Journal of Social Development in Africa (1990), 5,1, 39-57

Nigerian Students and Political Mobilisation

KOLA OLUGBADE+

ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to contribute to the debate on the role of students in political development and nation-building. Specifically, it is an analysis of the evolutionary and dynamic trends in the Nigerian student movement *vis-a-vis* the Nigerian state. It deals with the role that youth, and students in particular, could play in nation-building and political integration in a multiethnic, culturally heterogeneous, socially diversified and politically fragmented Nigerian state. The paper focuses on the role students should play in political mobilisation, especially during the current Nigerian transition programme and beyond.

Introduction

In his contribution to one of the issues of **Daedalus**, Lipset (1968) observed that in the past scholars have paid relatively little attention to the rather major role students played in reform and radical movements, in part because student movements are transitory in character and have left fewer records than adult organisation (Lipset,1968). This apparent neglect of student activities by scholars has occurred in spite of the fact that the contemporary world has been basically affected by student movements. This relative lack of interest in the role of students in society can be attributed to many factors including those mentioned by Lipset. But it appears one can, as Amoa (1979) puts it, attribute this lack of interest largely to the negative way student activities have been viewed all over the world.

This negative perception of student activities has led to an inadequate analysis of what they, as part of the intellectual group in the Third World, can positively contribute to the development process in their countries. This attitude toward student activism has influenced Nigerian society, and the ruling class in particular, in their relationship with students. Society has generally seen students as pampered, irrational and immature citizens, whose youthful exuberance should be checked constantly. Independent research work and the literature (Amoa,1979; Olugbade,1981; Jacks,1975; Bachtiar,1968) on student politics have proved in this view wrong.

This paper is therefore an attempt to contribute to the debate on the role of students in political development and nation-building. Specifically, the paper will analyse the evolutionary and dynamic trends in Nigerian students *vis-a-vis* the Nigerian state. It deals with the role

+ Graduate student, Department of Political Science, University of Pittsburgh, USA

youths, and students in particular, could play in nation-building and political integration in a multi-ethnic, culturally heterogeneous, socially diversified and politically fragmented Nigerian state. The paper focuses on the role students should play in political mobilisation during transition towards 1992 as well as their role during the Third Nigerian Republic. The components of the paper include the evolution of the Nigerian student movement, contemporary and comparative views of students' political role in society, as well as their roles toward 1992 and beyond.

Evolution of the Nigerian Student Movement

The beginning of higher education in Nigeria has been traced through different historical periods. One school of thought traces it to the abolition of slavery and the settlement of the freed slaves in Sierra-Leone in 1787 (Fafunwa,1974). This is linked with the establishment of the Fourah Bay in 1827. Akintoye (1973) traces the history of university education in Nigeria to the nineteenth century when the first Nigerians found their way to Fourah Bay College. Another school of thought (Horton,1886; West African University,1872) argues that higher education in Nigeria started with the nationalist movements. What is certain is that university, as we know it today, has its ancestry in the Middle Ages in Europe with the revival of learning in the twelfth century (Okafor,1971; Haskins,1963).

By 1945, Nigerians were no longer satisfied by the small educated elite produced yearly by mission schools and government colleges. The diploma-awarding Yaba College of Technology also became inadequate for the need of Nigerians for higher education. Pressure was consequently put on the colonial government to establish universities in the country. The University College, Ibadan, was finally established in 1948 (Fafunwa,1974; Okafor,1971). The college remained the only institution of university standing for more than a decade, new ones being established in the early 1960s.

Universities in Nigeria, and in Africa as a whole, were established as part of the nationalist programme of decolonisation and nation-building which followed the attainment of political independence, in some cases as part of the nationalist struggle (like those of Ibadan and Nsukka). The nature and processes of the anti-colonial movements have therefore left a legacy of strong student unionism, student political activism and idealistic radicalism. It is this historical circumstance which tends to orient university students to the defensible belief that they are the guardian of the conscience of society (Anise,undated). It is also generally the case that student political activism tends to adopt the strategy of confrontation (when consultation has failed) whenever the need to deal with institutional authorities arises.

With the establishment of the University College, Ibadan, student unionism became institutionalised in the country. As a result of early administrative problems, the students were not able to do much, like their forerunners the West African Students Union (WASU) and the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) - until 1956 when an active and non-partisan national student body was formed. This was the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS). From then on, different institutions of higher learning started to form autonomous unions.

The organisation remained the voice of Nigerian students until April 1978 when it was banned by General Olusegun Obasanjo's regime. The ban was the result of a long and

protracted consultation, negotiation and confrontation that culminated in violent crisis over a proposed increase in fees, feeding and boarding (**Daily Times**, April 21 and 29, 1978; Olugbade, forthcoming). As soon as the NUNS was banned, the students regrouped under a new name, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). From the students perspective, NANS was an offshoot and a continuation of NUNS. For them, it was only a change of name to circumvent the legal aspect of the ban on NUNS. But throughout its life span, the Obasanjo regime did not recognise NANS. Lifting of the ban on NUNS became a major campaign issue among the five political parties during the 1979 elections - all promising to lift the ban. It was no surprise therefore that as soon as he assumed office in October 1979, President Shehu Shagari lifted the ban on NUNS and pardoned all its officers dismissed, or rusticated, by the Obasanjo regime during the 1978 crisis. Despite this gesture by the Shagari administration, the student body did not change its name back to NUNS until the new organisation, NANS, was itself banned by the Babangida regime in 1986. It should be noted that, despite the ban on the central body of Nigerian students between 1979 and 1989, the body has remained active in the nation's affairs. The only thing it has not been able to do is negotiate on behalf of its members with the government. The government has refused to have anything to do with it officially. This was why the body was not represented in the government's political bureau, and other activities in the disengagement programmes of the government.

