Transitions from Democracy in Nigeria: Toward a Pre-emptive Analysis

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Abstract

Two 'fully fledged' democratic administrations in Nigeria have been terminated by military *coups d'etat* since independence in 1960. Having, in addition ruled for about 30 out of over 40 years of sovereign existence, the military has been described as the obstacle to the consolidation of democracy. But what a critical reading of Nigeria's political history would reveal is that the elected governments were in the throes of death almost from their inauguration, while the state had virtually collapsed by general election time. The military *coup*, thus, became a kind of euthanasia. In both cases of breakdown, there was a repeated pattern of transition from democracy marked by depluralization, state appropriation, delegitimation of regimes, inter-hegemonic conflict and, finally, military *coup*. These are argued as consequences of the peculiar political and intergroup environment of Nigeria and character of the state. Therefore, every future democratic administration is susceptible to the same trajectory. Yet, the progressively degrading tenor of life under military rule has highlighted the intrinsic value of democracy. This article, therefore, attempts to create, from a genetic analysis of the collapse of democracy in Nigeria, the groundwork for a pre-emptive analysis.

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The more comprehensive our knowledge of the past is, the farther into the future we can predict the consequences of our behaviour in the present, the greater are the goals we set ourselves (Kautsky, 1988: 465).

The task of assessing the prospects for democratic instability in Nigeria clearly suggests that we try to pin-point the particular conditions and controversies that were associated with the traumas of the past on the one hand, and that are relevant to the new approaches implicit in the newly inaugurated political system on the other (Whitaker, 1979: 6).

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The Necessity for Democracy

If any conclusion can be drawn from the political history of post colonial Africa, it is that multi-party democracy has been as unsuccessful, as the military *coup d'etat* has been the favoured mode of regime change. Although the 'one party democracies' have held out for much longer, they too have not been immune to military takeovers; and neither have the successor military governments. The general instability of political life is evidenced by the fact that forcible change of government occurred, on the average, in between two and three states in Africa every year between 1960 and 1980 (Welch, Jr., 1987: Table 8. A1; Doro 1974). In the 1990s alone, Africa managed to produce seven civil wars and a genocide. The kind of international interest generated by these conflicts, and the consequent refugee problem, have tended to portray the states of Africa as politically immature and in need of external recolonization. Even though the idea of recolonization, whether by the international community or African hegemons, may appear extreme, the underlying sentiment that 'things worked better under colonial rule' is quite widespread (Mafeje, 1995a, 1995b: Mazrui, 1995a, 1995b). Ake (1994: 2–3) also concludes that, based on "several critical indicators, the average African is worse off today than she was 30 years ago".

More widespread and devastating is the progressive degeneration of economic life in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The privatization of the state with its resources and general economic mismanagement, and the crises which structural adjustment programmes were, theoretically, designed to respond to, have impeded the expansion of a rational private sector and encouraged the growth of a peculiar cash capitalism for which neither production nor a market was necessary. Thus, European refugee camps are littered with refugees and asylum seekers from Africa whose real horror is not political victimization or the scourge of war but decline, or feared decline, in the quality of life.

If the Nigerian problem were to be described merely as an instance of this African situation, it would be because of the common features of decay, dismalness and helplessness. But a particular trajectory would seem to be discernible, an almost recurrent pattern of events (Ifidon, 1998). When Herring (1962: 242–243) concluded that the prospects for democracy in Nigeria were more promising than in most developing countries, he visualized a country where economic production kept pace with population growth, where the abundance of natural and human resources created the potential for a viable economy, and where the parliamentary heritage from Britain seemed to have taken root. But, by 1964, that democracy, with all its promises, had virtually ceased to exist, paving the way for a military *coup* and three years of civil war. The pattern of collapse would seem to have been replicated in the second democratic regime between 1979 and 1983. The third attempt at democracy in 1993 was stillborn.

It is tempting to make the correlation that, since military *coups* terminated Nigeria's democratic administrations in 1966 and 1983 and frustrated the 1993 transition, Nigeria therefore has a military problem, that the military is "the major obstacle to democracy" (Rotimi and Ihonvbere 1994: 685). But this would be too superficial; it implies a certain element of unexpectedness and spontaneity of democratic collapse. What a historical analysis of these democratic episodes will reveal are elected administrations in their death throes (with the state exhibiting sure signs of failure), their lives mercifully terminated through military *coups* to prevent the state from expiring. In other words, democracy had collapsed before the *coups*, and it was the failure of democracy that inspired the *coups*.

These observations are important in order to properly characterize the progressive transformation of democratic structures into instruments of authoritarian control. If, as Huntington (1991: 29) has noted, democracies always exhibit "moderate and incremental", and hardly precipitous, changes, the notion of a transition from democracy[1] encapsulates the cumulative degradation of the institutions of democracy.

