

## **NIGERIA: WANT IN THE MIDST OF PLENTY**

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## **NIGERIA: WANT IN THE MIDST OF PLENTY**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and perhaps also its most poorly understood. It has endured six successful and numerous failed military coups, a civil war that cost well over a million lives, three inconclusive transitions to democracy and recurrent factional violence. Despite more than \$400 billion in oil revenue since the early 1970s, the economy underperforms, and the great majority of citizens have benefited little. More effective institution-building is imperative.

This background report is the first in a new series on Nigeria. Subsequent analysis and policy recommendations will deal with issues such as the Niger Delta, federalism, inter-communal tensions in the Plateau State and elections. Throughout its 46 years of independent history – 28 years under military rule – analysts, historians and others have often over-simplified the country either in terms of its ethnic divide between Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba, or through a religious dichotomy of “the Muslim north against the Christian south”. Demagogues have exploited such social cleavages for their own ends, often fuelling civil strife.

The country's history since independence suggests, however, that the politicisation of ethnicity and religion and factional mobilisation along these same lines is a direct by-product of the monopolisation of power and assets by ruling elites eager to avoid open and fair competition. With Nigeria's emergence as a major oil producer, pervasive patron-client networks have developed at all levels of government. Federalism has permitted entitlements to be spread more widely across society but it has in turn fuelled a proliferation of state and local institutions that have made governance fragmentary and unwieldy. Unable to obtain their fair share of the country's wealth, most citizens have been left with two choices: fatalistic resignation or greater identification with alternative hierarchies based on ethnicity, religion or other factional identities.

In the absence of checks and balances, especially during periods of military rule, the state has failed to fulfil most of its major functions, and large segments of the public have ceased to expect social services, public utilities, infrastructure, security or administration from it. Many groups have resorted to self-help measures through ethnic, religious, community or civic organisations. Under the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha, this dissociation between citizens and government produced a slow-motion version of a failing state. By 1999, the majority of Nigerians were worse off than their parents had been at independence in 1960.

The 1999 return to democracy meant a fresh start. However, the past weighs heavily on the democratic experiment. Widespread corruption and persistent electoral malpractice continue to undermine politics as a whole. Military rule has cast a long shadow, and Nigeria remains dangerously reliant on oil receipts and mired in patron-client networks. New challenges have arisen, with inter-communal clashes across the country causing more than 14,000 deaths since 1999 and displacing more than three million. Militias have sprung up, notably in the oil-rich Niger Delta, where growing tensions are a direct result of decades of environmental harm and political neglect.

Concurrently, Nigeria is striving to assert its political weight in West Africa, across the African continent and beyond. It is all too easy for the world to perceive it only as a major world oil producer and a regional policeman. However, if the international community fails to better grasp the internal dynamics and intricacies, there is a very real potential for the persistent levels of violence to escalate with major regional security implications.

**Dakar/Brussels, 19 July 2006**

## NIGERIA: WANT IN THE MIDST OF PLENTY

### I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a fragile state whose economy is almost entirely based on exports of oil and gas. With a population estimated at 130 million and expected to rise to 175 million by 2020, the world's tenth largest crude oil producer (2005) is also Africa's most populous nation.<sup>1</sup> One out of every six Africans is Nigerian.

The former British colony, which became independent in 1960, is a vast country of more than 900,000 square kilometres, almost four times the size of the UK – but with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita 35 times lower.<sup>2</sup> Even in comparison to other African states, Nigeria lags: South Africa, the other continental heavyweight, has a GDP per capita six times greater; Angola, an oil-rich but until 2002 war-stricken country, has a GDP more than 1.5 times higher; and the stable Sahelian state Senegal, with exports largely limited to groundnuts and fish, enjoys more than twice Nigeria's per capita income.<sup>3</sup>

“Most Nigerians are poorer today than they were at independence in 1960”.<sup>4</sup> The country has abundant human and natural resources but still struggles with mass impoverishment. Agriculture, once its primary hard currency earner, has collapsed, and food imports now account for a sixth of the trade bill.<sup>5</sup> Manufacturing is a smaller proportion of the economy – about 6 per cent – than at independence. The landscape is dotted with oversized industrial projects of limited utility and capacity. For example, the Ajaokuta steel project, launched in 1979 at a cost of several billion dollars, has not produced a single steel slab in 27 years. Two thirds of the investment

in manufacturing – much by the government – has been wasted.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the country's oil wealth, extreme poverty – defined by the World Bank as living on less than \$1 per day – now affects 37 per cent of the population.<sup>7</sup> Nine out of ten Nigerians live on less than \$2 daily. Corruption, a boom and bust cycle of oil prices and failure to diversify the economy have left the country in “a development trap”.<sup>8</sup> Shortly before his military regime fell in July 1975, General Yakubu Gowon, aptly described Nigeria's malaise as “want in the midst of plenty”.

Nigeria continues to produce millions of migrants, essentially economic refugees, who live throughout Africa, Europe and the U.S. Since 1994, when Western Union started its operations in Nigeria, an average of \$3 billion in remittances has been channelled annually via this service alone.<sup>9</sup> This is twice as much as the yearly inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) during the early 2000s. The message is stark: a major upheaval in Nigeria, whether another civil war like the Biafran bloodbath in the late 1960s or even just the fear of an impending conflict, has the potential to flood Africa, and possibly other parts of the world, with refugees.

Nigeria has over 250 ethno-linguistic groups and numerous religious communities. One of its founding fathers – Chief Obafemi Awolowo – described it as “merely a geographical expression” that lumped together an arbitrary collection of disparate groups following colonial rule.<sup>10</sup> The country's independent history has been marked by the rivalry between the “big three” ethno-regional clusters that, combined, represent roughly

<sup>1</sup> Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>; U.S. Energy Information Administration.

<sup>2</sup> \$620 in 2005. Figures denoted in dollars (\$) in this report refer to U.S. dollars.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Program (UNDP) annual report on “Human Development”, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Nwafekoku O. Uwadibie, “Oil and Macroeconomic Policies in the Twenty-First Century”, in Ike E. Udogu (ed.), *Nigeria in the Twenty-First Century* (Asmara, 2005), p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Shaxson, “New Approaches to Volatility: Dealing with the ‘Resource Curse’ in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *International Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 2, March 2005, p. 315.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 314.

<sup>7</sup> “Nigeria Country Brief”, World Bank, updated April 2006. Other sources, including the Federal Research Division of the U.S. Congress and the Canadian International Development Agency, cite figures in the 57 per cent to 70 per cent range for those living on less than \$1 a day.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Bach, “Inching Towards a Country Without State: Prebendalism, Violence and State Betrayal in Nigeria”, in: Christopher Clapham, Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills (eds.), *Africa's Big States* (Johannesburg, 2005), p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> *The Nigerian Guardian*, 30 September 2003, quoting Western Union's operational director.

<sup>10</sup> Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London, 1947), p. 48.

60 per cent of the population: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Igbo in the south east and the Yoruba in the south west.

Since the 1970s, the politicisation of ethnic allegiances has been increasingly compounded by religion. Broadly speaking, the “Y” formed on the map by the Niger River and its main subsidiary, the Benue, demarcates a predominately Muslim north, an overwhelmingly Christian east and a western region that is religiously almost evenly split. Although religious identities in Nigeria are complex and clouded by mixed patterns of observance and the lack of reliable statistics, it is generally accepted that 45 per cent to 50 per cent practice Islam, 40 per cent to 45 per cent are Christian, and the balance follow traditional beliefs. However, religious observation is far from mutually exclusive: many people combine “mainstream” doctrine with elements of indigenous or sectarian practice. As Matthew Hassan Kukah, chairman of the National Secretariat of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria, asserted in the mid-1990s, “Every Nigerian carries an excess luggage of identity...even in our common quest for social justice, we are constantly negotiating with the others on behalf of a religion, an ethnic group or a state”.<sup>11</sup>

The Federal Republic of Nigeria contains 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This includes twelve northern states (originally Muslim emirates), twelve Middle Belt states that are home to numerous minorities and twelve southern states, where Yoruba, Igbo and Ijaw are predominant. When the country gained independence from British rule, it had only three states. Federalism has proved prone to repeated division, which has posed a central challenge to effective governance. This tendency is especially visible at the third tier of the federal system, where the Local Government Areas (LGAs) have multiplied six-fold since 1963, from 131 to 774.

The issue referred to as the “National Question” – how to structure the state so that every ethnic or religious group and every Nigerian as an individual becomes a stakeholder – lies at the heart of the country’s troubled history.

## II. FROM THE BRITISH TO BIAFRA AND AFTER: 1960-1978

A brief discussion of pre-independence history is useful in understanding why issues such as “indigeneity” – a divisive concept that pitches “indigenes” against “settlers” – have become increasingly problematic. Nigeria owes its name to Flora Lewis, the colonial editor of *The Times*, the British newspaper that in 1897 was first to use it to describe an “amalgamation” of the Niger River and the surrounding “area”. She later married Frederick Lugard, who became the first governor general of the “amalgamated” British colony in 1914 and applied her name to what was largely his creation.

Ethnic identities in Nigeria are not a natural given, despite the substantial impact that such identity has played in the country’s history. Its ethnic identities are historical constructions with political value. Their “truth” is not based on indisputable fact but on subjective conviction, allegiance and mutual identification.

There is no cogent reason, for example, to consider the Hausa-Fulani an “ethnic bloc” in the way they are usually presented. On the contrary, in purely ethnic terms, it would make sense to uphold the distinction between the Hausa “indigenes”, historically sedentary peasants, and the Fulani, cattle-rearing nomads who have spread from the Senegal River valley across West Africa. On religious grounds, the Hausa are divided between the Muslim majority associated with the Fulani aristocracy through common belief and those who remain faithful to traditional religions, the Maguzuwa. Finally, there is no Nigerian “tradition” of basing political units on ethnic criteria. As Elizabeth Isichei points out, “in pre-colonial Nigeria there was, on the whole, little relationship between ethnicity and units of government. The Oyo empire [in the south west] included the non-Yoruba Fon of [neighbouring] Dahomey and excluded some Yoruba areas such as Ekiti”.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, after independence in 1960, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and others considered the word “tribe” relatively synonymous with “friend”, at least by comparison to its use in contemporary Nigeria. But this definition turned bitter during the Biafran crisis of 1967-1970, when the eastern Igbo fought to secede from the Federal Republic.

Tribal identification also worked its way back into politics unexpectedly through the backdoor of the “federal character principle”, a constitutionally entrenched tenet

<sup>11</sup> Michèle Maringues, “Nigeria. Guerrilla Journalism”, Reporters Sans Frontières, Paris, 1996, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Nigeria* (London, Lagos, New York, 1983), p. 4.

that was meant to guarantee ethnic and religious inclusiveness. For the sake of ethnic balancing, the federal character principle was based on the concept of “indigenity”, which has since taken on a life of its own. Today, in practice, the distinction made between natives of a given part of the country and other Nigerians often amounts to blatant discrimination.

Ethnicity has left a deep mark on Nigeria’s independent history. The Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the west and the Igbo of the east have been perceived by other groups – and have perceived themselves – as the dominant “ethnic triumvirate”. Their rivalry runs through post-independence history. Politicised tribal feelings have provoked not only a civil war but also fear among many Nigerians that one of the three may come to dominate the whole. More than anything else, ethnicity has fostered a political culture where the struggle for inter-ethnic equity has impeded that for democratic rights – both of the individual and the group.

## A. THE COLONIAL LEGACY

The boundaries of present-day Nigeria contain a prodigious variety of historical political units, social orders, economies and cultures.<sup>13</sup> The northern savannah was dominated by the Sokoto Caliphate, a theocracy established through a holy war by *shehu* Usman dan Fodio (1745-1817) and one of West Africa’s largest states before it was conquered by the British at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> A member of a prestigious Fulani clan, the Toronkawa, Usman forged an alliance between the disgruntled Hausa peasantry and the Fulani aristocracy.<sup>15</sup> Although he took the title of *Amir al Muminin* (“Commander of the Faithful”), he was the jihad’s spiritual leader, while the fighting, between 1804 and 1808, was largely left to his brother, Abdullahi, and his son, Muhammadu Bello. After their victory, the Fulani leadership of Sokoto presided over a multiethnic Muslim empire, incorporating the Hausa states along with various minorities in the Middle Belt. It was flanked to the east by the old Kanuri empire of Borno, also Muslim, but fiercely independent.

The Middle Belt, home to more than half of Nigeria’s 250-plus ethnic groups, stretches like an ample girdle across the hilly central plateau. In pre-colonial days, it

provided a vast reservoir of slaves for the Sokoto Caliphate and was considered by its northern neighbours as *Dar el-Harb* (the “land of unbelief”). It has always been a diverse zone of transition between north and south. The coastal and forest areas west of the Niger River were home to Yoruba and Edo states as well as other groups, while the regions to the east included several small states and societies, of which the Igbo were the largest.

European involvement came with Portuguese contact in the late fifteenth century but it was not until 1861 that Britain established the coastal Colony of Lagos. This was followed in 1900 by the Protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria. Internecine warfare among the local populations facilitated these invasions. The number of Europeans actually fighting was so small that it is “unlikely that more than twenty died in active combat in the whole invasion of Nigeria”.<sup>16</sup> On 1 January 1914, Nigeria was established by “amalgamating” the two British protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria.<sup>17</sup> Two years later, in 1916, the Slavery Ordinance codified the outlaw of slavery and slave trading, a landmark in Nigerian history that signalled a major social transformation.

Despite “amalgamation”, the British continued to administer the northern and southern zones in strikingly different ways, with a lasting impact. In the north, the application of Frederick Lugard’s doctrine of “indirect rule” considerably insulated local political and religious institutions. The British utilised the pre-colonial hierarchies associated with the Sokoto Caliphate and the Borno kingdom. Indirect rule through the emirs favoured the more conservative elements of society, who remained more concerned with their prerogatives than social progress.

Restrictions on the spread of missionary influence further preserved the status quo in the northern Islamic societies. Colonial rule shielded the north from the Christian missionaries and Western education, which were advancing from the south. The British considered the “feudal” system of the north a more advanced and centralised form of political organisation and Islam as a more sophisticated and respectable religion than the polytheistic beliefs of the south. This led them to shore up the hierarchies they found in the north, effectively freezing any real political transformation. Moreover, they encouraged some northerners’ sense of superiority at a time when the once innovative region – for centuries a

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<sup>13</sup> This account draws on Peter M. Lewis, Pearl T. Robinson and Barnett R. Rubin, “Stabilizing Nigeria: Sanctions, Incentives and Support for Civil Society”, Centre for Preventive Action, New York, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> The term “shehu” means a messenger sent by God.

<sup>15</sup> The clan preserved an ancient tradition of Islamic learning and piety near modern-day Sokoto.

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<sup>16</sup> Isichei, op. cit., p. 372.

<sup>17</sup> In 1961, in the wake of a UN supervised plebiscite, a portion of land was added that had previously been the United Nations Trust Territory of Northern Cameroons under British administration.

gateway to trans-Saharan trade routes – had actually become a dependant hinterland of the more dynamic coastal regions.<sup>18</sup>

Given the emphasis on preserving northern traditions, the British allowed the educational gap between north and south to widen considerably. By confining Arabic to the traditional curriculum of the Koranic schools while making English mandatory for job seekers in modern state administration and the dynamic sectors of the economy, Lugard and his successors put the north at tremendous disadvantage. In 1927, in Jos – a Middle Belt town then considered part of the north – all but two pupils in the local government school were southerners or from other colonies. In 1952, there were 23,000 people – half of those southerners – literate in English in Kano Province out of a population of 3.4 million. Throughout the 1950s, secondary schools in the south outnumbered those in the north by twenty to one.<sup>19</sup>

Since the colonial administration did not want to antagonise the political establishment in the north, the emirs were assured there would be no colonial interference with Islam. Indeed, they were given veto power over access of Christian missionaries who wished to evangelise and reside in their areas. Thus, despite the importance of missionary activities in the colonial enterprise elsewhere, Christianity had little influence on the administrative structure of the colonial state in the north. In the south, drawing on the concepts of “Western education” and “enlightenment”, colonial authority and missionary organisations – notably the Church Missionary Society (CMS) that had penetrated into the south west as early as the middle of the nineteenth century – supported one another.