One experience from the universities, since their inception, is the convergence of youthfulness and idealism. Such idealism often derives power from effective organisation and targeting. Student activism, as Anise (1979) once put it, finds a natural habitat in the halls of academia. The experience of the universities has shown that when the climate is ripe, and the susceptibility to radicalisation is married to a heightened sense of social injustice, educational institutions can indeed become factories for the production of idealistic social reformers and even highly committed revolutionaries.

Anise (1979) identifies some characteristics of Nigerian university life which seem to have contributed to the establishment of strong, activist unionism on all campuses. There is the fact of locational exclusivity and detachment. Almost all Nigerian universities have been located, and new ones tend to be located, in secure, exclusive areas removed physically from any major population centres. Many are located at least three miles from the towns nearest to them. This atmosphere sets the residents apart, thus making obvious the elite status enjoyed by the students and staff alike. This elitism is further heightened by the pyramidal structure of education in the country. Only a small percentage of pupils in primary school can get to secondary, and only a very tiny fraction of high school graduates can ever make it to university. Those who make it there are indeed the cream of educational institutions as well as of society at large. Society tends to look at university students as societal leaders in the making. Hence the consciousness of a special ordination cannot but crop up from time to time among the academic elite so nurtured.

Secondly, and traditionally, most of the early university students were mature adults, many already in their 20s and early 30s by the time they got to university. Several had established families and homes and had had long and varied work experience. Generally then, they tended to strong nationalist opinions. Their disposition already made them candidates for student activism and unionism.

Thirdly, because the university system began during the period of the nationalist anti-colonial struggle, most university students were anticolonial nationalists. From here, they developed the tradition of not only activism but of a radical, progressive political culture which has been sustained over the years.

The fourth issue raised by Anise is that successive governments in Nigeria have given official and legal recognition to student unionism, to their various campuses and their national executives. Nigerian student unions have always received financial subsidies from the governments to supplement the revenues they receive from student levies and dues. In short, student unionism is encouraged by government itself.

Governments in general have tended to use students and their unions as progressive support enclaves in pursuit of both legitimacy and popular appeal. During the days of party politics, most political parties and their leaders strove to establish student wings to capture the progressive sentiments which were usually quite vocal in various matters. But when government and students interests do not converge, and they often diverge, this 'solidarity' usually breaks down. The consequence is usually disagreements, which often lead to crises of various dimensions. When such crises occur the powers-that-be always resort to panicky measures like scapegoating or banning student organisations. Such measures by the authorities, in most cases, do not solve the problems. Rather, they escalate the crises, although the measures have been taken in an attempt to prevent the students from performing their historical roles, as in other countries of the world.

Contemporary views of the student political role in society

Two major schools of thought have emerged about the political role of students in society. These are the schools of what I would call positivism and negativism. While the positivists see students as part of the major forces in societal development, and advocate that they be assigned specific roles in nation-building, the negativists strongly contend that students are immature, irrational and of undefined emotions whose youthful exuberance should be put in 'proper' check (**Survey**,1988).

One of the greatest exponents of the negativitist school is Feuer. His ideas are well articulated in his popular work on the conflict of generations. Feuer (1969) stresses that student movements are born of vague, undefined emotions which seek issues and causes to which to attach themselves. He also argues that students revolt because of an intense heightening of emotions of guilt and self aggression, as well as aggression towards the elders. Feuer attributes this to the university culture, which reinforces and provides an ideology for the rejection of their father's ideology, that each demonstration a student engages in is something of a puberty *rite de passage*. He also asserts that students demonstrate because the university setting is the last community of comradeship before they are enveloped by the competitive, unfeeling adult world (Feuer,1968). Putting all the causes of student revolt in psychological terms, Feuer asserts that student movements in society indicate generational disequilibrium, as, he argues, a normal country is one in which there is a generational equilibrium.

Feuer's arguments represent the position of the ruling class. It is necessary therefore to raise objections to his generational conflict theory. First, if university students should revolt against lack of employment, for example, it would be unrealistic to explain their action in generational conflict terms. The frustration of students, which might lead to radicalism and rebelliousness, might be, among other things, the result of the inability to satisfy occupational interests rather than an expression of hostility towards the older generation (Olugbade, forthcoming). This is the case in Nigeria. In fact, retired General Emmanuel Abisoye, a member of the ruling class, had the courage to tell President Babangida this home truth when he was submitting his panel's report in 1986[1]. According to the General, part of the cause of the student crisis emanated from the fright, confusion, grievances and deep fear and uncertainty which engulfed the campuses because of the lack of job opportunities after graduation.

The second objection to Feuer's generational conflict theory is that he stresses the psychological aspect to an incredible degree. It is naive to suggest that students do not clearly see the difference between authoritarian and democratic systems. Nothing should prevent Nigerian students from confronting their universities, and the system as a whole, when need be. Students in other countries confront their universities and the entire system on issues vital to them.

The third point which makes the theory unacceptable is the fact that Feuer thinks that student movements have no demands, or that whatever demands they have are irrational. This is not true. He himself writes somewhere else that "student movements sacrifice their own economic interest for the sake of a vision of a nobler life for the lowliest" (in Amoa, 1979). He also holds the view that a normal society is one without a revolutionary student movement. Since there is no society which has not experienced student action in one way or the other, Feuer would want every one to believe that there is no 'normal society' in this world. This is a false assumption. For him to equate a normal society with generational equilibrium is very tenuous indeed. He yearns for stability and order in a society without conflict and, above all, for the maintenance of the status quo. He seems to overlook the fact that conflict is endemic in society. He also fails to believe that student movements in all societies have made a positive contribution in their countries.

