
The Nigerian State and Politics in the Fourth Republic

Osita Agbu

Introduction

We cannot engage in any far-reaching and grounded discourse of Nigerian politics without first interrogating the character of the Nigerian state in terms of its origin, people, human interactions and economy. Nigeria is made up of some 250 ethnic groups with no common language. However, there are three dominant ethnic groups, namely, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, which together constitute a tripod that has serious implications for the socio-economic management and political organisation of the country. Pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial developments have together combined in shaping the mode of governance in Nigeria. Pre-colonial Nigeria was characterised by the existence of empires, kingdoms and segmented societies like the Habe Kingdom (Hausa) of the fifteenth century, before the ascendancy of the Fulani in 1804 after the Jihad. Other political entities included the Kanem-Borno Empire, Oyo Empire, Benin Kingdom as well as segmentary societies of South Eastern Nigeria. Generally, during the pre-colonial era, four major political systems were identifiable: the emirate system, monarchical system, semi-monarchical system and republican monarchism. In the emirate system, the structure was hierarchical, showcasing a sort of uni-directional flow of authority from the emir to the people. In the monarchical and semi-monarchical systems, authority tended to be pyramidal, for example, in the Yoruba kingdom of Oyo and the Benin Kingdom. Republican monarchism was characterised by decentralist principalities consisting of independent political units or segments with little allegiance to any overarching authority. Whilst the emirate system was synonymous with a subject political culture, the monarchical and semi-monarchical systems embodied a participant political culture, and republican monarchism was characterised by a high level of decentralization and independence.

The point to note is that pre-colonial Nigeria did not have a monolithic political system, and very little commonality existed among the different peoples apart from trading arrangements. Also, at each turning point during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, there were different norms. This does not of course mean that there were no commonalities at all. For example, whilst in many of the societies women could not aspire to political leadership positions, some however created roles for women that were vital for the governance of their societies. Nonetheless, the differences did little to help the emergence of a Nigerian nation. Indeed, the fact that Nigeria is still a corporate entity five decades plus after political independence is nothing short of a miracle considering its colonial legacy.

The nature of the Nigerian state and society is fundamentally anarchical, mainly because of the multiplicity of its ethnic groupings and its mono-product economy superintended by a distorted federal structure. Its political structure and governance have been distorted since political independence in 1960; first, by colonialists; second, by the ethnicised political class; and thirdly; by military politicians. The character of the Nigerian state derives from the various experiences of the past such as the colonial experience, the coercive amalgamation of southern and northern protectorates in 1914, the various attempted and successful *coups d'état* (eleven as at the last count in 1997), ethnic politics, the civil war (1967-1970) as well as deep-rooted distrust among some of the ethnic nationalities, and settler/indigene crises across the country (Moru, 2004). These experiences have continued to shape the structure and dynamics of the Nigerian state system. Unfortunately, this is a structure that also fosters nepotism, undermines creativity and glorifies mediocrity through the misapplication of the federal character provision and quota system in the amended 1999 Constitution. To this extent, access to power and the use of it for primitive accumulation and influence becomes an internecine affair.

The task today is how to understand and eschew the confusion that have arisen from this distortion; which has stultified, stigmatized and puzzled many Nigerian observers. Molding a distinct political form through the deconstruction and transformation of the Nigerian state from its inherited form is the most important task before many Nigerians.

In the immediacy, however, and leading up to the present political dispensation, the background could be traced from the demise of the military strongman, General Sani Abacha who died in 1998, and his replacement with General Abdulsalami Abubakar who initiated and superintended the transition to the Fourth Republic that saw a return to civil rule in 1999. The Fourth Republic is sequentially the republican government of Nigeria from 1999, deriving its powers from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. A widely monitored 1999 election saw the emergence of former military ruler, Olusegun Obasanjo, on the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The election, though widely regarded as hugely flawed, was grudgingly accepted by most of the citizens since the ultimate

objective then was to shepherd the military out of the corridors of power. The general election of 2003 was no better, and was roundly condemned as lacking transparency. Again, in the controversial general election of April 2007, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the PDP was purportedly elected. The internal processes of the Party which threw him up were obviously flawed as later events were to show. It was generally believed that his candidacy was imposed on the country by the party 'godfathers'. By February 2010, after much political machinations and brinkmanship, a very sick and obviously physically incapable President Musa Yar'Adua, was temporary replaced by Acting President Goodluck Jonathan through the intervention of the National Assembly as an obviously lame Executive Council of the Federation lacked the will and courage to take a decisive action on the health status of Mr. President. This became necessary as the Nigerian ship slowly, but surely headed for the rocks! As at 2010, no one knew how long the Acting Presidency would last. But mercifully, the 2011 general elections proved much better in its organisation and execution by INEC, and delivered to Nigerians better elections and better candidates. Goodluck Jonathan was elected President, and thus the Acting Presidency terminated. This is the background against which we seek to re-visit the concept of the state, impact of colonialism on the state, post-independent politics, the role of the political elite and elections, and the character of the Nigerian state in the Fourth Republic.