Colonial rule created the conditions for the political ascendancy of Western-style educated Christians in the south but kept a Muslim theocratic elite in power in the north. Barewa College, also known as Katsina College, served as the incubator of the future national leadership that was handpicked in the north. In the south, from the inter-war period onwards, Western education stimulated nationalist aspirations. In the early 1920s, in order to compete for the three out of 46 seats in the Legislative Council that were opened to a limited franchise in Lagos, Herbert Macaulay, the “father of Nigerian nationalism”, founded the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP),

the first political party in the country. At the time, the population was less than 20 million.

A third long-term consequence of colonial rule was the invention of a politically unified, though not ethnically homogenous, north that had never existed before. British colonialism benefited the emirs and effectively handed them control of areas in the Middle Belt they had been unable to conquer. At the same time, in the cities of the northern emirates, colonial rule fanned ethnic prejudice by housing southern immigrants in segregated living areas commonly known as *sabon gari* (strangers’ quarters).

In short, the colonial system of indirect rule consolidated the power base of the northern emirates that had emerged as a consequence of the Fulani jihad of the early nineteenth century. The collaboration between the British authorities and the Fulani Islamic aristocracy laid the foundation for the political significance of Islam in independent Nigeria. As author Olufemi Vaughan noted, “...British administrators transformed the fluid structures of local governance in the nineteenth century into rigid institutions of native authority under colonial rule in the twentieth century”, and established the framework under which the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy would legitimise its domination “in the ethno-regional political framework that unfolded during the transitional phase of decolonisation”.<sup>20</sup>

In 1939, British authorities carved out three regions with different ethnic compositions and economic patterns, superseding the north-south divide with a new tripartite administrative structure.<sup>21</sup> Each region had a dominant ethnic group: the Hausa-Fulani in the Northern Region; the Yoruba in the Western Region; and the Igbo in the Eastern Region. Together, these major ethno-linguistic clusters comprised almost two-thirds of Nigeria’s people. Their cultural and linguistic differences were paralleled economically: cotton and groundnuts were the dominant cash crop in the north; cocoa in the west; and palm oil in the east. In the 1950s, agriculture contributed as much as 64.4 per cent to GDP.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in the run-up to independence, three major parties consolidated their regional bases, with their leaders attaining national prominence through local power.

□ In the north, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello led the government thanks to his control of the Northern

<sup>18</sup> Marc-Antoine de Montclos, *Le Nigeria* (Paris, 1994), pp. 58-65.

<sup>19</sup> Isichei, op. cit., p. 441; the educational gap still exists: in 1970 more than 85 per cent of children in Lagos went to primary school compared to only 44 percent in Kano State; in the early 1990s two southern states alone produced more first-year university students than all nineteen northern states together.

<sup>20</sup> Olufemi Vaughan, “Religion and State Formation”, in Udogu (ed.), op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>21</sup> This section draws on James S. Soleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, 1958).

<sup>22</sup> Nwafejoku O. Uwadibie, “Oil and Macroeconomic Policies of Ethnic Reconciliation”, in Udogu (ed.), op. cit., p. 76.

People's Congress (NPC), which drew its major support from the Hausa-Fulani.<sup>23</sup> The NPC had emerged in 1951 as a political offshoot of the *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa*, a predominantly Hausa-Fulani elite organisation rooted in emirate ideology.

- Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the Yoruba-based Action Group (AG) ascended to the Western Region premiership. His party, which developed as the political branch of the "Society of the Children of Oduduwa", the mythic ancestor of the Yoruba people was founded in 1948. He launched his newspaper, *The Nigerian Tribune*, in 1949.
- Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, a pioneer of nationalism, founder of *The Pilot* newspaper and leader of the Igbo-dominated National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), became premier of the Eastern Region.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the late colonial period and the initial years of independence, these three parties sought to fend off opposition from regional minorities while contending nationally. By independence in 1960, the regions were governed under virtual single-party rule. Even in the Northern Region, where the conservative NPC faced a spirited challenge from the populist Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) under Aminu Kano, the dominance of the ruling elite remained unshaken. At the federal level, political competition meant rivalry between the three leading regional parties. Political combat most often boiled down to a three-way struggle, although minority interests increased their political leverage over time.

## B. INDEPENDENCE AND DIVISION

A series of moves before independence played a key role in shaping Nigeria. As a result of unprecedented consultations at the village, district, provincial, regional and national levels prior to the 1951 drafting of the MacPherson Constitution, federalism was viewed as the best way to address the strong demand for regional autonomy.<sup>25</sup> In 1954, the Lyttleton Constitution formally established the three-region federal structure and laid out a roadmap for self-rule. The regions were granted autonomy over internal policy and administration, while the central colonial power retained authority over inter-regional policy and external affairs.

Nigeria inherited the Westminster model of parliamentary rule. The 1957 constitutional settlement, which the British negotiated with nationalists, allotted representation in the federal legislature on the basis of regional population. According to a 1952 census, the Northern Region had 53 percent of the population. The hold of the Northern People's Congress there translated into a dominant position in the National Assembly, and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the party's deputy leader, became prime minister in the new national administration. This arrangement was ratified in the 1959 transitional elections, in which the Northern People's Congress maintained a commanding position. The British governor invited Tafawa Balewa to form the government, and with control of the federal executive and a secure regional base, the leading northern party was in a uniquely advantageous position. The northern elite had a grip on the political centre that it could preserve through selective alliances with and exclusion of rival southern parties.

On 1 October 1960, Nigeria – a country of 40 million people – became an independent state. It had been previously agreed that it would have an institutional framework built around federalism. Under the Independence Constitution, and the subsequent Republican Constitution adopted in 1963, the regions enjoyed even greater powers, including concurrent authority with the central government over higher education, industrial development, the judiciary and – in hindsight most importantly – the police.

In 1960, the north set the political tone for the independence era. In an often-quoted comment, Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa declared that the British were known "first as masters and then as leaders and finally as partners, but always as friends". This sparked considerable resentment among southern nationalists. After the proclamation of a constitutional republic in 1963, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, the leading political figure from the Eastern Region, was named president as a move toward greater ethnic balance. However, this did little to alter the competitive dynamics of the system or diminish fears that the dominant position of the northern Hausa-Fulani elite in the federal government would result in the political exclusion of other major groups.

These concerns fostered an environment in which politicians engaged in extensive gerrymandering, electoral fraud and violence as ethnically-based parties attempted to preserve their regional control and challenge northern dominance at the federal level. More than ever, these regionally-based parties sought exclusive control by coopting regional assemblies and the growing number of parastatals. Parties intimidated, roughed up and sometimes eliminated opponents.

<sup>23</sup> Alhaji Ahmadu Bello held the traditional title of Sardauna of Sokoto.

<sup>24</sup> The NCNC was later renamed the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens.

<sup>25</sup> Named after the Governor General at the time.

Their zero-sum political struggle quickly eroded the government's legitimacy and stability.

Author Daniel Bach commented on Nigeria's fragile unity: "Besides the exclusively federal areas of jurisdiction, such as defence and external affairs, considerable legislative and residual powers had been entrusted to the regions. Nigeria's weak centre was accompanied by the Northern Region's institutionally embedded dominance of federal assemblies and the superior power exerted by all three geo-ethnic clusters within their own regions".<sup>26</sup> However, the "federal trinity" bequeathed by the British was challenged as early as 1963, when the north and east formed a national alliance. The subsequent creation of a fourth region, "Midwestern", allowed ethnic minorities in the south west to be accommodated but diluted Yoruba dominance in the area.

The 1964 federal elections ratcheted up political pressures. The pact between the northern and eastern regions fell apart. Instead, the eastern National Council of Nigeria party, headed by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, sided with the western and Yoruba-based Action Group, led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and the populist Northern Elements Progressive Union in a coalition dubbed the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). This was opposed by the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), which aligned the northern, conservative Northern People's Congress and a dissident faction of the Action Group, Chief Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party. Campaign violence provoked an electoral boycott by disgruntled southern opposition parties. In the end, the Northern People's Congress claimed a landslide victory in the Northern Region, giving it a free hand in forming a new federal government. Tense negotiations between Prime Minister Balewa and President Azikiwe produced a dangerous compromise, with the Northern People's Congress coalition taking office while rescheduling elections in the regions affected by the boycott.

In October 1965, with support from the federal government, Chief Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party – a Northern People's Congress ally, won the Western Region elections through blatant vote rigging and suppression of the opposition. In the aftermath, the situation degenerated into near anarchy, with the Action Group factions engaging each other in "Operation Wetie", during which political opponents were murdered by dousing them with fuel and setting them alight. The federal government called on the military to impose order but in January 1966, its evident impotence prompted a coup. Nigeria's first attempt at

democracy collapsed, a victim of political opportunism, ethnic demagoguery and military intrusion.

The consequences of the failed democratic experiment were far-reaching, and the coup established a precedent for the military's political involvement. The army (perhaps more than elsewhere in Africa) was regarded as the sole force capable of cutting the Gordian Knot of ethnic rivalry, centrifugal threats and political malfeasance.<sup>27</sup> Biafra's secession and the ensuing three years of civil war (1967-1970) more deeply entrenched the idea that a national identity could only crystallise around the armed forces. The military presented itself as caretakers of the nation. In a huge country often threatened by its innumerable internal contradictions, the claim gained credibility easily, as it also did abroad. A civil society activist explained:

Since the military take-over in 1966, people in this country don't have a serious say in the way they are ruled. The military not only confiscated power for a long time but also, for good, the leadership selection. Even when they do not rule themselves, they decide who's at the helm of the Nation.<sup>28</sup>

## C. MILITARY POWER AND CIVIL WAR

The January 1966 coup d'état was bloody. Those killed included: the Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, several officers from the high command, the prime minister of the Northern Region, Tafawa Balewa; and, the western premier, Chief Akintola. The conspirators were primarily Igbo. The six majors and a captain who carried out the coup were led by a popular officer, Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu, who personally commanded the unit that murdered Ahmadu Bello and his wife in their bedroom. What was left of the federal cabinet quickly relinquished power to the highest-ranking surviving military officer, General John Aguiyi Ironsi, also an Igbo. Displaying surprising leniency toward the coup leaders – the "January Boys" – the new military head of state imprisoned them but spared their lives. He severely castigated civilian rulers for corruption, fraud and arrogance, while declaring his intention to return power to an elected government "in due time".

### 1. The lurch into war

The circumstances of the coup and the composition of the junta intensified ethnic enmities, particularly when the

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<sup>26</sup> Bach, "Inching Towards a Country without a State", op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> Robin Luckham, *The Nigerian Military: A Sociological Analysis of Authority and Revolt* (Cambridge, 1971).

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 2 June 2006.

military government declared Nigeria a unitary state, a move many perceived as an attempt by the Igbo to entrench their position.

In July 1966, a counter coup was staged by northern and Middle-Belt elements in the armed forces. General Ironsi and twelve other top office holders were assassinated. Igbo were purged from the government and military. This action, "Operation Araba", brought into power the highest-ranking northern officer, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, the army chief of staff. A Hausa-speaking Christian from the Middle Belt, he was then only 31. He granted the military unlimited capacity for structural reform<sup>29</sup> and immediately reinstated the federal system. In May 1967, in a radical reconfiguration, however, his government subdivided the four regions into twelve new states – six each in north and south. This corrected a flagrant imbalance in favour of the north that had been a major cause for political instability. However, it also opened the gates for proliferating state structures and the military's divide and rule approach to controlling these structures.

The federal military government soon was responding to mounting civil strife and secessionist rumblings as the second coup within six months aggravated resentments among ethnic communities. Pogroms against Igbo enclaves in the north in the wake of the first coup and a new spate of violence prompted a mass exodus of Igbo civilians and military personnel to their regional homeland. Three days after General Gowon's announcement of the creation of twelve states, Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu led Igbo officers and political leaders in declaring the secession of the Republic of Biafra<sup>30</sup>. Thus began a bitter civil war in which between one and two million lives were lost to war and famine.<sup>31</sup>

After a lull of a month, combat started on 6 July 1967, pitting large sections of the Igbo community against the federal government in a conflict that drew northern and western groups together against the eastern secessionists. Lasting antipathy between the Igbo and Yoruba communities was a direct result of the split among southerners during the fratricidal struggle. However, the promise of a measure of self-rule offered to the Middle Belt and the Niger Delta rekindled their commitment to the federal cause. In the former Eastern Region, this undermined the support the Biafrans might otherwise have secured from non-Igbos. By granting the delta

minorities two new states – Rivers and South East – the central government rendered the Biafran cause largely meaningless in the eyes of the Ijaw, Itsekiri, Etches, Ibibios, Ikwerres, Urhobo and Ogoni.<sup>32</sup> On the federal side, the creation of new states was equally decisive since many soldiers originated from the Middle Belt, an area where Christianity and traditional religions went along with resistance to the northern emirate system and Islam.

On 15 January 1970, after Colonel Obasanjo's federal Third Marine Division captured their radio station, the Biafrans surrendered unconditionally. The secessionist leader, Colonel Ojukwu, fled to Côte d'Ivoire. In a "spirit of magnanimity", General Gowon announced national reconciliation – "no victor, no vanquished" – and granted a general amnesty. However, "in retrospect, implementation of the reconciliation policy ran into a roadblock from the word go".<sup>33</sup> While there is little doubt the Igbo have been ostracised ever since their attempt to leave the federation, Gowon's policy helped avoid what many anticipated would be a bloodbath of reprisal killings.

The Biafran crisis left a traumatic legacy. The threat of state breakdown is a prominent concern of Nigeria's leaders and people to this day. Factional violence, especially when fanned by ethnic resentment, still inspires foreboding of a national collapse. Signs of division within civilian and military elites prompt similar anxieties.

## 2. Enter oil, exit two generals

The end of the civil war coincided with the steep rise of oil wealth. In 1970, oil revenue was a mere \$250 million but it soon assumed strategic budgetary importance. After the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) embargo and price hikes following the Middle Eastern Yom Kippur war in 1973, revenues sprang from \$2.1 billion in 1972 to \$11.2 billion by 1974, a major windfall for an underdeveloped country.<sup>34</sup> Almost overnight the country was flooded with petrodollars, and financial constraints vanished.

<sup>29</sup> Constitution Decree N°1.

<sup>30</sup> For an informed biography of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu and an account of the Civil War from a Biafran perspective, see Frederick Forsyth, *Emeka* (Ibadan, 1982).

<sup>31</sup> John De St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London, 1972).

<sup>32</sup> Future militant and martyr of the Ogoni cause, Ken Saro Wiwa, took refuge on the federal side, where he was appointed civilian administrator of the crucial oil port of Bonny on the Niger River Delta. In 1990, he published his account of the civil war in a book, *On a Darling Plain*, which angered many Igbo for its portrayal of them not as victims but as perpetrators of oppression against the eastern minorities.

<sup>33</sup> Philip C. Aka, "The Need for an Effective Policy of Ethnic Reconciliation", in Udogu (ed.), op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> These are nominal figures. In real terms, they would be much higher. U.S. Energy Information Administration data.

