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Economy and Politics in the Nigerian Transition

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Abstract

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

Introduction

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

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

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

Decay of the National Infrastructure

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Corruption and Legitimacy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Crisis of the Educational Sector

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mass Poverty

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

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

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

The National Minimum Wage

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Revenue Generation for a Representative Political System

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

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

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

The External Debt Profile

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

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

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

Mechanics of Governance

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

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

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

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

The Constitution and Constitutional Reform

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

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

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

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

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

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

Managing the Electoral System

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

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

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

Militricians and Democracy

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

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

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

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

Concluding Remarks

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

Note

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