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Mrs R. J. Jones, Managing Editor, *Government and Opposition*, Room B702, London
School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE,
Tel. and Fax: 020 7405 5991.

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Deconstructing Abacha: Demilitarization and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria after the Abacha Era

AS RECENT DEMILITARIZATION AND DEMOCRATIC TRENDS WORLD-WIDE have shown, the exit of a dictator of the calibre of Abacha (1993-98) in Nigeria may foster a strong desire among successors for transition to a more democratic order.¹ As in Chile after General Augusto Pinochet, and in Spain after Franco, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who succeeded General Sani Abacha, presided in Nigeria over a programme of transition to civilian rule. This culminated in the election of General Olusegun Obasanjo (retired) in February 1999, and his subsequent official take-over of government in May 1999. However, since new democracies often revert to dictatorships, the new government faces daunting challenges in Nigeria's search for democracy and political stability.

In view of the process and circumstances surrounding his election, most political commentators view Obasanjo's present administration as a 'pacted democracy' — a result of a compromise involving the ex-military ruling elite, the political class and some foreign interests.² Judith Ann Walker, who was an observer of the

*I am immensely grateful to the Belgian Administration (ABOS), the Belgian Embassy in Nigeria, and Prof. Kris Deschouwer of the Centrum voor Politicology, Vrije University Brussels, for providing me with the financial and material resources for this study. I am equal¹ indebted to Gary Kynoch, Bridget Gillich and the anonymous reviewers at *Government and Opposition* for providing helpful contributions.

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave*, London, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

² Kunle Amuwo, 'The Political Economy of Nigeria's Local Government Election of December 1998', *Transition in Nigeria, Issue: Journal of Opinion*, XXVII:1 (1999), pp. 21-5; Kayode Soremekun, 'Disguised Tourism and the Electoral Process in Africa: A Study of International Observers and the 1998 Local Government Elections in Nigeria', *Transition in Nigeria*, pp. 26-8; Darren Kew, 'Democracy-Dem Go Crazy, O: Monitoring the 1999 Nigerian Elections', *Transition in Nigeria*, pp. 30-2; Amadu Seay and Charles Ukeje, 'The West and Elections in Nigeria', *Transition in Nigeria*, pp. 34-8.

presidential elections in February 1999, concludes that the election of Obasanjo is not a triumph of democracy because he is viewed as the 'ordained military successor'.³ The notion therefore is that the transition in Nigeria has barely started. The new president, who narrowly survived Abacha's tyranny, has now found himself at the centre of the new political process with its surrounding uncertainties.

This study aims critically to assess the prospects for political stability and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The first part reviews other recent transitions to democracy in the Third World in an effort to identify the policy options available to the new government. The second section makes a case for the distinctive character of Abacha's monstrous regime. Abacha's dictatorship has been described correctly as the worst post-independent regime in Nigeria. The contention here is that his regime was one of the most important for demilitarization because of the clear message passed to the entire citizenry, especially to the elite — that under authoritarianism a similar danger of persecution confronts both high and low in society. The third section discusses issues deserving the careful attention of the present administration, described in some quarters as 'Nigeria's last chance' to progress toward democratic consolidation.⁴

RECENT DEMILITARIZATIONS AND MEASURES FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO DEMOCRACY

Samuel Huntington has presented an original discussion of shared trends peculiar to recent democratic transitions in Third World countries. As he argues, outcomes of these later transitions were largely contingent on the choices made between authoritarian

³ Judith Ann Walker, 'Civil Society and Election in Nigeria', *Transition in Nigeria*, op. cit., pp. 54-5. See also Yemi Olowolabi, 'Born-Again Helmsman: A Trust of Faith Presents Obasanjo with a Second Chance', *Tell*, Lagos, 31 May 1999, pp. 20-21. General Obasanjo was thrown into goal by Abacha, following an accusation of plotting a coup in 1994.

⁴ In an editorial, captioned 'Nigeria's Last Chance', the new democratic government was described as Nigeria's last opportunity to redeem itself from the inclination towards self-destruction, which has been in motion for four decades. *Tell*, Lagos, 31 May 1999, p. 16.

reactionaries (standpaters), moderate reformers and radical revolutionaries.⁵ Explaining the 'Third Wave' (democratic transitions of the late 1970s and 1980s), Huntington offered some explanations why only about thirty countries with authoritarian systems shifted to democratic political systems while approximately one hundred others failed in this regard. In a study of histories of regime changes in those countries that did democratize between 1974 and 1990, including Portugal, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile and Nicaragua, Huntington found that these countries oscillated among others, Huntington found that these countries oscillated between democratic order and more conservative military regimes as a result of incidences of radicalism, corruption and disorder. Other reasons identified for non-consolidation of democratic gains include persistent economic problems, extremist policies of newly democratic governments, drastic reactions of former dictators, unchecked polarization of the polity and de-colonization hangovers.⁶

Huntington identifies a four-fold typology of authoritarian regimes: one-party, personal, military and racial oligarchy, with South Africa as an example of the last. Nigeria's experience has been with military dictatorships which Huntington considers as best able and most willing to hand over to populist government, provided there are sufficient safeguards from prosecution for the soldiers, assurance of military resources and autonomy of the army as a whole. In Nigeria until lately, soldiers have been shielded from any kind of civil probe or prosecution. This fact obviously influenced their willingness to quit power on the few occasions on which they have done so. Notwithstanding, displaced armies, as Robert Pinkney notes, find it easier to return to power than other authoritarian regimes. In Nigeria, this fact has been demonstrated often. One possible explanation is that, as an institution, the army is more likely to remain intact than a displaced authoritarian party, or the henchmen of a displaced personal ruler.⁷

While one-party or military dictatorships present great institutional and ideological barriers to democratization, personal rulers are even more reluctant to retire.⁸ Abacha's regime (1993-

⁵ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, op. cit., pp. 109-315.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-7.

⁷ Robert Pinkney, *Democracy in the Third World*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1993, pp. 120-2.