The Concept of State

The concept of the state could be traced to two main traditions, the Weberian (Weber 1964) and the Marxist (Marx and Engels 1852/1958). For Max Weber, a state is a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in a given territory. The emphasis here is on the claim to the monopoly of the use of force. Indeed, Weber saw the state as an institution, *sui generis*, existing to safeguard and regulate the society. Marxists reject the position of the liberal theory that the state is basically neutral and stands aside to mediate the contradictions inherent in society (Best 1990). Rather, they conceive of the state as a product of the social system that is characterised by class contradictions, struggles and class domination. These classes have different interests. The state is, therefore, an instrument of class domination with class bias to conflicts in society. It is a specific modality of class domination (Ake 1985; Ihonvbere 1989). It is not above class struggle, and can only be an agent of a particular class. In fact, in the *Communist Manifesto*, the state was construed as an agent of the bourgeoisie, thus: 'the executive of the modern state is a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie'.

The literature is replete with many more recent descriptions of the state. So, a state could be any of the following depending on its character and manifestation; capitalist, marxist, socialist, communist, colonial, neo-colonial, welfarist, overdeveloped, rentier, prebendal, enduring, juridical, predatory, fictitious,

collapsing and collapsed as the case maybe (Leftwitch 2000; Joseph 1987; Zolberg 1995). Nevertheless, these various sub-classifications could also be tied up into two main strands – state-centric and society-centred. There is, therefore, the conceptualization of the state based on the indices of structure, apparatus of power and their functions, and the conceptualization that perceives the state as a consequence of the character of the society, that is, class structure, social norms and the civil society. Whilst the state structure conceptualization is state-centred and professes a realist outlook that perceives the state as a rational unitary actor (Allison 1971), an organisational statism (Niskanen 1974) and an analytical concept (Mitchel 1992); the ‘class character’ approach is society-centred and encompasses the pluralists who basically see the state as an arena for competition among various interests (Bendix 1967; Dahl 1971; Held 1989). Included among the pluralists are also the structural-functionalists who perceive the state as an instrument of social integration (Parson 1965; Almond and Powell 1966) and the Marxists who see the state as an expression of class struggle and domination (Poulantzas 1978; Jessop 1990). However, common to the pluralists is the notion that the state is a reflection of the society; hence its dynamics encapsulates the norms, intra- and inter-class struggles and politicized ethnic relations. The character of these struggles determines the structure of the institutions and policies of the government. For us, therefore, the society-centred theoretical approach is much relevant to our understanding of the character of the Nigerian state and its politics. And this character cannot be properly understood until we factor in the economic element. Given Nigeria's profile as a largely mono-product oil producing country, the political economy of oil and its contradictions have been a major factor shaping the character of the Nigerian state and its politics.

The Nigerian State

The character of the Nigerian state could be understood in terms of the genealogy of global capital accumulation and the interplay of local and global class relations. The penetration of European merchants into the territory now known as Nigeria eventually led to the emergence of the nation-state whose umbilical cord is strongly tied to capitalism. The state eventually became a tool in the hands of capitalist forces which used it as an instrument to pacify, dominate and keep the pristine forces apart to enable capital accumulation. The dialectics of existing social forces in its struggle with global capital and wealth accumulation led to the continual transformation of the Nigerian state. But in what direction was this transformation headed? It clearly headed towards its continued use as a provider of raw materials (groundnuts, palm oil, cocoa, and oil and gas) for lubricating the engine of capitalist development, largely in the West. In spite of its transformation from being a colonial entity, the Nigerian state retained the fundamental character of not being a popular-national state that represented the interests of the people (Ibeanu 1997:8).

In terms of transformation, though the pristine forces at independence comprising nationalists, traditional leaders and the educated elite, wrested power from the British colonial power, they soon became embroiled in interests struggle. This led to a crisis of nation-building characterised by hegemonic struggles for access to power at the centre. Although, the 1979 Constitution was a watershed experience in Nigeria's constitutional development, the subsequent party politics that emerged was not much different from what existed in post-independent Nigeria. Political parties were largely formed along ethnic lines, while the political class politicized the ethnic divides. Invariably, what ensued from the symptoms of incompetence, ignorance and corruption, was politics of bitterness and winner-takes-all rather than politics of tolerance. The Nigerian state was to witness further crisis relating to revenue allocation, state creation, civil war, power-sharing, and *coups d'états* that almost led to the disintegration of the political entity. Since then, Nigeria has been bedevilled by claims of marginalization, separatist agitations, resource control, inter-communal conflicts and insurgency. Terrorist attacks and rejection of the Nigerian state have become new threats to the corporate existence of the country. It was perhaps the need to arrest some of these crises, promote national unity and command the loyalty of all that led to the much vilified Federal Character Principle and the quota system as affirmative actions to ensure a sense of belonging and loyalty to the federation. The Federal Character Principle demands that government activities and institutions must reflect the diverse ethnic groupings that constitute the geographic expression called Nigeria [Section 14(3-4), 1999 Constitution]. Unfortunately, the reason for enacting this principle was defeated as the dominant and ruling classes distorted its use for selfish ends. The principle enabled them to sponsor candidates to high political positions, increasing their influence and undermining the spirit of the principle. Invariably, policies, programmes, ascendancy to positions of power and influence, wealth and security were determined by a few individuals that re-cycled themselves or their relations and children into positions of power and authority in a patron-client relationship. Government businesses and activities became personalized, laws became personified and dissent and opposition to policies and powers then became suicidal. Invariably, the Nigerian state became privatized (Eze 2009).

