 5) that pervades the African continent. The Bank defines governance as "the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs" (World Bank, 1989: 60). This encompasses the state's institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making processes, and implementation capacity, and the relationship between government officials and the public. To the Bank, good governance in Sub-Saharan Africa requires political renewal. This means a concerted attack on corruption from the highest to the lowest levels. This can be done by setting a good example, by strengthening accountability, by encouraging public debate, and by nurturing a free press. It also means empowering women and the poor by supporting grassroots and non-governmental organizations (World Bank, 1989: 6).

Hyden and Bratton (1992) explained governance in terms of the conscious management of regime structures with a view to enhancing the legitimacy of the public realm. They see governance as a systematic and professional framework from which legitimate public enterprise activities are conducted. More specifically, it implies creative interaction designed to promote full and effective participation by the citizenry in public affairs, accountability by the state, continuous state-society and

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intra-society interaction, and the exercise of institutional arrangements founded on, and designed to, sustain those values.

Adebayo Adedeji (1997: 13) also affirms that, “good governance is required to build an effective relationship between people and their governments, and it is essential for creating an enabling environment for sustainable development”. To him, good governance requires:

The politics of consent and consensus, the politics of conviction and commitment, and the politics of compassion and accountability. Consensus politics is involving people in the process by which policies are developed, listening to what they have to say and adapting the approach of the leadership and government in the light of all these. By so doing, government is most likely to win the consent of the majority of the people, if not all, to such policies and, with that consent, conviction in the rightness of the courses being pursued and commitment to see them through successfully (Adedeji, 1990: 10).

Good governance has also been described as “the traditions and institutions that determine how authority is exercised in a particular country” (Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton, 2000: 1). These traditions and institutions include:

1. The process by which governments are elected, held accountable, monitored and replaced;
2. The capacity of governments to manage resources efficiently and formulate, implement, and enforce sound policies and regulations;
3. The respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.

Healey and Robinson (1992) on their part refer to governance as the use of legitimate authority exercised in the application of government power, and in the management of public affairs. To them, good governance implies:

A high level of organizational effectiveness in relation to policy formulation and the policies pursued, especially in the conduct of economic policy, and its contribution to growth, stability and popular welfare. Good government also implies accountability, transparency, participation, openness and the rule of law (Healey and Robinson, 1992: 163-164).

Thus, from 1989, there followed a flow of pronouncements on governance, democracy and the relationship of either or both to development. The call for democracy and better government became louder. In the view of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP),

Good governance is effective, participatory, transparent, accountable, equitable and promotes the rule of law. Governance is led by the state, but transcends it by collaborating with the private sector and civil society. All three domains are critical for sustaining human development. The state creates a conducive political, economic and legal environment. The private sector generates jobs and income, and civil society facilitates political and social interaction and mobilizes groups to participate in economic, social and political activities (UNDP, 1997: 6).

To this end, there became a need for the same rule of good governance to apply to not only the state but to all sectors of the society. In other words, the concept of governance should not be restricted to the national and international systems but should be used in relation to regional, provincial, and local governments as well as other social systems such as civil society, the military, private enterprises, and the family.

Furthermore, the concept of governance later moved from the discourse on development to that of political liberalization. Issues like the disintegration of authoritarian regimes and a new approach to the state-society relations began to generate great concern in political discourse (Carter Center, 1989; Huntington, 1991; Sandbrook, 1990; Ake, 1991; Healey and Robinson, 1992). It was realized that there was a need for regime changes to be through free and fair electoral processes for them to be seen as legitimate. Also, political leaders ought to share power with civil society by establishing a set of rules that restrain and channel conflict among themselves and among other groups and citizens in the society (Holm and Molutsi, 1992: 75).



### **6.3 The Characteristics of Good Governance**

Governance embraces all the methods (whether good or bad) that are being used by all societies in the distribution of power and in the management of public resources, as well as in solving their problems. Good governance, therefore, can be seen as the aspect of governance whereby public resources, problems and business of government are managed effectively, and in a way that meets the needs and aspirations of the society.

As much as it could be said that the concept of good governance came into the limelight in 1989, the characteristics of governance that are highlighted by many of the academic literature derive from, or are related to, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This Declaration, which was signed by many countries, may thus be taken as representing the moral consensus of the international community. These characteristics include:

- The political rulers and government officials are both held accountable to the ruled for their actions through clearly formulated and transparent processes, and more particularly that the legitimacy of a government is regularly established through a well-defined open process of public choice such as election or referendum (Article 21).
- The safety and security of citizens is assured (Articles 3, 5) and the rule of law prevails, such that contracts can be fairly enforced both among private operators (individuals or enterprises), and between a private operator and the state. Moreover, citizens should be legally protected from arbitrary or capricious actions by public authorities (Articles 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 28).
- Public agencies are responsive to the needs of the public, and social and economic development is promoted for the benefit of all citizens in an equitable manner (Article 22, 23, 24, 25).
- The ready availability of information that will permit accountability to be practiced, laws to be correctly applied, markets to function, and people to be creative and innovative (Article 19).
- Freedom of association and expression of opinion (Articles 19, 20) (Cited in Landell-Mills and Serageldin, 1992: 306).

Therefore, in the light of the above, some literatures on good governance have come up with lists of the basic elements of good governance (see example, World Bank, 1989; Pagden, 1998; Oyediran, 1998; International IDEA, 1998; Woods, 1999).

These requirements include:

- accountability;
- transparency;
- participation;
- fairness;
- the rule of law, due process and an independent judicial process;
- free flow of information;
- respect of fundamental human rights;
- efficiency and effectiveness;
- decentralization of power, structure and decision making; and
- high standard of integrity.

These features were articulately summarized by the United Nations' African Governance Forum (AGF II) held in Ghana in June 1998. According to the UN,

Good governance, understood as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in a way that guarantees participation by the people, political stability, institutional development and respect for human rights, requires the following basic principles:

- The participation of women and men in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate recognized institutions which articulate their interests; this implies freedom of opinion, of speech, and of association;
- The primacy of law, which is expressed in the existence of fair legal frameworks, the impartial enforcement of the laws, and an independent justice system;
- Transparency, based on the free flow of information, which is an essential condition for understanding and follow-up of issues of general interest;
- Equity, which entails the cultivation of a political, economic and social environment enabling every member of society to improve, or at least maintain, their standards of living;

- Effectiveness, achieved by adapting institutions to needs and by making optimal use of available resources;
- Accountability, which implies that those holding positions of responsibility at all levels (political institutions, administration, economy, civil society) should be answerable for their actions, and, as a corollary, citizens should be able to require an accounting from officials.<sup>117</sup>

#### **6.4 The Roles and Responsibilities of the State in Relation to Good Governance in Africa**

The AGF II defines accountability as the obligation to render an account for a responsibility that has been conferred.<sup>118</sup> It means that individuals and organizations charged with the performance of particular actions or activities are held responsible, and are answerable to the people for actions they take or fail to take in discharging their official duties. Many African leaders have failed in this regard. Many of them are authoritarian and unaccountable to their people, and many hold on to power without the consent of the governed.<sup>119</sup> As Richard Joseph (1990: 202) argues, “the most decisive way in which (political) accountability can be achieved is through the requirement that a government’s continuation in office depends on the active approval of the people as expressed in competitive elections”. Many African countries do not have free and fair transition of governments. Elections are manipulated in favor of certain candidates (usually the incumbent president), and attempts are made at amending constitutions so as to accommodate provisions that would allow presidents to stay longer than the required terms of office.