The 1975 development plan targeted “the income bracket of developed countries in two decades”.<sup>35</sup>

Much more immediately, rocketing oil prices provoked rampant corruption, which soon exhausted General Gowon’s political capital. His military governors ran the twelve states like private fiefdoms, and the federal government was rife with misconduct. The latter further lost its way after the 1974 postponement of the return to civilian rule. In his independence anniversary broadcast on 1 October, Gowon announced that 1976 was “no longer realistic”. A subsequent cement scandal – the massive importation of subsidised cement by senior military officers in order to skim public funds – affronted public opinion. At the apex of the fifteen-month crisis, a “cement armada” of nearly 200 ships choked Lagos port. To end the logjam, 50 large cranes were imported from the UK “but, as no one knew how to operate them, they were left rusting on the docks”, remembers a close Gowon associate.<sup>36</sup>

Constitutional reforms, more new states and changes in the governorships were promised but in July 1975, General Gowon was overthrown in a bloodless coup while abroad. Brigadier (later General) Murtala Ramat Mohammed, a Muslim from Kano and a key figure in the July 1966 revolt, became the new head of state. His no-nonsense reputation changed the atmosphere quickly:

On the morning after Murtala Muhammed seized power in July 1975 public servants in Lagos were found “on seat” at seven-thirty in the morning. Even the “go-slow” traffic [jams] that had defeated every solution and defied every regime vanished overnight from the streets! Why? The new ruler’s reputation for ruthlessness was sufficient to transform in the course of only one night the style and habit of Nigeria’s unruly capital. That the character of one man could establish that quantum change in a people’s social behaviour was nothing less than miraculous. But it shows that social miracles *can* happen.<sup>37</sup>

Many Nigerians were impressed by a man they viewed as a military redeemer. Some even hailed a “soldier messiah”, a vision that has haunted the political horizon since. In the heady days of un hoped-for petroleum wealth, Murtala’s combination of charisma, populist reform, economic nationalism and principled diplomacy galvanised the nation. He vowed a prompt return to civilian

government and elaborated a four-year transition agenda. He ousted Gowon’s military governors and launched a sweeping purge of the civil service: 10,000 allegedly incompetent or corrupt public servants were dismissed or retired. The number of states was increased from twelve to nineteen. He decided to establish a new federal capital in Abuja to avoid the chronic congestion of Lagos. The government also pushed ahead with an increasingly ambitious program of public spending and state-led industrialisation. Nigeria adopted an uncompromising stance against “neo-colonial interference in Africa” and, above all, against the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Yet, the experience was short-lived. On 13 February 1976, after 201 days in power, Murtala was assassinated during an abortive coup, shot in his car on his way to work, by officers from the Middle Belt led by Colonel Bukar Dimka.<sup>38</sup> Each year on the anniversary, the “saint in uniform” is remembered with quasi-religious fervour. Murtala was succeeded by his chief of staff, Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba who promised to maintain his policies. Dimka and more than 30 other coup plotters were executed. The new head of state, supported by his chief of staff from the north, Shehu Musa Yar’Adua, carried on with structural reform and a high-profile foreign policy. He expanded the economic public sector and implemented the announced changes in the federal system. The creation of seven new states further divided the major ethno-regional blocs and provided greater representation for minority groups. Alterations in the federal revenue allocation formula established new rules for apportioning central resources.

In 1978, the Obasanjo administration issued the Land Use Decree, whereby all subsoil minerals, including oil, were deemed as belonging to all the people of Nigeria, not just those from the area of origin. The decree aimed at unifying diverse customary tenure systems to make land more readily available for public purposes, though at the risk of depriving communities of their ancestral ownership, notably in the oil-rich Niger Delta.<sup>39</sup> The new administration also reaffirmed the commitment to move the capital to Abuja, an ethnically neutral, central location. But, above all, General Obasanjo engineered Nigeria’s first voluntary transfer, in 1979, from military rule to a constitutional civilian order.

<sup>35</sup> Shaxson, op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>36</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 31 May 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (London, 1983), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> The bullet-riddled black Mercedes in which the 38-year old military ruler died is exhibited in the National Museum in Lagos.

<sup>39</sup> The Land Use Decree was later incorporated into the 1999 constitution. A subsequent Crisis Group report on federalism and the constitution will discuss this issue in more detail.

The decade after the civil war was thus marked by authoritarian rule, momentous economic transformation and important alterations in the federal system. Military leaders eventually ceded power to a new democratic government, although the transition was fitful. Efforts at achieving political reform unfolded against a backdrop of fundamental social and economic change, as the unprecedented petroleum boom dramatically altered government finances and drastically enlarged the domestic market. These developments had profound effects on inequality, social divisions, and the relationship of citizens to government.

### III. POLITICAL SOLDIERS: 1978-1998

#### A. THE SECOND DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT

When political party activity resumed in September 1978, with the country still under military rule, dozens of groups came forward for certification by the Federal Electoral Commission. They were quickly pared down to five parties that met the exacting criteria and were permitted to contest the 1979 elections. The new parties operated in a fundamentally changed framework. The 1979 constitution replaced the Westminster-inspired parliamentary system with an American-style presidential system, providing for an executive presidency, a bicameral legislature, an independent judiciary and an expanded federal structure with nineteen states. Rules governing parties and elections were intended to discourage ethnic or regional bias. Parties were required to demonstrate a “federal character” through balanced representation from all areas.<sup>40</sup> A formula to guarantee broad appeal required winning national candidates to garner at least 25 per cent of the vote in two-thirds of the states.

In spite of the new provisions, the leading parties and coalitions reflected many of the personal, ethnic and ideological allegiances of the earlier democratic period. The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), headed by Chief Awolowo, mirrored the Action Group with its electoral base in the Yoruba states of the south west. Awolowo advocated ethno-linguistic foundations for national government institutions. His long-time rival, Dr Azikiwe, led the Nigerians People’s Party (NPP), which drew upon substantial Igbo support in the eastern states.<sup>41</sup> Alhaji Aminu Kano presided over the People’s Redemption Party (PRP), which appealed to the northern populist constituency. The most important northern-based party was the National Party of Nigeria, a centrist formation supported by business elites and the Fulani aristocracy.

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<sup>40</sup> The “federal character principle”, first formulated in 1975 by General Murtala in an address to the committee charged with drafting a new constitution, has been applied not only for elections but also for appointments, employment, the composition of the officer corps and other ranks in the armed forces, recruitment and allocations in the public sector. It is loosely defined as the need to ensure that “there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in the Government [of the federation] or in any of its agencies”, according to Chapter II, § 14 (3) of the 1999 constitution that provides for a Federal Character Commission (FCC) charged with enforcing compliance at all levels of government.

<sup>41</sup> Azikiwe portrayed himself, however, as a pan-Nigerian nationalist.

Shehu Shagari headed the National Party of Nigeria, a breakaway from which and the only newcomer, the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) under Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, was strong in the north-eastern states.

Competition soon revived familiar disputes involving northern domination, ubiquitous acrimony and zero-sum politics. The northern National Party of Nigeria emerged as the leading competitor on the basis of organisational reach and electoral appeal. Despite southern accusations of regional bias, it became the first party in Nigeria to acquire a national profile. In 1979, Shehu Shagari was elected president, and the party captured the most seats in the National Assembly and control of seven state governments. Yet, the return to civilian rule began in controversy, because the presidential election yielded a marginal victory for the National Party of Nigeria, prompting a challenge by adversaries who claimed it had fallen short of the required nationwide voting distribution. The case, though speedily resolved by the Supreme Court, tarnished the legitimacy of the new democracy.

The return to civilian rule brought a return of Byzantine political manoeuvring. The National Party of Nigeria and the eastern-based Nigerians People's Party initially formed an alliance, which was opposed by a coalition of governors from the Unity Party of Nigeria, based in the south west, the northern-populist People's Redemption Party and the north-eastern Great Nigerian People's Party. But the Nigerians People's Party soon fell out with the National Party of Nigeria, and several of its members joined the opposition.

To some degree, these re-alignments reflected ideological distinctions between progressives and conservatives, as well as multiethnic resistance to what was perceived as dominance by the northern establishment. But they had as much to do with local rivalries and individual posturing as with doctrinal or ethnic concerns. In any case, competition quickly violated the basic ground rules of democracy and precipitated open conflict. Beyond procedural manoeuvres against rivals, widespread and opportunistic party defections, electoral fraud and violence were widespread. Parties inflated voter rolls, falsified ballots, bribed voters, tampered with counting procedures and hijacked ballots. Party youth wings and other armed groups intimidated voters and poll watchers and attacked candidates and activists. Hundreds of deaths were attributed to political violence during the second period of civilian rule.<sup>42</sup>

Rampant corruption also undermined democracy. The period of civilian rule straddled the peak years of the

petroleum boom after the Iranian revolution of 1979, and the copious revenues fuelled massive venality within the political elite.<sup>43</sup> The claims on public resources multiplied as thousands of politicians and their clients sought contracts and favours or merely siphoned public funds to private accounts.<sup>44</sup> A lively but increasingly partisan press denounced scandals that involved hundreds of millions of dollars. The audacity of such misconduct was displayed in a series of fires in public buildings intended to destroy evidence of illegal activities.<sup>45</sup> Public resentment over the brazen greed of officeholders deepened as the economy slumped. In the early 1980s, oil revenues plummeted as breathtakingly as they had risen, while widening social disparities provoked strife. The 1983 campaign was marred by violence and frantic disbursement of public largesse to influential interests that exacerbated public disaffection.<sup>46</sup>

The National Party of Nigeria swept the elections, capturing the presidency, an absolute majority in both the House and the Senate, and thirteen of nineteen state governorships. The magnitude of the victory was implausible in view of the inflated voters' register, the party's success in opposition strongholds and abundant evidence of fraud. Sporadic violence erupted in the south-western states. The Shagari administration barely had time to embark on a new term before a bloodless coup in December 1983 installed Major General Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the emirate state of Katsina, as head of state.

## 1. The return to military rule

The return of military rule was initially welcomed. Many Nigerians saw it less as a coup d'état than the coup de grace for the previous administration. If the 1966 putsch had set a precedent for the army's role in politics, the Buhari coup set the stage for a series of civil-military cycles. As the near future was to demonstrate, these cycles were more often than not military-military ones, with ruling generals being replaced by other men in uniform before they could actually restore civilian rule, as they invariably promised in their first address to the nation.

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<sup>43</sup> Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge, 1987).

<sup>44</sup> The numbers of the political elite grew especially as the result of the multiplication of states and local jurisdictions.

<sup>45</sup> In 1981, the tallest building in Lagos, the headquarters of the national telecommunications company, was gutted by such a blaze.

<sup>46</sup> de Montclos, op. cit., p. 114.

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<sup>42</sup> Lewis, Robinson and Rubin, op. cit., p. 40.

General Buhari and his close associate, Major General Tunde Idiagbon, embarked on a “War against Indiscipline” to curtail political corruption and impose accountability.<sup>47</sup> Dozens of politicians were investigated and arrested, and prominent officeholders received lengthy prison terms for financial misconduct. But the initial enthusiasm that greeted the regime soon waned as repression and economic drift took their toll. Internal security agencies operated unchecked, the media was treated with a heavy hand, and reticence about the possibility of another civilian transition all contributed to public malaise. There was much relief when, on 27 August 1985, the regime fell to yet another coup.

The new president – the first military ruler to assume this title – was a 44-year-old Muslim from Niger State, in the Middle Belt: Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (“IBB”). During his first years, Babangida seduced many by his openness and firm commitment to reform. He seemed the “ultimate soldier-politician”.<sup>48</sup> It was only much later, once the enquiry into the October 1986 assassination of *Newswatch* magazine editor Dele Giwa had progressed, that his first years in power were sullied.<sup>49</sup>

Babangida, the perfect “militician”, in Nigerian parlance, released political prisoners and restored freedom of the press; he implemented a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) with the support of the World Bank and the IMF and established an advisory committee that recommended a five-year plan for transition back to civilian rule. After accepting its report in 1987, Babangida asserted that it would be necessary to extend the 1990 deadline by two years in order to conduct an effective transfer.

The government’s program provided for constitutional change, party registration, a national census and local and national elections. A new constituent assembly revised the constitution in 1988 and 1989 while adhering to limits set by the military government.<sup>50</sup> A bicameral legislature was retained but with a legally mandated two-

party structure, a stronger role for local governments and a formally independent electoral commission. In early 1989, the military government lifted the ban on political activities and created two official parties to channel politics during the transition: the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the centre-right National Republican Convention (NRC).

A coup attempt, a windfall in oil revenue and his own autocratic tendencies derailed Babangida’s transition agenda.<sup>51</sup> In April 1990, young officers, led by Major Gideon Orkar, announced the end to northern domination as they claimed to act “for the marginalised, oppressed and enslaved people of the Middle Belt and the South”, notably the minorities from Delta State from where most of the plotters hailed. They were subdued within hours, and in the following months Babangida pursued a bloody purge of the military. But their action threatened a dangerous rift within the army, if not the nation. A shaken Babangida hurriedly relocated the seat of power to Abuja in December 1990. A fresh petroleum windfall from the first Gulf War contributed to a marked change in the pace of the promised return to civilian rule,<sup>52</sup> providing new resources for economic fixes, political patronage and corruption. In the wake of the mini-boom, many economic reforms slackened. Debt service remained delinquent, undermining the government’s international credibility.

In August 1991, Babangida announced a surprise creation of nine new states and dozens of local governments. The ensuing confusion created a rationale for a second postponement of the transition, from October 1992 to January 1993. Fraud and violence intensified as the electoral schedule went forward. Presidential primaries in August and September 1992 degenerated into wrangling and legal challenges, whereupon Babangida voided the results and banned all candidates from further contesting the vote. For the third time, he moved back the democratisation deadline, scheduling a new nomination process to culminate with presidential elections on 12 June 1993. The final transition date was designated as 27 August, the eighth anniversary of his coup. But the repeated deferrals fuelled suspicion he would perpetuate his rule. In an effort to assuage concerns, Babangida named a civilian transitional council in January 1993 to assume routine governmental responsibilities until August. The caretaker

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<sup>47</sup> “The evils of Nigeria have been identified. The War against Indiscipline has been declared. The banner is ‘Leadership by example’”, read a widely circulated government booklet entitled “National Consciousness and Mobilisation Crusade”.

<sup>48</sup> Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (London, New York 2000), p. 44.

<sup>49</sup> Maringues, op. cit. The Jamaican sociologist Patrick Wilmot, teaching at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria, was kidnapped by security police in 1988 and expelled for making comments critical of the government. In 2005, he published a brilliant satirical novel on the Babangida era *Seeing Double* (London, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Notably, the presidential character of the new government and the restriction on the number of authorised parties.

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<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group interview, retired general, Abuja, 4 June 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Peter M. Lewis, “Endgame in Nigeria? The Politics of a Failed Democratic Transition Seeks to Bring Democracy Nearer”, *Africa Watch*, 21 April 1992, pp. 3-4. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, revenues went from \$9.9 billion in 1989 to \$13.6 billion in 1990 (both nominal figures).

administration was headed by Ernest Shonekan, a politically inexperienced Yoruba businessman known for strong pro-British views.

## 2. Transition

The presidential election of 12 June 1993 was the last step in the transition schedule prior to the handover. The candidates selected by the parties in March were consummate insiders with close connections to military and business leaders. Alhaji Bashir Tofa, the National Republican Convention candidate, was a Muslim business magnate from the Hausa heartland of Kano. Moshood K. O. Abiola, the Social Democratic Party nominee, was a Yoruba Muslim based in Lagos. An immensely rich media baron, Abiola enjoyed national prestige and extensive personal contacts. He strived to bolster his appeal by selecting Babagana Kingibe, a northern Muslim and former Social Democratic Party chairman, as his running mate. In 1982, Abiola had already sought the northern National Party of Nigeria's presidential nomination, which was then supposed to be given to a Yoruba candidate.<sup>53</sup> Bashir Tofa, by contrast, was little-known even in his own constituency.

The campaign was brief and notably restrained, dampening interest in the transition. Only 35 per cent of the electorate voted. Administrative and logistical problems were considerable but there was little evidence of organised fraud or vote rigging and virtually no violence. The election was not formally overseen by foreign observers but the independent press and thousands of party monitors generally ratified it. It was an encouraging change from the difficult electoral past, and public expectations ran high. The National Electoral Commission quickly tabulated returns, and results leaked to the media indicated a solid 58 per cent for Chief Abiola.<sup>54</sup> In addition to his support in the Yoruba heartland, he carried important northern, Middle Belt and south-eastern states. He was said to have won nineteen states to Bashir Tofa's eleven. This appeared to signal a shift from past sectional voting patterns toward a stronger national political orientation.