Another group in the negativist school of thought includes those who put forward the minority theory. They single out student activism as the work of the 'active few' or 'a small minority' of the student population. Among the leading figures who hold this views are Soares, Pinner, Hurwizt and Lipset. Soares (1967), for example, has shown in his work that radicals are only a small minority of the student population in most developing countries, and that these radicals are greatly over-represented among those who believe students should play an active role in politics and who act on that belief in demonstrations and strikes. Lipset and Altbach (1967) in their own work came to the conclusion that radical attitudes in American universities are not representative of the student body as a whole, and reflect only the position of an active minority.

The attitude of Lipset, and those in his group, towards student activism poses a danger. To view all student activities as the work of an active minority suggests, in a way, that other

fall of Numeri of Sudan. The Khee Government of Korea was also toppled in 1960 partly as a result of student demonstrations (Amoa,1979).

Such is the power of students. From the examples of student activities discussed above, we can conclude that student activism is political in content. Also, it can be seen from these discussions, that there are certain ills in our society over which students legitimately express resentment. Nigerian students, like their counterparts all over the world, have an historical role to play since they are the midwives of a greater tomorrow. In their traditional role as a bastion against all forms of retrogression and reaction, Nigerian students should always rise to the challenge of the times, especially during this period in Nigeria when the country is planning the transition to the Third Republic.

Toward 1992 and beyond

In the preceding section an attempt has been made to show that students are a potential political force in contemporary society, and as such it may be necessary, especially in Nigeria, not to view them as a disruptive force. We have seen how students and student movements have contributed in a large measure to the sociopolitical developments of their various countries. Not only have they fought for their own interests, but also for the interests of their people. They fought colonial regimes and helped in overthrowing dictatorial national governments, and demanded the liberalisation of oppressive political systems.

As rightly noted by Amoa (1979), we need not search for more evidence of the important role students play and have played in order to come to the conclusion that it does not help to look at students' social and political roles only in negative terms as Lipset, Altback, Soares, Feuer and others have done. There is a need in Nigeria for a more realistic look at what students are doing all over the world, so that the nation can learn some very useful lessons. The methods they adopt may not always be to the liking of many people, this should not prevent those in authority from listening to them. It is the message they carry and the aims of their agitations that we have to assess. This is very crucial to Nigeria, like other developing countries, in assessing the role students can play in the development process.

This is particularly necessary because of the role intellectuals are supposed to play in New States. It has been emphasised, for example by Shils (1959) and Kautsky (1981), that the development of the New States lies on the shoulders of the intellectuals who are a major category of the elite in developing countries. We need to add that this role would better be performed by the radical intellectuals (among whom are the students) because of their commitment to the changes which they seek. To effectively perform this historic role, Nigerian students have to operate in a conducive atmosphere. They also have to receive the necessary functional education.

The educational system in Nigeria has to break away from the shackles of its colonial legacy. Colonial education was not designed to prepare young people for service to their own country. Instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial society and its state. As put by Wilmont (1980), Nigerian youth is doubly alienated, first as youth and then as Africans. But Nigeria cannot afford to regard its students in this negative way, as immature, volatile and potential

anarchists. This becomes more relevant and important for the country in the period of transition planning.

Nigeria cannot afford the luxury of Western societies in which alienated youths, finding no place for themselves in society, resort to drugs, promiscuity or terrorism; where youths, losing respect for their parents, also lose respect for the institutions of society. The Nigerian students must know their place in society, and the role they are expected to play, and must be educated to and allowed to play that role. If Nigerian students are to meaningfully contribute towards making 1992 a reality, and play positive roles thereafter, then (Nyerere, in Wilmont,1980:22):

> "Our educational system has to foster ... the social goals of living together and working together for the common good. It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in termsof human well-being ... Our education must therefore inculcate a sense of commitment to the total community, and help the pupils to accept the values appropriate to our kind of future, not those appropriate to our colonial past."

This means that the educational system in Nigeria must emphasise cooperative endeavour, not individual advancement. It must stress concepts of equality and the responsibility to give services which goes with any special ability. I cannot agree less with the Wilmont's observation that the benefits of modern education and technology can only be realised where the basic, absolutely essential structures of society have been preserved. The curricula content must expose the students to their society and its social problems. Unless this is done, they may not be capable of finding possible solutions to some of the societal problems to which they are expected to address themselves in the current search for a new social order.

As a social movement which should seek deliberate and radical changes in society, the Nigerian student movement needs a social and political climate which allows opposition and criticism and which is not repressive. Such a climate should not be hostile to it, but allow it the freedom to organise and to propagate its ideals among its followers, and ultimately to bargain in the political arena. Under such a free atmosphere students will be able to join other social groups in the formation of public opinion by providing ground for discussion of the social and political problems that plague the country in the search towards nationhood. In the process, there will be constructive criticism of the government's activities.

However, when a political climate becomes hostile to students, as we have now in Nigeria, the government loses one of the most essential agents of positive mobilisation. One of five types of adaptive responses may result. Following Merton's (1957) typology, students in such a situation may choose to conform, be innovative, act in a ritual manner, retreat or rebel. An alternative formulation put forward by Finlay *et al* (1968) is that, in the face of imminent sanction, the students will choose one of the following:

1. increased activism, either supportive or oppositional
2. opportunism as a means of decreasing threats and/or increasing gains
3. acquiescence to assure safety
4. a retreat from all forms of involvement.

fall of Numeri of Sudan. The Khee Government of Korea was also toppled in 1960 partly as a result of student demonstrations (Amoa,1979).