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<sup>117</sup> Africa Governance Forum (AGF II): Accountability and Transparency in Africa (1998)  
<http://members.fortunecity.com/mohamedbali/agf2.htm>

<sup>118</sup> Africa Governance Forum (AGF II): Accountability and Transparency in Africa (1998)  
<http://members.fortunecity.com/mohamedbali/agf2.htm>

<sup>119</sup> For instance, President Chiluba of Zambia tried to change the country’s constitution to enable him seek a third term of office.

The state has the responsibility to create a political environment that is conducive to good governance. It should ensure the full participation of the people in political activities. Participation denotes “the involvement of people in activities and decisions regarding the designing and implementing of social, economic, political, and other strategies, as well as policies and processes which affect their lives and their development” (Otite and Kawonise, 1997: 33). A rise in political participation would open the way for greater public accountability and room for pressure from civil society for better management of the country’s resources. It is, therefore, imperative for the state to create a political system that promotes participation and which would produce consensus, however minimal, from the public. Political leaders should cultivate tolerance for public debate, public scrutiny, and public questioning of political, economic, and social policy choices.

There is a need for the state to embark on decentralization of power to avoid over-concentration of power in the state so as to give the people a sense of belonging to the political system. Centralization of power tends to shift power upward and away from the people. Decentralization involves the transfer of authority and resources:

from the central government and its agencies to field organizations of those agencies, subordinates units of government, semi-autonomous public corporations, area-wide or regional development authorities; functional authorities, autonomous local governments or non-governmental organizations (Rondinelli, 1981: 137).

Consequently, decentralization would bring governance closer to the people, thereby encouraging more local participation in decision-making, and also engage civil society more intensely in the governance processes.

Rondinelli (1981) broke down decentralization into three categories – deconcentration, devolution, and delegation – based on the extent of power that is delegated. According to him, deconcentration obtains when some amount of

administrative responsibility is transmitted to lower levels within the central government. It is “the shifting of workload from central government ministry headquarters to staff located outside of the national capital”. Deconcentration may also take the form of field administration, which entails the transfer of decision-making discretion to plan, make routine decisions and adjust the implementation of central directives to field staff. Local administration, a form of deconcentration, is the arrangement under which all subordinate levels of government within a country are agents of the central authority. This form of decentralization simply extends the reach of national government to local areas.

In contrast, devolution involves the transfer of power to sub-national units of government, which are autonomous, distinct from the central government and under only indirect supervisory control of the center. It provides local units with autonomy and the authority to make decisions, thereby weakening the authority of the central government. These units have responsibility for specific functions over defined areas and are under leaderships that are elected by the people. Delegation implies the transfer of authority to plan and implement decisions over specific activities to organizations such as corporations, which are placed under the indirect control of central government.

It is believed that decentralization would strengthen the capacity of local units/governments to manage their own affairs and functions in a more beneficial way since they are closer to the people than the central government. Community-oriented decentralization fosters partnerships between civil society and local governments, thereby creating a far more participatory process that ultimately enhances the quality of life of the people.

The relationship between the state and other sectors of the society need not be one that is characterized by suspicion and antagonism. The state should strive to create a conducive environment for broad-based participation of all stakeholders, protect the vulnerable, improve government efficiency and effectiveness, foster equity, encourage social integration and cultural diversity, protect the environment and uphold gender equality. African states also need to empower people in general and strive to provide for greatest possible social, economic, and political inclusion. For this to be possible, the state must be legitimate and function within an institutional environment that fosters popular participation and is governed by the rule of law. African states need to build the capacity to add value to, and facilitate, social interaction by protecting the environment, maintaining social harmony, security and order, stabilizing the economic environment, and financing and providing essential public services and infrastructure. In the event that they are not able to provide certain social services, room should be made available for other sectors of the society capable of taking over these roles.

One factor that erodes good governance is **corruption**. Herbert Werlin (1973: 73) defines political corruption as the “diversion of public resources to nonpublic purposes”. It is also perceived as “outright theft, embezzlement of funds or other appropriation of state property, nepotism the granting of favors to personal acquaintances, and the abuse of public authority and position to exact payments and privileges” (Harsch, 1993: 33). Osoba (1996: 372) defines corruption as:

A form of anti-social behavior by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits on its perpetrators, is inconsistent with the established legal norms and prevailing moral ethos of the land, and is likely to subvert or diminish the capacity of the legitimate authorities to provide fully for the material and spiritual well being of all members of society in a just and equitable manner.

Alatas (1990) divided corruption into seven distinct types: autogenic, defensive, extortive, investive, nepotistic, supportive, and transactive. Autogenic corruption is

self-generating and typically involves only the perpetrator. Defensive corruption involves situations where a person needing a critical service is compelled to bribe in order to prevent unpleasant consequences being inflicted on his interests. Extortive corruption is the behavior of a person demanding personal compensation in exchange for services.

Investive corruption entails the offer of goods or services without a direct link to any particular favor at the present but in anticipation of future situations when the favor may be required. Nepotistic corruption refers to the preferential treatment of, or unjustified appointment of, friends or relations to public office in violation of the accepted guidelines. Supportive corruption usually does not involve money or immediate gains but involves actions taken to protect or strengthen the existing corruption. Finally, transactive corruption refers to situations where the two parties are mutual and willing participants in the corrupt practice to the advantage of both parties. In other words, corruption covers the abuse of all offices of trust for private gain, whether in the public or private sector.

Many African states are characterized by corruption. Corruption hinders “economic performance, increases the cost of public investment, lowers the quality of public infrastructure, decreases government revenue, and makes it burdensome and costly for citizens – particularly the poor – to access public services” (IBRD, 2000: 73).

Corruption undermines the legitimacy of governments and destroys the fabric of society. It erodes the institutional capacity of government as procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned off, and officials are hired or promoted without regard to performance. Limited but valuable funds and resources initially earmarked for the improvement of services, and provision of hospitals, schools, and other infrastructures are either embezzled outrightly, misappropriated, or otherwise severely depleted through kickbacks and over-invoicing by agents of government.

In Nigeria in particular, corruption has permeated every aspect of the country. Regimes in Nigeria, either civilian or military, have used political offices as instrument of private accumulation. Since the public treasury has been the primary and ultimate source of rapid private accumulation by the Nigerian political elite, the struggle to capture state power (and, therefore, the national treasury) among factions of the ruling class has become progressively acrimonious and bitter (Osoba, 1996: 384). Different groups in the society, including the military, struggle to get hold of political power, either by straight or crooked means, in order to have control over the sharing of the 'national cake'. Resources meant for the running and maintenance of public institutions (hospitals, schools, public utilities, the police) are diverted into private purses, siphoned off into foreign bank accounts, or recycled into the country's economy.<sup>120</sup> As a result, these institutions are not able to perform their expected functions, thereby endangering the lives of the citizens relying on their services.