Supportive of the myth of 'the military problem' is the attempt to establish a distinction between civil or political and military élites (Onimode, 1983: 198–200; Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1988: 135). But, in terms of political behaviour and the structure of the relationship with the masses, a clear cut distinction cannot be sustained between civil and military administrations in Nigeria. They have both been characterized by arrogance, violence, poor managerial capacity, predation and inter-ethnic rivalry.

Originally, hailed as corrective, as helping to reset the democratic clock, military rule in Nigeria has always been personal rule. But the dictatorships of Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) and Sani Abacha (1993–1998) represented its culmination. Real and imagined sources of challenge were eliminated; private armies and assassination squads were created; and the revenue of the state became the revenue of Nigeria's dictators, who also became grand patrons of organized crime. The poverty bracket widened commensurately, while individual liberties were in abeyance. The Nigerian state had been feudalized. In no time, and with predictable alacrity, intellectuals, and political scientists were in the forefront. Oyediran (1993) and Salih (1993) consider only the idealistic dimension of the production of legitimating ideas by Nigerian intellectuals. But, the motivation for involvement of social scientists in the administrations of Babangida and Abacha was at the same time pecuniary, opportunistic, denigrating and predatory. They expounded an ideology of 'Nigerianism' which was anti-outsiders, supportive of the new dispensation and extolled the virtues of Nigeria's traditional political values of complete obedience to authority (and elders), and advertised an indigenously crafted political technology. But Abacha died suddenly and, with him, the dream of crafting a peculiar Nigerian state form.

A qualification could be appended to the conclusion that so called democratic administrations have been as 'unrepresentative'' and violent as their military continuations. In the very early days of these administrations, with an intense and almost aggressive desire amongst Nigerians for democracy, there was 'real' democracy to the extent that pledges of accountability, justice, equity, personal liberties and good governance were made by administration officials. But as they settled in and predation began, quickly followed by the pressure of retaining power, the democratic state became distant from its mass base and progressively ceased to be democratic. No wonder there was much jubilation whenever a democratic administration was unseated by the military. Indeed it was the delegitimation of the democratic administrations, in the eyes of both the public and their operators, that provided the initial legitimacy for the *coups* and subsequent military rule. This also indicates that military administrations, in their early days, held out hope of a better deal. However, the recent experience under Babangida and Abacha demonstrates how easily military rule can degenerate into tyranny. If only the liberal momentum of the early days of elected administrations could be sustained, then the democratic regime would be certainly preferable.

It is this hope that has made the continued recourse to democracy alluring in spite of its very many imperfections in Nigeria. Joseph (1991: 4) has argued that the pursuit of democracy is driven by the urge amongst Nigeria's ethnic groups not to be excluded from government. However, this problem has traditionally been expressed in federalist agitations. The direction of the development of democratic ideology in Nigeria since the 'no taxation without representation' phase of anti-colonial nationalism has, therefore, been toward individual liberties and empowerment. How can these, and the umbrella democratic regime, be guaranteed beyond the inaugural phase of an elected administration? How can the drift toward inter-group conflict and state collapse characteristic of elected governments in Nigeria be avoided? These questions are in urgent need of answers if the current momentum of redemocratization is to be sustained.

The approach adopted in this essay is to generate an early warning sequence, very feasible since the transitions from democracy have not been sudden. Outlining the processes by which this transition occurred twice in the past is, possibly, to be able to anticipate and monitor contingent occurrences and, hopefully, safely and deliberately steer Nigeria away from the now traditional trajectory. Such a possibility is premised on the existence of fairly stable and recurrent patterns of political mobilization and competition, of inter-group relations, and of the relationship of groups to the state. A genetic analysis of the collapse of elected governments in Nigeria would reveal five stages in the transition from democracy: depluralization, state appropriation, regime delegitimation, inter-hegemonic conflict and military *coup*. It is in their succession and cumulation, however, that they acquire an almost irreversible fatality. These components of

genetic analysis, because of the historical character of the state and inter-group configuration, have been recurrent and, therefore, also components of an early warning analysis.

Aspects of a Futurological Science

Hegel (1956: 6) certainly captured the tragedy of the human condition by the observation that the true lesson of history is that neither peoples nor their governments have learnt anything from history, "or acted on principles deduced from it". However, this is not proof enough that experience or 'similar circumstances of the past' cannot be relevant in explicating, elucidating or unravelling present difficulties. Machiavelli (1970: 1–39), too, notes the recurrence of the human tragedy which, however, he attributes to the neglect of historical studies and misreading of the results of such studies, where available. But, he continues, "if one examines with diligence the past, it is easy to foresee the future of any commonwealth, and to apply those remedies which were used of old". This optimism in the value of history (or experience and memory in other dimensions) is however oversimplified. This is not to minify the worth of history as a basis for futurological undertakings. At least, that no human event as it occurs is ever completely unexpected, unforeseen or 'new' is proof of this. However, such a claim is merely a matter of perspective and does not yet suggest a methodological framework for anticipating, much less engineering, future outcomes. The notion of 'similarity' or 'resemblance' of events could, however, be refined to form the basis of such a framework.