⁸ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, op. cit., pp. 582-6.

98) was increasingly becoming a personal fiefdom; hence his reluctance to quit. With the exit of personal rulers, the successor may seek a transition to democracy, if no other viable political structure appears to be available. The case of Spain, where Franco's death in the 1970s paved the way for democratic institutionalization in the country, stands out.⁹ Similarly, Abacha's death led to the emergence of a successor who realized immediately that there was a need for the military to retreat. In some instances, personal rulers sought legitimacy through election frauds, as did Generals Babangida (1985-93) and Abacha throughout their rule.

On the whole, success in recent transitions has tended to come easier where the transition process moved in a gradual sequence, with hardliners, softliners and moderates finding common understanding.¹⁰ The three crucial interactions in democratization processes are those between government and opposition, between reformers and standpaters in governing coalitions, and between moderates and extremists in the opposition. In all transitions, 'these three central interactions play some role'.¹¹ Hence, Georg Sorensen concludes: 'transitions to democracy are rarely based on the complete defeat of the elites who stood behind the previous authoritarian rule. In a vast majority of cases, the transition to democracy is based on negotiations with forces backing the authoritarian regime'.¹²

As Pinkney pointed out, the pitfall in focusing on the structural form of authoritarian government is to assume that it is an independent variable. This is against the backdrop of doubts whether authoritarian rulers aborted previous attempts at democracy or whether the outcome depended largely on the country's culture, history and recent political structure.¹³ In Nigeria for instance, while some scholars emphasize history and ethnicity as obstacles to

democracy, others focus on failure and corruption of leadership.¹⁴ The plausibility of stable, long-term democracy emerging from government-opposition cooperation, pacts, consensus, moderation and gradual change — as opposed to its emergence from opposition, conflict and rapid change — is quite obvious. The experiences of Pakistan, South Korea, South Africa, much of tropical Africa and Latin America clearly point in that direction. Where there are underlying conditions favourable for cooperation, consensus and gradual, moderate change, and where there are political actors who are favourably disposed to democratic objectives, these assets cannot be dismissed.¹⁵

The main points of the discussion of newly demilitarizing politics like Nigeria may be summarized as follows:

1) Poverty obstructs the expansion of democracy. 'Shifts from authoritarianism to democracy between 1974 and 1990 were heavily concentrated in a "transition zone" at the upper-middle levels of economic development'.¹⁶ Increased wealth helps in moderating the choices made by actors involved in transition politics.

2) Although economic wealth makes political settlements easier, inter-elite behaviour — in terms of their disposition towards cooperation and moderation — remains decisive in bringing about successful results.

3) Also important is the insight offered on the psychology of dictators in and outside the seat of power. Most often, dictators find themselves in a position where exit from power is more dangerous than hanging on. Thus, the temptation for the new government to exert revenge after a dictator's exit must be pursued with caution because if self-preservation is at stake, retreating dictators and their henchmen may attempt to reverse the transitional process.

¹⁴ For instance, see Coran Hyden and Donald C. Williams, 'A Community Model of African Politics: Illustrations from Nigeria and Tanzania', *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* (1994), pp. 68-96; Okwudibia Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu, Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1982; Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, London, Heinemann, 1983. Achebe reviewed particularly the second republic and came to the conclusion that there is nothing especially wrong with the Nigerian people, their climate or their society, except the inability of its leaders to rise to the challenge of able leadership.

¹⁵ Pinkney, op. cit., p. 150.

¹⁶ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, op. cit., 1993, p. 311.

⁹ Pinkney, op. cit., pp. 120-1.

¹⁰ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, op. cit., pp. 110-23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹² Georg Sorensen, *Democracy and Democratization*, Boulder, Colo., Westview Press, 1998, p. 28.

¹³ Pinkney, op. cit., p. 121.

4) With the reality of democracy as the *de facto* ideology in the modern world, little room is now left for tolerating dictatorships. Indeed, poverty could be a consequence of lack of democracy rather than a cause. 'The combination of causes generally responsible for one wave of democratization differs from that responsible for other waves.'¹⁷

There are three common points of agreement between Huntington and other transition theorists like Rustow, Lijphart and Binder et al. The first is that democratization moves in phases before the final elaborate rules of the game are devised.¹⁸ The second is that compromise, accommodation and the involvement of all segments in the political process ensure stability in the system.¹⁹ The third is that gradual resolution of problems associated with identity, participation, penetration, legitimacy and distribution goes far to entrench democratic institutions, as was the case in Western democracies.²⁰

The transitional approach to explaining democratization suggests that democratization is largely contingent on what elites and individuals do — when, where and how. The focus, as David Potter notes, is on hardliners, softliners, opportunists, moderates, and not on the people. It also helps to explain that the historical route to liberal democracy is determined fundamentally by the agency of elite initiatives and actions. Notwithstanding, Potter recognizes that elite choices are shaped at least to some extent by 'structures' which he defines as sets of physical and social constraints, sets of changing opportunities, and sets of norms or values that can influence the content of elite choices.²¹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38. See also Leonard Binder et al., *Crisis and Sequences in Political Development*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1971, pp. 12-17, 18-52 and 296.

¹⁸ Dankwart A. Rustow, 'Transition to Democracy', *Comparative Politics*, 2 (1970), p. 362.

¹⁹ Lijphart, 'The Power Sharing Approach', in J. V. Montville, *Conflict and Peace Making in Multiethnic Societies*, Massachusetts, Lexington Books, 1990, p. 494.

²⁰ Binder et al., pp. 58-60; 182-96. For similar views by Huntington, see his guidelines in *The Third Wave*, op. cit., from pages 138-63.

²¹ David Potter et al., *Democratization*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997, pp. 17-18.