The fight against corruption, either wholehearted or as a cover up by different regimes in Nigeria, has become more or less a permanent feature. Different measures and anti-corruption institutions have been put in place in the campaign for the eradication of corruption. For instance, during the Second Republic (1979-83), a Code of Conduct Bureau and a Code of Conduct Tribunal were established to monitor, investigate, and punish corruption in office. The two bodies however, could not function as their members were appointed by the president, and were dependent on legislative funding and review (1979 Constitution, Sections 140-45: 47-48). Hence, the bodies were dependent on the very politicians they were meant to regulate. Other regulatory mechanisms, like judicial commissions of enquiry, Civil Service Rules,

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<sup>120</sup> For instance, after the demise of General Sani Abacha in 1998, it came to light that the former military ruler and his family had been siphoning the country's money into Swiss Bank accounts. The Swiss Federal Banking Commission disclosed that a total of 2.2 billion dollars was deposited into various accounts in Switzerland by General Abacha and his family members (*Sunday Tribune*, 17 September 2000: 6).



War Against Indiscipline Council, put in place by different regimes have also failed to significantly impact on corruption. This is largely due to the fact that these institutions are inevitably manned, controlled, and operated by, and in the interest of, members of the ruling class who have a vested and entrenched interest in sustaining and even extending corrupt practices (Osoba, 1996: 385). And in the process, these institutions end up covering up rather than exposing corruption, thereby consolidating its hold on the society.

There is a need to address and combat corruption not only in Nigeria but also in Africa in general. This can only be achieved if the people are empowered, both constitutionally and legally, to participate freely in governance, and to challenge corrupt officers. The people should be allowed to closely monitor the activities of those in charge of public offices, and hold them accountable for mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds without fear of intimidation by those in power. Also, this can only be possible with an independent judiciary that is not cowed by the political elite and those in charge of the state.

The rule of law needs to be respected. The state should be operated in such a way that no one would be above the law. According to Ayang'Nyong'o (2000), this would mean that,

on the basis of rules and regulations laid down by the legislature, implemented by the executive arm of government and adjudicated by the judiciary (in the event of a dispute), individuals will seek to maximize their interests as citizens endowed with rights and obligation to the state. While accepting basic human rights as inalienable, the rule of law assumes every citizen will assimilate the principles and ideals of citizenship as the basis of exercising his or her rights and claiming the same from the state.

Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that ensure impartiality. This would require, among other things, the full respect of fundamental human rights, an

independent judiciary that the people can trust to grant them justice, which is backed by an impartial and incorruptible police force.

### **6.5 Good Governance and Civil Society**

The concept of good governance applies to civil society as well. Governance of civil society implies the effective functioning and performance of civil society organizations. It requires the creation of structures and processes that would make them accountable to their members as well as to the society. Civil society organizations need to establish and nurture procedures of operation that will give them credibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy to play the role of buffer between the state and its citizens. Civil society organizations cannot clamor for good governance on the part of the state without themselves subscribing and exhibiting the same characteristics. By cultivating and abiding by the principles of good governance, civil society organizations will be better positioned to play the role of articulating popular interests, monitoring government performances, and also facilitating popular participation in governance.

Assorted analysts have viewed civil society organizations differently. According to some, civil society not only provides a platform for the realization of democracy and good governance in Africa but also constitutes the independent stratum of power that forges collective identities, builds consensus, and constructs platforms around moral, social and political values for the purposes of citizen education, sensitization, and mobilization (Azarya, 1992: 83-91). Civil society has also been articulated as having tremendous implications for shaping and pluralizing power relations (Keane, 1988: 13), broadening the avenues of societal representation of interests and of individual and group influence and participation (Harberson, 1992: 291-5), creating a new political culture of citizenship that stresses rights, obligations, protest and contestation (Grindle, 1996: 7), and prompting political liberalization (Keane, 1988: 12). But it

could also be observed that not many civil society organizations are actually playing these roles. Due largely to division and fractionalization that often characterized many of these organizations, they are unable sometimes to articulate their activities in a way that foster good governance.

There is, therefore, a need for civil society to address the issues of good governance in order for it to be relevant, credible, and legitimate in the society. Civil society organizations must exhibit openness, transparency, and accountability in their activities. Being transparent involves communicating to members, stakeholders and the public, and also making relevant information available upon request.

Accountability of civil society organizations can be in various forms (Leat, 1988: 107). These can be in regards to: (a) fiscal accountability: the proper use of money; (b) process accountability: following proper procedures (whether in a particular project or more generally by acting in accordance with the constitution of the organization); (c) program accountability: the quality of its work; and (d) accountability for priority: the relevance or appropriateness of the services being provided. Effective accountability requires:

a statement of goals (whether in adherence to certain rules or achievements of identified performance levels), transparency of decision-making and relationships, honest reporting of what resources have been used and what has been achieved, an appraisal process for the overseeing authority to judge whether results are satisfactory and concrete mechanisms for holding to account (i.e. rewarding or penalizing) those responsible for performance (Edwards and Hulme, 1995: 12).

The purpose of accountability is to ensure that the exercise of responsibility is directed toward meeting the publicly stated goals of the organization. The more civil society organizations are accountable in these regards, the more they would be better understood by the populace, thereby strengthening their credibility and legitimacy.

Many civil society organizations in Nigeria and other African countries lack internal democracy, transparency, and integrity. Many of them do not have Board of Directors, and in cases in which they do, many of these boards rarely meet. Many do not have constitutions, and obnoxious provisions are made in the constitutions of some that do have.<sup>121</sup> Elections into offices of the executives are not regular and conventions are not held regularly. Financial accounts are not made to the members in most cases, and there are no proper means of feedback between the organizations and their members. Members are seldom given the opportunity to contribute to decision-making. To foster good governance in civil society organizations, therefore, two-way communication needs to be established between the organizations and their members.

## **6.6 Role of civil society**

Bonvin and Saint-Martins (1993) aptly summed up the importance of civil society in the society:

While the state provides the various forms and institutions of government to carry out public functions and fulfills a necessary role as an arbitrator and conciliator between competing interest groups, it is civil society, defined as those uncoerced human groups and relational networks of consensual association and empowerment, which creates the values and normative framework for governance and private enterprise. Civil society is the milieu in which empowerment takes place, the arena in which people develop the capacity that will enable them to play a role in the economic and political choices that their societies will have to make.

Civil society is an important link between the state and the society. It can serve as an instrument of fostering the participation of the members of the society in political, social and economic activities. A vibrant civil society can help in improving the governance style of African states. In a study of eight Latin American and African countries, Grindle (1996) found that an invigorated civil society heightened public

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<sup>121</sup> In a particular organization in Enugu, Nigeria, its constitution stipulates that the Director (who happens to be the founder) would stay in office till she is 70 years old. This, ostensibly, is undemocratic.

debates, media criticisms, political mobilization and public agitation, and contestation for increased participation over policy and governance, resulting in the opening up of space for negotiation and the redefinition and re-construction of state-society and state-economy relations. Diamond (1997: 24-25) also enumerates the roles civil society could play in the society to include challenging abuses, strengthening the rule of law, monitoring human rights, educating citizens about rights and responsibilities, building a culture of civic engagement, enhancing state responsiveness to societal interests and needs, and building a constituency for economic as well as political reforms.