The hopes for a legitimate transition, however, were soon dashed. The Association for a Better Nigeria, which campaigned for a continuation of Babangida's administration, obtained a court injunction against the release of the results. This sparked a judicial battle with no clear decision. Eleven days after the poll, the government stepped in, annulling the election and suspending the electoral commission. Babangida

justified this on the grounds that administrative and legal problems had irreparably tainted the process. His professed concerns for the rule of law rang hollow. The U.S. and UK censured the regime and called for a rapid return to democracy. Along with the EU and Canada, they suspended most non-humanitarian aid. Chief Abiola spent several weeks in Washington and London seeking support but, despite expressions of sympathy, received no commitments. Nigeria's other leading trade partners, including France, Germany and Japan, were reserved. African governments and regional organisations were generally silent.

In Nigeria, and most acutely in the south west, the invalidation of the 12 June results tapped a reservoir of discontent. The perception of disfranchisement by a northern Muslim establishment incited deep resentment in Abiola's home region. Many Yorubas believed ethnic exclusion was the real motive for the annulment. Rioting erupted in Lagos and other south-western cities, and the police responded with force, killing at least 100. Recalling the strife that foreshadowed the civil war, many southern ethnic groups fled back to their home regions. In late August 1993, responding to public indignation, and the urgings of some fellow officers, Babangida finally vacated office, after retiring the entire military high command, except for Sani Abacha, whom he named defence minister, and turned authority over to a civilian interim government led by Chief Shonekan.

That appointment was widely regarded as ceremonial since Abacha, an Babangida confidant and ex-chief of staff, was positioned to safeguard the army's vital interests. In fact, Abacha, an ethnic Kanuri whose parents had moved to Kano, forced Shonekan's resignation in 82 days, on 17 November 1993. He dissolved the parties and intensified repression of dissent while offering assorted inducements for cooperation. Civilians were incorporated into the cabinet, and Babagana Kingibe, Abiola's former running mate, surfaced as foreign minister.

## 3. The Abacha era

With the end of the Cold War, a wind of change was blowing across Africa, and Nigeria's traditionally vibrant civil society – especially in the south – took up the gauntlet to protest military dictatorship. The press also joined in. As author Kaye Whitman maintained, "this was probably the finest hour of the Nigerian journalist in all the history of the profession in the country".<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> When Shehu Shagari decided to run again, Abiola abruptly quit the party.

<sup>54</sup> Newswatch, 28 June 1993, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Kaye Whitman, "The Switchback and the Fallback. Perspectives of Nigeria-UK Relations 1960-2006", draft made available to Crisis Group.

Pressure for democratisation regained momentum in the weeks before the first anniversary of the 12 June election.

In May 1994, a new umbrella organisation, the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), came to the fore, a multiethnic alliance of former politicians, notables and retired military officers dedicated to restoring Chief Abiola's rightful place in office. Shortly before the election anniversary, Abiola declared himself the legitimate president. The police issued an arrest warrant but he eluded capture. Although 12 June passed quietly, Abiola was arrested ten days later when he addressed a public rally and was charged with treason, a capital offence. That intensified the confrontation between government and opposition. On 4 July the oil worker's union struck, demanding Abiola's release and recognition of his mandate. For nine weeks, labour action, protests and scattered riots in several south-western cities amounted to the most forceful resistance to military rule in Nigerian history. At the peak of the strike, oil exports were reduced by one third, although revenue losses were diminished by the increase in world prices.

In mid-August 1994, Abacha moved to end the stand-off by dismissing and arresting union executives. Three independent media companies were closed, and "unknown assailants" attacked the homes of democracy activists. More than 120 street protesters were killed as security forces quelled disturbances in major cities.<sup>56</sup>

Seven months later, in March 1995, the military government announced it had thwarted a coup plot. As many as 400 officers and civilians were arrested or detained, among them retired generals Obasanjo, the former head of state, and Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, his former chief of staff and a recent presidential aspirant. Prominent journalists were also arrested, along with Beko Ransome-Kuti, chairman of the Campaign for Democracy and a brother of world-famous Afro-beat musician Fela Kuti.<sup>57</sup> The authenticity of the conspiracy was doubtful<sup>58</sup> But the regime conducted in camera trials for more than 40 of the alleged plotters, which resulted in severe rulings, including a death sentence for Yar'Adua and life imprisonment for Obasanjo. The dearth of clear evidence and lack of due process elicited protests from the U.S., UK and some of Nigeria's other key trading partners. Abacha responded to international calls for leniency by reducing sentences for several of the alleged plotters. Capital punishment

for Yar'Adua was mitigated to life imprisonment, while Obasanjo received fifteen years.

On 10 November 1995, however, the military regime executed Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists from the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Saro-Wiwa, a prominent journalist and popular playwright, was from the Ogoni community – a group of about 500,000 people – in the south east. Ogoniland is in the heart of the oil-rich Niger Delta, Africa's largest wetland region. Since proclaiming an "Ogoni Bill of Rights" in 1990, MOSOP had promoted an increasingly militant campaign against the government and Royal Dutch-Shell, the oil company, to protest environmental degradation and economic neglect of the area. In October 1992, a documentary on the unfolding crisis in the delta, "The Heat of the Moment", had been aired on British television's Channel 4, putting the Ogoni issue on the international map. The government responded with a heavy police and military occupation of Ogoniland. The movement itself split into moderate and radical factions.

In 1994 Saro-Wiwa and 27 compatriots were arrested in connection with riots in which four pro-government Ogoni chiefs died.<sup>59</sup> The hanging of the "Ogoni Nine", a week after a flawed trial and virtually without judicial review, provoked a wave of international denunciation, even more so as the executions occurred during the annual Commonwealth summit (for the first time in the presence of Nelson Mandela). The organisation suspended Nigeria, and even South Africa, traditionally reluctant to criticise African states, expressed public disapproval. Nigeria was becoming a pariah in the world community.

Abacha's government was Nigeria's most repressive rule to date. The combination of personalised power, obscene corruption and raw authoritarianism was without precedent even by comparison with the already sad record of governance.<sup>60</sup> It was the country's darkest hour since independence.

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<sup>59</sup> "The Price of Oil. Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities", Human Rights Watch, Washington DC, 1999.

<sup>60</sup> The Abacha regime did not surpass its predecessors by much in corruption. According to *The Washington Post*, 10 June 1998, the Okigbo commission of inquiry – appointed by General Abacha – estimated that \$12.2 billion in oil earnings had disappeared between 1990 and 1994. General Babangida has not been asked to account for the loss of such a large amount of money. Kunle Amuwo from the department of political science of the University of Ibadan wrote in 1995: "The General [Babangida] ran the oil industry like a personal fief, granting oil-lifting rights in flagrant violation of stipulated

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<sup>56</sup> Lewis, Robinson and Rubin, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>57</sup> Maringues, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> Howard French, "In Nigeria, a Strongman Tightens the Vice", *The New York Times*, 31 March 1995, p. A3.

#### IV. THE RETURN TO DEMOCRACY: 1999-2006

On 8 June 1998, General Abacha died, apparently from a heart attack, after several months of manoeuvring to succeed himself in the planned transition to civilian government on 1 October 1998. The highest ranking officer within the armed forces, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, was sworn in as head of state. He released most political prisoners, including General Obasanjo and the civil rights activist Beko Ransome-Kuti. As he was making preparations to also free Chief Abiola, the latter died of an apparent heart attack on 8 July 1998, a month after Abacha. Before his death, several eminent personalities (including UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan) had urged Abiola in vain by to renounce his 1993 presidential mandate.<sup>61</sup>

The return to democratic rule went ahead as scheduled: elections to the House of Representatives and the Senate were held on 20 February and 7 March 1999 respectively, and a presidential poll on 27 February 1999. On 29 May, General Abubakar handed over power to the elected president, General Olusegun Obasanjo. "It was consensus politics at its best among the mostly northern military", analysed a Western ambassador.<sup>62</sup> Throughout the transition, General Abubakar had been counselled by former head of state General Babangida, whose ex-head of military secret services, General Aliyu Muhammed Gusau, subsequently became the national security adviser.<sup>63</sup> Seven years later, on 30 May 2006, Obasanjo dismissed General Aliyu, only two weeks after the legislature thwarted an attempt to rewrite the constitution to allow Obasanjo to stand for a third term. This signalled the end of consensus politics among the military leadership and the beginning of the battle for the presidency in 2007.

The legacy of the past continues to weigh heavily. Military rule has cast a long shadow, and Nigeria is

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procedures. Indeed, oil ministers rose and fell from grace to grass according to their attitude to his personalisation phenomenon", "General Babangida, Civil Society and the Military in Nigeria. Anatomy of a Personal Rulership Project", Working Papers of the Centre d'Etude d'Afrique Noire, N°48, Bordeaux, 1995, p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Wole Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth At Dawn. Memoirs* (Ibadan, 2006), pp. 18-22.

<sup>62</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 1 June 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Crisis group interview, close associate of General Babangida, 4 June 2006. Philip C. Aka, in Udogu (ed.), op. cit., p. 42, writes: "General Obasanjo's nomination and election as president was supported and backed by the same northern establishment of Hausa-Fulani military leaders who cancelled the Abiola election".

still dependent on oil receipts and mired in client networks. "Obasanjo rules with the mentality of an ex-soldier, and he is surrounded by ex-soldiers; this impedes the emergence of a genuinely democratic culture",<sup>64</sup> argued a lawyer and civil society activist. Additionally, new challenges have arisen as inter-communal clashes throughout the country have caused the death of over 14,000 since 1999 and internally displaced over three million.<sup>65</sup>

#### A. CIVILIAN RULE

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the return to democracy in 1999. In the 39 years of independence to that point, 28 had been dominated by military dictatorship. The election of Olusegun Obasanjo, the only military ruler to have returned power to a civilian government, clearly meant a fresh start. In 1999, he was regarded by many, inside and outside the country, as a bridge across several of Nigeria's major fault lines: a retired general and former military ruler who had willingly handed over power to an elected president; a Yoruba who, while proud of his cultural heritage, referred to himself as a "detribalised Nigerian"; and a leader and eminent personality able to repair Nigeria's relations with the international community.

However, in many ways, the return to an open political system has been more enthusiastically embraced internationally than at home. The country remains handicapped by political malpractice, deep economic contradictions, social inequality and a considerable potential for violence due to the politicisation of identity. Unfortunately, seven years of democratic rule have not cured the cancer of corruption. A civil society activist commented: "Corruption is as high as under military rule; some would even say higher".<sup>66</sup>

Nigeria has been a democracy without a credible electoral process capable of expressing the will of the majority. Though the 1999 poll held the promise of ending misrule after Abacha's death and the excesses of military dictatorship, it only attracted a 25 per cent turnout.<sup>67</sup> Electoral observers reported widespread incidents of ballot box stuffing, numerous phantom voting booths and impossibly high claimed turnouts in some districts. An international community pleased

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<sup>64</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 5 June 2006.

<sup>65</sup> "Violence left 3 million bereft in past 7 Years, Nigeria reports", Reuters, 13 March 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 2 June 2006.

<sup>67</sup> "National Assembly and Presidential Elections in Nigeria, 20th and 27th February 1999", Commonwealth Observer Group, London, 1999.

by the end of authoritarian rule unanimously praised the election as a democratic watershed but the flaws were such that former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, despite his friendship with Obasanjo, concluded: "Regrettably, it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election".<sup>68</sup>

### 1. The 2003 election and the second term

Toward the end of his first term, between August and October 2002, Obasanjo faced controversial impeachment proceedings that attested to the fierce competition for power between the federal legislature and the executive branch. People's Democratic Party (PDP) Senator Arthur Nzeribe acknowledged bribing other senators to persuade them to cease those proceedings.<sup>69</sup> His statement prompted neither public indignation nor sanction. On the eve of the April 2003 elections, the outgoing federal assemblies passed a bill to curb the powers of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act Commission (ICPC). Despite expending considerable resources, the ICPC had secured the conviction of only one minor official, the chairman of a local government in Kogi State and was itself accused both of corruption and of allowing itself to be used by the executive against its legislative opponents.

In 2003, Obasanjo defeated retired General Muhammadu Buhari, a former military ruler like himself, by a near two-thirds majority, winning all but ten states (the northern Shari'a states). Summarising his analysis of that year's legislative as well as presidential polls, elections expert Darren Kew asserted that "the problems were so numerous and the gap in credibility so vast that the victors writ large can hardly claim to hold the legitimate mandate of the Nigerian people".<sup>70</sup> He cited presidential returns in Ogun State, the president's home area, where the Independent National Electoral Commission reported he received 99.92 per cent of the vote, though other candidates from the region were standing, notably Gani Fawehinmi, and opinion polls showed him with a favourable rating around 70 per cent. In addition, 1,365,367 votes were cast in

Ogun State for president but only 747,296 for governor the same day. Kew questioned the credibility of the elections "given that the results in a third of the states were rigged and in another third were dubious", while "as many as ten million voters' cards had been fraudulently issued".

However, once again, a semblance of democracy and the absence of violence were enough to earn the elections international approval, although observer missions from the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute and the EU decried the process as deeply flawed. The British foreign secretary declared he was "disturbed" by such reports but his government swiftly lauded Obasanjo's "clear mandate".<sup>71</sup>

Obasanjo's performance is a matter of considerable debate but the sense of disillusionment beyond his core supporters is palpable.<sup>72</sup> However, even harsh critics acknowledge that his record on human rights and civil liberties has been a marked improvement from the military regimes. There is a general absence of political prisoners, and the media and civil society operate in a largely free manner. That said, there have been abuses by the security services, including reprisal killings and the criminalisation of political dissent, notably in the Niger Delta. Furthermore, the culture of impunity for political and economic crimes remains largely unabated.<sup>73</sup> The government has not released the investigative report of its own human rights commission into the 2000-2002 violent incidents that was submitted to the president in May 2002. Equally, the plight of pre-trial detainees – over 70 per cent of the prison population – who have never been presented to a judge remains unaddressed.<sup>74</sup>

Since the return to democracy, Nigeria has also been splashed by waves of communal violence. Between 1999 and 2002, an estimated 8,000 people died mainly as a result of sectarian or inter-religious clashes.<sup>75</sup> At least 6,000 more have since lost their lives in ethnic or religious killings and, with increasing frequency, as a result of the proliferation of non-state armed groups.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Agence France-Presse, Lagos, 10 March 1999. The official tabulation gave Obasanjo 62 per cent of the vote.

<sup>69</sup> Patrick Utomi, "Nigeria as an Economic Powerhouse: Can It Be Achieved?", in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *Crafting the New Nigeria: Confronting the Challenges* (Boulder, 2004), p. 127. Two years earlier, the senator and wealthy businessman reportedly had already advised the ambitious: "If everybody in Nigeria was corrupt, he would be a fool to be an exception to the prevailing rot and malaise". Onome Osifo-Whiskey, "Nzeribe's Brinkmanship", *Tell*, 1 May 2000.

<sup>70</sup> Darren Kew, "The 2003 Elections: Hardly Credible, but Acceptable", in Rotberg (ed.), op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>71</sup> "Nigerian leader slams EU", BBC News Online, 25 April 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2976985.stm>.

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interviews, civil society activists and foreign diplomats, Abuja, 30 May-6 June 2006.

<sup>73</sup> A portion of the funds siphoned off by the late General Abacha and his family were recovered in a negotiated settlement.

<sup>74</sup> Bronwen Manby, "Principal Human Rights Challenges", in Rotberg (ed.), 2004, p. 183.

<sup>75</sup> William Reno, "The Roots of Sectarian Violence, and its Cure", in *ibid.*, p. 219; Bach, op. cit., pp. 61, 77, says over 10,000 killings and 1.7 million internally displaced persons.

<sup>76</sup> Reuters, 13 March 2006.