Such is the power of students. From the examples of student activities discussed above, we can conclude that student activism is political in content. Also, it can be seen from these discussions, that there are certain ills in our society over which students legitimately express resentment. Nigerian students, like their counterparts all over the world, have an historical role to play since they are the midwives of a greater tomorrow. In their traditional role as a bastion against all forms of retrogression and reaction, Nigerian students should always rise to the challenge of the times, especially during this period in Nigeria when the country is planning the transition to the Third Republic.

Toward 1992 and beyond

In the preceding section an attempt has been made to show that students are a potential political force in contemporary society, and as such it may be necessary, especially in Nigeria, not to view them as a disruptive force. We have seen how students and student movements have contributed in a large measure to the sociopolitical developments of their various countries. Not only have they fought for their own interests, but also for the interests of their people. They fought colonial regimes and helped in overthrowing dictatorial national governments, and demanded the liberalisation of oppressive political systems.

As rightly noted by Amoa (1979), we need not search for more evidence of the important role students play and have played in order to come to the conclusion that it does not help to look at students' social and political roles only in negative terms as Lipset, Altback, Soares, Feuer and others have done. There is a need in Nigeria for a more realistic look at what students are doing all over the world, so that the nation can learn some very useful lessons. The methods they adopt may not always be to the liking of many people, this should not prevent those in authority from listening to them. It is the message they carry and the aims of their agitations that we have to assess. This is very crucial to Nigeria, like other developing countries, in assessing the role students can play in the development process.

This is particularly necessary because of the role intellectuals are supposed to play in New States. It has been emphasised, for example by Shils (1959) and Kautsky (1981), that the development of the New States lies on the shoulders of the intellectuals who are a major category of the elite in developing countries. We need to add that this role would better be performed by the radical intellectuals (among whom are the students) because of their commitment to the changes which they seek. To effectively perform this historic role, Nigerian students have to operate in a conducive atmosphere. They also have to receive the necessary functional education.

The educational system in Nigeria has to break away from the shackles of its colonial legacy. Colonial education was not designed to prepare young people for service to their own country. Instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial society and its state. As put by Wilmont (1980), Nigerian youth is doubly alienated, first as youth and then as Africans. But Nigeria cannot afford to regard its students in this negative way, as immature, volatile and potential

anarchists. This becomes more relevant and important for the country in the period of transition planning.

Nigeria cannot afford the luxury of Western societies in which alienated youths, finding no place for themselves in society, resort to drugs, promiscuity or terrorism; where youths, losing respect for their parents, also lose respect for the institutions of society. The Nigerian students must know their place in society, and the role they are expected to play, and must be educated to and allowed to play that role. If Nigerian students are to meaningfully contribute towards making 1992 a reality, and play positive roles thereafter, then (Nyerere, in Wilmont,1980:22):

> "Our educational system has to foster ... the social goals of living together and working together for the common good. It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in termsof human well-being ... Our education must therefore inculcate a sense of commitment to the total community, and help the pupils to accept the values appropriate to our kind of future, not those appropriate to our colonial past."

This means that the educational system in Nigeria must emphasise cooperative endeavour, not individual advancement. It must stress concepts of equality and the responsibility to give services which goes with any special ability. I cannot agree less with the Wilmont's observation that the benefits of modern education and technology can only be realised where the basic, absolutely essential structures of society have been preserved. The curricula content must expose the students to their society and its social problems. Unless this is done, they may not be capable of finding possible solutions to some of the societal problems to which they are expected to address themselves in the current search for a new social order.

As a social movement which should seek deliberate and radical changes in society, the Nigerian student movement needs a social and political climate which allows opposition and criticism and which is not repressive. Such a climate should not be hostile to it, but allow it the freedom to organise and to propagate its ideals among its followers, and ultimately to bargain in the political arena. Under such a free atmosphere students will be able to join other social groups in the formation of public opinion by providing ground for discussion of the social and political problems that plague the country in the search towards nationhood. In the process, there will be constructive criticism of the government's activities.

However, when a political climate becomes hostile to students, as we have now in Nigeria, the government loses one of the most essential agents of positive mobilisation. One of five types of adaptive responses may result. Following Merton's (1957) typology, students in such a situation may choose to conform, be innovative, act in a ritual manner, retreat or rebel. An alternative formulation put forward by Finlay *et al* (1968) is that, in the face of imminent sanction, the students will choose one of the following:

1. increased activism, either supportive or oppositional
2. opportunism as a means of decreasing threats and/or increasing gains
3. acquiescence to assure safety
4. a retreat from all forms of involvement.

No matter which form is chosen one thing is clear, a hostile political climate to student activism is inimical to the nation's progress, development and stability. I advocate that Nigerian students should go for the first option: that is increased activism, which should be either supportive or oppositional depending on the issues at stake.

The panic measures of placing bans on student unions and student activities, either locally or at national level, cannot solve the problem. Rather than banning the student body the government should explore the creation of avenues for continuing dialogue between university authorities and students. Banning student bodies simply drives them underground. It is sweeping the problem under the carpet, and they are bound to erupt sooner rather than later. There is need for a concerted voice of the nation's students during this period of transition planning. The energy of the youth must be galvanised into constructive channels and not allowed to be diverted into a destructive force (**National Concord**, July 29 1986).

As Mazrui (1978) argues, the banning of students' co-curricula activities would affect the quality of their education. Education is not simply what goes on in the classroom, but also the experience of being socially engaged and intellectually committed. But behind it all is the further experience of team work and collaboration, even in situations where one team has to compete and even quarrel with another.