- That the character of the Nigerian state is worrisome is not in doubt. Fifty years plus after political independence, the country is still reeling from vociferous and sometimes violent challenges to its power and hegemony in various parts of the country particularly in the East, the Niger Delta, the West, the Middle Belt and the North East, where an insurgency and terrorism is raging led by *Boko Haram*. After over fifty years, the country is today more insecure, less stable and less confident than it was at independence, and this is in spite of the billions of dollars earned from the sale of crude oil and gas. The citizens are, on a daily basis, assaulted, maimed or killed by either the police or armed robbers and assassins, visited with sectarian crisis that the state appears incapable of

resolving, decimated by the scourge of poverty and ravaged by bribery and corruption in low and high places. The citizens' agony is compounded by the lack of basic infrastructure such as motorable roads, electricity and potable water as well as other basic amenities which are taken for granted in many other countries. The cries of marginalization and alienation appear therefore to be largely justified. Still, the dominant and hegemonic political elite continue in their profligacy, stealing the people's vote and mandates and abusing the system. This is against the background that at independence, Nigerian nationalists actually believed that a nation had been born. Had they known that in about fifty years the country would have retarded or de-progressed, perhaps the idea and acceptance of the Nigerian geographic space as a political entity would have been re-negotiated to make for more practical association of peoples. The Nigerian state in its *structural and distributive* mode is *highly dysfunctional*, counter-productive and lacking in innovation. Indeed, there is presently palpable anger and alienation in the land.

In other words, the demand for a national dialogue or national conference by some Nigerians was very much justified. A Presidential Advisory Committee was inaugurated 7 October 2013 at Abuja to distil modalities for the National Dialogue, which was chaired by Dr. Femi Okuroumu. The Dialogue eventually held beginning from 17 March to the end of July 2014. The report of the Dialogue is yet to be implemented as there are constitutional issues to resolve.

At present, the existential conditions of the Nigerian people in the face of the scandalous display of unmerited and stolen wealth by a few individuals and public servants create the right condition for the deepening of contradictions and revolutionary pressures. Thus, we experience frequent labour strikes, including the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and demonstrations by students of higher institutions either opposing increases in fees or demanding better facilities. Generally, relations between the state, its agents and agencies and the citizenry are characterised by suspicion, demonstrations and communal strife. The state, given its monopoly of power and the use of force, responds with silence, threats, dismissals, imprisonment and intimidation. The dominant moral climate in Nigeria against the backdrop of stolen mandates and corruption in high places is every man to himself and God for us all. There was a time when the attitude was that of '*siddon look*', meaning 'let's wait and see', but it seems the masses are now more conscious, and therefore more predisposed to defending their political rights and votes. Still, the 'National Question' continues to resonate even as state elite across all the ethnic groups fight to retain the advantages they currently have in a distorted federation led by a weak and narrow-minded hegemonic political class. However, history has shown that no dispensation lasts for forever. The dissenting voices and opposition currently gathering momentum in the country and awakening political sensibilities will be instrumental in one day upstaging

this lethargic political class. It is even now happening with the very destructive Boko Haram Insurgency raging in the North East of the country.

The State in Nigeria is basically a neoliberal state, an appendage of the 1648 Westphalian State in Europe. In fact, as a 'gatekeeper state', it serves as an instrument of capitalist accumulation, which thrives on dispossession of the populace. It can, therefore, not serve as an instrument of good governance for the Nigerian people. Our observation is that the Nigerian political elites have developed a hegemonic project based around three core principles – multiculturalism, economic liberalism and democracy – which incorporate the indigenous peoples into the political system while simultaneously excluding indigenous movement demands that would undermine the political and economic sources of elite power.