The National Commission for Refugees has estimated that over the past seven years more than three million people have been displaced due to several hundred separate conflicts. Although it is difficult to group so many apparently isolated incidents within a common theme, the evident rise of violent conflict calls for an explanation. Daniel Bach suggests the emergence of a new type of political entrepreneur who asserts dominance through his capacity to control illicit forms of violence.<sup>77</sup> He also notes the rising phenomenon of political and/or criminal godfathers. This new violence – like ethnic or religious violence – is linked to the failure of the state, the collapse of the judicial system, endemic poverty and corruption, as well as the manipulation of a grassroots frustration with the unresponsiveness of the ruling political elite.

In recent years, the Niger Delta has become the main battleground for non-state armed groups. Since execution of the “Ogoni Nine” in 1995, frequent outbreaks of violence there have tended to create a permanent state of unrest, and political demands have become increasingly difficult to disentangle from the general insecurity and intra-communal violence as well as the emergence of organised crime, especially in relation to illegal oil bunkering.

Traditional cult elements are very strong among Delta militants: for example, many Ijaw fighters believe they are impervious to bullets thanks to their protection by *Egbesu*, a traditional god or belief that defends them if certain rituals are observed. Similarly, Ken Saro Wiwa saw himself as the *Wiayon*, the mythical Ogoni character who is to come down from heaven to liberate his people.<sup>78</sup> In his last newspaper column, published in 1990 in the *Sunday Times*, he announced “The Coming War in the Delta”, and wrote: “Finally, the delta people must be allowed to join in the lucrative sale of crude oil....Only in this way can the cataclysm that is building up in the delta be avoided. Is anyone listening?”<sup>79</sup>

By 1998, unrest in the delta had significantly diminished oil production for short periods, although overall production levels from the region remained around two million barrels a day.<sup>80</sup> In 2004, after an apparent lull, the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF), led by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, emerged out of

the mangrove swamps. It has since been crushed and its leader jailed. But another youthful militant group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), has taken over the fight for local self determination since January 2006 and reduced oil output by at least 25 per cent.<sup>81</sup> Oil will continue to fan the flames of armed conflict in the Niger Delta.

Nigeria’s most recent electoral controversy came with President Obasanjo’s bid to remain in office for a third term, a blunder that has considerably tarnished his legacy. He was thwarted on 16 May 2006 when unable to muster a majority for the necessary constitutional amendment. Two days later, he put a brave face on , extolling “a victory for democracy”. Yet, political opponents as well as sections of civil society were not readily persuaded he had definitively renounced his project. “It’s only a temporary retreat. He’ll seek other means, or seize any pretext, to stay in power”, predicted a human rights lawyer.<sup>82</sup> A Western diplomat said:

It’s been a close call but I believe, and I very much hope, that President Obasanjo has understood that a vast majority of Nigerians doesn’t want him to stay on. They want change at the helm of the state, and respect for the constitutional order. Obasanjo has committed a political mistake that has upset the country and raised doubts about his democratic credentials abroad.<sup>83</sup>

## 2. The role of civil society

The new democratic dispensation, with its achievements and shortcomings, has proved a complex challenge for civil society, many of whose members had taken great risks in confronting military rule, especially under the Abacha regime, but were ill prepared to operate in the new environment. “Especially in the south, we used to boast of our ‘vibrant’ civil society, our strong trade unions that were said to be ‘the other kind of politics’, our ‘fiercely independent’ press and a myriad of human rights and pro-democracy organisations”, recalls the leader of a major civil society umbrella organisation. “But we’ve exhausted our forces in the battle against Abacha that we clearly lost, and after 1999 militants, money and true democratic convictions have been a scarce commodity”.<sup>84</sup> A widely discussed book – Kayode Fayemi’s *Out of the Shadows* – exposed

<sup>77</sup> Bach, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>78</sup> According to Ken Saro Wiwa, quoted by Maier, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>79</sup> Maier, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>80</sup> This can be explained, in part, by the fact that attacks slowed what would likely have been increasing levels of production.

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nigerian officials and foreign diplomats, Abuja, 31 May-6 June 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 2 June 2006.

<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 1 June 2006.

<sup>84</sup> Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Abuja, 2 June 2006.

extensive infighting within the democratic opposition to the Abacha regime.<sup>85</sup>

Many civil society activists acknowledge misgivings about their capacity for consolidating and sustaining the democratic process.<sup>86</sup> Some accuse the international community of having abruptly cut off their financial aid after the demise of military rule. “The wholesale, unconditional endorsement of the civilian government after 1999 was far less expensive and much more convenient”, argues a civil rights lawyer.<sup>87</sup> Others dwell on the fact that Nigeria’s NGOs and professional bodies are urban based and elitist in location and operation, often isolated by narrow regional or ethnic membership, while their leadership is dominated by middle-class professionals.

All civil society actors seem to have bidden farewell to the romanticised perception of their movement that prevailed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Nigeria’s labour and student bodies, organised business, women’s lobbies, professional associations, civil liberties organisation and pro-democracy movements such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), the Campaign for Democracy and Development (CDD), Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Campaign for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Women in Nigeria (WIN) and the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP) have been struck by popular disaffection that no government vilification or police harassment can explain and sometimes plagued by financial scandals. Nevertheless, some of their members believe they may have entered a more realistic, and in the long term possibly more productive, phase of their work.<sup>88</sup>

### 3. A shifting foreign policy

Foreign policy has changed considerably. Nigeria had been quasi-absent internationally for some years, until Obasanjo returned it to the world stage. He has strengthened its assertive position as West Africa’s “regional power” that the ruling generals established in the 1990s, when they sent troops to Liberia and Sierra Leone. Both deployments were mandated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as

regional peacekeeping missions in member states stricken by civil war. From 1990 to 1997 in Liberia, when a UN operation took over, Nigeria provided 12,000 of the 15,000 “white helmets” of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

In February 1998, Nigerian troops intervened in Sierra Leone to reinstall President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, who had been overthrown by rebels and fled into exile. They stayed on as two thirds of a 15,000-man ECOMOG force and then under a UN mandate until May 2000 when the UK intervened to rescue UN peacekeepers taken hostage by Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels.

The return to democracy has removed the international opprobrium from alliances with Nigeria. This holds specifically true for France. In a dramatic change, President Obasanjo has put to rest the poisonous legacy of the Biafran crisis, when Paris actively supported the secessionists. France has seized the opportunity to build a strong partnership with Abuja that has resulted over the past seven years in a Franco-Nigerian “condominium” in West Africa.<sup>89</sup> Within weeks of his election in 1999, Obasanjo suggested a mutually beneficial alliance with Paris. Asked how he expected relations to evolve, he replied:

Very positively. I believe that France will build a new relationship with Nigeria. Because France is changing, as the situation in Africa is changing as well. There is a combined opportunity to seize: France fully appreciates that several African countries will play a significant role, at least on our continent. Quite frankly, I think Nigeria is one of these countries, like South Africa. And on our side, we are conscious about the fact that France also plays, for historical reasons, a major role in Africa. We accept that fact. Of our mutual respect an alliance will come into being.<sup>90</sup>

Obasanjo has since confirmed this stance in many ways, not least during his eighteen months at the helm of the African Union, from May 2004 to September 2005, a period during which he staunchly backed France’s military intervention and political manoeuvring in war-torn Côte d’Ivoire, a former French colony. “Nigeria belongs to Africa geographically, France historically”, Obasanjo has repeatedly explained to

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<sup>85</sup> Kayode Fayemi, *Out of the Shadows. Exile and Struggle for Freedom & Democracy in Nigeria*, Centre for Democracy and Development, Lagos, 2005.

<sup>86</sup> Peyi Soyinka-Airewele: “Civil Society and Universities in the Democratisation and Development Enterprise”, in Udogu (ed.), op. cit., pp. 133-160; for a broader view, see also Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria* (Ibadan, 1999).

<sup>87</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 2 June 2006.

<sup>88</sup> Crisis Group interviews, civil society activists, June 2006.

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<sup>89</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nigerian and French officials, Abuja, Paris, May, June 2006.

<sup>90</sup> “Nigeria, a Fresh Start?”, interview with Stephen Smith in *Politique Internationale*, no. 83, October 1999, p. 344.

visitors.<sup>91</sup> “Nigeria stands for half of ECOWAS, in terms of population as well as GDP”, a French official emphasises.<sup>92</sup> “We cannot afford to ignore Nigeria in West Africa, and we even think that Nigeria is of more immediate importance to France in Africa than South Africa”, Nigeria’s main rival on the continent.

The new diplomacy is a heavy investment but Nigeria can no longer afford to remain an introverted giant. In October 1999, Obasanjo claimed his country had spent \$8 billion, and lost 500 men, in Liberia and Sierra Leone.<sup>93</sup> By June 2006, it had deployed six battalions, roughly 4,800 men, abroad for multinational peacekeeping operations: three in Sudan, two in Sierra Leone and one in Liberia. Since 2001, when the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was launched, Nigeria has also become a pillar of that fresh attempt to redress the continent’s economic problems through better governance. Progress has been limited, except for work underway on a gas pipeline to link Nigeria to Algeria and potential markets in southern Europe (Italy, Spain, France) and on the West Africa pipeline to provide the coastal states between Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire with crude oil.

In the post-11 September world, Nigeria’s “special relationship” with the UK has further diminished,<sup>94</sup> increasingly superseded by strong economic ties with the U.S., the largest buyer of its oil.<sup>95</sup> President Jimmy Carter visited in March 1978 and dealt with Obasanjo as a military ruler.<sup>96</sup> Since 1999, two presidents – Bill Clinton in August 2000 and George W. Bush in July 2003 – have made official visits.

In July 2002, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Walter Kansteiner stopped in Nigeria to assert that African oil was of “national strategic importance” to the U.S.<sup>97</sup> The “new Nigeria” has been granted preferential debt relief: in March 2006, it paid the last instalment

of a \$12 billion debt, satisfying obligations to foreign creditors in the Paris Club that had once been \$31 billion. The London Club debt, \$2.5 billion owed to private creditors, is still under renegotiation. “It will be settled soon and under equally favourable terms”, assured a Western diplomat who closely monitors the process.<sup>98</sup>

Geopolitical rivalry between its traditional Western partners and China has helped Nigeria strengthen its bargaining position. Whereas only 5,000 to 6,000 UK citizens live in Nigeria, between 30,000 and 40,000 Chinese do business in the country.<sup>99</sup> In 2005, Sino-Nigerian trade peaked at \$2.9 billion.<sup>100</sup> Although fluctuating oil prices make meaningful comparisons difficult, China has become one of Nigeria’s top trading partners, alongside the UK, the U.S. and France.<sup>101</sup> During a state visit to Nigeria in April 2006, China’s President Hu Jintao announced a \$2 billion low-interest loan in exchange for oil exploration rights off the Niger Delta as well as in the Lake Chad region. China is to launch a Nigerian telecommunications satellite before the end of the year and has pledged unspecified bilateral cooperation in the nuclear field.<sup>102</sup>

Nigeria has greatly enhanced its geopolitical weight since 1999. However, it remains to be seen if, over time, the political class will continue to invest in continental and wider international involvement or rather return to national introspection. Contradictory signals lend credence to both scenarios.

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<sup>91</sup> Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Abuja, 1 June 2006.

<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group interview, Paris, 15 May 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Agence France-Presse, 26 October 1999.

<sup>94</sup> Nonetheless, each month about 25,000 Nigerians apply for a visa to the UK, where an estimated one million have already settled permanently, according to British diplomats in Abuja. The UK embassy’s visa section – Britain’s largest – is staffed by almost 100 employees (65 in Lagos and 30 in Abuja).

<sup>95</sup> Well ahead of several European countries (in decreasing order: Spain, France, Germany, the Netherlands).

<sup>96</sup> This was the first U.S. presidential visit to the continent since Franklin Roosevelt was in North Africa during World War II.

<sup>97</sup> Dave Clark, “U.S. envoy in Nigeria as America looks to African oil”, Agence France-Presse, 25 July 2002.

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<sup>98</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 1 June 2006.

<sup>99</sup> Crisis Group interviews, British and Chinese diplomats, Abuja, 1-2 June 2006.

<sup>100</sup> Crisis Group interview, Chinese diplomat, Abuja, 2 June 2006.

<sup>101</sup> According to Kaye Whiteman, *op. cit.*, p. 17, “latest figures show that China now has the largest share of the Nigerian market”; in 2000, the UK was still narrowly the largest exporter to Nigeria, with a 10.9 per cent market share, ahead of the U.S., 9.2 per cent, and France, 8.7 per cent. The British market share was 36 per cent in the early 1960s.

<sup>102</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western and Chinese diplomats, Abuja, 31 May-6 June 2006.

## V. RESOURCES, RELIGION, FEDERALISM AND MILITARY POLITICS

A number of inter-related issues are of importance for understanding Nigeria, including the impact of the country's reliance on energy revenues, growing tensions over religious identity, the mixed experience of federalism, and the military's ongoing role in politics.

### A. THE RESOURCE CURSE

Since the mid-1970s, Nigeria's political fate has been inextricably linked to oil. Petroleum accounts for 80 per cent of the government's revenue, provides more than 95 per cent of export earnings and generates over 40 per cent of the country's GDP.<sup>103</sup> Dependence of that sort has major consequences, and vast natural wealth has not translated into improved living standards for the great majority, as corruption continues to exact a heavy toll.

Oil exploration started as early as 1937; crude was discovered in 1956, and the first commercial oil exports followed two years later. In 1969, the Petroleum Decree, which vested the federal state with "the entire ownership of all oil and gas within any land in Nigeria, as well as under its territorial waters and continental shelf", was adopted. In 1971, the government nationalised the oil industry by creating the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC). Since this time, all oil production takes place by means of joint ventures with foreign oil companies, with NNOC always having a majority share. It was this nationalisation that enabled Nigeria to join OPEC that same year by meeting one of its key membership requirements. Since the early 1970s petroleum has been of fundamental budgetary importance, although boom-bust cycles due to strong fluctuations in international prices have challenged government planning.

The brief return to civilian rule in 1979 coincided with a record high in oil prices, due to the Iranian revolution. Nigeria's light crude sold for over \$40 per barrel (equivalent to more than \$100 per barrel today). But

prices soon plummeted, and government revenue dropped by nearly half over the following four years. In 1982 the world price was as low as \$10. Poverty and unemployment worsened, as inflation remained high and public services deteriorated for lack of funds, and it was not long before the fate of the civilian government was sealed.

Oil has plunged Nigeria into "Dutch disease" – the phenomenon whereby an increase in revenues from a natural resource raises the exchange rate, making other export industries uncompetitive and possibly leading to deindustrialisation. In May 2006, Nigeria's crude oil output was about 2.1 million barrels per day, though attacks on pipelines in July have lowered it somewhat.<sup>104</sup> In addition to its oil wealth, the country has proven natural gas reserves estimated at 184 trillion cubic feet, which makes it the seventh largest source in the world.<sup>105</sup> The reserve-production ratio, assuming no additions to proven reserves in the future, is estimated at 240 years for gas, compared with about 40 years for oil, reflecting the relative under-exploitation of natural gas.

The mono-commodity economy has been sustainable, though at a staggering social cost and great risk to national unity. However, in the long run it is probably unviable and certainly undesirable:

The economic record since the oil boom is one of lacklustre growth, increasing poverty, widening inequality and a secular decline in performance. From 1980 to 2002, economic growth averaged just 2 per cent annually, and real income per capita stands today at about one third the level achieved in 1980....Nigeria's once-thriving agricultural and solid mineral exports are moribund; manufacturing today constitutes a smaller proportion of the economy (about 6 per cent) than at independence. The economy drifts on a sea of oil, blown by the capricious winds of international energy markets.<sup>106</sup>

In the 1950s, agriculture represented almost two thirds of GDP but in the wake of the oil boom, cultivation fell from 18.8 million hectares in 1975 to 11.05 million in 1978. As a result, agricultural output dropped by nearly 50 per cent in volume and by over 50 per cent in value, while output of cocoa, oil palm and rubber – the traditional export crops – fell by 74 per cent between 1970 and 1981. Unmanageable urbanisation accompanied

<sup>103</sup> Terry Lynn Karl and Ian Gary, "Bottom of the Barrel: Africa's Oil Boom and the Poor", Catholic Relief Services, p. 26, [http://www.crs.org/get\\_involved/advocacy/policy\\_and\\_strategic\\_issues/oil\\_report\\_one.cfm](http://www.crs.org/get_involved/advocacy/policy_and_strategic_issues/oil_report_one.cfm). This study, published in June 2003, builds on Karl's earlier book, *The Paradox of Plenty. Oil Booms and Petro-States* (Berkeley, 1997). These numbers obviously fluctuate with the price of oil and production levels.