It also needs to be pointed out that the development process requires active public opinion in order to make the government aware of existing problems. This does not imply that the government may not be aware of the existing problems at all, but that it is likely to overlook a lot of them or look at them from a different and narrow angle. This anomaly can be corrected through constructive criticism from an enlightened public. The citizens need to be constantly informed of what goes on in the society. Dissemination of information to the public through activities of such social movements can help create a higher degree of consciousness which people need for their development efforts. This will further aid the mobilisation effort of the government launched in 1987. This is particularly necessary in a country like Nigeria with a largely illiterate population. Students, as a special group close to the grassroots, could and should play important roles in national mobilisation, especially at the grassroots. The federal government's Political Bureau recognises this fact when it states in its report that students constitute a reservoir of energy and dynamism for any national struggle or campaign, if they are correctly guided, mobilised, and fully integrated into the social fabric. According to the report (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1987:158-60) "With appropriate training and guidance, [students] can provide the manpower needs of the country and ... they can make positive contributions to national development".

It is obvious that students cannot be kept in the background during the transition planning. Apart from the reasons given earlier, Madunagu (1980) has offered additional reasons for this: (a) students are linked to the larger society by family, marriage, friendship, religion, ethics, culture and history generally; and they cannot pretend to be indifferent to the fate of this larger society. They have a stake in what goes on in the society. For example, when the rulers inflicted a civil war on the country, students suffered with the larger society. They are also not excluded from the present economic problems of the country. (b) Students are trained to

take up positions in the social organisation of labour. The conditions of this imminent integration into the larger society cannot but reflect on the students' consciousness negatively or positively. Since there is no passive consciousness, Madunagu argues, students are often compelled to anticipate their imminent integration by political and ideological actions. (c) Students are maintained in their education by the larger society either collectively, individually, or both. They cannot, therefore, be expected to be indifferent to social developments and policies which, by increasing the economic and social burdens of the larger society, directly threaten to terminate or disturb their education. (d) By their training, students have access to information and ideas. They can, therefore, articulate, rightly or wrongly, the various state policies and measure rhetoric against reality. Students can also compare their society with other societies with which they have come in contact though information and ideas. The result is critical consciousness.

One can therefore conclude, following Madunagu's lead, that though students are formally divorced from material production, they cannot be divorced from ideological and political struggles. Because ideology and politics have a dialectical influence on material production, students can be said to have one leg in social reproduction and one leg outside it. This ambivalent location in social reproduction in general lies at the root of the limitations of the students' role, and it is at the same time the objective cause of the ambiguity of this role.

Need for internal self re-examination

Granted that the social and political climate for effective participation in transition planning are present (and they should be), the Nigerian student movement still needs some organisation restructuring within its rank and file as well as ideological self re-examination. The student movement in Nigeria can effectively perform its responsibilities during transition and beyond, if the leadership is purposeful and has a sense of direction. Following Smelser (1962), the leadership should be able to formulate beliefs as well as mobilise its members and the citizenry for positive action. The leaders should commune emotionally with their followers. They should not be selfish individuals who ride on the back of the people in order to achieve personal goals and ambitions. The goals of the leadership must not be at variance with those of the followers. Like national leadership, the leaders of the movement must be ready to suffer severe deprivation in the interest of the people.

No matter how important or effective the leader may be, the qualities that endear him to his people may soon fade away if he operates in an ideological vacuum. Even if he manages to cope, as most charismatic leaders do, things could be very difficult for his successors. This is why the issue of ideology is linked with leadership. It is ideology that determines the economic model of the society. It is ideology that will give direction and purpose to the nation's journey towards the building of a stable and virile nation. It serves as a guide to policy choices and political behaviour and explains to all those who consult it and believe in it the meaning of their existence and purpose of their action. Without ideology, we are almost without an anchor and a port and our ship drifts aimlessly without a mission or a purpose. It

is the ideology that will fashion the motivations of the movement, its attitudes and the political regime under which it exists (Olugbade,1987). It is partly due to the existence of an ideology to which they hold tenaciously that both the United States and the Soviet Union are what they are today. The ideologies they have, and which they believe in, have been the guide for the development of both countries.

The Nigerian student movement must be precise in its vision of the society it wants. It must be consistent with a particular ideology which in its view will emancipate the people from abject want and poverty; one which will lead the country to the Biblical promised land. The movement should not advocate or propagate an ideology just for publicity sake, without conviction. Whatever ideas they promote should have meaning to the ordinary Nigerian on the street - his culture, needs and aspirations. When they criticise government for inadequacies, they must have alternative suggestions. In this way, the movement could meaningfully contribute to societal development and not just promote the narrow interests of its members.

In addition to the issues of leadership and ideology, the Nigerian student movement should effectively mobilise not only its members but the entire people of the federation for meaningful and positive participation in the political process. There should be group consciousness, which means a sense of belonging and solidarity among the members of the group. Although the solidarity occurs in various degrees, it is an essential feature of a social movement. The consciousness is generated through active participation which in itself is a direct consequence of effective mobilisation. Nigerian students should be actively involved in government's social mobilisation programme, known by its acronym MAMSER, which was launched during the second half of 1987 by President Babangida.

The attractiveness and relevance of whatever ideology they pursue will to some extent determine the degree of group consciousness the movement will have. The group consciousness will in turn contribute to active participation, which is also a crucial element of a social movement. If the Nigerian student movement is to become an effective organisation, then the greater proportion of its members should be very active participants. The movement, as a goal-oriented one, should not wait to see what could be done by the government to meet its demands. It should seek to achieve its demands by direct action. Even if the goals it strives to achieve are not fully met, the Nigerian student movement, as a norm-oriented body, will take pride in the fact that it has contributed towards the solution of societal problems, even if only partially.