DECONSTRUCTING ABACHA: HIS POLITICS AND ITS NUISANCE VALUE

Laurence Whitehead's essay 'Drama of Democratization' aptly captures 'the complex dynamics, shifting agendas, and multiple interactions'²² that characterized the transition politics of the past two decades in Nigeria. As conceptualized by Whitehead, many democratic transitions commence like drama with a clearly defined objective:

[they] condense a great deal of complex and often unexpected narrative into a limited chronological space, and then achieve a moment of resolution that crystallizes the significance of what went before. The drama ends; the game is won or lost; the democratic institutions are launched.²³

Broadly considered, the politics of the period were part of the peculiar nature of class relations and power struggle in post-colonial Africa. The African elites, both in military or civilian garb, are perpetually in competition over access to available resources. In her analysis of patterns of competition in Nigeria, Terisa Turner notes that because the state controls opportunities for profit in commerce, politics becomes dominated by struggle for positions in the state or for access to those who have influence over government decisions.²⁴ In this system, fighting for power is a do-or-die affair because those who lose have no share in the system.

Obscured for long by his superiors in the military profession before his emergence centre-stage in Nigerian politics, Abacha was a keen spectator of the volatile struggles for power after independence in 1960. Understanding the attractions of the game with particular regard to its control over public resources, he engineered two coups within a period of eighteen months, to establish himself as a principal competitor. According to Obayuwana, Abacha's role as a king-maker in the second coup, which brought General Babangida to power as Nigeria's fifth military leader, in August 1985, was an indicator of 'the character of his later life as a

²² Laurence Whitehead, 'The Drama of Democratization', *Journal of Democracy*, 10:4 (1999), p. 85.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁴ Terisa Turner, 'Commercial Capitalism in Nigeria: The Pattern of Competition', in Dennis L. Cohen and John Daniel (eds), *Political Economy of Africa, Selected Readings*, London and New York, Longman, 1981, p. 155.

cat with nine lives'.²⁵ The ethics of power struggle in sub-Saharan Africa dictate that the expertise with which individuals and groups can organize violence and intimidation secures power. In the game, ultimate winners win big; losers lose even bigger.

Distribution of rewards is a tradition in Nigeria's client-patron political system, described by Richard Joseph as 'Prebendal'.²⁶ In the system, actors would weave a complex network of relationships with individual clients and groups. A patron could be a civilian or a military officer with a considerable amount of influence. The common expectation is that the patron sooner or later would find his way to a higher position of power. With the patron in power, rewards would flow to the clients in the form of government contracts, political appointments, arbitrary promotions, exclusive commercial privileges, scholarships, and so on. In this structural form, as pointed out by Post and Vickers, resides the dangerous dynamics of political instability.²⁷ With avarice and self-interest as the guiding norms, there is no hard-to-follow rule guaranteeing clients' continued loyalty to their patrons and vice versa. Therefore, actors can shift loyalties, forge new alliances, and change roles, depending on individual ambitions, personal ego, tribal or confessional affiliation and the nature of existing relationships with the men in the corridors of power.

With Babangida in power, unhindered patronage flowed to Abacha. His appointment as the Chief of Army Staff was complemented with membership of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). Within a space of five years, he attained the rank of a five-star general with an appointment as Minister of Defence.

²⁵ Clement Obayuwana, '1983 Coup Brought Abacha to Limelight', *Daily Champion*, Lagos, 9 June 1998, p. 6. The coup of 1985 was remarkable because of its crafty planning that caught General Tunde Idiagbon hands-down. Many Nigerian political observers had doubted the possibility of such a coup with the personality of Idiagbon as Buhari's number two man. The former was on a hajj to Mecca when his administration was overthrown in 1985.

²⁶ Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*, Cambridge and Ibadan, Nigeria, Cambridge University Press and Spectrum Books, 1987 and 1999. See especially pp. 55-68; Peter Lewis, 'From Prebendalism to Predation: The Political Economy of Decline in Nigeria', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34:1 (1996), pp. 79-103.

²⁷ Kenneth Post and Michael Vickers, *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria 1960-1966*, London, Heinemann, 1973, pp. 46-9.

Cold, calculating, and taciturn, Abacha participated actively as Babangida's henchman and survived his eight years of cunning, manoeuvring and general mistrust — adopting these Machiavellian qualities for his future role in Nigerian politics.

Richard Joseph has recognized the illusory nature of African democratic transitions in the 1990s. He concludes that in the majority of cases, they were 'deliberately contrived to satisfy prevailing international norms of presentability'.²⁸ Guided or visual transitions' aimed at self-succession in Nigeria started under Babangida. On his assumption of power, the ex-dictator had deceived the Nigerian press with his pretensions to espouse human rights, press freedom and wide consultation on state policies. The proscription of *Newswatch Magazine* on 6 April 1987, for publishing a government report 'ahead of the government's consideration and decision',²⁹ was later to remind the press that dictatorships and issues linked with liberalism are strange bedfellows.

His endless transition to civil rule went along with a high level of corruption and gross abuse of human rights, press freedom and systematic elimination of opponents. With no intention to leave power, and in order to guide the process, he promulgated decrees 17 and 27 in August 1985.³⁰ The agonies brought about by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) adopted by his regime, were compounded by annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election won by Chief M. K. O. Abiola, which amply demonstrated

²⁸ Richard Joseph, 'Africa 1990-1997: From Austerity to Closure', *Journal of Democracy*, 9:2 (1998), pp. 3-4.

²⁹ Mohammed Yusuf, former press secretary to the Chief of General Staff, cited by B. Edokeyi, 'The Guillotine', *Newswatch*, Lagos, 14 September 1987, p. 17. According to the report, the paper was banned for six months. Although its house's reopening was granted forty days before the expiration of its ban, all pleas for clemency in addition to court actions undertaken by Gani Fawehinmi and Olu Onagoruwa (two radical Lagos lawyers and human rights activists) did not change the position of the regime. See also Dan Babarinsa, 'The Sword of Damocles', *Newswatch*, Lagos, 14 September 1987, p. 20; and Yusuf Mohammed, 'The Press as Colossus: Fact or Falacy?', *Newswatch*, Lagos, 14 September 1987, p. 16.