<sup>104</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration.

<sup>105</sup> *Oil & Gas Journal*, 1 January 2006 estimate, as cited by the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

<sup>106</sup> Peter M. Lewis, "Getting the Politics Right: Governance and Economic Failure in Nigeria", in Rotberg (ed.), op. cit., p. 99.

the agricultural collapse: Lagos's population grew by 14 per cent each year in the 1970s, as workers flooded in to meet the demands of the construction industry.<sup>107</sup> Yet, even today, the mostly traditional agriculture-based sector still employs over 60 per cent of the population, and contributes 27 per cent to GDP.<sup>108</sup> But the country, a food exporter at independence, is now a massive importer. In 2002, Nigeria had to import almost one third of the rice it consumed, making it the world's second largest market for this staple.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps most illustrative of all is the fact that Nigeria must import large quantities of petroleum products such as diesel and petrol, despite being one of the world's largest crude oil producers, because the refining sector has been characterised by mismanagement, sabotage, improper maintenance and lack of investment. Continuing petroleum product subsidies, which make it difficult for refineries to operate in an economically efficient way, have become so entrenched that any attempts to remove them have inspired threats of or actual large-scale labour strikes.

Mass impoverishment has also been a by-product of the ill-managed, oil-driven economy. In 1989, the World Bank classified Nigeria to be a "low-income" country for the first time since the Bank began the classifying countries as such in 1978, after years of declining GDP per person in the 1980s. Even during the prosperous period 1985-1992, when average per capita spending rose by one third, distribution of the gains deepened inequalities: for the top 10 per cent of income earners, spending rose by nearly a half, while for the bottom 5 per cent, it fell by 40 per cent.<sup>110</sup> Today, 43 per cent of the population has no access to a safe source of drinking water, and infant mortality is among the highest in the world.<sup>111</sup>

Nigeria is "a classic illustration of the 'paradox of plenty'",<sup>112</sup> but the statement needs to be put in perspective. A recent academic study pointed out that:

A country can rely heavily on oil exports without enjoying oil wealth. Oil constituted over 95 per

cent of Nigeria's exports in 2002, but if we keep in mind that Nigeria's population by far exceeds 100 million inhabitants, then – statistically – one Nigerian would have earned a miserable 30 cents a day from the \$13.7 billion Nigerian oil export sales in 2002. In contrast, the earnings per capita in Equatorial Guinea would have been 50 times higher (\$14.87). Oil abundance in Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea is a remarkably different phenomenon.<sup>113</sup>

Although 30 cents would not have been a "miserable" amount – if they had managed to get hold of it – for the 70 per cent of Nigerians who survive on less than \$1 a day, the argument nonetheless holds true given the glaring inequalities in wealth distribution. So, indeed, "it is rather governance quality than revenue quantity that makes the difference".<sup>114</sup>

Contrary to what resource curse theories suggest, Nigeria's oil plight is not an unavoidable fate. No causal link exists between resource abundance and corruption, authoritarianism, economic decline and violent conflict, except that which has been established by a state whose officeholders use political power to control economic assets for their own benefit and that of their business associates. There is, however, a correlation between resource abundance and these various negative outcomes simply because most developing countries, and even some developed ones, find the challenge of managing the resource overwhelming in the face of the immense temptation for rent-seeking behaviour. Nigeria has clearly not yet mastered this challenge: "It's simply institutionalised looting of national wealth", said a Western ambassador.<sup>115</sup>

Oil wealth distribution is the heart of Nigerian politics.<sup>116</sup> Over time, the derivation principle – that some proportion of revenue generated by oil exports should be returned to the oil's place of origin – has waxed and waned. Under the 1960 and 1963 constitutions, prior to large-scale exploitation of oil, 50 per cent of the revenue was returned to the states from which it was derived. In 1975, Decree Six increased the federal government's share in the oil

<sup>107</sup> Shaxson, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

<sup>108</sup> U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook, Nigeria country profile.

<sup>109</sup> The share of total imports attributed to foodstuffs grew from 8 per cent in 1990 to 14.4 percent in 2000. See "Essence of WARDA – Why Nigerians are hooked to imported rice: Insights from a comprehensive rice sector study", The Africa Rice Center, no. 1, January-March 2003.

<sup>110</sup> Shaxson, *op. cit.*, p.317.

<sup>111</sup> See "Nigeria country profile", United Nations Population Fund, <http://www.unfpa.org/profile/nigeria.cfm>.

<sup>112</sup> Karl and Gary, *op. cit.*

<sup>113</sup> Mathias Basedau and Wolfram Lacher, "A Paradox of Plenty? Rent Distribution and Political Stability in Oil States", German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), working paper no. 21, Hamburg, April 2006, p. 8.

<sup>114</sup> Karl and Gary, *op. cit.*

<sup>115</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 1 June 2006.

<sup>116</sup> Three subsequent Crisis Group reports – one on the federal system and two on the Delta region – will analyse resource allocation and the situation in the main oil-producing region.

sector to 80 per cent and reduced that of the states to 20 per cent. Against the backdrop of the Biafran War, centralising military regimes systematically cut this rate, so that in the 1990s it was below 3 per cent.

A turning point in the revenue-sharing system came in 2000, with implementation of the 13 per cent derivation formula inserted in the 1999 constitution. The 36 states, which had obtained \$120 million in 1999, received almost \$1 billion in 2000 out of the Federation Account, where the money is pooled monthly, divided and then allocated to the federal government, states and local government areas by the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission, a federal executive body.<sup>117</sup> In 2004, the states gained over \$6 billion from the Federation Account, with nearly one third going to the four major oil producing states – Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom – which have 15 per cent of the population.<sup>118</sup> On average the states thus experienced, over four years, a 50-fold increase in the revenue channelled to them by the federal state. The increase has been 100-fold for the four major oil producing states, which “received roughly twice as much as the other five non-oil-producing zones...”<sup>119</sup>

In 2001, a centrally coordinated agency, the Niger Delta Development Commission, was established for alleviating the developmental and ecological problems of the oil-bearing communities. Its task seems Herculean: between 1976 and 1996, 4,835 oil spills, estimated at 1.8 million barrels, were formally reported to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) but the real figures were possibly as much as ten times higher.<sup>120</sup> Nigeria is particularly susceptible to oil spills because the numerous small fields in the Niger Delta require an extensive network of small flowlines. Also, the numerous flowlines and pipelines have often been poorly maintained, and many are much older than their planned usable lifetimes. These spills, combined with decades of wide-spread flaring of gas, have caused serious atmospheric pollution, groundwater and soil contamination, constant heat around the flare pits and abnormal salinity of the pool water, resulting in serious health hazards for the inhabitants of the Delta region and grave disturbances to the life cycles of plants and animals. Although its adverse effects have been

known since the early 1980s, flaring of gas is scheduled to stop only in 2008. Nigeria continues to be the world’s largest source of flared associated natural gas, by some estimates flaring the equivalent of 40 per cent of Africa’s total natural gas consumption.<sup>121</sup>

Given the extent of the ecological, human and political disaster in the Delta region, wrangling over resource allocation formulas is hardly surprising. In 2002, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the federal government’s position that the natural resources on Nigeria’s continental shelf belonged to the federation as a whole and could not be said to be derived from the adjoining littoral states for revenue allocation purposes. The federal government’s revenue share was thereby increased from 48.5 per cent to 56 per cent, retroactive to 29 May 1999. In October 2002, dissatisfaction with the derivation formula acquired a new dimension, as the National Assembly passed a bill erasing the onshore/offshore dichotomy that was its basis. Under threat of impeachment, the president eventually gave in. Within a few weeks of elections, he accepted reinstatement of the status quo ante and ordered the outstanding offshore component of the derivation funds to be released to the coastal oil-producing states.

Notwithstanding offshore revenue derivation, many leaders of the oil-bearing communities in the Delta demand resource control: ownership and management of the oil fields both in their homelands and offshore. This goes far beyond what the Mantu Committee was ready to concede in March 2006, when it advocated a constitutional amendment to raise derivation from 13 to 18 per cent, itself a proposal below the 20 to 25 per cent sought by the oil states in the National Assembly.

“The debate over oil revenue allocation formulas is indispensable, and healthy for democracy in this country”, argued a Western diplomat, but it should not be “at the expense of fundamental governance issues, that would become even more important if there were to be resource control by local communities”.<sup>122</sup> A 100-fold increase in state revenue in Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom, as well as demands for resource control at local level, raise questions about institutional capacity and accountability as well as democratic checks and

<sup>117</sup> Karl and Gary, op. cit. Of late, the federal authorities publish the monthly amounts made available to states and Local Government Areas – a decision that has put unprecedented pressure on the lower levels of power to account for the oil money they receive.

<sup>118</sup> *The New York Times*, editorial, 16 April 2006.

<sup>119</sup> John N. Paden, “Unity with Diversity: Toward Democratic Federalism”, in Rotberg (ed.), op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>120</sup> “The Price of Oil”, Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>121</sup> Associated meaning that the natural gas is in the same field as oil. It is flared because burning off the associated natural gas maximises the valuable oil production, whereas there may be no way to monetise the gas profitably. It is much less expensive to produce non-associated gas than to separate associated gas from oil. However, the practice of flaring is ultimately wasteful and, as mentioned, carries large environmental costs.

<sup>122</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 1 June 2006.

balances at the second and third tier of the state. "Prior to any further transfer of funds or power to states or LGAs [Local Government Areas], control institutions have to be established there", a civil society activist said. "What democratic control we have today exists only at the federal level. But the worst corruption is to be found at the lower levels".<sup>123</sup> Given the central government's disastrous record on oil revenue spending, this means that the legitimacy of the federal structure as a whole will be at stake in the years to come.

Analyst Daniel Bach argues that oil wealth has made predatory conduct more widespread as officeholders have tried to satisfy themselves and their clients.<sup>124</sup> As the resources from petroleum exports became the main source of revenue, state patronage and rent-seeking became pervasive. Within the federal system, oil money was the price for political allegiance that deserved to be rewarded or for dissent that needed to be bought off. Oil wealth distorted budgets and eroded fiscal constraint. The illusion that the windfall was permanent and future revenue bonanzas would alleviate current distress resulted in the accumulation of foreign debt instead of capital. The state also became divorced from its tax base in domestic production and maintained over-valued exchange rates that devastated the agricultural and manufacturing sectors.

In the absence of viable private enterprise and open competition, the state took a commanding role in inducing development, guiding structural change, regulating markets and subsidising essential products or strategic projects. Weak institutions, a combative civil society, and the politics of fractious elites accentuated its distributive obsessions. The ruling establishment and its business connections engaged in avaricious rent-seeking rather than productive investment (as the cement scandal in 1975 graphically illustrated). In the context of soft budget constraints and cash abundance due to oil royalties, the ultimate corollary has been what a senior religious figure called "almost universal corruption".<sup>125</sup>

## B. FEDERALISM AND FRAGMENTATION

Nigeria is the world's fifth largest federation, after India, the U.S., Brazil and Russia, a three-tier system of 36

states, the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Although none of the states can be considered an ethnic homeland, roughly half have primary ethnic identities, as each of the three largest ethnic groups – Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo – accounts for all but a relatively small segment of the population in five to seven states.<sup>126</sup> Since independence, the original tripartite federal structure that allowed each of the three majority groups to be dominant within its geographic domain has been broken up through a relentless process of multiplying government structures. Ethnicity has been diluted, while a strong central power emerged during the long military dictatorship that secured the lion's share of oil wealth for the federal level. Proliferating state structures have been used to divide and rule as well as to decentralise patronage. This continually expanding and fragmenting federal structure has led to serious institutional decline and structurally embedded corruption.

When Nigeria became independent as a federal state in 1960, the central government was relatively weak. The "federal trinity" preserved after the end of British rule was first split up in 1963 by creation of Midwestern State. In 1966, the military government sought to placate minorities in the secessionist region and elsewhere by dividing the country into twelve states – six in the north, six in the south. Beyond its immediate political rationale, this opened the gate to expanding federal structures as a way of buying off dissent and stifling demands for a return to democracy. It also paved the way for a sprawling network of state patronage, a process which has been defined as "the fragmentation of existing politico-administrative units (whether state or local governments) into new ones with identical functional characteristics".<sup>127</sup>

Military rulers increased the states to nineteen in 1976, 21 in 1987 and 30 in 1991. That year General Babangida bought time for his beleaguered regime and assuaged persistent southern fears by subdividing the big three northern Muslim states of Sokoto, Kano, and Borno. In 1996, the Abacha regime sought political credit by creating six additional states, thus giving the country three times the number considered necessary for a stable balance of constituent states in the early days of independence.

"It is disturbing to note how rarely the military template of federalism is questioned by Nigerians", observed a Western diplomat. "Their strong desire for 'true federalism' has been perverted, but hardly anyone

<sup>123</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 2 June 2006.

<sup>124</sup> Bach, *op. cit.*, p. 69; Bach argues that, due to its oil income, Nigeria has been able to preserve a neo-patrimonial state, viewed as a "generic expression of prebendalism", which has collapsed in much of the rest of post-colonial Africa; see also Joseph, *op. cit.*

<sup>125</sup> Crisis Group interview, Roman Catholic archbishop, Abuja, 3 June 2006.

<sup>126</sup> Richard L. Sklar, "Unity or Regionalism: The Nationalities Question", in Rotberg (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>127</sup> Bach, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

wants to recognise the fact, because the existing states have taken on a life of their own. As a political reality, they are here to stay".<sup>128</sup> The search for an effective formula to integrate the ethnic, cultural, religious, economic, and political demands of a heterogeneous society has been the perennial challenge. Yet, the betrayal of popular aspirations for democratic diversity has passed almost unnoticed. "Military federalism is a contradiction in terms, since all major state and local appointments came from above".<sup>129</sup>

The onset of military rule in 1966 changed the nature of federalism, as decision-making under the successive juntas was highly centralised and, by nature, undemocratic. During three decades, with brief civilian interludes, power was only delegated to the lower echelons of a command structure that had been entirely determined at the top; there was no question of decentralising power. Although the tenets of federalism provide for power-sharing and a dispersal of opportunities, the combination of oil income and military rule has fostered a concentration of authority and resources. The federal, oil-funded state has evolved under tight control, at every level the hierarchy of command shadowed by a hierarchy of entitlement.

Administrative effectiveness and economic viability were afterthoughts in the fragmenting institutions. In 1976, during the heyday of the oil boom, the Irikefe Panel on the creation of new states explicitly advised that the federal government should not "attach undue emphasis on the requirements for economic viability...since all the existing states except possibly Lagos are heavily dependent on the Federal Government for a substantial percentage of their revenue".<sup>130</sup> Indeed, the state and local governments generally depend on federal transfers for 70 to 80 per cent of their revenues.<sup>131</sup> Cashing in on the oil wealth, the federal power structure has put into place the conduits for the transmission of its resources to local authorities as an institutionalised network of patronage.

Local elites have been responsive: a 1996 review dealt with 72 claims for creation of new states, 2,369 claims for local councils and 286 claims for boundary adjustments.<sup>132</sup> As a result, Nigeria is highly fragmented and administratively inefficient. Policy-making is very

difficult due to the multitude of pressures from economic and functional interest groups, making it hard for the state to deliver services. At the same time, the state often appears pervasive because it is linked by patronage networks from the top echelons to isolated villages. This badly fragmented system of governance has created a Nigeria that is not a failed but rather a perpetually faltering state.