The unfortunate thing is that the student movement, before its ban in 1986, had not adequately mobilised its members, let alone the whole society, for effective political participation and/or social mobilisation. The type of mobilisation I have in mind is that which strives toward the cultivation of political consciousness and awareness in the people. Participation, as I see it, implies more than greater access to government. It inputs considerable value to personal political activism. In effect, as Elekwa (1986) puts it, assessments of the validity or legitimacy of a government are indirectly related to the number of citizens involved. The measure of an individual's citizenship is shown by a willingness to become involved in public life, not marginally as a voter, but as a direct participant in policy determination. This process includes exercising judgment and in the allocation of resources.

Contrary to what operates within the movement, one expects a high degree of mobilisation and participation in such a supposedly enlightened and intellectual organisation. Research conducted in one of the Nigerian universities in 1981 (Olugbade,1981), and another survey between 1984 and 1988 (Olugbade, forthcoming), showed that most student union members did not know what their union stood for. Some of them see their leaders as trouble makers seeking cheap and undue publicity.

The essence of this is that the movement still needs to mobilise resources, at both the national and campus levels, toward meaningful participation in the political process. If it is to be part of the struggle toward the Third Republic, and it has to be, the movement has to get reorganised, educate its members and raise the general consciousness of the people. Effective action of a movement depends on its organisation. Even for a demonstration or riot to succeed, it needs an allocation of tasks, a division of labour, allocation of resources, and effective management and monitoring. This type of coordination is absent within the Nigerian student movement, hence the ease with which it is demobilised during crises.

Nothing better explains this point than the Indonesian experience. When the Indonesian students found that prices of gasoline and transportation fares had been increased, they demanded the reduction of these for the whole country. As a result of adequate mobilisation and effective coordination, their demonstrations and direct action yielded results. The government acted promptly and positively to the demand for lower public busfares, and the state oil company was compelled to lower the price of gasoline (Bachtiar,1968). This was similar to what happened in Nigeria in 1988. The government and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNCP) increased the price of gasoline. This led to an unreasonable increase in the cost of transportation and undue hardship throughout the country. Like the Indonesian students, Nigerian students protested against the increase. But unlike their Indonesian counterparts, Nigerian students at that time had no well organised national body (banned in 1986) and members were neither adequately mobilised nationally nor organised at the various campuses. As a result of this, coupled with governmental insensitivity (to the problems of the people) and authoritarianism, the protesting students were easily demobilised. Within a few days of the demonstrations, more than 45 institutions of higher learning (including all the major universities) were closed by the government (**Newswatch**, May 2 1988). The same Indonesian students performed another feat in 1966. Their high political awareness, coupled with a sense of mission, led the Indonesian Student Movement (KAMI), drawing on the support of the army, to fight the dissolution of the communist party and replacement of the existing cabinet. By their militant action, President Sukarno was removed from office (Bachtiar,1968).

The views expressed by Amoa (1979) about publicity by the students in Ghana is equally true of Nigeria. The lack of coordination, the absence of active participation by the students in the activities of the movement, as well as an absence of support from the general public, are also due to the poor propaganda machinery and inefficient dissemination of information of their point of view. This is with the possible exception of the 1978 crisis when the propaganda machinery was adequate. The effective publicity and proper mobilisation during the 1978 crisis paid well in view of the massive support and participation, not only by students

but also the general public, including market women. Except for the isolated case cited above (and a few others), what goes on in one university hardly gets to other universities on time. One reason for this is the very poor communication system in the country, which is a serious barrier not only to student activities but to all social, economic and political activities. The telephone system is very unreliable and the postal system erratic. Apart from this poor communication system, the students have no national newspaper of their own in which to write about the country's problems (through which they could inform their members and the general public of the state of the nation), or to get themselves informed about what goes on in other universities.

Evidence from many other countries shows that Nigerian students are lagging behind in this area. As Bachtiar reports, among the many newspapers sold in the streets of Indonesia, the student press, especially **Harin Kami** (Kami Daily or Our Daily) and **Mahasiwa Indonesia** (Indonesian Student), gained an important place. These publications are said to be widely read for the sharp critical thrust of their reporting and discussion of public affairs. The Brazilian students also have a printing press for their political actions. Student newspapers provide key channels of political communication among students at faculty, university and national levels. The Metropolitan Union of Students in Rio de Janeiro (UME) publishes a weekly, **Metropolitans**, which enjoys a wide circulation throughout the country. The National Union of Students (UNE) also publishes its own weekly journal, **Movimento**. Both student newspapers, it is reported, carry a heavy concentration of articles on national and political problems. In the United States, almost all university campuses have daily, or at worst, weekly newspapers that inform students about local, national and even international events. Some of them have two newspapers. The absence of sufficient information among Nigerian students in the different institutions, and the absence of publicity of their goals, seems to have weakened the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) and its offshoot the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). This absence of information flow and inadequate publicity have also affected, negatively, whatever impact the movement could have made on the general social and political system in the country. They relied solely on national newspapers, many of which are owned by federal and state governments and other individuals hostile to the movement's activities. This trend has to be reversed, especially at this point in time when all hands must be on deck to evolve a new Nigeria. For its members and the general public to be aware of its activities and its points of view, the body needs a different forum to publicise and propagate its activities.

Conclusion

From the analysis in this paper, it has become established that the Nigerian student movement is as relevant as any other group in the Nigerian society for its development. They have an historical responsibility to mobilise the people, raise their level of consciousness and educate them to participate in political, economic and social activities of the country. They cannot afford to sit on the sideline and watch things, as they have a greater stake in whatever happens than the present members of the ruling class, as, ultimately, the mantle of the nation's leadership will fall on them.