Traditionally, the notion of similarity of events has been attached to singular occurrences and its value contested and defended on the basis of the extent to which similar events could mean recurred events. This level of considering the problem is restrictive, however. Rather than characterizing singular events, the notion of similarity should define a relationship among events to which a 'causal necessity' can be ascribed, even if only in a reflective sense. By necessity is not to imply a predetermination or predestination of events. It is meant to indicate how particular outcomes, choices or decisions are facilitated by particular conditions and therefore become more likely before their occurrence, but inevitable afterward.

The sphere of human activity is not anarchic. Individuals, and then groups, in the course of interacting with one another and sustaining themselves have, over time, created discernible and fairly stable patterns of relationships that are impersonal to the extent that they seem to stand above the particular individual or group. Such relationships are ordered as if by a superintending or underlying logic that bears a causal relationship to, and explanatory significance for, the action of the specific individual or group. These inadvertent patterns of social, political or economic relations (or of thought), systems or structures provide by causal necessity the contextual constraint on individual action[2] (Easton 1990: 147–148).

It is with the notions of structure and causal necessity that Popper's (1960: 110–111) objection to the possibility of recurrence, or periodic occurrence, of similar events that "instances of repetition involve circumstances that are vastly dissimilar" must be met. It is only on the basis of these notions that experience can be of any value: "Only if the same cause is always followed by the same effect does learning from the experiences of the past make sense" (Kautsky, 1988: 470). In fact, it is in terms of the generation of "discernibly similar social practices ... across varying spans of time and space and which lend them 'systemic' form" that Giddens (1984: 17) defines "structure" or "structuring properties". Ultimately, it is the emancipatory imperative that justifies any science of futurology.

A Structuralist History of Transitions from Democracy in Nigeria

Between independence and 29 May1999, Nigeria had two democratic administrations. The first, modeled on the British parliamentary system, was headed by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1 October 1960 to 15 January 1966). The second, an adaptation of the American presidential model, was headed by Shehu Shagari (1 October 1979 to 31 December 1983). Although the demise of these administrations appears to be the consequence of a struggle for control of the state by Nigeria's major ethnic groups (and coalitions), based on the assumption that colonialism introduced capitalism into Nigeria, these transitions from democracy have been attributed to conflict among bourgeois factions (Sklar,1971; Nnoli, 1978; Lawal, 1972; Dibua, 1988). This class perspective has tended to view the symptomatic ethnic mobilization as merely instrumental, thus splitting what were but regional élites, instead of economic production class, from their empirically inseparable masses. But Nigeria's political problem derives from the ethno-regional configuration generated by the territorial framework for British colonial political administration.

The Colonial Prelude

The single most important conclusion of structuralist political historians of colonial Nigeria is that the pattern of relationship among the British colonial officials of the north and south (of Nigeria), and the socialization of the emerging Nigerian leaders to this pattern have been at the root of political conflicts in Nigeria since independence (Heussler, 1968: 80, 170–174; Nicolson, 1969: 302–304; Okonjo, 1974: xvi). The extent of the impact of colonial administrative practices has been dramatically expressed by Kirk-Greene (1968: 37, n.34), who, recalling the antagonism between northern and southern colonial officials, remarked that "if all Nigerians had withdrawn from the country, there would have been a civil war between the groups of Europeans". Class and nationality differences among the British officials have been adduced for the

bifurcation of colonial administrative practices in Nigeria. As Nicolson (1969: 126, also p42) describes this phenomenon as, "the projection into Nigeria of the great schism in British or, specifically, English life, with Northern Nigeria attracting the attention of the consciously 'superior' classes, the officers and gentlemen – and that helped to repel and antagonize the rest, the traders and missionaries busy and influential in the South".

Although Nigeria was amalgamated in 1914, the north and south continued to be administered as separate territories. In 1939, Southern Nigeria was split, by Benard Bourdillon, into western and eastern provinces. But it was Arthur Richards who, in 1945, thought that the ensuing three regions were Nigeria's natural divisions and, therefore, gave the "purely administrative arrangement" constitutional recognition (National Council of Nigeria and thè Cameroons 1945: 12). While this decision might have had an innocuous intent, the fact that the second half of the 1940s represented the period of the crystallization of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria, particularly in the south, meant the creation of territorial administrations that coincided with the home base of each of Nigeria's three main ethnic groups. The west became coterminous with the *Yoruba* ethnic group, the east with the *Ibo*, and a residual north with the *Fulani-Hausa* ethno-political cluster.[3] These three territorial regional administrations were transformed into territorial, ethno-political and regional identities, with the *Ibo* Federal Union (to become the ethnic organizational basis of the erstwhile nationalist party, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons which dominated in the east), *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, in 1948, (the Yoruba cultural organization which later became the Action Group – AG in 1951, the party of the west) and, in 1949, the *Jamiyya Mutanem Arewa* (the pan-northern cultural association that became the Northern Peoples Congress – NPC in 1951, and the party of the north).[4] They were the conflict units with which the *Yoruba*, *Ibo* and the *Fulani* struggled for the exclusive domination of the Nigerian state, the control of which was soon to be relinquished by Britain.