³⁰ For details of Babangida's schemes to remain in power, see Oyeleye Oyediran, 'Transition Without End: From Hope to Despair', proceedings of a paper delivered on *Dilemmas of Democracy in Nigeria*, at the University of Wisconsin, in November 1995; and Seye Kithinde, 'Years of the Locust', *The News*, Lagos, 18 October 1993, pp. 16-21.

his unwillingness to see an end to the hardships experienced during his regime.⁵¹

Speaking later in June 1998, Babangida admitted that his cancellation of the 1993 election was wrong. His son Muhammed was quoted as saying that his father acted under pressure from his fellow generals. 'They put my father in a corner [and] they threatened him', he disclosed.⁵² Abacha advanced the argument that if power was allowed to be held by a southerner like Chief M. K. O. Abiola, the North would lose a lot.⁵³ Here, a clear understanding of the game of Nigerian politics was cleverly exploited. To secure easy electoral support, politicians usually invoke regional, tribal or confessional sentiments. As Walter Schwarz pointed out, politics in Nigeria equals tribalism.⁵⁴ When Babangida was forced to quit in August 1993, General Sani Abacha was conspicuously left behind as Defence Secretary in an interim government constituted to manage the political mess.

The Interim National Government (ING), led by Chief Shonekan which lasted for three months, provided an interlude for a change of principal actors on the political stage. Being erroneously viewed until then as a man of honour, Abacha was approached to lend his support to the underground moves aimed at restoring the electoral victory of Abiola. He received the consent of the latter to push Shonekan aside, on the understanding that he would afterwards surrender power to him.⁵⁵ The script ran perfectly according to the plot. On 17 November 1993, Abacha proclaimed himself Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Abacha in Office. In his analysis of the factors leading to consolidation of democracy in developing countries, Dankwart

⁵¹ Peter Lewis, 'Endgame in Nigeria? The Politics of a Failed Democratic Transition', *African Affairs*, 93 (1994), pp. 323-46; Claude E. Welch Jr, 'Civil Military Agonies in Nigeria. Pains of an Unaccomplished Transition', *Armed Forces and Society* (Summer 1995), pp. 593-614.

⁵² Muhammed Babangida, cited in *Post Express*, Apapa, Lagos, 28 July 1998, pp. 1-2.

⁵³ General Sani Abacha, cited in *Post Express*, Apapa, Lagos, 28 July 1998, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Walter Schwarz, *Nigeria*, New York, Praeger, 1968, p. 14.

⁵⁵ Colonel Yakubu Bako, in an interview with *Tall*, Lagos, 26 July 1999, pp. 16-20. Bako was among the middle-rank officers who were against the 1993 election annulment.

Rustow identified four historical phases of democratic development. According to Rustow, the first is that of establishing national unity, when the vast majority starts to share a sense of political identity. This leads to the second phase characterized by a long period of political struggle. This period of political struggle or 'hot family feud' takes a particular nation into the third or decision phase when the groups in conflict decide to compromise and adopt democratic rules, guaranteeing some share in the polity for all parties. This is the 'historical moment'. The fourth phase involves the consolidation of the compromises made in the 'historical moment' into habit.⁵⁶ Thus, to appreciate the legacy of Abacha's regime in the tortuous phases of political development in Nigeria, a brief account of his style of politics is important.

Under the pretence that his stay in power was going to be brief, as it would only resolve the controversies brought by the annulment of the 1993 election, prominent members of the opposition, including Abiola's supporters, were recruited into Abacha's cabinet. By June 1994, it had dawned on most Nigerians, including optimists, that he was not planning to relinquish power. All his actions and pronouncements pointed to this fact.

As oft-reiterated in African mythology, 'a snake that fails to swallow its kind will not aggrandize'.⁵⁷ From 1994, the regime commenced to crush opposition by way of arrests, detention without trial, imprisonment and executions. Abiola was arrested in June 1994 while trying to claim his electoral mandate as president. His arrest provoked a series of industrial actions jointly organized by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Staff Union (PENUGASU). Others whose solidarity brought pressure on the regime were the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas workers (NUPENG), the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), and other civil associations.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Rustow, op. cit., p. 2; also 'How Does Democracy Come into Existence?' in P. C. Lewis and D. C. Potter (eds), *The Practice of Comparative Politics*, Harlow, Longman, 1973, pp. 117-32.

⁵⁷ See Raphael Chijioke Njoku, 'Consociationalism: Its Relevance for Nigeria', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 5:2 (Summer 1999), p. 8.

⁵⁸ Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria*, Ibadan, Nigeria, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1999, pp. 117-73.

The regime was determined not to lose control to the opposition and accordingly leaders of various associations including journalists, lawyers, union leaders and pro-democracy activists were hunted down and taken into custody by security agents. Some unlucky ones like NADECO's chief financier Pa Alfred Riwanu were assassinated in cold blood, prompting many others to run into exile. Godwin Oryecholam's study on the human costs of Abacha's war against Nigerians depicts gory escapades of a blood-thirsty ruler hell-bent on keeping himself in power. Throughout the era, Nigerian opponents of Abacha were either pleading for the lives of those going to be hanged or those rotting in gaol. Included among his victims were Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Ogoni environmental activists hanged on 10 November 1995. Nigeria's former second-in-command, General Musa Yar'dua, died in prison for allegedly plotting a coup.³⁹ Perhaps most depressing was the brutal assassination of Kudirat, Abiola's wife, in 1996 in Lagos.⁴⁰

In the last six months of his regime, Abacha added more anxieties to the transition. In the first place, he refused to publicly acknowledge his plans for self-succession. Secondly, he kept mute over the fate of his former second-in-command, General Oladipo Diya, and other officers sentenced to death by firing squad for plotting a coup in December 1997. The various political parties involved in his transition programme were further intimidated to adopt him as their sole presidential candidate. Individuals and groups were frequently hired for a price to hold solidarity rallies for the purpose of giving legitimacy to his self-succession plans. Abacha's style of politics fit well into the general observation made by Joseph on the re-composition of power in Africa behind the facade of democratization in the 1990s. Autocratic regimes while espousing democratic ideals strengthened their grip on power.⁴¹

³⁹ See Yemi Olowolabi, 'Abacha Declares War on the Opposition: The Crackdown Continues', *Tell*, Lagos, 25 May 1998, pp. 22-3, and also Anthony Opara and Uche Okereke, 'Abacha Survived Two Coups', *Daily Champion*, Lagos, 9 June 1998, p. 6. Yar'dua and Obasanjo were jointly implicated in the 1995 coup hoax.