Civil society organizations have been suppressed long enough in Nigeria and other African countries. A balance between the state and civil society needs to be forged in such a way that each occupies and manages its own sphere of competence and domain. Civil society has to continue to serve as a check on the excesses of the state and also to lend a helping hand in areas where the state falls short. There is a need for civil society to be strengthened and empowered so that it can better perform its roles in society more effectively. Civil society can be empowered in three basic ways. First, civil society organizations should be granted the political space to operate as separate, autonomous entities. For civil society to play the role of countervailing power, it needs to be financially independent from the state as well as international donors. Also, civil society organizations should be given a free hand in the provision of certain services that the state may not be able to provide. These include education, housing, transportation, and other social services. Secondly, there is a need for capacity and confidence building of civil society organizations. Thirdly, the state should make conscious effort to seek the input of civil society in the governance process.

Civil society organizations can serve as instruments of empowering the people by providing them with civic and political education. They also need to serve as the avenue for the dissemination of information to the people. For example, the role of the media as watchdog over the state needs to be strengthened. The media is “charged with the role of holding government accountable and to guard against the abuse of power – hence the need to raise countervailing structures of surveillance to monitor government’s activities and stem an inherent disposition towards excess” (Oseni, 1995: 3). The media also needs to complement the efforts of other civil society organizations by airing jingles and programs aimed at educating members of the public about their roles, rights, and responsibility in the society.<sup>122</sup> Capacity-building activities like organization of workshops, seminars, training programs, and conferences need to be promoted by civil society organizations in order to raise civic consciousness.

As a means of ensuring good governance, civil society organizations need to build a strong alliance culture. They need to come together in alliances and develop networks in order to enhance their overall effectiveness as societal institutions. Through coalitions, joint ventures and strategic alliances, civil society organizations would be able to strengthen their cohesion and coherence. They will also be able to serve as watchdogs over themselves, thereby ensuring accountability to the people. Through networks and collaboration, civil society organizations would be able to share knowledge and resources, reduce the cost of service provisions, as well as improving the lives of the people in general.

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<sup>122</sup> There are a number of such programs being aired on the television and particularly on the radio in Nigeria since the return of power to a civilian government in 1999. The radio is the most widely used means of information dissemination in Nigeria. One of such programs, called “Majiyagbe” (“War Against Oppression”), a program of the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS), is designed to educate the people not only on their rights and responsibilities to the government but also on the provisions of the Constitution and their rights to question their elected representatives, which has not been the tradition in Nigeria. Interview #9, BCOS, Ibadan, 24 January 2001.

## 6.7 The Future of the Nigerian state

As much as it cannot be denied that the Nigerian State is a product of colonialism, there is a need not to lose sight of the fact that her formal colonization ended in 1960. Much emphasis is placed on the colonial origin of the Nigerian State but since the termination of colonial rule and the advent of self-rule, what has the political elite done with power? Unaccountable, illegitimate governance has characterized the post-colonial state, with the economy being plundered by successive regimes. Specifically, corruptions, nepotism, aggressive struggle for power, and rivalries among the political elite have characterized the Nigerian State, providing the opportunity for the military to seize power in 1966. Since then, the country has experienced more of military rule than civil rule, with only a brief civilian administration of Shehu Shagari (1979-83), and the current Obasanjo administration which came into power in 1999. Even so, the possibility of the military seizing power again in the near future cannot be ruled out.

It could be argued that a civilian government does not necessarily translate to good governance; the brief civilian rule Nigeria has experienced provides adequate proof of this. Yet, military rulers in Nigeria have not subscribed to good governance either.

Until the military coup in 1966, the political elite did not believe that there was a:

viable alternative to civilian government and also to them. The traditional rulers were believed to be ignorant in the art of modern, democratic politics. The civil service, though enlightened, had inherited and accepted the philosophy of political neutrality of the British civil service. The army was also assumed to have non-interventionist orientation beside the fact that it was weak and poor in numbers, equipment, strike force and training experience” (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985: 18).

Thus, the politicians were taken unaware by the 1966 coup. Nonetheless, despite the fact that military coups take place to “salvage” the country from collapse, military rule is still perceived generally in Nigeria as illegitimate. In fact, military rule has been interpreted as a negation of democracy. Ake opines that:

The military can never engender democracy because it is the anti-thesis of democracy as regard to its norms, values, purposes and structure. The military addresses the extreme and the extraordinary while democracy addresses the routine; the military values discipline and hierarchy, democracy values freedom and equality; the military is oriented to law and order, democracy to diversity, contradiction and competition; the method of the military is aggression, that of democracy persuasion, negotiation and consensus building (Ake, 1996: 14-15).

For Nigeria to move forward and continue to gain relevance, there is a need for a re-definition of the state. There is a need to change the popular perception about the state. The degree of access to state power usually determines accessibility to state resources. This usually aggravates conflicts among the various ethnic groups that make up African states. The competitions for access to state power and resources are so intense that elections are seen as a matter of life and death. The politics of many African states is such that candidates and parties at elections would do almost anything to win at all cost, leading often to the use of violence. Once in power, political leaders often find it difficult to relinquish the position to any other candidate or party. The state should be used as an instrument for the benefit of all in the society, and not to benefit certain individuals or groups.

The basic expectation of good governance is that equity, justice, and fairness would prevail in the allocation of resources, and in the process of changing of leadership. The process of electing leaders should be free, fair, and transparent, with popular participation by all the citizens. Open electoral processes would most likely build public confidence and trust in the newly elected government and in ensuring political legitimacy. And if people know and are able to periodically change an unresponsive and unaccountable government when they need to, then it will not only increase the level of political participation in each country but also help check the excesses of leaders.



Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure the protection of fundamental human rights and the limitation of the arbitrary use of power. The rights of the people to life and various freedoms such as speech, thought, association, assembly, and movement should be protected. To this end, there should be effective legal and independent judicial systems in place. The constitution should be one that is easily accessible to the people. As Nasa Tumwesigye posits:

Constitution making process should be inclusive. As for any constitution to work, the people must not only understand it but they must have taken an active part in its making which will ultimately make them identify with the constitution. The constitution making process and its development should not be seen only through the eyes of well educated lawyers, academicians, politicians etc. who may fail to relate to the thinking, understanding and aspiration of the people affected by such developments (Cited in Ihonvbere, 2000: 10).

Therefore, the constitution making should be people oriented. Participation should be broad-based and inclusive of input from both urban and rural areas. This would enable the constitution to command respect from all the people of the society.

There is a need to reinforce the rule of law by creating or strengthening agencies entrusted with the task of ensuring accountability within the state such as anti-corruption commission, human rights commission, independent electoral commission, ombudsman, and other monitoring organs. For instance, the anti-corruption commission should be one that will serve as instrument of making government officials accountable for their actions by subjecting corrupt officials to the judicial processes. The populace should be encouraged to report cases of bribery and corruption without fear of intimidation. In fact, the issue of corruption in Nigeria is not limited to the state and civil society. Corruption has permeated every nook and corner of the Nigerian society: the police, students, civil servants, custom officials, the judiciary, and many others take or offer bribe for one favor or the other. There is a need to re-orientate the generality of Nigerians in a bid to eradicate corruption completely. Also, an independent electoral commission that is autonomous from the

state and impartial in its organization and management of elections should conduct elections. The impartiality, fairness, and proper management of an election by an independent commission will go a long way in ensuring the credibility of the election as well as the legitimacy of the government in power.