Thus emerged the most significant structuring factor and basis of continuity in Nigeria's political history. Early consequences of this pattern of relationships were the successful Yoruba conspiracy to exclude the *Ibo* Azikiwe from going into the central legislature from the electoral college of the Western House of Assembly, and the apparent alignment of the east and west against the north on the question of self government for Nigeria in 1953. The constitutional review exercise of 1954, a response to the latter problem, weakened the center importantly by giving residual powers to the regional governments. Nigeria virtually became a federation of the *Ibo*, *Yoruba* and *Fulani* and the stages in the transition from democracy became the stages in the crystallization of ethno-hegemonic conflict.

The First Transition from Democracy, 1960–1966

The result of the federal election of December 1959, by which power would be transferred from Britain to a Nigerian government, confirmed the tri-ethnic framework of Nigerian politics. Of the 312 seats contested, the NPC won 134, all of them won from the Northern region; the NCNC won 89 seats, 58 from its Eastern region base, and 31 from ethnic and political minority groups in the north, west and Lagos; the AG won 73 seats, 33 from its ethnic support base in the western Region, 25 from northern minorities, 14 from eastern minorities, and 1 from Lagos; other parties and independent candidates took the rest 16 seats.

The British Governor General, James Robertson, thought the north would not accept a government made up from a coalition of the southern parties and so, asked the NPC to form a government (Robertson 1974: 234). Nevertheless, the AG's active support for minorities in the north and east already made a coalition of the NPC and NCNC likely. The NPC went into coalition with the NCNC, and the AG became the opposition. By the pattern of thinking about politics, this meant an *Ibo-Fulani* coalition against a *Yoruba* opposition. Considering the animosity between the AG, on one hand, and the NCNC and NPC on the other, the pattern of alignment appeared exclusionary. But the more frightful import of this pattern for the AG was the possibility of using central executive power to intervene in the west and undermine its ethnic and political base. It was to forestall such an eventuality that the executive council of the AG in mid September of 1960 established a tactical committee. While this move represented a tendency to consolidate the status of the AG as a regional force with the hope of capturing central power, another tendency, symbolized by the deputy leader of the AG, Samuel Akintola, emerged that favoured cooperation with the coalition government and partaking in the distribution of political and economic resources.

A wide ideological gulf separated the NPC and NCNC. The NPC was conservative and isolationist; the NCNC socialistic and pan-Africanist. However, they had the resentment of the AG, with its leader, Obafemi Awolowo, in common. That was the true basis of the coalition. Two developments followed from this. The conflicting tendencies within the AG created factional problems which led to a political crisis in the Western region in May 1962, and the opportunity for the coalition to intervene and eventually confirm its AG supporter, Akintola, in power. By mid 1963, with the conviction of Awolowo for treasonable felony, and the excision of a Midwest region from the west, the influence of the AG in regional and national politics had been virtually destroyed (Sklar, 1991).

An initially quiet struggle for supremacy between the coalition partners had become evident by the beginning of 1961 (Dudley, 1982: 63, 64 ff; Ingham, 1990: 72, 73 ff). As the AG went down, this became progressively pronounced

and came to determine the direction of the politics and stability of the Nigerian state. Their disagreement over the 1962 census figures, the proposed basis for delimiting constituencies for the 1964 federal election, heightened and nationalized this rivalry and, ultimately, led to the formation of two broad alliances – the United Progressive Grand Alliance and the Nigeria National Alliance. Although representing the south and north respectively, they thinly concealed the struggle between the NCNC and the NPC or, more accurately, between the *Ibo* and *Fulani*, to control central executive power. The federal elections of 1964/65, contested on the platforms of the alliances, were as uncompromisingly fought as they were manipulated. The NNA, and thus the north, won. It was in the midst of the clamor for eastern secession and the violent aftermath of the election in the west that the military struck on 15 January 1966.

The Second Transition from Democracy, 1979–1983

The tri-regional configuration of Nigeria was first altered in 1963 with the establishment of a Midwest region and then, in mid 1967, a 12 state structure emerged. Ten years later, the states became 19, a situation that seemed to Diamond (1990: 365) "likely to weaken the ethnic and regional solidarities that had cursed the First Republic and to generate a more fluid and shifting pattern of alignments, with state interests representing an independent and, at least occasionally, crosscutting line of cleavage".[5] But identities, once constructed, do endure; since the states established were not sovereign, the sense of peoplehood has become trans-territorial and residual. The 1979 election result demonstrated this.