⁴⁰ See Joseph, 'Africa, 1990-1997: From Abertura to Closure', op. cit., p. 5. Godwin Oryecholam, 'The Price of Democracy', *The Week*, Lagos, 31 May 1999, pp. 8-13; Aminu Tijani, 'Abacha's Murder Incorporated', *Tell*, Lagos, 19 July 1999, pp. 16-24.

⁴¹ Joseph, 'Africa, 1990-1997: From Abertura to Closure', op. cit., p. 4. See also Mikhail Mumin, 'Lagos: Go Now! Abuja: Go Now!', *Tell*, Lagos, 16 March 1998, pp. 22-3.

Assessing the Abacha years, Rueben Abai notes that the dictator was all-knowing, all-conquering, with no challenger. Nigerians were harassed to such a point that the first thought among the citizens at dawn was 'what will General Abacha do today?' And the last question at evening was 'what will Abacha do tomorrow?'⁴²

Lessons from Abacha's Regime. While Abacha 'was an affliction on Nigeria', his demise provided the much-needed opportunity to accelerate democratic transition.⁴³ For one thing, the regime within a space of five years hastened the three processes out of the four historical phases of political development as theorized by Rustow. The period of hot family feuds not only brought about the desire for compromise, but also a sense of political identity and unity. This development somehow lent credence to the notion which suggests that the seed of democracy is often propagated by the actions of its worst enemies.⁴⁴ If this notion is accepted, and past historical experiences of other countries have lent it confirmation, strange as it may sound, scholars may begin to agree that Abacha's dictatorship provided Nigeria with grounds for the revival of democracy.

Abacha's self-interest brought a 'great awakening' among Nigerians of divergent groups. According to the consociational school of thought, one of the favourable factors for cooperation among the elite in deeply divided polities is identification of the existence of a common enemy to the nation state, which often promotes a sense of nationalism. Once the peril is recognized, the theory says, remedies may be applied.⁴⁵ The substance of this was

⁴² Rueben Abai, 'The Nation Versus Abacha', *The Guardian*, Lagos, 1 May 1998, p. 29.

⁴³ Adekunbi Ero et al., citing an unnamed business associate of the late dictator, who wished not to be identified, *Tell*, Lagos, 22 June 1999, p. 28. See also Stephen Orvis, who in 'Chronology of Nigerian Elections', *Transition in Nigeria Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, XXVIII:1 (1999), pp. 1-2, shares the unanimous view that Abacha's government was the most brutal military administration the country had ever experienced.

⁴⁴ This was the understanding deduced by Pinkney, who made a critical review of Huntington's book *The Third Wave*, in his own very impressive work *Democracy in the Third World*, op. cit., pp. 120-1.

⁴⁵ Arend Lijphart, 'Power Sharing Approach', in J. V. Montville (eds), *Conflict and Peace Making in Multiethnic Societies*, Massachusetts, Lexington Books, 1990, pp. 497-9. Sue M. Halpern, 'The Disorderly Universe of Consociational Democracy', *West European Politics*, 9:2 (April 1986), p. 182.

manifested in the unprecedented solidarity shown by a group of 34 prominent Nigerian politicians drawn from different ethnic groups and united by their opposition to Abacha's self-succession scheme. It also took nothing less than the obvious dangers of Abacha's politics of annihilation for the northern elite to acquiesce in the idea of conceding power to a southerner. Abacha pushed the marginalization and northernization of state power to its utmost limits, thereby provoking restiveness among various Southern nationalities about what may be regarded as internal colonization by the North.⁴⁶ Commenting recently on the national question, Eskar Toyo shares the view that military rule aggravates ethnic separatism by hindering the operation of true federalism as a functional solution to the national question. It hinders democratic culture, which tempers separatist feelings and awakens fear of domination among groups.⁴⁷

E. Gyimah-Boadi has recognized the contribution that Africa's nascent civil society made to the anti-authoritarian struggle and the rebirth of African liberalism of the 1990s.⁴⁸ Paradoxically, the regime's attempt to suppress the expression of public opinion and independent views in Nigeria brought about the multiplication of voluntary associations. Again with an overarching sense of a common national danger, most of these pro-democracy civic networks, which had in the past operated without a common front, were forced to work together in order to find a way out of the national predicament. As in the case of Franco's Spain in the 1970s, Abacha provided a cause for cooperation among pro-democracy activists, religious leaders, journalists, human rights crusaders, local and foreign NGOs, together with individuals and governments working with those at home and the legion of Nigerian self-exiles, to exert pressure on the regime. Two remarkable initiatives were the emergence of the

⁴⁶ Kola Olufemi, 'The Limits of Electoralism', *Transition in Nigeria*, op. cit., p. 9. In Nigeria's political discourses, the term 'northernization' represents the notion of moving federal institutions under northern control.

⁴⁷ Eskar Toyo, 'The National Question in Nigeria', *The Guardian*, Lagos, 15 November 1998.

⁴⁸ E. Gyimah-Boadi, 'The Rebirth of African Liberalism', *Journal of Democracy*, 9:2 (1998), p. 21.

National Coalition for Democracy (NADECO) and the Joint Action Committee on Democracy (JACON).⁴⁹ The dictatorship has further made the nation aware of the obvious dangers posed by the possibility of the destiny of an entire nation falling under the control of a sick man.