In short, the Nigerian state has been shown not to be a neutral institution; rather, it is an instrument of domination, oppression, primitive accumulation and the protection of elite interests. Eze (2009: 449) has observed that the Nigerian state is a product of western imperialism which has continued to be structured and transformed by the dictates of the productive forces it created. Central to this is the fact that state power was established as an instrument of capital formation and wealth development. Consequently, the various pseudo and comprador bourgeoisies prevalent in the socio-economic system compete in a zero-sum game for the acquisition, use and consolidation of state power. The multiple ethnic pluralities of Nigeria, and its politicization provided a fertile ground for the class struggle. The logic of federalism, unity in diversity, equity and justice, led to the introduction of divisive policies such as the federal character principle and the quota system. Before long, this organising principle of inclusion became distorted and found its way into the political arena and political parties. And in a situation in which people who run for electoral positions are selected on quota basis without really winning an election in a free and fair manner, it is no surprise that the country has become saddled with incompetent and visionless individuals whose only goal is to use public office for primitive accumulation of the commonwealth for self-aggrandizement. The country is worse for it today.

The neo-liberal state in Nigeria at this time has a transformed political centre at the core of which people at the highest echelons of government prioritize marketization, corporatization and outsourcing, as well as economic relationships which aid this. The political centre has been captured by entrepreneurs of the state, corporate interests, and the accountancy firms. Thus, political parties are bound to espouse this mantra, not the idea of serving the Nigerian people's interests. Indeed, in this dispensation, political parties promote the neo-liberal culture: a culture which is based on celebrating the cult of the individual, selfishness, greed and the validation of winners. These parties cannot, therefore, be the heralding of a new participatory and popular democracy as proclaimed. Political gangsterism has become the dominant practice in such a framework. In effect,

drawing on insights from economic, political, and cultural theories of liberal democratic governance, countries with a history of Western European influence and with British common law origins often have better governance, but this has not been the case in Nigeria. Why? This could be explained by other factors, both exogenous and indigenous to the Nigerian experience. However, we quickly note that multi-party elections alone are not necessarily the only key determinants of good governance.

Colonialism and the Character of the State before Independence

The British colonial authorities kept the different regions of Nigeria apart to further their own interests prior to independence. Through the use of this divide and rule policy, the British did immense harm to any chance of the peoples of these regions seeing themselves as partners in progress for the development of the geographical entity called Nigeria. The use of the indirect rule system worked more successfully in the north than in the south partly because of the emirate traditional political arrangement. This system suited the colonialist who did not have to deal directly with the people. The Muslim religion and the reverence for religious leaders which is very strong in the north of the country were used as organising principles to keep the subjects in check. This approach was partially successful in the west but different in the east. The east, made up mainly of the Igbo nation historically characterised by segmented and acephalous societies, did not have the kind of reverence for authorities that exist in the north. The Igbos are mainly individualistic and entrepreneurial by orientation and believe in their capacity to become successful through personal efforts and not necessarily through collective or institutional means. It is therefore important to note that the pre-colonial arrangement conditioned the colonial. Though the British occupied Lagos in 1861 and indirect rule continued until 1938, the official date of Nigeria's colonization was 1900 when the British succeeded in militarily 'pacifying' the whole country, while the northern and southern parts of the country were amalgamated in 1914 as one country. Thus, history has a lot to contribute to our understanding of the character of the Nigerian state.

Nigeria constitutionally became a quasi-federation in 1951, since then the country has achieved the enviable but problematic status of a full federation with a strong centre, which has increasingly become an albatross difficult to shift. A federal constitution was fully achieved in 1954 with the enactment of the McPherson Constitution. To a large extent, Nigeria is blessed with enormous human and material resources, however, the uneven distribution and irresponsible use of the proceeds from these resources, especially oil revenues have made Nigeria's fiscal federalism problematic, and this has at times led to fundamental differences among the political elite, leading to elite struggles for access to state resources.

Post-Independence Politics, Oil-based Economy and the Political Elite

Although Nigeria achieved political independence on 1 October 1960, it boasted a colonial, political and economic architecture that tended to accentuate the differences amongst the national elite. Post-colonial Nigeria was to become even more antagonistic as life was then 'short and brutish'. At this period, the centre could no longer hold as parochial and voracious elite from the different regions battled for the soul of the country. Nigeria thus witnessed its first military *coup d'état* on 15 January 1966, followed by a reprisal counter coup in July of the same year. With the discovery of crude oil in the Niger Delta in 1958 and with the country being largely run as a mono-product cultural economy, the state witnessed many more *coups d'état*, the last being an attempted coup on 21 December 1998 against Sani Abacha. According to Mimiko (2007:304):

the very nature of the Nigerian state, oriented towards rent-seeking ends, makes contest for it acute. The state is colonial and clientelist. It lacks hegemony and is oriented basically to promote the rent-seeking proclivities of transient custodians of state power ... The contest for political power in the prevailing context, therefore, becomes a hot context for the main focus of primitive accumulation, and is of necessity conflictual, highly divisive and fundamentally incapable of sustaining a stable pattern of regime change.