In order to solve the problem of the minorities in Nigeria, mechanisms of accommodation and power sharing should be put in place to accommodate both majority and minority groups. With these mechanisms, it is believed that there would be a decrease in the pressure and struggle for political inclusion and intense competition for state resources. This will, most probably, translate into more political stability for the country.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

Good governance can thus be seen as a system of governance that promotes and sustains a nation's social, political, and economic development. It entails a system that is participatory, consensus oriented, transparent, accountable, responsive, effective, efficient, equitable, and respects the rule of law.

Good governance is also reflected in the recognition of the views and opinions of the public in the formulation of public policy and national development programs. Among other things, it requires enlightened participation by people not only in the national decision-making process but also in ensuring accountability and transparency of political leaders, administrators, and public and private institutions. This further requires that citizens have opportunities to discuss policies and issues that affect them without any fear of intimidation. However, good governance is an ideal that many countries are aspiring to achieve. There is a need for an extra effort in this regard in most African countries.

Since 1989, the issue of good governance has dominated development literature. Bad governance in many of African states has been identified as one of the root causes of the lack of development and the increasing poverty ravaging the African continent. International donor agencies and financial institutions are increasingly insisting on good governance as a major criterion for financial aid and loans to African countries. Yet, despite this demand for good governance, it could be noted that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other western governments have been known to give assistance at various times to highly authoritarian corrupt or incompetent regimes. This includes Argentina, Chile, Iran, South Korea, Zaire, Haiti, and many African countries (Robinson, 1993; Leftwich, 1993; Barya, 1993: 16-23).

Many people in Africa feel disconnected, excluded, and disappointed with the government institutions and public agencies in their countries, and in particular, with the absence of transparency in, and accountability of, these public agencies. They would love to see responsive governments in place where equal rights and justice are available to all. The ordinary people need to be empowered to take charge of their lives. The process of empowerment involves transforming the economic, social, psychological, political and legal circumstances of the currently powerless; the emergence of group identities (or community), the development of autonomous and coherent popular organizations, and the defense of, and education about, the legal rights of the popular sectors (Sandbrook, 1993: 2). It involves not only enabling the poor to meet their basic needs and to participate fully in decision-making on issues that affect their lives but also to be adequately empowered with the capacity to challenge internal and external agents of exploitation and immiseration.

However, for the creation and nurturing of this kind of environment of social cohesion and growth, a strong and able civil society is crucial. This is because civil society organizations are often able to reach segments of rural populations that governments

neglect or do not target as a priority. Therefore, the state must be willing to allow real power sharing through the assignment of direct responsibilities and the forging of real partnerships with civil society. It must be prepared to turn over both public responsibility and the necessary resources to popular, people-centered, autonomous associations when ever necessary. There must also be a willingness to give civil society a recognized place in the mechanisms of planning and initiation of policies. The right of civil society organizations to act as watchdogs and monitors over the affairs of the state need also to be recognized and protected.

In order to engender empowerment, African society needs to be transformed from one that encourages the demarcation of the society into two classes of citizens in which some citizens are above the laws because they are rich or politically powerful, while the others are subject to, and answerable to, the law. Participation and accessibility to the political system should be based on fairness, equality, and inclusiveness.

In a nutshell, good governance is a fragile plant that will need sustained nourishment (Landell-Mills and Serageldin, 1992: 318). It will require a fundamental change in mentality and social expectations that will only change gradually. Indeed, the place and role of Africa in the global community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be determined in large part by the extent to which African leaders are ready or willing to allow this transformation to occur.

## Chapter 7


### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Evolving a Way Forward

*...analyses of civil society and democratization give rise to considerations of political openings, political opportunities, structures, power asymmetries, contested meanings, and marginal as well as modal political practices. These are the channels through which a culture of politics is reconstructed... (Robinson, 1993:4).*

#### 7.1 Overview

The concept of civil society has generated fierce debate and contestation among political scientists since its emergence in political discourse in recent years. The debate surrounds its meaning, its usefulness in analyzing political situations around the world, as well as its importance as countervailing power in relation to the state. Civil society is distinguished from the public activities of the state because it is voluntary, and from the private activities of the market because it seeks common ground and public goods. It is perceived to ignite social consciousness thereby fostering a stronger and more dynamic political participation of citizens. As Swilling (1991: 22) points out, civil society is a sphere in which ordinary citizens with little or no political or economic power “have access to locally-constituted voluntary organizations that have the capacity, know-how, and resources to influence and even determine the structure of power and the allocation of material resources.” Civil society has also been perceived as a sector that fills the gap wherever the state has failed or proved inadequate. According to Hyden (1996: 97), civil society “helps mobilize resources in ways that the state alone is unable to do. Development benefits from the freedoms that civil society provides because people can take initiatives that they would otherwise not do”

For the purpose of this study, civil society is defined as an arena made up of voluntary associations, which serves as an avenue for the co-ordination of various interest of



society for the promotion of change or for the maintenance of the status quo. In this sense, civil society can not only ensure and effect a check on the arbitrariness of the state but also can serve as a buffer between state power and private spheres. It is against this background that this thesis elucidates the importance of civil society as a crucial force in the shaping and pluralization of power relations. To this end, this work has been an attempt to explore the concept of civil society as an analytical tool in politics. It sought to understand its importance in the political environment, its roles within the society, as well as its effectiveness as a tool in the promotion and provision of a better life for members of the Nigerian society in particular as well as other African countries generally.

The study also took into cognizance the non-monolithic nature of civil society. Civil society is made up of both progressive and conservative forces with competing views and interests. Therefore, while it may provide the opportunity for participation in democratic institutions in order to either maintain or challenge the status quo, it may also create avenues for individuals or groups to pursue their interests to the detriment of democracy.

Also, the relationship of civil society with the state was examined in order to have a clearer understanding of the strength and character of the impact of each on the other. Special emphasis was placed on the roles and functions of civil society in Nigeria by examining the Nigerian civil society between 1985 and 1999. During this period, segments of civil society continuously challenged the hegemony of the military over all other segments of the Nigerian society. Not surprisingly, the relationship between civil society and the state was tension-ridden and oppositional. Given its overall inability to co-opt civil society into docility, the state responded by using its coercive powers in a repressive and often brutal attempt to quash the most articulate and effective impediment to its unfettered hegemony. To its credit and despite occasional

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deviations by some members in collusion with the state, the Nigerian civil society provided not only the most formidable challenge and buffer to state power but also served as an abiding vehicle for the emplacement, fostering, and preservation of human rights and democratic values in Nigeria.

The study hinged on the theories of civil society by Alexis de Tocquville and Antonio Gramsci. De Tocqueville stressed the importance of volunteerism, community spirit, and independent associational life as a necessity for the protection of the society against the dominance of the state, and also as a counterbalance for ensuring an accountable and effective state. Gramsci, for his part, argues that civil society is the arena, separate from the state and market, in which ideological hegemony is contested. In other words, civil society contains a wide range of organizations, which either challenge or uphold the existing order. Using the Tocquevillian and Gramscian appraisals as frameworks for analysis, the study sought to evaluate the activities and roles played by civil society in this crucial period of Nigeria's history as a basis not only for determining the relevance of civil society organizations but also to suggest a positive course for their usefulness as instruments for establishing and sustaining good governance in Nigeria and other African countries.