Since the 1990s, a six-zone model of geographical state clusters has de facto superseded the existing federal structure as a more pertinent political reference. These zones – north west, north east, Middle Belt, south east, south-south, south west – have been given geographical designations as surrogates for cultural groupings. They are based on historically founded socio-political realities: the emirate states; Borno and environs; Middle Belt minorities; Yoruba states; Igbo states; southern minorities. As the first three are northern and the second three southern, they duplicate to some extent the colonial divide inherited from British rule, which became hardened in part because of the policy of indirect rule.

But a regional language is spoken by nearly all the people in only three of the six zones: Hausa in the north west, Igbo in the south east, and Yoruba in the south west. The other three zones are ethnically and linguistically diversified: the northeast includes, among many other groups, a large Kanuri-speaking population; the Middle Belt contains a multitude of diverse groups – by far the largest number of ethnicities of any zone; the south-south zone also has a broad spectrum of ethnic and linguistic groups, though the Ijaw, the country's fourth largest ethnic group, predominate. These six geographical zones, although they are constantly invoked in political debate and are explicitly cited in one of the most sensitive pieces of legislation adopted during Obasanjo's first term as elected president, the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, still have no legal basis.<sup>133</sup>

The cancerous growth of state structures has many negative consequences: over-expenditure of state revenue, administrative rivalries and confusion and numerous bureaucratic obstacles for business. Another, often neglected consequence is the proliferation of "minorities" inside the ever increasing number of territorial units. "Each wave of state and local government creation has further entrenched sectional loyalties through its reproduction of the 'settlers versus natives' dichotomy on a narrowing geo-political basis".<sup>134</sup> The legal distinction between "indigenes" and "non-indigenes" was inserted

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<sup>128</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 1 June 2006.

<sup>129</sup> John N. Paden, "Unity with Diversity: Toward Democratic Federalism, in Rotberg (ed.), op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>130</sup> Bach, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>131</sup> Rotimi Suberu, "Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria", United States Institute of Peace, Washington, 2001, p. 48.

<sup>132</sup> Paden, op. cit., p. 23.

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<sup>133</sup> Crisis Group interviews, officials, diplomats and civil society leaders, Abuja, 31 May-6 June 2006.

<sup>134</sup> Bach, op. cit., p. 68.

for the first time into the 1979 constitution, which alternatively referred to “indigenes of a state” and to “the populations which belong to a state”. An indigene was meant to be “a person whose parents or grandparents historically originated from a community within that state”. As the 1999 constitution uses but does not define more precisely that term, internal citizenship remains a disputed issue that fuels local violence all over the country, most notably in the Middle Belt.

In some states, “indigeneity” is used to give specific groups certain rights in relation to government appointments or other benefits based not on their Nigerian citizenship or residency in a state but on their ancestors’ place of origin.<sup>135</sup> Elsewhere, son-of-the-soil movements have pitted “indigenes” against “settlers” in violent conflict. Emphasis laid on the “indigeneity” of employees in public services, parastatals, universities and even private enterprise has stoked tensions and undercut the sense that jobs should be awarded on merit. With state and local government structures proliferating, Nigerians have become “indigenes” of units that cover increasingly smaller slivers of the national territory – while they are strangers in the rest of their country.

The complexity of the federal system is spelled out in painstakingly detailed constitutional provisions. The 1999 constitution is 160 pages, a striking contrast with the U.S. document, which is ten. However, the abundant verbiage does not solve the intricate problem of how to decentralise Nigeria without moving to partition, or to those variations of confederation that might foreshadow partition. Since the return to democratic rule, the idea of a possibly “asymmetric federation” seems to be gaining ground. As one scholar put it, the question is: “how weak will federal Nigeria have to become to survive?”<sup>136</sup>

## C. SHARI’A LAW AND CHRISTIAN REVIVALISM

Religious populism has contributed to national divisiveness since the return to open and competitive politics. Implementation of a Shari’a (Islamic law) civil and criminal code in twelve northern states in 1999-2000 and aggressive Christian revivalism in the south have compounded and sometimes superseded ethnicity. In the north, fundamentalist Muslim denominations have presented the rest of the country as the land of

*al-fasad* (corruption); in the south, non-mainstream Christian churches, especially among Pentecostals and other evangelicals, have viewed the Islamic *umma* (community) as a fundamentalist conspiracy. Nigerians have turned to religion as a coping strategy in an environment rife with economic uncertainty, social inequality and political exclusion. Religious activities have expanded through proselytising, sometimes in cutthroat struggles for converts between Islam and Christianity. Religious strife, with or without ethnic overtones, has taken its toll in the north, especially in the Middle Belt, which has emerged as the spiritual and sometimes physical battleground in competition for religious and political control, often entangled in land tenure, migration, community boundary or local inequality issues.<sup>137</sup>

However, as much as it would be erroneous to depict Nigeria’s ethnic divide as infighting among the “big three”, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, it would also be misleading to describe Muslims and Christians as massed against each other. Much bloodshed has been the result of sectarian violence within the communities themselves. The religiously almost evenly split south west has been spared Muslim-Christian conflict, perhaps as a result of its strong Yoruba ethnic identity, or simply because of effective mutual deterrence. “In any case, all forms of popular revolt, whether they are ethnic, religious or factional, gush from the same wellspring of unbearable frustrations”, explained a religious leader.<sup>138</sup> The political mobilisation of religion is nothing new in Nigeria. During the anti-colonialist struggle, Nnamdi Azikiwe established the National Church of Nigeria and Cameroon not for spiritual reasons, but in order to mobilise the faithful against British rule.

Since the mid-1970s, politicised faith has become as disruptive as ethnicity. At times it has even appeared as if the country was moving away from its tripartite ethnic divide towards a binary opposition between the overwhelmingly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south (with the south west holding the balance). However, major religious upheaval occurred first in the north, between rival Sufi and fundamentalist Muslim denominations, and then in the diverse Middle Belt where Christianity is historically linked to resistance against the northern emirates’ hegemony.

### 1. Turning to the church when the state fails

The rise of religious revivalism seems to hinge on faltering governance. Stepping in to provide basic services and

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<sup>135</sup> “They Do Not Own this Place: Government Discrimination against ‘Non-Indigenes’ in Nigeria”, Human Rights Watch, vol. 8, no. 3 (A), Washington, April 2006.

<sup>136</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, “Troubled Nigeria: Great Opportunities, Tough Challenges”, in Rotberg (ed.), op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>137</sup> A subsequent Crisis Group report on Plateau State will discuss this in detail.

<sup>138</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 3 June 2006.

organise grassroots communities, religious organisations have become credible, legitimate alternatives to the faltering state, adept at articulating communal aspirations and values.<sup>139</sup> Religious networks also provide avenues of advancement for the enterprising outside the collapsing framework of corrupt institutions and a run-down economy. Finally, religious mobilisation has opened windows of opportunity, as they connect Christians and Muslims to international networks. Christians draw on ideas, staff, and material support from churches in the U.S. and Europe; Muslims find models and donors in the Islamic world.

If the politicisation of religion in Nigeria were to be pinned to a date and an event, it could be 1977, when an elected assembly convened to work out a new constitution. The most contentious issue was the status of Shari'a law, notably at the federal level. A compromise provided that predominantly Muslim states could employ it in appropriate areas but there would be no Shari'a in the Federal Court of Appeal.<sup>140</sup>

However, the heated debate revealed the explosive potential of group identity among the faithful on either side of a perceived north-south divide. The number of Muslims making the pilgrimage to Mecca had jumped from fewer than 6,000 in the 1960s to over 100,000 by the mid-1970s. Among Christians, growing alienation from the mainstream Catholic and Protestant denominations coincided with the proliferation of charismatic or evangelical churches, most of which were oriented toward personal salvation and proselytising rather than global social concerns. The Church of God International in Benin City and the numerous evangelical and Pentecostal churches prominently situated along the Lagos-Ibadan expressway typify the withdrawal from overt political engagement. In the Middle Belt, some local churches soon came into conflict with Muslim communities.

In an attempt to unify the various orthodox and heterodox denominations, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was founded in 1976. It was immediately perceived in the north as the "Christian bloc" formed by southerners to confront Islam, and suspicion grew rapidly. Many Christians were convinced that the break in diplomatic relations between their country and Israel in 1973 had been instigated and sponsored by Nigerian Muslims as a spiteful gesture directed against them. The government takeover of mission

schools in 1976 did nothing to assuage their mistrust. Widespread sectarian violence in the north caused many southerners to view Islam as a religion of intolerance.

In the 1970s, Muhammed Marwa, a self-styled *mahdi* (God-sent messenger), won a considerable audience among the poorest in big northern cities. So acidic was his language and so combative his posture that he was given the nickname *Maitatsine* ("the one who knows how to curse"). Starting in December 1980 in Kano, then spreading to Kaduna, Maiduguri and two towns in Gongola State, the revolt of his followers cost more than 10,000 lives over four years. In Kano, it was repressed by aerial bombardment that reduced part of the north's biggest town to rubble.

Clouded by secrecy, Nigeria's membership in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was a major bone of contention. "Babangida nurtured conspiracy theories as he surreptitiously smuggled Nigeria into the OIC", insisted a Catholic archbishop.<sup>141</sup> In January 1986, a short Agence France-Presse dispatch broke the news that Nigeria had been admitted as the 46<sup>th</sup> member. A strong Muslim lobby had sought this since the early 1970s but successive federal governments resisted. Now it became known that General Babangida, without consulting his Christian ministers, the external affairs ministry, his highest-ranking executive advisory board or the Armed Forces Ruling Council, had applied and that the OIC's annual conference had enthusiastically waived formalities and granted immediate full membership. "The resulting controversy polarised the country along the religious divide more than had any other issue in Nigeria's history".<sup>142</sup>

The Roman Catholic archbishop of Lagos, Monsignor Anthony Okogie, declared that Christians were prepared to "burn the nation in a religious war".<sup>143</sup> The fracture was such that in its wake Babangida sponsored an Advisory Council on Religious Affairs (ACRA) to promote understanding between Christians and Muslims. It met a few times but soon fell dormant, and tensions continued to rise. In 1987, a small group of lecturers at the University of Jos, the capital of Plateau State, wrote a highly critical book about the Hausa-Fulani political class, provocatively entitled *The Kaduna Mafia*, which was widely circulated in the Middle Belt and the south. It chronicled the Hausa-Fulani's

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<sup>139</sup> Olufemi Vaughan, "Religion and State Formation", in Udogu (ed.), op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>140</sup> "The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979", Articles 240-244; three judges versed in Islamic law were to be included in the existing Federal Court of Appeal.

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<sup>141</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 3 June 2006.

<sup>142</sup> Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria. The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester, 1998), pp. 94-95.

<sup>143</sup> See Maringues, op. cit., p. 23.

“manipulation of Islam” to create both a political class and a “mafia”.<sup>144</sup>

Anecdotal evidence attested to the federal government’s partiality. In 1988, Babangida yielded to pressure from the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and Iran to ban importation of Salman Rushdie’s novel, *The Satanic Verses*. Christians took this as further evidence of official support for both Islam and what one paper called the Ayatollah Khomeini’s “fundamentalist philistinism”.<sup>145</sup> In 1989, at the conclusion of a major Islamic conference, the Islam in Africa Organisation (IAO) was founded and allowed to locate its headquarters in Nigeria. One of its most important resolutions was categorical: “We are ready to go any length to get Shari’a established in this country whether we are alive or dead”.<sup>146</sup>

The Christian Association of Nigeria asserted that about 80 per cent of cabinet posts and all the important ones were held by Muslims and that they dominated the federal government. In response, Babangida outraged Christians by reshuffling the government and filling the cabinet entirely with Muslims. In this highly inflammable environment, a series of violent incidents occurred throughout the 1990s: clashes between Muslims and Christians in Kano, Katsina, Bauchi and Zangon-Kataf, a small town in the south of Kaduna State, left several thousand dead. “Many Muslims and Christians began to view violence not in moral terms, but as a necessity sanctioned by religious beliefs. Indeed, many people began to think of violence as the only available and moral option for transforming the language of public discourse and for self-defence”.<sup>147</sup> The language of faith became the narrative of violence. In February 2000, the Catholic Bishops Conference urged the government “to take vigorous action to halt this mad rush to national suicide”.<sup>148</sup>

## 2. Uneasy with Islam?

Mirroring the evangelical and charismatic revolution in the south, Muslim revivalism was on the rise in the north. Alongside existing reformist movements such as the *yan’Izala* (the *Jama’at izalat al-bida’ wa-iqamat al-Sunna*, “Movement to Eradicate Innovation and Restore True Belief”) – and *Ja’amutut Tajidmul Islami* (“Movement for Islamic Revival”), numerous autonomous mosques sprang up. Independent preachers started to

canvass grassroots support throughout the northern states and in the Middle Belt.

Sustained economic hardship and rising inequality fed dislocation and social frustration, fostering the growth of Islamist movements. Traditional Sufi Islam in the north based on the Maliki school of jurisprudence was called into question, as was a historic compromise reached in 1959, still under British colonial rule, by which a dual system was set up in the north which deprived the emirates of virtually all legal powers.<sup>149</sup> In 1999, this compromise was nullified first in Zamfara, and then, over the next two years, in eleven other northern states, which all reinstated Shari’a as an antidote for the “moral corruption” of Western modernity, the rising tide of violent crime and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly AIDS.

Shari’a provided an alternative to a failed model of governance. It also allowed the local political elite to mobilise their followers outside the established framework of the federal police and army: vigilante forces pursued alleged criminals and sometimes political opponents.<sup>150</sup> Once Zamfara was proclaimed a Shari’a state, popular enthusiasm across the north was such that no governor could resist the introduction of Koranic criminal law. Although no death sentence passed by Shari’a courts has been carried out, some of the provisions of the code directly contradict the federal legal system and constitution. For example, in some Shari’a states, apostasy is a legal offence, notwithstanding Article 38 of the constitution, which guarantees that “every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief”.

President Obasanjo, perhaps worried that his born-again Christian faith and southern Yoruba ethnicity would disqualify him as an impartial arbiter, has preferred to temporise although he declared himself – in his personal capacity – opposed to Shari’a. In 2003, during his electoral campaign, he spoke more clearly but still without initiating any institutional response: “Unfortunately, after 50 years of politics of ethnicity, which has hindered progress, we are now witnessing politics of religion that is more devastating than that of ethnicity. If we allow religion to eat deep into our body politic, we will suffer more”.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Falola, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>145</sup> *The Guardian*, 23 February 1989, p. 3.

<sup>146</sup> Quoted in Falola, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>147</sup> Falola, op. cit., p. 192.

<sup>148</sup> “Nigerian bishops warn of ‘national suicide’”, Reuters, Lagos, 28 February 2000.

<sup>149</sup> Maliki law was restricted to the civil sphere for Muslims only – their personal status, family law, and civil law issues. The criminal law fell into the common domain.

<sup>150</sup> “Political Shari’a? Human Rights and Islamic Law in Northern Nigeria”, Human Rights Watch, Washington, September 2004.

<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Udogu (ed.), op. cit., p. 8.

The risk remains, though the specific form of religious mobilisation that swept across the north under the Shari'a banner has lost momentum over the past three years. Ordinary citizens have grown so tired of the *Hisbah* ("moral guards") that, in early 2006, the government of Kano State banned them. In June 2006, a Roman Catholic archbishop from a Middle Belt state returned from a trip to several "Shari'a states" with the impression that the Islamic order was crumbling. "So, what was it all about?", he asked. "Today, in Kano or Maiduguri, you can get any quantity of alcohol you wish, and there is as much armed robbery and prostitution as elsewhere".<sup>152</sup> He also repeated what his fellow Christians in the Middle Belt are in the habit of saying: "The blood of the tribe is thicker than the water of baptism". However, he cautioned against the danger of "a new political masquerade under religious disguise" in the run-up to the 2007 presidential election.