The contradictions inherent in an unproductive and oil-based economy was to play itself out in subsequent years as the military, with the help of civilian collaborators, manipulated the ethnic differences, looted the treasury and regrettably succeeded in bastardizing most, if not all of the inherited institutions, norms and values that are germane to good governance and societal cohesion, such as integrity and communal harmony. The country is yet to recover from this.

Therefore, that there are internal contradictions and ongoing class struggles in a rent-seeking Nigerian formation is not in doubt. At independence in 1960, Nigeria emerged as a neo-colonial capitalist state structurally integrated into the world capitalist system. According to Onimode (1981) and Nnoli (1981), the British colonial authority carefully cultivated a local petty-bourgeoisie to whom political power was transferred, while at the same time, retaining with other industrialized capitalist nations their dominance of the economy of the Nigerian state. Nnoli (1981) noted that this emergent petty and comprador bourgeoisie's objective interest largely lay in the consolidation and reproduction of the colonial system of economic life for pecuniary benefits. Since independence, this local ruling class has continued to pursue policies that reproduce the colonially established bourgeois structure. They tend to be externally oriented, have developed tastes similar to those of the western elites, and therefore find it extremely difficult to understand and articulate the need for endogenous development. Hence, the modern Nigerian state invariably acts to preserve the existing social order in which the capitalist mode of production is not only prevalent but consistently reproduced.

The integration of Nigeria into the global capitalist order operates principally for the benefit of the advanced capitalist economies as the role determined for Nigeria is that of an exporter of raw materials and importer of finished or semi-finished goods (Osoba 1978). Indeed, the character of the Nigerian state can be summarized as follows; firstly, Nigeria is a rentier state and proto-capitalist in its aspiration as the Nigerian state promoted capitalist accumulation and the capitalist class formation in a distorted manner. This is evidenced in the fact that the state itself is:

... a major owner of the means of production and finance capital. It invested in large scale productive enterprises, on its own or in partnership with foreign and domestic private capital. It took an active part in promoting Nigerian capitalists, through state banks, development corporations and support schemes. Heavy state investments in economic and social infrastructure clearly support further capitalist production (Beckman 1983).

Secondly, the Nigerian state is a neo-colonial state dominated by conservative forces and interests. On many occasions, the state has found it extremely difficult to control the activities of the trans-national companies (TNCs) operating in the country. This is not surprising since more often than not, the ruling and dominant classes either connive with or find it extremely difficult to resist the overtures and offers made by the foreign companies. Also, the instability associated with the country cannot be divorced from the machinations of the multinationals and their activities in the process of production. As a marginalized capitalist formation, the Nigerian state is therefore an organ of international capital, as the real control of its economy is in the hands of external interests or foreign capital. Effectively, then, the Nigerian state can best be described as a comprador state, since state institutions and its officials operate as agents of imperialism. According to Beckman (1982), the Nigerian state is a state of imperialism. Imperialist social relations of production have been domesticated and the state itself is the very linch-pin around which the system of imperialist domination rotates. This is an important phase of imperialist domination from within, with its specific contradiction, and its specific form of resistance. The Nigerian elite have developed capitalist tastes like their counterparts in the West, except that while their counterparts also engage in productive capitalism, the Nigerian elite is quagmired in consumerism.

The Nigerian elite uses its alliance with foreign capital to enhance its class rule and accumulation. Furthermore, the Nigerian state is characterised by the predominance of the public sector in the generation of profits and determination of the production structure in the economy (Ekuerhare 1984). It is also characterised by a primitive accumulation process with the government playing the central role as a breeding ground of indigenous capitalists. This primitive accumulation process is achieved basically through corruption and violence (Iyayi 1986).

We can at this stage ask the question: in whose interest does the Nigerian state act? In fact, while the Nigerian state serves both as an organ for the penetration of global capital and for the emancipation of the domestic bourgeoisie, it cannot be reduced to either. The primary role of the Nigerian state is basically to establish, maintain, protect and expand conditions conducive for capitalist accumulation in general, without which neither foreign nor Nigerian capitalists can prosper. Suffice it to say that the 'Nigerian state' represents the interests of dominant social forces in their relationship with transnational and international interests (Shaw and Fasehun 1980:551). The Nigerian state is, therefore, dependent and its actions are significantly constrained in the global system. A combination of emphasis on the character of the ruling class in the Nigerian formation which is predatory; the class character of the state, which is rentier to the detriment of productive activities; and the role of the transnational corporations and the overriding influence of the global capitalist production system provide a graphic background for understanding the myriad of problems associated with governance and the conduct of elections at all levels in the country.