However, it should be noted that this study neither suggests the existence of a homogenous Nigerian civil society nor that they have a unity of identity and purpose. There are both rural and urban civil society organizations that aim at attaining a better life for members of their communities/society without engaging the state. There are also civil society organizations that not only seek the furtherance of political objectives but also which rouse when they adjudge a pressing need to do so. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the study did not examine all sections of Nigerian civil

society; rather, it looks at the sections that often stood in opposition to various aspects of the state's programs and policies.

## **7.2 Challenges Facing Civil Society in Nigeria**

This study has shown that as far back as the pre-independence period, civil society organizations have been active participants in Nigeria politics. Civil society successfully saw to the country's independence, engendered several substantive changes in state policies, and scored a victory by forcing the military out of political power. However, despite being a formidable force against military rule, the ability and capacity of civil society to sustain its role as a balancing force between the state and the people is in doubt. This is due to the fact that it is riddled with problems, ranging from state hostility and sabotage to internal organizational and operational problems. It is observed that many civil society organizations are bogged down by ethnic and ideological schisms, thereby weakening and undermining their solidarity and focus in confronting the state and in fomenting their transformative agenda for social, economic, and political development of Nigeria.

Also, many of the regimes in Nigeria saw civil society as a challenger, competitor, or as a subversive element intending to topple their government. This section highlights some of the problems that militated against the proper functioning of civil society during the period studied; it takes the position that unless the organizations find ways to address the problems meaningfully, their relevance within the Nigerian political economy will remain less than optimal.

### **7.2.1 Factionalization**

The issue of factionalization is one of the biggest problems facing many civil society organizations in Nigeria. This is usually caused by both internal and external factors. Mismanaged internal squabbles over matters arising from ideological or



methodological differences often resulted in the breaking up of the organizations into two or more opposing camps, and leading to disunity, dissonance or claptrapping of the messages of the organization concerned. External influences deriving from ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural factors, as well as government interference also caused the fragmentation of several organizations. As a result of conflicts, many organizations are thereby rendered weak and incapable of fostering effective and sustained change and development.

### **7.2.2 Infiltration**

The military governments of the period studied were able to infiltrate the ranks of many of the more vocal civil society organizations by using disgruntled members to foment discord within the organizations or, in some cases, they were sponsored to set up competing organizations with (purportedly) the same objectives and programs. In this way, many organizations were destabilized, destroyed, or victimized in other ways, including forced exile or hiding for some of the key members of their leadership. Perhaps, the new democratic dispensation would allow civil society organizations the space they need to strengthen themselves in ways that would render them less vulnerable to internal bickering and political machinations that lead to splintering. Furthermore, it is possible that the more tolerant and transparent ethos of the new democratic environment would create the synergy necessary not only to catapult civil society organizations into more mature relationships with the state and the general public but also to focus more fully and decisively on the business of encouraging the respect for human rights norms, entrenching democratic values, and fomenting transformative growth and development.

### **7.2.3 Obnoxious laws and decrees**

As a result of the obnoxious laws and decrees rolled out by the military during the period of study, most civil society organizations were rendered powerless in

confronting the state, as well as in pursuing their objectives of looking after the well being of their members. For instance, the Trade Disputes (Essential Services Deregulation, Proscription and Prohibition from Participation in Trade Union Activities) Decree No. 24 described education as an essential service, thereby prohibiting teachers from embarking on any strike action. It also prevented three associations<sup>123</sup> in the education sector from involvement in trade union activities. Section 4 of the decree imposed a fine of N100, 000 or three years imprisonment, or both for violation of the decree. Although decrees are the prerogative of military regimes, there is some evidence in Africa and throughout the world that civilian governments are capable of passing laws that aim to scuttle debate, opposition, and effective challenge to the preferred priorities of those wielding political power. So far, however, there seems to be strong evidence that the Nigerian civil society is far better off (in terms of the absence of legal restrictions) under the new democratic environment than it ever was under any military government. As such, the future appears brighter in the short and medium terms for civil society organizations in Nigeria.

#### **7.2.4 Funding**

Funding poses a major challenge to all civil society organizations. A large number of Nigerian civil society organizations source their funding from international donors. This has its various problems. Firstly, funding often comes with conditions. The donors tend to dictate the programs they want carried out and, often, if the receiving organization is not careful, it can easily become a vehicle for the realization of the ambitions and agendas of the donors. Secondly, once the intended objective has been realized, funding usually ceases from the source. Also, with the return of Nigeria to

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<sup>123</sup> These were: Academic Staff union of Universities; Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities and other educational institutions; Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research Institutes, and Associated Institutions.

civil rule in 1999, there has been the tendency for most international donors to channel their support towards state programs rather than to civil society organizations. This is probably in order to help in strengthening emerging state institutions. Paradoxically, while the focus on the state serves important functions, the neglect of civil society may work in the medium and long terms to negate or weaken important parallel avenues and mechanisms for ensuring political pluralism and consolidating transparency, accountability, and good governance. Furthermore, given the need for civil society organizations to address the issue of donor dependency, these organizations need to diversify their resource bases (particularly with local fund-raising activities) in order not only to pursue autonomous programs but also to sustain them once initiated.

#### **7.2.5 Capacity building**

Another challenge related to funding is capacity building. The major factor impeding capacity-building drive of many civil society organizations in Nigeria is inadequate funding. Given the dearth of funds, many civil society organizations face great problems concerning not only their continued existence but also skills development for their staff (including ancillary staff) complements and the sustainability of their public assistance projects. Many good programs such as seminars and workshops on popular participation in governance that could help in empowering their communities and the general public are often not effected due to lack of capacity to organize them or to follow them up. As suggested above, civil society organizations need to establish local funding bases. They also need to develop ways to facilitate both domestic and external funding without jeopardizing their own mandates and programs.

### **7.2.6 Organizational Structures**

Many civil society organizations in Nigeria lack adequate organizational base as well as the full compliment of staff support necessary to run effectively their organizations. They lack basic modern technical equipments such as equipped library, computers to store data, access to the internet for conducting research, and access to international literature that are essential for their proper functioning. Also, there are organizational constraints, which make decision making process narrow, usually with the head of the organization being the sole decision maker. Civil society organizations should have properly constituted boards of director or executives as the case may be, with a written constitution. There is also the need for the establishment of self-evaluation and monitoring mechanisms in order to ensure transparency and accountability. This will help in enhancing their legitimacy and credibility.

### **7.2.7 Alliances and Networking**

Alliance formation is crucial in enhancing the capability of civil society organizations to advance their missions and objectives. During the period studied, many of these organizations, most especially human rights organizations, built networks and forged alliances around specific issues. This enabled them to have a wider coverage and to reduce duplication of services. Broad coalitions like the Campaign for Democracy (CD) and the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) were formed to advocate for the restoration of democratic rule and to monitor the 1999 elections respectively. Groups with similar interests also formed alliances to carry out developmental projects. However, many of these alliances were not sustained due to one reason or the other.<sup>124</sup> There is a need for more networking and alliances between civil society organizations not only within the country but also with other organizations with similar ideas and

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<sup>124</sup> For instance, in one of such alliances, a group of civil society organizations came together to work on a health facility project in Enugu. Funding was received from the USIS but the project was hijacked by one of the bigger organizations in the alliance, leaving the others frustrated.

challenges within the continent and globally. This will provide the avenue for the exchange of ideas, skills, and experiences as well as to further enhance their capacity to effectively carry out their responsibility to the general public.