#### D. THE MILITARISATION OF POLITICS

Militarised violence, particularly surrounding elections, has become an integral part of the political culture. The longevity of military rule and the fact that the generals have sometimes been comparatively liberal in permitting political debate and media independence have paradoxically fostered an environment in which violent coercion is often seen as almost banal. It is sufficient to recall the murderous violence the military has inflicted upon itself at every changing of the guard to gauge the level of political violence that has been considered business as usual.<sup>153</sup>

Throughout Nigeria's independent history, the police and military, while failing to curb rising crime and politically inspired violence, have used unrestrained force on fellow citizens and caused thousands of deaths. The restoration of democracy has not ended widespread harassment, abuse, torture and extrajudicial murder by security forces. Massive reprisal killings have occurred, such as in 1999, when an army unit destroyed the town of Odi in Bayelsa State, allegedly in response to

the assassination of twelve policemen by local youths. According to research published in 2002, 2,483 people died in the massacre.<sup>154</sup> In 2001, following the abduction and killing of nineteen soldiers by an armed group, about 200 civilians were killed in a retaliatory operation in Benue State. There have been numerous similar, though less murderous, incidents ever since.<sup>155</sup>

In all these cases, the government has failed to act against the law enforcement agencies or the commanders responsible for the killings. At times, officeholders, including the president, have condoned such flagrant human rights violations.<sup>156</sup> Alongside the police and the armed forces, the principal intelligence agencies, the State Security Service (SSS), National Intelligence Agency and Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), operate without effective oversight.<sup>157</sup> The international community has been conspicuously silent about human rights abuses since civilian government was restored. As a result, in the eyes of many Nigerians, its credibility as a safeguard against government excesses has been diminished.

Non-state armed groups first emerged in the south east. By the late 1990s, insecurity there had reached such alarming levels that traders in Onitsha, the region's biggest market, sponsored a vigilante group, the "Bakassi Boys". Elsewhere, notably in Abia, Anambra and Imo states, similar groups of young men were contracted to provide private security. They soon either spiralled out of control or were used by their sponsors as private militias against rivals. Initially greeted as auxiliary law and order forces, they became known for human rights abuses.

The case for separate sub-federal police at state or grassroots level has been undermined by the impunity of such armed groups and, even more, their politicisation by local elites. At the federal level, the authorities face the daunting task of coping with a proliferation of armed groups. The Prohibition of Certain Associations Act of 2002 bans "associations or individuals or quasi-military groups" formed "for the purpose of furthering the political, religious, ethnic, tribal, cultural or other social interests of a group".<sup>158</sup> The target seems broad but even more

<sup>152</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abuja, 3 June 2006.

<sup>153</sup> The long string of military coups was inaugurated in January 1966 by a bloodbath which led to the killing of the Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, and his wife, the prime minister of the Northern Region, Tafawa Balewa, and Western premier, Chief Akintola. Six months later, in July, the head of state, General Ironsi, and twelve other top office holders were murdered. After the Dimka coup was foiled in 1976, the colonel and 38 of his co-plotters were executed; the alleged coup plot led by General Mamman Vatsa in 1986 resulted in the execution of the main conspirator and nine other officers. After Major Gideon Orkar attempted to overthrow General Babangida in 1990, he and 67 other soldiers were executed by firing squad.

<sup>154</sup> The research was by the Port Harcourt organisation Environmental Rights Action. This incident will be discussed further in a subsequent Crisis Group report on the Niger Delta.

<sup>155</sup> Bronwen Manby, "Principal Human Rights Challenges", in Rotberg (ed.), op. cit., pp. 175-197.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>157</sup> Benneta A. Odunsi, "The Police and Human Rights Infractions: The Need for Reform", in Udogu (ed.) op. cit., pp. 185-205.

<sup>158</sup> Quoted in Reno, op. cit., p. 234.

worrying is that the state has not addressed the issues taken up by armed groups it has not been able to suppress.

In the early 2000s, the *Hisbah* vigilance committees were set up in the north to promote compliance with Shari'a. Their excesses, especially in Kano, echoed the lawlessness that has come to be associated with the activities of the southern-based ethnic vigilante groups. Among the latter the O'Odun People's Congress (OPC) figures prominently. Founded in 1994 in the aftermath of the annulment of Abiola's election as president, it quickly grew into a mass movement, promoting and defending Yoruba interests by means that included violence. Feelings of alienation ran particularly high in Yorubaland and were reflected in the "O'Odun Bill of Rights", which advocated a sort of confederal arrangement within which all Yorubas would form a distinct political unit and called for a national conference to determine Nigeria's future.

The OPC was banned in late 1999, when it had become clear that the election of Obasanjo, a Yoruba, had done nothing to soothe anger over the 1993 annulment. The OPC's organisational strength has ebbed away, though popular support for what is politically promoted as the "Yoruba cause" remains strong. In the south east, since the turn of the century, an even more radical and overtly secessionist program has been promoted by the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). Its members use the uniforms of the former Biafran police force, hoist the old separatist flag and circulate maps showing the boundaries of an independent Biafra.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Nigeria is a patchwork of overlapping identities, a historically diverse palimpsest that has evolved with every rewriting. Rudimentary frameworks of analysis such as "north against south", or "Christians versus Muslims" oversimplify its extraordinary complexity and challenges.

The next big step will be the 2007 election: there cannot be a democracy without a reliable, free and fair electoral process. In light of the 2003 polls, Nigerians still wait to be convinced that civilian democratic rule is determined by their votes. "This is not an election, but a selection", has often been the refrain. It ought to be otherwise in 2007, and, after the failure to rewrite the constitution to allow President Obasanjo to stand again, chances are good. The race has never been so open. Consensus politics within the military establishment was stretched to a breaking point during the debate over an Obasanjo third term. Having fallen out with the kingmakers in uniform who supported him in 1999, the outgoing head of state is said to favour a dramatic shift in the powerbase of the federal state by giving a leg up to a successor from the south-south, the volatile Niger Delta region.<sup>159</sup>

The election will be decisive for precisely the reason celebrated Nigerian author Chinua Achebe cited in *The Trouble with Nigeria* almost 25 years ago:

Dear reader, you may think I over-draw the picture. Let me assure you that I have only sketched in the tip of the iceberg. As a class, you and I and our friends who comprise the elite are incredibly blind. We refuse to see what we do not want to see. That is why we have not brought about the changes which our society must undergo or be written off. We have no option really; if we do not move, we shall be moved. The masses whose name we take in vain are not amused; they do not enjoy their punishment and poverty. We say thoughtlessly that politics is a game of numbers. So it is. The masses own the nation because they have the numbers. And when they move they will do it knowing that God loves them or He would not have made so many of them.<sup>160</sup>

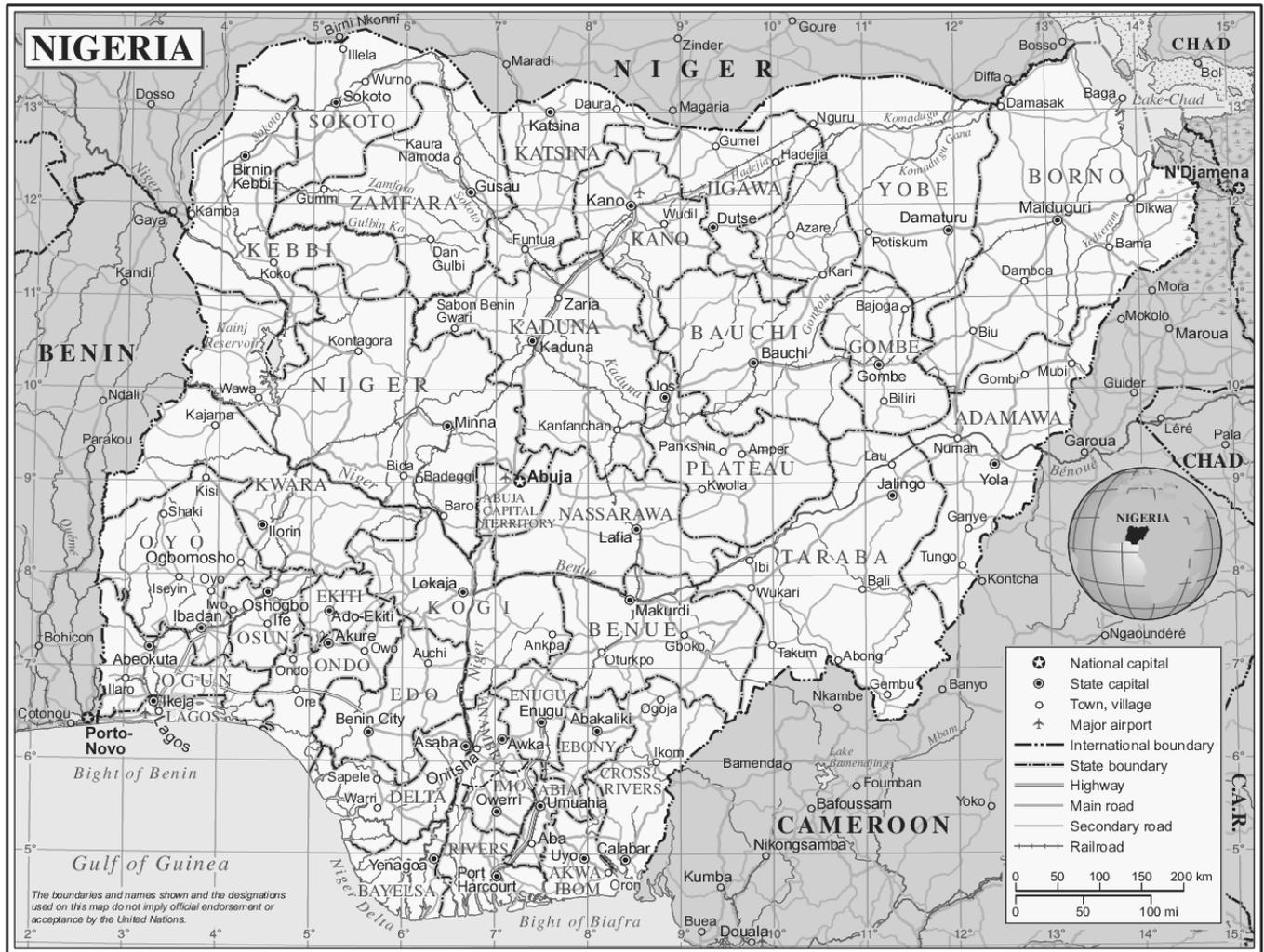
**Dakar/Brussels, 19 July 2006**

<sup>159</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nigerian officials and Western diplomats, Abuja, 30 May-6 June 2006.

<sup>160</sup> Achebe, op. cit., p. 25.

## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF NIGERIA



## APPENDIX B

### GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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AACRA	Advisory Council on Religious Affairs
AG	Action Group
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CDD	Campaign for Democracy and Development
CDHR	Campaign for the Defence of Human Rights
CLO	Civil Liberties Organisation
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CRP	Constitutional Rights Project
DMI	Directorate of Military Intelligence
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
FEDECO	Federal Electoral Commission
GDP	Gross domestic product
GNPP	Great Nigerian People's Party
IAO	Islam in Africa Organisation
IBB	Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida
ICPC	Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act Commission
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
LGAs	Local Government Areas
MASSOB	Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NADECO	National Democratic Coalition
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons
NDPVF	Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
NEC	National Electoral Commission
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NEPU	Northern Elements Progressive Union
NNA	Nigerian National Alliance
NNDP	Nigerian National Democratic Party
NNOC	Nigerian National Oil Corporation
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NPC	Northern People's Congress
NPP	Nigerians People's Party
NRC	National Republican Convention
OIC	Organisation of the Islamic Conference
OPC	O'Odua People's Congress
OPEC	Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PDP	People's Democratic Party

PRP	People's Redemption Party
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SSS	State Security Service
UK	The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UPGA	United Progressive Grand Alliance
UPN	Unity Party of Nigeria
WIN	Women in Nigeria

## APPENDIX C

### TIME LINE OF POST-INDEPENDENCE HISTORY

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**1960, 1 October** – Independence as a federation; Prime Minister: Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa

**1963** – Proclamation of a Constitutional Republic; President: Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe; Prime Minister: Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa; Lyttleton Constitution establishes three-region federal structure.

**1966, January** – Federal government's inability to control nation-wide political violence leads to military coup by mainly Igbo officers that brings General John Aguiyi Ironsi to power.

**1966, July** – Countercoup by northern and Middle Belt members of the armed forces. General Ironsi and twelve other high ranking officials are assassinated. Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a Hausa-speaking Christian from the Middle Belt comes to power.

**1967, May** – Gowon institutes twelve-state system, six in the north, six in the south. Three days later Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu declares secession of Republic of Biafra.

**1967, 6 July** – Civil War begins.

**1970, 15 January** – Civil war ends after one to two million lost lives from war and famine; Ojukwu flees to Côte d'Ivoire, and Biafrans surrender after Colonel Obasanjo's Marine Division captures their radio station. General Gowon grants a general amnesty avoiding probable widespread reprisal killings.

**1975, July** – Bloodless coup. Brigadier General Murtala Ramat Mohammed, a Muslim from Kano, takes power. Many are impressed by his no-nonsense manner, and 10,000 allegedly incompetent or corrupt civil servants are dismissed or retired. Mohammed decides to establish new capitol in Abuja.

**1976, 13 February** – Coup attempt led by Colonel Buker Dimka fails, but Murtala Mohammed is assassinated. Succeeded by Chief of Staff Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba promising to maintain Mohammed's policies. Dimka and 30 other coup plotters are executed. Seven new states are created, and Obasanjo engineers first successful transition from military to constitutional civilian rule three years later.

**1979**, – Shehu Shagaru, National Party of Nigeria, wins the presidency but without the required nation-wide voting distribution (25 per cent in each state); his victory is ratified by the Supreme Court but its legitimacy is tarnished.

**1983, December**– Bloodless coup led by Major General Muhammadu Buhari. After a bloody electoral period, the return of military rule is welcomed by many. Buhari wages a "War on Indiscipline" against corrupt officeholders but a lack of interest in democracy and heavy handed security agencies lead to another military coup.

**1985, 27 August** – Coup installs Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB), who takes the title of president, releases prisoners and implements a Structural Adjustment Program with the World Bank and IMF. Claims a five-year plan to transition back to civilian rule but continually postpones the transition.

**1990, April** - Attempted coup by Major Gideon Orkar fails. Capital moved to Abuja in December.

**1993, 12 June** – Presidential election between northern Muslim Bashir Tofa and Yoruba Muslim from Lagos Moshood Abiola. Only 35 per cent vote but little evidence of corruption or violence. Results indicate Abiola wins with 58 per cent but Babangida annuls election, keeps power against strong protest from Abiola but to apparent international indifference.

**1993, August** – Babangida turns authority over to civilian government led by Chief Shonekan but on 17 November the defence minister and Babangida's former chief of staff, General Sani Abacha, forces his resignation and takes power.

**1994, May** – Multiethnic alliance of former politicians, nobles and retired officers form the National Democratic Coalition to restore Abiola to office. He declares himself rightful president and is eventually captured and charged with treason. Labour action, protests and riots in south-western cities. Security forces kill dozens, three media companies are shut, “unknown assailants” attack homes of democracy activists and union leaders are dismissed.

**1995, March** – Obasanjo and others jailed for alleged coup plotting.

**1995, 10 November** – Ken Saro-wiwa and eight other activists from the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in the oil-rich Niger Delta are executed. MOSOP promotes militant campaign against the government and the Royal Dutch-Shell oil company.

**1998, 8 June** – General Abacha dies, succeeded by General Abdulsalami Abubaker, who releases most political prisoners, including Obasanjo.

**1998, 8 July** – Abiola dies in prison just before release.

**1999** – Elections for the House of Representatives and Senate and handover to a newly elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo. He describes himself as a “detrribalised Nigerian” but ethnic and religious strife cause over 14,000 deaths in seven years.

**2003** – Obasanjo is re-elected, defeating General Buhari.

**2006, 16 May** - Parliament defeats a constitutional amendment thus ending Obasanjo’s bid to run for a third term.

## APPENDIX D

### ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

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