Hence, it is safe to say that the Nigerian state plays a crucial political role in industrial relations. As a petty-bourgeois state, it supports capital whenever fundamental conflicts arise between labour and capital. It is, therefore, clear that the dominant role played by the petty-bourgeoisie in contemporary Nigerian society has immediate implications for the political and electoral processes. Therefore, power is important, and indeed, is the ultimate prize for the large army of combatants who battle, upon the pain of death, to attain political power. What, however, makes the Nigerian case unique, is the multicultural character of its elite and the tendency to embrace corruption as a means of achieving personal and group interests. Against the background of a skewed political arrangement and an unbalanced federation, in addition to the easy perquisites derivable from occupying positions of authority in an oil-rich country, access to power becomes deadly and electoral integrity is undermined.

Furthermore, the Nigerian state has a structural problem as currently constituted of a 'strong centre' and weak states. This does not allow for the requisite depth of commitment on the part of the citizens. The state is too centralized to deliver quality governance in a highly plural and heterogeneous political context, and is therefore invariably prone to instability. Many have, therefore, repeatedly called for the decentralization of governance with more powers devolved to the states in order to ensure buy-in by the citizenry. The expectation is that with this devolution of powers, the incidence of corruption would reduce tremendously as the penchant for corrupt means of achieving political and/or economic ends will cease.

Generally, the political elite have tended to display a conservative attitude that hardly promotes democracy at the political level. An explanation for this is the dominant place of force and violence in the political life of Nigerians over the years. From colonialism, an authoritarian and exploitative phenomenon, through

to military rule, it is surprising that Nigerian governments over the years have not taken the necessary steps to put an end to this ugly phenomenon. The neglect of the debilitating impact of force and violence in the national psyche has contributed to its overriding manifestation in the society and in the democratisation process, including its negative influence on the conduct of elections.

The Nigerian State in the Fourth Republic

Having critically examined the general character of the Nigerian state in pre- and post-colonial Nigeria, what then can we say is the present character of this state? And to what extent has it transformed and in what direction? Cumulatively, the malaise confronting Nigeria increasingly indicates that it is a state in deep crises of nation-building. Nigerian masses are still not sure whether to completely pledge allegiance to the entity, as the central government has not demonstrated serious commitment to protect the lives of the people and provide for their welfare. Hence, it is difficult to obtain the required allegiance from them. The Niger Delta crisis would not have been as intractable as it was if Niger Deltans had some trust in the Nigerian State. It was only when they perceived some sense of seriousness from the Musa Yar'Adua-led PDP government that amnesty was brokered in 2009 and many of the militants laid down their arms. This political mileage is yet to be completely consolidated by government due to unnecessary politicking and the pursuit of selfish interests by some members of the political class. For instance, many observers witnessed in disbelief how some elements of the northern political elite, bent on holding on to power at all cost, insisted on foisting a sick and incapable president on the nation contrary to constitutionally laid down rules. The interest of the hegemonic class is therefore not difficult to understand. Against the voice of the people led by civil society and some notable Nigerians, who clearly called for the Vice-President to take over from the President, the hegemonic political class resorted to lies, trickery and justifications on why a sick president must remain in office. Clearly, their interest negated the public interest and led to uncertainty in governance. Nigeria was being polarized into 'elite-mass' and 'ethnic' cleavages that did not augur well for the country. The country was overheating as conservative and radical forces took different positions.

Therefore, the Fourth Republic, beginning with the election of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as civilian President in May 1999, has grown out of flawed political processes, intimidation and outright brigandage which combine to undervalue the democratic process. Though government has embarked on several reforms, yet it has continued to lack legitimacy as a result of the flawed elections. Though, the international community was largely benign and chose to accept the results of the 1999 elections for the sake of 'democracy', the 2003 and 2007 Presidential elections also won by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) were severely criticized. The reports of both domestic and international observers about the elections pointed out several shortcomings that made the elections unacceptable.

There is a general feeling that the ruling party, the PDP, lack a clear political ideology and direction. Indeed, it could be said that because this party, which claims to have the largest membership of any party in Africa, does not have internal democracy as evident in the conduct of its primaries, a contagion effect has been passed on to some of the other parties, as quite a number of them thrived on the use of 'godfathers' to select candidates for elections. A culture of impunity has characterised Nigerian politics and the conduct of elections in more recent times in Nigeria. Hegemonic and unbridled politics by the major parties have combined to rob the electorate of their constitutional right to elect their leaders. Nigerians often experience what is called 'garrison politics', in which force, intimidation and manipulation of results are used to impose unpopular individuals on the people. It was in the Anambra State Governorship election of February 2010 hotly contested by three political parties, the PDP, All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) and the Action Congress (AC) amongst others, that the peoples' votes could be said to have triumphed, despite poor organisation of the elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The voters register was greatly mutilated as many eligible voters could not find their names in the register and therefore could not exercise their franchise. This time, however, the peoples' vote counted because of better voter consciousness and their determination to physically defend their votes by any means necessary. Voters refused to leave the polling stations after casting their votes and made sure that the result from the various polling stations were announced on the spot, approved by all designated party agents and documented. The civil society also played a key role in ensuring that the governorship election was not rigged as they encouraged the people to defend their votes. Anambra State had hitherto been one of the most problematic states where free and fair elections were marred by the nefarious activities of 'godfathers' who used party machinery and coercion to select candidates who would stand for elections, and they would proceed to rig the elections in favour of such candidates. Thus, these corrupt politicians imposed governors on the people in connivance with the security forces. It took several months of legal battle for Peter Obi of APGA to win back his mandate at the electoral tribunal. The point to note here is that without the activities of the civil society groups and the citizens of Anambra State, the cabal that had hitherto intimidated and looted the state would have had their way. In this case, the heightened consciousness on the part of the people on the one hand, and the fear of violent repercussions arising from mass action that could result from rigging the elections made the corrupt politicians to desist from their intransigence.