### **7.3 Concluding Remarks**

Civil society organizations (especially those constituting the nine broad categories identified in the study (see chapter 1) have made tremendous impacts on the political and social development of Nigeria. Through their activities, they have engendered changes in the policies of the state, and also created unprecedented domestic and international awareness to situations affecting the Nigerian populace. Also, many of them were instrumental to the eventual establishment of democracy in the form of the country's return to civil rule in 1999.

However, much work still needs to be done in order to sustain democracy in Nigeria. There is a need for the mechanisms of transparency and accountability to be put in place in all spheres of public life in order to facilitate easier access and equal opportunity to individuals and societal groups to political power and the economic resources of the country. This is essential not so much because of the need to empower all of Nigeria's peoples politically and economically to participate as full partners in the governance and development activities of the country but because such involvement conveys the notion of collective ownership and ensures that the country's resources are not wasted because of bickering, rivalry-driven graft, or internecine conflicts. The protection of the fundamental human rights of the people is essential. To this end, the citizens should be educated on their rights and privileges, and be able to seek redress in the court of law. Furthermore, the judicial system should be seen not only as fair but also one that the people could trust and go to for justice and redress.

Finally, this study concludes that a virile civil society is important for the sustenance of democracy. But as Woods (1992: 94) pointed out,

The emergence of a civil society does not guarantee the development of democracy; however, it is unlikely that a viable democracy can survive without a civil society.... It is within civil society that public opinion is formed and it is through independent associations that individuals can have some influence on government decision-making.

All that notwithstanding, there remains a need for the state to create an enabling environment for the thriving of civil society organizations; that way, instead of confrontation and hostility, the relationship between the state and civil society would be one of cooperation and solidarity in order to pursue and maintain common goals and values necessary for establishing a good society.

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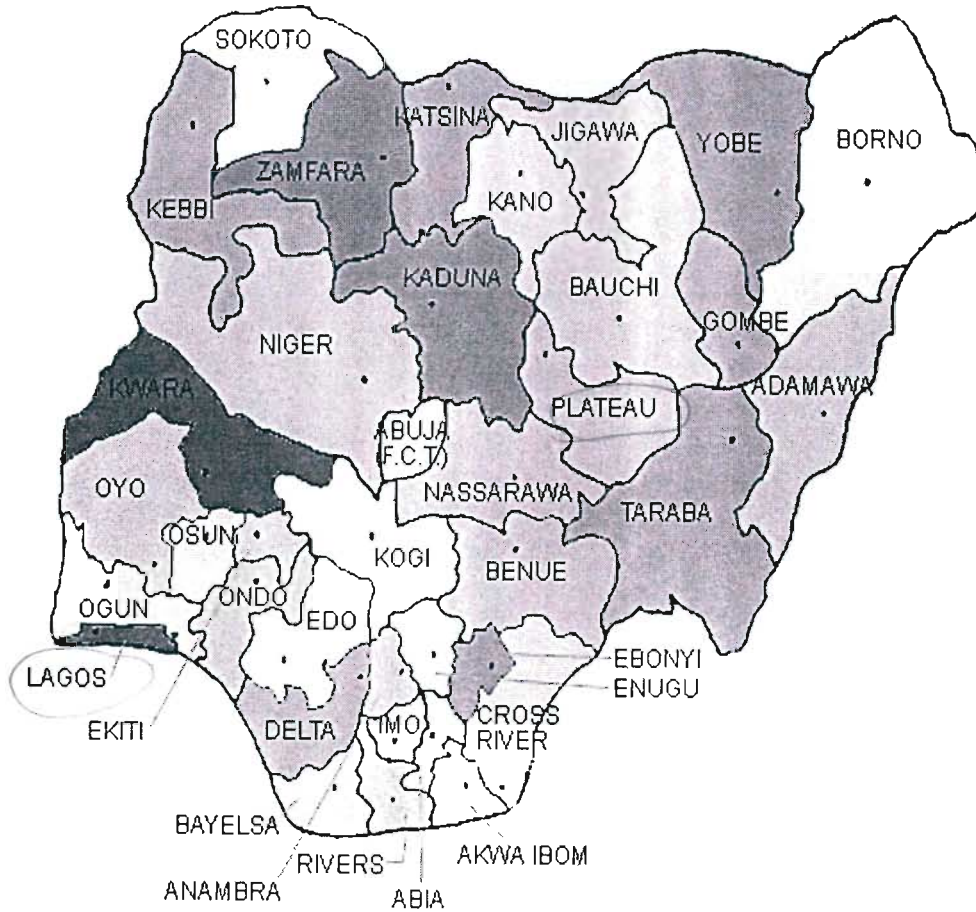


## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Map of Nigeria.

Source: <<http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/geography.html>>

(The map below shows all the states in Nigeria, with their capital locations indicated by dots.)



## **Appendix 2: Ogoni Bill of Rights (1990).**

*Presented to the government and people of Nigeria*

We, the people of Ogoni (Babbe, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyo- Khana and Tai) numbering about 500,000, being a separate and distinct ethnic nationality within the Federal Republic of Nigeria, wish to draw the attention of the government and people of Nigeria to the under mentioned facts:

1. That the Ogoni people, before the advent of British colonialism, were not conquered or colonized by any other ethnic group in present-day Nigeria.
2. That British colonization forced us into the administrative division of Opobo from 1908 to 1947.
3. That we protested against this forced union until the Ogoni Native Authority was created in 1947 and placed under the then Rivers Province.
4. That in 1951 we were forcibly included in the Eastern Region of Nigeria, where we suffered utter neglect.
5. That we protested against the neglect by voting against the party in power in the region in 1957, and against the forced union by testimony, before the Willink Commission of Inquiry into Minority Fears in 1958.
6. That this protest led to the inclusion of our nationality in Rivers State in 1967, which state consists of several ethnic nationalities with differing cultures, languages and aspirations.
7. That oil was struck and produced in commercial quantities on our land in 1958 at K. Dere (Bomu oilfield).
8. That oil has been mined on our land since 1958 to this day from the following oilfields: (i) Bomu (ii) Bodo West (iii) Tai (iv) Korokoro (v) Yorla (vi) Lubara Creek and (vii) Afam by Shell Petroleum Development Company (Nigeria) Limited.
9. That in over 30 years of oil mining, the Ogoni nationality have provided the Nigerian nation with a total revenue estimated at over forty billion naira, thirty billion dollars.
10. That in return for the above contribution, the Ogoni people have received NOTHING.
11. That today, the Ogoni people have:

- (i) No representation whatsoever in ALL institutions of the Federal government of Nigeria.
  - (ii) No pipe-borne water.
  - (iii) No electricity.
  - (iv) No job opportunities for the citizens in Federal, state, public sector or private sector companies.
  - (v) No social or economic project of the Federal government.
12. That the Ogoni languages of Gokana and Khana are undeveloped and are about to disappear, whereas other Nigerian languages are being forced on us.
  13. That the ethnic politics of successive Federal and state governments are gradually pushing the Ogoni people to slavery and possible extinction.
  14. That the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited does not employ Ogoni people at a meaningful or any level at all, in defiance of the Federal government's regulations.
  15. That the search for oil has caused severe land and food shortages in Ogoni, one of the most densely populated areas of Africa (average 1,500 per square mile; national average 300 per square mile).
  16. That neglectful environmental pollution laws and sub-standard inspection techniques of the Federal authorities have led to the complete degradation of the Ogoni environment, turning our homeland into an ecological disaster.
  17. That the Ogoni people lack education, health and other social facilities.
  18. That it is intolerable that one of the richest areas of Nigeria should wallow in abject poverty and destitution.
  19. That successive Federal administrations have trampled on every minority right enshrined in the Nigerian constitution to the detriment of the Ogoni and has, by administrative structuring and other noxious acts transferred Ogoni wealth exclusively to other parts of the republic.
  20. That the Ogoni people wish to manage their own affairs.