On the basis of the above, coupled with the historical responsibility of students in the society, a conducive social and political climate should be allowed the students in the country's political arena. The federal government should as a matter of urgency lift the ban on NANS while the various institutions should resuscitate student unions on their campuses. It is not just enough to lift the ban on NANS or resuscitate the different campus unions, they must be allowed to organise freely, and coordinate their activities without undue interference from the authorities, either government or university. A situation where the government or the university controls what should or should not be in the constitution of the student union is an encroachment on the rights of the students to associate freely. It is a mockery of the so-called government's human rights sermon being preached daily. Above all, the current clamp down on student activities is, as argued earlier, inimical to participatory democracy, progress and stability. It is at variance with the objectives of the struggle towards the Third Republic. If the repressive and unwarranted ban remains, student crises, as witnessed in the University of Lagos and the Ondo State University (both in April 1987), will continue to erupt like volcanoes with devastating consequences. In fact, subsequent events in the country, since the ban on organised student activities, have proved this. In 1988 alone almost all higher institutions were closed at one point in time. For example, during the fuel crisis of that year, more than forty-five institutions were closed (Olugbade,1989). Some were even closed twice or even more during the year (for example, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Benin, University of Nigeria, Nsukka). 1989 has not been better. Within the first month of this year alone, some institutions were closed because of student demonstrations. As Vieta (**West Africa**, January 16 1989) notes, major factors in student activism leading to such closures include the socioeconomic and political conditions in the country and on campus, as well as international developments. Public response and the behaviour of security agencies are catalytic factors. As he rightly observes, "students + police = riots".

Despite the odds, Nigerian students should continue to work with other democratic bodies like the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), and the academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in evolving a just and egalitarian society. They should not be contented with being leaders of tomorrow alone. They should strive to be active partners in the progress of today, identifying themselves with the problems and prospects of nation building. They should play the role history assigns to them, the clay of the Nigerian struggle. The leadership should join other groups in the society in the patriotic mission of the total liberation of the country from dependency and imperialist exploitation. An unfortunate aspect of this is that some of these bodies with which the students could work are already banned or disorganised. For example, the NLC was banned from 1987 till late 1988 when the ban was finally lifted. The ban really affected the morale of its members. The body is just trying to get reorganised after its late 1988 election. At the time of writing this paper (March 1989) both ASUU and NANS are still banned. As stated earlier, NANS has been banned since 1986 while ASUU was banned in July 1988 during its strike on salary increases, among other demands. With the systematic banning of all organised groups, the government, despite its populist human rights face, is becoming more and more coercive, authoritarian and insensitive to public opinion. The unnecessary and unwarranted ban is making a mockery of the democracy to which the Babangida regime wants to return the country. While some people are suggesting the active involvement and

participation of these bodies in the disengagement programme, because of their likely positive contributions, the government is alienating them. For example, it has been suggested that members of these bodies (NANS, NLC and ASUU) could serve as electoral officers during the elections, as well as enumerators during the census scheduled for 1991[2]. As part of the few vocal and militant groups in the society, they are likely to perform better than many of those previously used in these exercises, especially if the organisations are involved as groups and not just hand-picked individuals within its ranks. As consistent critics of governmental and societal ills, such an exercise will be a serious challenge to them to really prove their worth in organisation and management. It is hoped that the government will make good its promise to lift the ban on these bodies and involve them in the disengagement programme.

If and when the ban is lifted, NANS should reassess its strategies and the events leading to the ban, with a view to correcting and learning from its mistakes. At the same time, it should not abdicate its role as the conscience of the parents, a majority of whom are marginalised and who cannot speak out against societal oppression and injustice. They should heed Fanon's warning, in his letter to the youth of Africa, when he rightly observed that "the future would have no pity for those men who, possessing the exceptional privilege of being able to speak words of truth to their oppressors, have taken refuge in an attitude of passivity, of mute indifference, and sometimes of cold complicity" (cited in Wilmont, 1980). Students in Nigeria should, following Samora Machel, try to transform science and knowledge from instruments of crime against the people into instruments of their liberation, to transform ideas from instruments of mystification into instruments of enlightenment (in Wilmont, 1980). This is the task before students, and indeed all citizens of Nigeria, in the coming years.

The society should not drive the students, and other progressive forces, into desperate solutions for its problems. If this happens, then, as Fanon puts it, the society shall be replaced not by peaceful change but by a violent overthrow (through a revolution and not the musical military coups) of the Nigerian social system. This is the last weapon of the people if the current attempt at democracy fails. This appears to be the only reasonable prescription in view of our past historical experience. Hence the need for all those interested in the progress and stability of the country to join hands and see to the success of the ongoing democratic reforms.

I have gone thus far because Nigeria as a nation under the past and present ruling class do not realise that the hallmark of any viable society is the satisfaction of human needs and the mutual cooperation that this entails. Social development is meaningless unless it leads to improvements in the conditions of life of the people, unless it guarantees their security and the affairs of state. A social system which sets a man against his brother in the name of 'free competition', which destroys the relationship between parents and children, which reduces human beings to commodities, which generates fabulous wealth at one pole and desperate poverty at the other, which makes a virtue of theft and poverty a crime, obviously cannot, as Wilmont (1980) notes, foster social development. That is the Nigerian society - a society drifting, without a purpose and sense of direction.

If the country is to progress Nigerian students must join other patriotic bodies to stop the drift. They must continue to serve as a pressure group, appealing at all times to the nation's conscience, challenging excessive authority, protecting and defending the oppressed and urging the nation on to utopian heights. In the course of the performance of this task, they will

do foolish things, act irresponsibly and behave irrationally. It is the duty of the administration to punish their folly, and check their irresponsible and irrational behaviour. But this can and must be done without destroying their initiative or suppressing their youthfulness (Olugbade,1980).