The flawed elections cannot be divorced from corruption and its implications for the political process. The structure of the Nigerian state is such that corruption remains a major problem and culprits are often let off the hook. Indeed, publicly disgraced government officials and politicians often find their way back into the foray of politics, and end up being given government appointments (Moru 2004).

The character of the Nigerian state has played a dominant role in the formation of a peculiar Nigerian mode of politicking that glorifies selection, rather than merit as a key political variable. This is ironically being replicated in the run-up to the 2015 general elections as the ruling party, the PDP, has its party primaries where it selected and nominated President Goodluck Jonathan as its presidential candidate without subjecting him to any election. For the political class, politics in the Fourth Republic connotes access to power and its uses for personal enrichment. But where is the opposition? The opposition is nowhere to be seen until recently when the Action Congress (AC) became more and more critical of the policies of the ruling PDP. Often, the ruling party is able to get key elected individuals from an opposition party to defect to their side with promises of compensation by the party. This is one of the issues that should be addressed in the political reform measures currently under discussion. For instance, how do you prevent a politician elected on a particular political platform from defecting to another party midstream into his tenure? A new opposition party – the All Progressives Congress (APC) was formed on 6 February 2013 to contest the 2015 general elections against the ruling PDP. It is an alliance of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA).

Elections in Nigeria prior to 2011 were not about popular vote but about power relations, patronage and selection. It was about the ability to harass your opponent, threaten his life and those of his family, recruit thugs to cart away electoral materials and intimidate INEC officials, and if possible assassinate your opponent (Moru 2004). It was rare to see an incumbent voted out of office before the 2011 elections. The power of incumbency, stolen taxpayers' money, the police, state and federal electoral officers were invariably bought over or threatened, to prosecute what was taken as a war. The perquisites of office derivable from the successful prosecution of the war was simply too irresistible. The flawed elections, non-transparent party primaries, corruption, intimidation, impunity, violence, assassinations, disenfranchisement and helplessness of the electorate were all possible because the rentier Nigerian state had been hijacked or captured by an unrepentant political class and state elite bent on satisfying their interests and not that of the people. The implication is that any serious attempt at upturning the system will face resistance. But this is to be expected. Nonetheless, a vibrant civil society that refuses to be docile in the face of injustice can remove the stranglehold of the corrupt political class. It is only then that the country can ensure its survival, make progress politically and lay to rest the shadow of disintegration that constantly hangs over the political terrain.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to interrogate the character of the Nigerian state beginning from the pre-independence period to the present times. However, in doing this, it constantly sought to determine the contemporary nature of the Nigerian state with respect to its politics. This it has done through the various examples discussed. From the initial aspirations of the nationalists who envisaged a strong and a united nation to the current worries about the way democracy is practised in Nigeria, it is obvious that the country has remained non-progressive in its traits and politics. This is primarily because national and transnational forces hold sway, while opposition forces have been too weak to check the excesses of corrupt politicians. It suffices to observe, as Edem (2010) says, that the Nigerian state is a confluence of nationalities made up of 'unreasonable' people (politicians) associating involuntarily in the pursuit of uncommon interests. It is fundamentally held together by its armed forces and controlled by a few influential individuals across the ethnic divide, who time and time again recycle themselves or their relations and children into positions of authority. The country still lacks the essential ingredients of legitimacy as significant numbers of its nationalities have not wholly consented to the political association. The situation is further worsened by poor leadership and institutionalised corruption, which stifle any effort to manage the contradictions and get the country on a progressive path. The state seems set for self-destruct. Attempts to convene an all-embracing national conference were sabotaged for a long time and sections of the country simply refuse to discuss those crucial issues that are germane to the country's progress. Although the country has a myriad of political and social institutions, they are mostly weak and disorganised, and subject to abuse and manipulation by an elite that revel in the weakness of its institutions.