Awolowo and Azikiwe, two key players in the 1959 election, again emerged as leaders and presidential candidates of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), respectively. Of the 4.9 million votes polled for Awolowo nationwide, 4.2 came from the successor states of the Western region (or 84 percent of total votes cast in these states). Azikiwe polled 2.2 million of the 3.7 million votes nationwide from the successor states of the Eastern region (or 58 percent of total votes cast in these states). While Awolowo polled 53.2 percent in the non *Yoruba* but western state of Bendel, Azikiwe got only 11 percent of the votes from the non *Ibo* areas of the former east. The three other parties, Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) were led by persons from the north. But the NPN most represented the outlook of the northern political élite. Its candidate was Shehu Shagari, a Fulani and NPC minister in the early 1960s. He got 3.9 million of his 5.7 million votes nationwide from the successor states of the Northern region (or 48.3 percent of total votes cast in these states; the other two northern candidates had a total of 39 percent of northern votes). The old tripod had re-emerged and the voting pattern in 1979 was as ethno-regional as in 1959 (see the table for comparison).

Comparison of Patterns of Voting in 1959 and 1979 Transitional Elections (million)

1959	Northern Region	Eastern Region	Western Region	1979[1]
NPC (Ahmadu Bello[3] – Fulani)	1.99	–	.03	
	3.99	1.19	.58	NPN (Shehu Sagari – Fulani)
NCNC (Nnamdi Azikiwe[3] – Ibo)	.53	1.25	.82	
	.55	2.15	.16	NPP (Nnamdi Azikiwe – Ibo)
AG (Obafemi Awolowo[3] – Yoruba)	.56	.45	.98	
	.53	.11	4.22	UPN (Obafemi Awolowo – Yoruba)
Other parties/Independent Candidates	.18	.24	.16	
	3.16	.20	.05	Other Candidates[4]

Notes
1. The votes for the Federal Territory of Lagos are included in that of the Western region.
2. In 1979, Nigeria was a federation of nineteen states, however, they corresponded to the old regions as set out below.
   Northern Region: Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Gongola, Borno, Bauchi, Benue, Kwara, Niger, Plateau.
   Eastern Region: Anambra, Imo, Rivers, Cross River.
   Western Region: Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Lagos, Bendel.
3. Nigeria between 1960 and 1966 operated a parliamentary system, so the votes represent the total for each party's parliamentary candidates. In 1979, the votes cast were for the individual candidates.
4. The other candidates in 1979 were Aminu Kano (PRP), a Fulani, and Waziri Ibrahim (GNPP), a Kanuri, both from the north.

Although Shagari won, a formal alliance was deemed necessary to facilitate the passage of presidential nominations and bills through the federal legislative houses. On 27 September 1979, the NPN-NPP accord, providing for the sharing of ministerial, board and legislative positions between the two parties, was signed. It took effect from 1 October when Shagari was inaugurated as President. Awolowo again acted out the role of opposition for which the governments of the western successor states were 'victimized' by the federal administration. A semi-formal association of the nine UPN, PRP and GNPP Governors, the 'progressives', emerged in response to the NPN-NPP accord. It was this association that formed the basis of a fleeting anti-NPN alliance, the Progressive Parties Alliance (PPA), when the accord was terminated amidst mutual recriminations in July 1981.

Although the NPN won 20.3 percent of southern votes, accounted for in particular by votes from the two non Ibo and former eastern regional states of Cross River and Rivers (25 percent of all votes cast in the eastern states), it was essentially a northern party, a re-creation of the NPC. According to Nnoli (1989: 104),

The NPN began in various forms and names in 1978 to mobilize first and foremost the Hausa-Fulani petty bourgeois within and outside the ethnic homeland for support. The core of that mobilization effort was the so-called Kaduna Mafia — the group of civil servants now turned businessmen who served under the late Sardauna of Sokoto. Their perception of Nigeria is patently ethnic-oriented with the consideration of the interest of the Fulani in particular and the rest of the petty-bourgeoisie of other northern peoples uppermost in their minds. The formation of the Yoruba solidarity front within the party over the frustration of Moshood Abiola's bid for the party chairmanship and candidacy was a response to its regional character (Okoli 1983).

With a poor economic management record and tenuous control over his appointees who privatized and openly pillaged the state, Shagari was renominated as party presidential candidate in June 1982. Although, at its summit meeting in October 1982, the PPA agreed on general principles to share federal electoral offices among its four parties, ethnic and personal animosities, particularly between Azikiwe and Awolowo, prevented the emergence of a fully fledged electoral coalition. Yet, the fact that the UPN was the least factionalized party made Awolowo to provide the most potent electoral challenge to Shagari. Meanwhile, the desperation with which the parties fought against political exclusion for their candidates made the exercise to review the voters' list in the second half of August, at best, farcical. At the end of the review exercise, an incredible 35.7 percent increase over 1979 was recorded, Kaduna and Rivers states recording the highest change (93.6 percent and 89.1 percent respectively).