Abacha, however, did not rule alone. It takes more than one individual to foster a dictatorship regime. Nigerians carried out his executions, identified the imagined or real enemies, and settled personal vendettas under the cover of state security.⁵⁰ This reflects the inherent dangerous dynamics of Nigeria's political economy of class conflict, embedded in what Ikporukpo has identified as the struggle over access to petroleum resources in the country.⁵¹ While extracting huge favours, legions of political sycophants urged Abacha to go on and on. State governors, top construction companies and oil concessions took the occasion of his wife's birthdays to lavish expensive gifts on the family. Musicians sang praises to his name. Religious leaders called him 'God's anointed' and offered 'national prayers' for his continued success.⁵² While such behaviour strengthened the regime, it also encapsulates the deplorable moral state of contemporary Nigerian society. Orewa, who appraised the

⁴⁹ According to Olufemi, in 'The Limits of Electoralism', op. cit., p. 9, the Joint Action Committee of Nigeria (JACON), a coalition of radical human rights and pro-democracy activists insisted on the imperative of political dialogue and restructuring through dialogue in the form of a national conference.

⁵⁰ For the gory details on Abacha's execution team, see Dare Babarinsa, 'Echoes from June 19', *Tell*, Lagos, 19 July 1999, p. 3; Aminu Tijani, 'Abacha's Murder Incorporated', *Tell*, Lagos, 19 July 1999, pp. 16-24.

⁵¹ C. O. Ikporukpo, 'Federalism, Political Power, and the Economic Power Game: Conflict Over Access to Petroleum Resources in Nigeria', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 14 (1996), pp. 159-77.

⁵² On the one hand, Oliver De Coque, Nigeria's highlife maestro has earned himself the reputation as the most notorious praise-singer for evil men. Between the Babangida and Abacha era, the musicians produced several records, calling the duo the best leaders of Nigeria. On the other hand, there were a few shining exceptions of religious leaders like Hassan Kukah, Abiodun Adetiloye, Bolanle Gbonigi, Tunde Bakare and some Nigerian Catholic Bishops and priests, who stood behind the people in the heat of opposition against Abacha. See Dare Babarinsa, 'The Gun and the Pulpit', *Tell*, Lagos, 25 May 1998, p. 3; and Bishop Gbonigi's radical interview granted to *Tell*, Lagos, 25 May 1998, pp. 12-21. In the interview which was published barely two weeks before the death of Abacha, the Anglican bishop did not entertain the slightest hesitation in declaring that the dictator was a 'ruthless, heartless and a thoroughly wicked man... a man without a human touch at all'.

society in the period of crisis, was right in his conclusion that 'we all are guilty'.⁵³

There seems to be a propensity for autocratic behaviour in the Nigerian national character. Leaders do not emerge in a vacuum. They are often a reflection of the society they represent. A closer study of Nigerian society reveals that Nigerians, in whatever position they may find themselves, have the tendency to approve absolute authority and its public manifestation. In a survey involving a sample of the population, it was revealed that in most families eldest sons often claimed absolute right over all property left behind by a deceased head of family. The study also showed that child abuse is a common practice in families, in schools and in the wider society. Most husbands habitually assault their wives. In higher institutions of learning most lecturers make themselves unapproachable to their students. Heads of public departments command the services of a generous number of attendants, who are often asked to run domestic errands for their bosses. These examples added together portray the picture of a society that lacks democratic culture, suppresses the full development of its younger members, shows disrespect for women, lacks a sense of fairness and upholds injustice.⁵⁴

Ironically, Abacha's regime fought wars on behalf of democracy in another West African sub-region. While the regime helped to end the civil war in Liberia, it also played a decisive role in restoring to power in February 1998 Sierra Leone's elected president, Ahmed Kabbah, overthrown by a military junta in May 1997.⁵⁵ This precedent may serve as a counter-weight to armed subversion of elected

⁵³ G. Oka Orewa, *We Are All Guilty: The Nigerian Crisis*, Ibadan, Nigeria, Spectrum Books Limited, 1997. My present study on African issues is taking an approach of the investigation into the psychological and moral conditions of African leaders and the nature of their various societies. E. A. Ayandele in his book, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914*, London, Longmans, 1966, pp. 329-45, had raised the notion that the kind of education, combined with the influence of foreign ideology, brought some amount of positive as well as negative influences on the post-independent generation of Africans. The persistence of social ills in the African continent calls for further studies in this direction into the causes of much societal maladjustment which has kept the African continent perpetually underdeveloped.

⁵⁴ The surveys are extracts from a preliminary study on 'The Social Psychology of an Aspiring Democracy'. [Raphael Njoku, Working Paper, Lagos, 1998].

⁵⁵ See Richard Joseph, 'Africa, 1990-1997: From Abertura to Closure', op. cit., pp. 8-9. Michael Bratton, 'Second Elections in Africa', *Journal of Democracy*, 9:3 (1998), p. 58.

governments in the future. Being himself a victim of the past regime, General Obasanjo's experience of imprisonment and subsequent release will remain the best lesson on respect for human rights and rule of law. Fundamental prerequisites of governance in the emergent global community. Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka has recently underscored the incontestable truth that, 'the ideal realm for us is the human space that empowers the citizen at all levels of social organization'.⁵⁶ This ideal will be just as relevant for the present regime.

General Abubakar and the New Democratic Institution. Abacha's successor, Abubakar, who assumed office in June 1998, was no doubt compelled to initiate a committed programme of demilitarization because of the follies of his predecessor. Abacha's extraordinary performance as a dictator marked the end of a phase in Nigerian history. Obviously no option was left for his successor but to quietly organize a respectable hand-over of power to civilians. The later transition was remarkably different from Babangida/Abacha's guided choreography, in which the government established and funded political parties, wrote their manifestos and appointed officials. Under Abubakar, political parties were formed entirely by the political elite.