Logic dictates and experience shows that the only way to make progress is through increased pressure on the elite by popular forces (see Graf 1988). This is because in the peripheral capitalist economy called Nigeria, the pattern of elite politics and its domination of popular classes have remained intact. Progress entails organisation, resistance, pressure and, if necessary coercion by counter-hegemonic forces to redirect the country on the path of peace and stability. So far, Nigeria's contemporary politics has simply been disastrous since there is nothing as criminal and painful as being disenfranchised and having strange elements and corrupt individuals imposed on the people. The end of this is usually violence, chaos and retrogression. The Nigeria of tomorrow must be a Nigeria whose elite are enlightened, rational and people-oriented. An elite that is collectively willing to do the right thing for the country despite their differences. Anything short of this breeds anarchy.

References

- Agbu, Osita, 1995, *Crisis of the State and Society in Nigeria: A Case of Leadership Failure*, Conference Proceedings on Nigeria at Crossroads: Which Way Out? Nigerian Anthropological and Sociological Association.
- Allison, T. Graham, 1971, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1st ed.*, Little: Brown.
- Almond, A. Gabriel and G. Bingham Powell Jr., 1966, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*, Little: Brown.
- Beckman, B, 1983, 'Whose State? State and Capitalist Development in Nigeria', *Review of African Political Economy*, No.23.
- Bendix, R., 1967, *Nation Building and Citizenship*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Claude, Ake Claude, 1985, *The Political Economy of Nigeria*, London: Longman. Dahl, R. 1971, *Polyarchy*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Edem, Orok, 2010, *The Nigerian State and National Security*, (http://nigerdeltacongress.com/narticles/nigerian_state_and_national_secu.htm), 3 Aug. 2010.
- Eze, C.M., 2009, 'The Privatized State and Mass Poverty in Nigeria: the Factor of Economic Development Programmes since 1980s', *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol.3, No.10, October.
- Graf, William, 1988, *The Nigerian State: Political Economy, State Class and Political System in the Post-colonial Era*, London: James Curry and Portsmouth.
- Held, D, 1989, *Political Theory and Modern State*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ihonvbere, Julius ed., 1981, *The Political Economy of Crisis and Underdevelopment in Africa*, Lagos: JAD Publishers.
- Iyayi, Festus, 1986, 'The Primitive Accumulation in a Neo-colony: The Nigerian Case', *Review of African Political Economy*, No.35.
- Jessop, B, 1990, *State Theory*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Joseph, Richard, 1991, 'Class, State and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria', *Journal of Comparative and Commonwealth Politics*, Vol.21, No.3.
- Leftwich, A, 2000, *States of Development*, Malden: Blackwell Publishers.
- Marx, Karl, Engels, 1852, *Selected Works*, Vol.1, Moscow: Foreign Language Publication House. Best S.G,1990, "State, Capitalist Crisis and Constitutional Reforms in Nigeria", in S.G Tyoden ed., *Constitutionalism and National Development in Nigeria*, Proceedings of the 17th Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), University of Jos, 21 – 23 November.
- Mimiko, O. N. Femi, 2007, 'Political and Constitutional Reforms', in Hassan Saliu et.al. ed., *Nigeria's Reform Programme: Issues and Challenges*, Ibadan: Vantage Publishers.
- Moru, John, 2004, 'Rethinking the Nigerian Reform Programme', *Thisday* (Lagos), June 23.
- Mustapha, A. R., 1992, "Nigeria: The Challenge of Nationhood", *Nigerian Forum*, NIIA, September – December.
- Niskanen, W, 1974, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*, Chicago: Aldine.
- Nnoli, Okwudiba, 1981, 'A Short History of Nigeria Development', in O. Nnoli ed., *Path to Nigerian Development*, Dakar: CODESRIA.

- Okechukwu, Ibeanu Okechukwu, 1997, 'The Nigerian State and Politics of Democratisation', Paper Presented at a *Conference on Comparative Democratisation in Africa*, Cape Town, May 31 – June 1.
- Onimode, Bade, 1981, 'Imperialism and Nigerian Development', in O. Nnoli ed., *Path to Nigerian Development*, Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Osoba, Segun, 1978, 'The Dependency Crisis of the Nigerian National Bourgeoisie', *Review of African Political Economy*, No.23.
- Parsons, Talcot, 1965, *Structures and Processes in Modern Societies*, London: Frank Cass.
- Poulantzas, N., 1978, *State, Power, Socialism*, London: New Left Books.
- Shaw, M.T and O. Fasehun, 1980, 'Nigeria in the World System: Alternative Approaches, Explanations and Projections', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.18, No.4.
- Mitchel, T., 1992, 'Going Beyond the State', *American Science Review*, Vol.4, No.86.
- Weber, Max ed., 1964, *The Theory of Social Economic Organisation*, New York: Free Press.
- Zolberg, A, 1995, 'The Formation of New States as a Refugee-generating Process', E. Ferris ed., *Refugees and World Politics*, New York: Praeger.