Now, therefore, while reaffirming our wish to remain a part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, we make demand upon the Republic as follows:

That the Ogoni people be granted Political Autonomy to participate in the affairs of the republic as a distinct and separate unit by whatever name called, provided that this autonomy guarantees the following:

- (a) Political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people;
- (b) The right to the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development;
- (c) Adequate and direct representation as of right in all Nigerian national institutions;
- (d) The use and development of Ogoni languages in Ogoni territory;
- (e) The full development of Ogoni culture; (f) the right to religious freedom;
- (g) The right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation.

We make the above demand in the knowledge that it does not deny any other ethnic group in the Nigerian Federation their rights and that it can only be conducive to peace, justice and fair play and hence stability and progress in the Nigerian nation.

We make the above demand in the belief that, as Obafemi Awolowo has written: in a true Federation, each ethnic group no matter how small, is entitled to the same treatment as any other ethnic group, no matter how large.

We demand these rights as equal members of the Nigerian Federation who contribute and have contributed to the growth of the Federation and have a right to expect full returns from that Federation.

Adopted by general acclaim of the Ogoni people on the 26th day of August, 1990 at Bori, Rivers State, and signed by:

BABBE: HRH Mark Tsaro-Igbara, Gbenemene Babbe; HRH F. M. K. Noryaa, Menebua, Ka-Babbe; Chief M. A. M. Tornwe III, JP; Prince J. S. Sangha; Dr Israel Kue; Chief A. M. N. Gua.

GOKANA: HRH James P. Bagia, Gberesako XI, Gbenemene Gokana; Chief E. N. Kobani, JP, Tonsimene Gokana; Dr B. N. Birabi; Chief Kemte Giadom, JP; Chief S. N. Orage.

KEN-KHANA: HRH M. H. S. Eguru, Gbenemene Ken- Khana; HRH C. B. S. Nwikina, Emah III, Menebua Born; Mr M. C. Daanwii; Chief T. N. Nwieke; Mr Ken Saro- Wiwa; Mr Simeon Idemyor.

NYO-KHANA: HRH W Z. P. Nzidee, Gbenemene Baa I of Nyo-Khana; Dr G. B. Leton, OON, JP; Mr Lekue Lah- Loolo; Mr L. E. Mwara; Chief E. A. Apenu; Pastor M. P. Maeba.

TAI: HRH B. A. Mballey, Gbenemene Tai; HRH G. N. Gininwa, Menebua Tua- Tua; Chief J. S. Agbara; Chief D.J. K. Kumbe; Chief Fred Gwezia; HRH A. Demor-Kanni, Menebua Nonwa.

### **Appendix 3: Addendum to the Ogoni Bill of Rights (1991)**

We, the people of Ogoni, being a separate and distinct ethnic nationality within the Federal Republic of Nigeria, hereby state as follows:

- A. That on 2 October 1990 we addressed an 'Ogoni Bill of Rights' to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida, and members of the Armed Forces Ruling Council;
- B. That after a one-year wait, the President has been unable to grant us the audience which we sought to have with him in order to discuss the legitimate demands contained in the Ogoni Bill of Rights;
- C. That our demands as outlined in the Ogoni Bill of Rights are legitimate, just and our inalienable rights and in accord with civilized values worldwide;
- D. That the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has continued, since 2 October 1990, to decree measures and implement policies which further marginalize the Ogoni people, denying us political autonomy, our rights to our resources, to the development of our languages and culture, to adequate representation as of right in all Nigerian national institutions and to the protection of our environment and ecology from further degradation.
- E. That we cannot sit idly by while we are, as a people, dehumanized and slowly exterminated and driven to extinction even as our rich resources are siphoned off to the exclusive comfort and improvement of other Nigerian communities, and the shareholders of multinational oil companies.

Now, therefore, while reaffirming our wish to remain a part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, we hereby authorize the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) to make representation, for as long as these injustices continue, to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the European Community and all international bodies which have a role to play in the preservation of our nationality, as follows:

1. That the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has, in utter disregard and contempt for human rights, since independence in 1960 till date, denied us our political rights to self-determination, economic rights to our resources, cultural rights to the development of our languages and culture, and social rights to education, health and adequate housing and to representation as of right in national institutions;

2. That, in particular, the Federal Republic of Nigeria has refused to pay us oil royalties and mining rents amounting to an estimated US twenty billion dollars for petroleum mined from our soil for over thirty-three years;
3. That the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria does not protect any of our rights whatsoever as an ethnic minority of 500,000 in a nation of about a hundred million people and that the voting power and military might of the majority ethnic groups have been used remorselessly against us at every point in time;
4. That multi-national oil companies, namely Shell (Dutch/ British) and Chevron (American) have severally and jointly devastated our environment and ecology, having flared gas in our villages for thirty-three years and caused oil spillages, blow-outs, etc., and have dehumanized our people, denying them employment and those benefits which industrial organizations in Europe and America routinely contribute to their areas of operation;
5. That the Nigerian elite (bureaucratic, military, industrial and academic) have turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to these acts of dehumanization by the ethnic majority and have colluded with all the agents of destruction aimed at us;
6. That we cannot seek restitution in the courts of law in Nigeria, as the act of expropriation of our rights and resources has been institutionalized in the 1979 and 1989 constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which constitutions were acts of a constituent assembly imposed by a military regime and do not, in any way, protect minority rights or bear resemblance to the tacit agreement made at Nigerian independence;
7. That the Ogoni people abjure violence in their just struggle for their rights within the Federal Republic of Nigeria but will, through every lawful means, and for as long as is necessary, fight for social justice and equity for them- selves and their progeny, and in particular demand political autonomy as a distinct and separate unit within the Nigerian nation with full right to:
  - (i) Control Ogoni political affairs,
  - (ii) Use at least 50 per cent of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development;
  - (iii) Protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation;
  - (iv) Ensure the full restitution of the harm done to the health of our people by the flaring of gas, oil spillages, oil blow-outs, etc., by the following oil companies: Shell, Chevron and their Nigerian accomplices.
8. That without the intervention of the international community, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the ethnic majority



will continue these noxious policies until the Ogoni people are  
obliterated from the face of the earth.

Adopted by the general acclaim of the Ogoni people on the 26th day of August 1991  
at Bori, Rivers State of Nigeria.