Nevertheless, Abubakar's transition was an affair between elite solidarity and communal support. Kunle Amuwo notes that the hasty nature of the process profoundly affected the observance of election laws, arguing that in reality politics and elections in the country have become 'an extension of military rule by civilian means'.⁵⁷ Also in their separate criticisms of the conduct of the elections and the role of international observers, Amuwo and Soremekun denounce the indifference of Abubakar's regime in controlling the use of money to influence electoral results. Electoral officials were reportedly given large sums of money, and foreign observers noted that they were more concerned with the appearance of democracy,

⁵⁶ Wole Soyinka, cited by Graham Fraser in 'Nobel Laureate Lauds Federalism's Ordinariness', *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 8 October 1999, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Amuwo, op. cit., in pp. 21-5 contends that the distortion of the political landscape by the military cannot be checked by advertised elections, controlled by big money. See also Francis C. Enemuo, 'Elite Solidarity, Communal Support, and the 1999 Presidential Election in Nigeria', *Transition in Nigeria. Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, XXVIII:1 (1999), pp. 3-4. Olufermi, op. cit., p. 8.

rather than its realization.⁵⁸ These facts not only vindicate Joseph's categorization of recent transitions in Africa as 'virtual democracies',⁵⁹ but also substantiate Schirmer's doubt over the 'the extent to which demilitarization is accomplished when a military "prepares the environment" for elections by pacification and immerses state security into both the constitution and the presidency'.⁶⁰

OBASANJO AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

New democracies, as Huntington observes, are usually confronted with the challenge of a drastic reform of civil-military relations. This is in addition to the need to 'establish their authority with the public, draft new constitutions, establish competitive party systems and other democratic institutions, liberalize, privatize, and marketize command economies, . . . while curbing inflation and unemployment, limit crime and corruption and curb tensions and violence among ethnic and religious groups'.⁶¹

Continued inter-group schism and some drastic policies being taken by the new government in Nigeria clearly constitute elements of radicalism threatening the new democracy in Nigeria. A part of this problem remains 'the constant mobilization of the Yoruba race . . . to demand ethnic federalism'.⁶² Presently, this demand is assuming a dangerous dimension, with inter-tribal conflicts involving Yorubas and Hausa-Fulanis in cities like Lagos, Shagamu, Ibadan and Kano. Another aspect is the de-northernization of federal institutions under the present government. Southerners in Nigeria are strongly opposed to the kind of control of key federal institutions

⁵⁸ Annuwo, pp. 21-4; Soremekun, op. cit., pp. 26-37.

⁵⁹ Joseph, 'Africa: 1990-1997: From Abertura to Closure', op. cit., p. 4. According to the author, 'virtual democracy' is defined as those transitions that are marked by co-optation of rival parties, and in which the result of the transition is by recalcitrance and piecemeal reforms. The overall objective is to present a mere visual notion of democracy, in conformity to foreign pressures to democratize.

⁶⁰ Schirmer, op. cit., p. 839.

⁶¹ Samuel P. Huntington, 'Reforming Civil-Military Relations', *Journal of Democracy*, 6:4 (1995), p. 10.

⁶² Jubril Ibrahim, 'Political Transition, Ethnoregionalism, and the "Power Shift" Debate in Nigeria', *Transition in Nigeria, Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, XXVII:1 (1999), p. 15.

prevalent under previous regimes. The present resentment ought not be over-exaggerated. During the Abacha years, persecution had no tribal or regional preference. Therefore, Obasanjo, a Yoruba, has to justify the significant decision of the northern elite to allow the shift of power to the South through equitable leadership.⁶³

Another issue facing Nigeria concerns the need to curb the tide of fraud and corruption in public offices. A local source estimates that over \$110 billion has been stolen from the national treasury since Nigeria's independence in 1960.⁶⁴ According to James Child, liberalism and libertarian values cannot be sustained in a fraudulent context.⁶⁵ Thus, the immediate focus should be on enforcing transparency in public offices, rather than the present heated pursuit of properties held by a selected group of individuals in the defunct (Abacha) regime. A gradual approach to the issue may prove more rewarding, given that a substantial part of the loot came from the last-minute contracts and rewards distributed to different interest groups by the Abubakar regime (1998-99) to oil the wheels of the 'pacted transition' process.⁶⁶

In view of the influences on the psychological development of Nigeria's present generation, a generation very familiar with such vocabulary as riots, coups, execution, rigging, robbery, scam, forgery, prostitution and extortion, the propensity for disorder is now higher than ever. Recently, cult rivalries in the various universities in the country have resulted in several deaths and injuries

⁶³ Joshua Lincoln, 'The "President" Federation: Nigeria and its Federal Future', in *Transition in Nigeria, Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, XXVII:1 (1999), pp. 17-20; see also Ibrahim, op. cit., p. 15. The Hausa-Fulani oligarchy had persuaded the northern citizens, who altogether constitute about 53 per cent of the population of Nigeria, not to put up a candidate in the 1999 presidential election, which saw two southern Yoruba candidates, Messrs Olusegun Obasanjo and Olu Falae standing in the election.

⁶⁴ A World Bank Communiqué cited in *Body and Soul*, 3 August 1999, pp. 12-14. See also *Africa Recovery* 13:1, (June 1999), pp. 11-12.

⁶⁵ James W. Child, 'Can Libertarianism Sustain a Fraud Standard', *Ethics*, 104 (July 1994), pp. 722-38.

⁶⁶ For detailed documentation on the level of corruption presided over by Abubakar's regime of less than one year, see Dave Babarinsa, 'A Looter Continues', *Tell*, Lagos, 7 June 1999, p. 3; and for a deeper insight into how Babangida's regime squandered over \$12.2 billion which Nigeria realized during the sharp rise in oil price triggered by the Gulf crisis (1990-91), see Jeffrey Herbst, 'Is Nigeria a Viable State?', *The Washington Quarterly*, 19:2 (1995), pp. 151-72.

among students.⁶⁷ When added to the series of religious riots provoked by the adoption of sharia laws in some sub-states, the periodic eruption of violent protests in the oil-rich Niger Delta, and the scandalous revelation of academic certificate forgeries involving some notable members of the political hierarchy, there is cause for alarm over the future of Nigeria.⁶⁸ The challenge therefore is how the government can initiate programmes to change social behaviour in Nigeria.