Months before the August 1983 presidential election, it was already feared that there was going to be a succession crisis via election rigging and thuggery. Okoli (1982: 31,95) had observed the nervousness with which Nigerians prepared for the 1983 election and two general fears about the election aftermath: "a total breakdown of law and order as a result of election-rigging", and "military intervention as a temporary measure". Both of these came to pass (Diamond 1988a: 71–78). Like the 1979 election, voting in the presidential election of 1983 followed an ethno-regional pattern.[6] Shagari was again declared winner and inaugurated President but the air was thick with political conspiracy and rebellion. On 31 December 1983, the military again struck, completing another process of transition from democracy.

Toward a Pre-emptive Analysis

There have been general studies of the transformation of democratic institutions into instruments of oligarchic control in Africa. Chazan (1993: 83; cf. Legum, 1986: Table 18.1) highlights the "dismantling of competitive institutions" and the "expansion and strengthening of the central administration" as the two component processes of the "transition to authoritarianism" in Africa. The latter is a consequence of an emergent statist élite political culture (Chazan et al, 1992:

38). For Diamond (1988b: 2–3), the "transition from political pluralism to authoritarianism", marked most significantly by the elimination of political competition, was the result of the tenuous political base, and therefore political insecurity, of Africa's leaders. But the process of breakdown of democracy in Africa was not a one time phenomenon; it has become recurrent. It is this fact of recurrence that makes such general studies inadequate, for neither a statist proclivity nor élite insecurity arising from tenuous political base could explain recurrence.

For Nigeria, the conditions that structure the recurrence of democratic breakdown have their origins in the pre-independence period. First, the character of the colonial state, being authoritarian, extractive, mercantile and functionally interventionist, precluded the flowering of an active private sphere. Because it excluded the forces it helped to liberate, it remained alien. But the post colonial state has remained alien to the extent that cultural groups could be ranged along an in-out continuum. Second, the prospects of taking over the colonial state at the onset of colonial transition led to the emergence of mobilized groups and a tri-hegemonic rivalry involving ethnic coalitions built around *Ibo*, *Fulani* and *Yoruba* identities. Consequently, the post colonial state remained pro-colonial because it continued to be instrumental and appropriative. Hence Ake (1997: 300) insisted that what British colonialism bequeathed was "not so much a state as a state project", "an exploitable resource, a contested terrain where all struggle to appropriate and privatize some or all of the enormous powers and resources of the state" (1997: 305). Thus, just like the colonial state, which the indigenous elite conveniently inherited rather than liquidate, the post colonial state in Africa lacks autonomy and is susceptible to instrumental use (Ake 2000: 115). It is the consequent crisis and fragility of the state that retards the progress of democratization. "No state, no democracy" (Linz and Stepan 1996: 15).

These factors have created a necessary succession in the stages of the transition from democracy. For each episode of democratic breakdown, the stages of succession have been cumulative, every stage adding to create a conflict situation.[7] This is what Nnoli (1995b: 2) has characterized as "an increasingly intense spiral of self-confirming hostile suspicious actions and counteractions and expectations which open up the possibility of inter-ethnic violence".

Since the appearance, in the 1940s, of the trichotomous struggle to, at the maximum, exclusively dominate the inchoate Nigerian state and, at the minimum, be associated with the dominating group, it had become evident that democratic politics could only be possible, or at least instituted, under the direction of a non-democratic regime. The democratic pretensions of the nationalist movement notwithstanding, democracy was instituted in Nigeria by the colonial administration. Subsequently, only an authoritarian military framework has guaranteed safe politicking, significantly fair elections and, ultimately, successful transitions to civil rule. Immediately inauguration on 1 October formally

terminated authoritarian rule, the transition from democracy commenced. The stages of the recurrent transition from democracy can be empirically and logically sketched.

1. **Depluralization and State Centralization.** The early days of a democratic administration, even though not entirely calm, have always been promising. Largely because the transfer of power is organized by the military, the incoming government possesses some internal legitimacy. But complaints about the pattern of political appointments are usually reminders of the existence of a competitive inter-group structure. Within the ruling party, the dominant ethnic coalition asserts itself, seizes strategic administration positions and to consolidate its hold on power, expands the state by establishing new parastatals outside the traditional bureaucracy. Two consequences follow. Firstly, appropriation of the state by the dominant ethnic coalition such that the state is identified with it or with its interests and, secondly, predation, through award of inflated or 'inexecutable' contracts to fellow ethnics (and sympathisers from other groups) and direct pillaging of state resources to the extent that the non-rational allocation of resources accounts for negative economic growth.