In sharing the views of Shils, Kautsky and others, I am suggesting that given the right conducive atmosphere, students in Nigeria can play a major role in the social and political development of the country, as students did during the nationalist struggle and the Anglo-Nigerian defence pact of 1961[3]. Students can evolve strong social movements that can seek change in the country. They could form and articulate public opinion, as a group influencing the decision makers in diverse ways. They could, following Eisentadt, be 'political entrepreneurs', persons who are able to mobilise political activities and social attitudes and integrate them in political organisations and processes according to the principles of functional democracy. Nigerian students must be guided to encourage them in all kinds of voluntary service and help in literacy programmes. In short, they can give leadership in various sectors of the society.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Major General Emmanuel Abisoye (Rtd) was the chairperson of the panel that probed the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) crisis of April, 1986. For a newspaper report of his speech see, for example, **Nigerian Tribune**, June 24 1986.
2. For a full discussion of suggestions as to the possible positive contributions of these bodies to the disengagement programmes, see Larry Diamond "Issues in the Constitutional Design for a Third Nigerian Republic" in **African Affairs**, and Kola Olugbade "Redesigning Nigeria; The Quest for a Stable Polity" (forthcoming).
3. It was partly due to the efforts of the students that the defence pact, which would have subjected Nigeria to total military control by Britain, was abrogated.

References

Akintoye S A (1973) **Ten Years of the University of Ife, 1962-1972**, University of Ife Press, Ife, Nigeria.

Amoa S A (1979) **University Students' Political Action in Ghana**, Ghana University Publishing Corporation, Tema.

Anise Ladun (1979) "Confrontation Politics and Crises Management:Nigerian University Students and Public Policy", in **Issue**, Vol 9 No 1, January.

Anise Ladun (undated) **Desubsidisation: An Alternative Approach to Governmental Cost Containment and Income Distribution Policy in Nigeria**, mimeo.

Bachtiar H W (1968) "Indonesia", in Emmerson D K (ed) **Students and Politics in Developing Nations**, Pall Mall, London.

Beloff Max (1968) "Universities and Violence" in **Survey**, No 69, October.

Cornell Richard (1988) "Students and Politics in Communist Countries of Eastern Europe" in **Asian Survey**, Vol 28 No 9, Sept.

Daily Times, (1978) April 21 and 29.

Elekwa Nnanta N (1986) "Mobilisation: An Effective Means of Citizen Participation in Community Development", paper presented at the 13th National Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), University of Lagos, 20-23 May.

Fafunwa A Babs (1974) **History of Education in Nigeria**, George, Allen and Unwin, London.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (1987) **Report of the Political Bureau**, Federal Government Printer, Lagos.

Feuer Lewis (1968) "Patterns of Irrationality" in **Survey**, No 69, October.

Feuer Lewis (1969) **The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements**, Heinneman, London.

Finlay David et al (1968) "Ghana" in Emmerson D K (ed) **Students and Politics in Developing Nations**, Pall Mall, London.

Haskins H C (1963) **The Rise of Universities**, Cornwell.

Horton James Africanus (1886) **West African Countries**, London.

Israel John (1968) "Reflections on the Modern Chinese Student Movement", in **Daedalus**, Vol 97 No 1, Winter.

Jacks Digby (1975) **Student Politics and Higher Education**, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

Kautsky J H (ed) (1981) **Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries: Nationalism and Communism**, John Wiley and Sons, New York.

Kwong Julia (1988) "The 1968 Student Demonstrations in China: A Democratic Movement?", in **Asian Survey**, Vol 28 No 9, Sept.

Lipset S M (1967) "Student Politics and Higher Education in the United States", in Lipset S M (ed) **Student Politics**, Basic Books, New York.

Lipset S M (1968) "Students and Politics in Comparative Perspective" in **Daedalus**, Vol 97 No 1, Winter.

Madunagu Edwin (1980) **The Tragedy of the Nigerian Socialist Movement and Other Essays**, Centaur Press, Calabar, Nigeria.

Mazrui Ali A (1978) **Political Values and Educated Class in Africa**, Heinneman Educational Books, London.

Merton Robert (1957) **Social Theory and Social Structure**, Free Press of Clencoe, New York.

More C H and Hochschild Arlie R (1968) "Student Union in North African Politics" in **Daedalus**, Vol 97 No 1, Winter.

Okafor Nduka (1971) **The Development of Universities in Nigeria**, Longmans, London.

Olugbade K (1981) **The Evolution and Dynamics of Student Unionism at the University of Ife, 1962-81**, unpublished research project, Department of Political Science, University of Ife, Nigeria.

Olugbade K (1987) "Leadership and the Problem of Ideology in Nigeria" in Olugbemi Stephen O (ed) **Alternative Political Futures for Nigeria**, the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), Lagos.

Olugbade K (undated) **Electoral Behaviour of Nigerian Students**, mimeo.

Olugbade K (1989) The Ideological Character of the Nigerian Student Movement" in Lawal Bayo and Olugbade Kola (eds) **Issues in Contemporary African Social And Political Thought**.

Olugbade K (forthcoming) "Performance of Nigerian Universities in Student Crises Management" in **Scandinavian Journal of Development Alternatives.**

Scares Glacio (1967) "The Active Few: Student Ideology and Participation in Developing Countries", in Lipset S M (ed) **Student Politics**, Basic Books, New York.

Shils Edward (1959) "The Intellectuals in the Political Development of the New States" in **World Politics**, Vol XII, October.

Smelser N J 1962) **Theory of Collective Behaviour**, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

West African University (1872) **Correspondence Between Blyden and Hennesy**, The Negro Printing Office, Freetown.

Wilmont Patrick F (1980) **Ideology and National Consciousness**, Lantern Books, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Not stated (1988) "The Student Revolt of the 1960s" in **Survey**, Vol 30 Nos 1&2 (128/129), March, 264-290.