2. **Regime Delegitimation.** The operating assumption usually is that any of the major groups will, for the period in which it is dominant, treat the state as its property. So there are always two excluded groups to whom the state is as alien as the colonial state, against which acts of subversion may be justified and from which loyalty can be withheld. On the one hand, excluded groups feel estranged from the state and, on the other, because of financial disempowerment, the oil rich state becomes quite poor. In both cases, the bloated state becomes very weak. Yet, the incumbent administration would wish for a second term.

3. **Inter-Hegemonic Conflict and *Coup*.** It is not strange at this point for (ethnic) opposition elements to make contact with fellow ethnics in the military. But, generally, the acceptable response is to seek change through the ballot box. The question arises: why should a dominant group with the political and financial resources of the state at its disposal consent to relinquish power to another group that will dominate it? So the ruling party and ruling group use the state to ensure its return to power in a usually violence ridden and farcical election. The non acceptance of the result in non ruling group areas diminishes the territory under the control of the state. At this point, it is proper to pronounce the collapse of the state. Predictably, the military seizes power and there is much jubilation, although mostly so among the excluded and marginalized groups.

Conclusion

The stages that have been described do not stand alone. Nor does it appear that the process can be arrested once started. Collective memories of past 'wrongs' combined with the reactivation of ethnic stereotypes and symbols ensures that everybody and not just a political élite is drawn into the struggle for ethno-political supremacy. This would seem to limit the possibility of this scheme becoming an early warning analysis with the possibility of intervention or early response. There is no doubt that appropriate early response or 'preventive' action should be part of an early warning analysis (George and Hall, 1997: 9) but in, a situation of recurrent crisis, perhaps, "pre-emptive action", removing the source of recurrence, is to be recommended (Renner, 1999: 53). It appears more feasible to prevent the occurrence of the cumulative episodes than attempt to stem their development once started. However, if emphasis were to be shifted from trajectory and mechanism of succession to the object of the struggle, pre-emptive intervention becomes possible.

Put simply, the source of recurrence of the transition from democracy in Nigeria is the struggle by mobilized groups, defined in ethnic and regional terms, to exclusively control a Nigerian state that is, considering its history and character, authoritarian and pre-modern. The simple response seems to be that the state should be reconfigured: decentralized, weakened and rendered less visible, that is, transformed into a kind of minimal state with abundant opportunities for genuine local self government.[8] However, like the initiation of the democratic regime itself, this can only be effected by an authoritarian government. Since democracy fails because the state does, restructuring the state thus appears a more urgent objective than democratization.

The democratic administration inaugurated on 29 May 1999, has not exactly conformed to the traditional Nigerian pattern. Although the new president is a *Yoruba,* he was not a *Yoruba* candidate and he received insignificant electoral support from the *Yoruba.* The significant role played by a section of the northern political élite in creating a pre-election platform for him has led to speculation that he will indulge the north with the presidency. For a former military ruler of Nigeria (1976–1979), and an international crusader for transparency and accountability in governance, perhaps such speculation was unfair.

However, there has been a recrudescence of the tri-ethnic political rivalry, with the *Fulani* north and *Ibo* east already screaming 'marginalization and exclusion', and the *Yoruba* west campaigning for regional autonomy in the guise of restructuring of the federal state. The ethnic violence in 2000 between the *Yoruba* and the northern community in the *Yoruba* town of Sagamu and northern city of Kano, between *Yoruba* ultra-nationalists of the *O'dua* Peoples Congress and *Ijaw* elements in Lagos, the Zamfara state *Sharia* law controversy, and the ethnic situation in the Niger Delta are all expressions of the struggle for

inclusion in, or domination of, the state and are indicative of the extent of the authority and legitimacy of the state. They make the current effort at democratization look futile. Shariff (1999: 26) has contended that "considering the agitation and movement towards a break-up of the polity, if care is not taken, Nigeria may as well be on the road to Moscow [i.e. disintegration]". So far, more effort has been expended on conciliating ethno-regional interests and stabilizing the central state than on restructuring the state or democratization. But, because the mechanism for the effort at conciliation has been idiosyncratic rather than systematic or structural, the durability of solutions cannot be guaranteed beyond the life of this administration. In relation to security and the economy, the Nigerian state continues to struggle to assert its authority and has, so far, had only limited success. At the levels of the component states and local governments, where autocracy, graft and personal rule are pervasive, democratization is yet to commence. Yet, not until the Nigerian state is widely perceived to defend and project the interests of an ethnic group can the self sustaining sequence commence.

Notes

1. For Legum (1986: 177), it would appear, the question of a transition from democracy does not arise since there was really no democracy in the first instance: "No single African country was a democracy at its independence, while most had a semblance of democratic forms of government, all lacked the content, or even a skeletal framework of a true political democracy." True, the enthusiasm for democracy among African nationalists did not outlive European colonial administrations, however, the application of the label 'democratic' to elected governments in Nigeria, irrespective of democratic content, is taken for granted.

2. Structure is not the "timeless, inalterable, constraining arrangement of social relations" that Bottomore (1976: 170–171) argues is incompatible with historical analysis. It is the mesh from which individual strands emerge. In this sense, history is the "interaction of structure and action" (Abrams 1982: 6, 108).

3. The demographic basis of this dominance is indicated in the table below:

Ethnic Group	Region	% of Regional Population	% of Nigeria's Population
Yoruba	West	70.7	16.2
Ibo	East	68.1	18.0
Fulani/Hausa	North	50.6	24.4

Source: Department of Statistics (1953, Tables A & B).

4. The leader of the NCNC, Nnamdi Azikiwe, had in July 1946 recognized and warned against the structural consequence of Richards' trichotomous framework: "The Richards Constitution divides the country into three zones which are bound to departmentalize the political thinking of this country by means of the bloc vote. Whether Richards intends it or not, it is obvious that regions will now tend more towards Pakistanization than ever before, and our future generations will inherit this legacy that is born out of official sophistry. If, therefore, there spring forth schools

of thought tomorrow, making requests of a parochial nature which would ordinarily rend this country into a multiplicity of principalities, mark it down, ... as one of the crops to be harvested from this curious constitution of a curious political regime ..." (Harris 1961: 100).

5. But compare Nnoli (1995a: 31): "In spite of the abolishment of the three regions (North, East and West) as political-administrative units with the creation of states designed to accommodate the interests of the minor ethnic groups in 1967, 1976 and 1991, the boundary between the old North and old South has not been disturbed."

6. Ethno-Regional Pattern of Voting in the 1983 Presidential Election (million)

	North	East	West
Total Votes	11.9	5.4	8.2
Shagari	7.8	2.4	1.9
Azikiwe	1.3	1.9*	0.2
Awolowo	1.1	0.8	5.9

* Azikiwe got 1.7 of his 1.9 million votes from the Ibo states of Anambra and Imo, the rest 0.2 from the non Ibo eastern states of Cross River and Rivers.

This pattern is claimed to have been absent in the presidential election of 12 June 1993. Because Ibrahim Tofa (Kano Kanuri) of the National Republic Convention (NRC) got his highest vote in the southern-eastern state of Rivers, performed slightly below Moshood Abiola (*Yoruba*) of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in his home state of Kano, and the predominantly *Yoruba* states of Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun and Osun only accounted for 37.1 percent of total SDP votes, therefore, it has been argued, "the old multi-ethnic sentiment characteristic of the pattern of voting appears to have given way to a more national outlook" (Akinterinwa 1997: 292). In spite of the fact that a two party system was imposed on an essentially ethno-regional political environment (with the result that there was no *Ibo* candidate) and Tofa's relative obscurity in northern politics, it was not accidental that Abiola received 37.1 and 43.5 percent of his total votes from southern *Yoruba* states and the old Western region, respectively, as against Tofa's 9.2 and 13.4 percent; or that Tofa got 56.6 percent of his total votes from the north, while Abiola got 61.6 percent of his from the south (see table below).

Pattern of Voting in the 1993 Presidential Election (million)

	North	East	West
Total Votes	11.9	5.4	8.2
Shagari	7.8	2.4	1.9
Azikiwe	1.3	1.9*	0.2
Awolowo	1.1	0.8	5.9
Total Votes	6.6	3.3	4.4
Abiola	3.2*	1.5	3.6
Tofa	3.4*	1.8	0.8

* While 60 percent of Abiola's 3.2 million votes came from the non *Hausa/Fulani* dominated states of Adamawa, Benue, Borno, Kogi, Kwara, Niger, Plateau, Taraba, Yobe and Abuja, of Tofa's 3.4 million votes, 56.8 percent came from the core *Hausa/Fulani* states of Bauchi, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, and Sokoto.

7. According to Smelser's (1962: 14) "logic of value-added", further elucidating the structuring of conflict and the mechanism of critical cumulation, each social environment generates its peculiar trajectory of conflict, the basal condition for cumulation appearing as the outcome of a particular combination of factors: "Every state in the value-added process...is a necessary condition for the appropriate and effective addition of value in the next stage...As the value-added process moves forward, it narrows progressively the range of possibilities of what the final product might become."

8. Ake (1991a: 37–38) has drawn attention to the difference between the size and strength of the state in Africa. To consolidate democracy, he argues, it is the former that must be reduced since, in any case, the African state is already weak. There is no doubt that a strong state may be able to contain further sectional differentiation but the possibility of a neutral state is unthinkable. Even then, the Nigerian state is not generally weak; it is only selectively and instrumentally strong. But destatization, as Ake argues elsewhere (1991b: 328), could be a strategy to reduce the economic rewards of political power and thereby guarantee democracy. Nozick (1974: 272) provides the theoretical connection: "The minimal state best reduces the chances of such takeover or manipulation of the state by persons desiring power or economic benefits, especially if combined with a reasonably alert citizenry, since it is the minimally desirable target for such takeover or manipulation."

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