The continued exclusion of women in particular and in general, the entire younger generation (within the age bracket of 21-39) from public offices, is counter-productive. Over 90 per cent of the new administration's cabinet is made up of the same class of individuals that has been in public service since independence in 1960.⁶⁹ The hegemonic appropriation of state offices by these first crops of post-colonial administrators is unrealistic within the framework of the new global system marked by innovations, liberalization and empowerment. As Whitehead stated, a long-term process of democratization and institutionalization calls for consideration of how the quality of actors may affect the long-term aspiration of the process. As his study shows, the transition of the late 1970s in Peru 'failed to create the conditions for democratic consolidation because only old and discredited actors returned to the stage.'⁷⁰ To paraphrase Huntington, if the Third Wave has a future in Nigeria, that future lies in the expansion of democracy in public appoint-

⁶⁷ Abuti, *op. cit.*, (p. 29), identified these negative forces as the dynamics conditioning the minds of new generations in Nigeria. See also Dele Adegkanah, 'The Killing Field', *Tell*, Lagos, 26 July 1999, pp. 22-5.

⁶⁸ Seep Offi, 'To Make or Mar: Ibrahim Salisu Buhari, Speaker of the House of Representatives, is Emmeshed in a Flood of Allegations Bordering on Insincerity. Can he Survive?', *Tell*, Lagos, 26 July 1999, pp. 26-7. The embattled former parliamentarian was found guilty of forgery and subsequently fined 2000 Naira.

⁶⁹ See George Mba, 'The President's First Headache', *Tell*, Lagos, 7 June 1999, pp. 22-4. Most conspicuous in the list of the present cabinet are personalities like Theophilus Danjuma, Jerry Gana, Laila Dongoyaro, Muhammed Arzika, Dotun Phillips, Dapo Sarumi, Philip Asiodu and Joe Nwodo, among others. Chinyere Amaechi, in 'Contending with Political Marginalization', *The Post Express*, Lagos, 8 October 1996, p. 17, observed that the exclusion of women from public office was rooted in colonial times and persisted in the contemporary era. See also Kukah, pp. 162-72.

⁷⁰ Whitehead, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

ments.⁷¹ Therefore, the Nigerian political culture — 'the system of values and beliefs that define the context and meaning of political action'⁷² — must embrace equality, freedom and social justice.

To consolidate Nigeria's nascent democracy, it is imperative to find a solution to the country's persistent economic problems, as well as to resuscitate developmental infrastructure. The educational system and social infrastructures, such as roads, telephone services, power-supply and postal service are all in poor shape.⁷³ As Huntington succinctly states, 'In short, if you wish to produce democracy, promote economic growth.'⁷⁴ According to *Africa Recovery*, only 57 per cent of adult Nigerians are literate, in comparison with the 71 per cent figure for all developing countries. UNICEF, in its 1999 Report on *The State of the World's Children* discovered that 'the number of boys dropping out of school in four states of eastern Nigeria has risen from 51 per cent in 1994 to 58 per cent in 1996.'⁷⁵ The modernization school of thought contends that a population's level of education, an index of modernization, is a central explanatory factor on people's commitment to democracy — where such commitment is measured by participation, moderation and tolerance to opposition.⁷⁶

Equally, extremist policies have to be minimized in order to guard against the dangers of drastic reaction by former dictators. One of the foremost actions taken by the new government was the retirement of all military officers in the previous regimes that had served in political positions. The policy was widely welcomed by Nigerians, hence the public clamour for more retirement, in addition to calls for a probe into members of the previous regimes.⁷⁷ These demands

⁷¹ Huntington, 'After Twenty Years: The Future of the Third Wave', *Journal of Democracy*, 8:4 (1997), p. 6.

⁷² Sorensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-6.

⁷³ Nigeria's Economy at the Crossroads: New Government Faces a Legacy of Mismanagement and Decay', *Africa Recovery*, 13:1 (June 1999), pp. 12-13.

⁷⁴ Huntington, 'After Twenty Years', *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁷⁵ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 1999 Report*, cited in *Africa Recovery* (June 1999), p. 12.

⁷⁶ Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁷⁷ For full details of the 'The Inevitable Purge', see *Tell*, Lagos, 28 June 1999. While the public welcomed the purge by Obasanjo, there was also pressure for a probe into the background individuals like Babangida, and other close friends of the previous military regime. See also Bako, 'More Officers Should be Sacked', *Tell*, Lagos, 26 July 1999, pp. 16-20.

are presently causing a state of anxiety in some sections of the Officer Corps. Yet the question remains whether authoritarian rulers aborted previous democratic governments or whether reversion to military regimes was product of the culture, history and political structures existing in the country. In this light, the passion for revenge on retreating dictators and their supporters might hide the more necessary steps to consolidation. Newly-elected governments are strongly advised to beware of playing politics with the military. As studies on demilitarization in Turkey, Brazil and Chile have shown, military officers will continue to have substantial influence in societies like Nigeria where they have voluntarily given up power. It might be wise at the moment to observe the policy of 'do not prosecute, do not punish, do not forgive, and do not forget.'⁷⁸

Lack of consensus among the political elite is the bane of democracy in Nigeria. Politics in plural societies fundamentally demands elite cooperation and accommodation. According to Lijphart, in deeply-divided societies, all significant groups need to be accommodated in the decision-making process for the sake of stability. This means that there should be an incentive for all groups to cooperate.⁷⁹ In Nigeria, therefore, excluded groups need accommodation; more autonomy needs to be allowed and the electoral process should de-emphasize exclusive access for victors to all spoils of office. Thus, the real issue in Nigeria also seems to go beyond the rhetoric of power shift. Reaching an acceptable formula for rotating power has remained an issue of contention. Due to the fact that the post of the presidency is the most powerful position in Nigeria, presidential elections tend to attract keen interest among diverse groups.⁸⁰ Consequently, issues dominating political discourses dwell on de-concentration of power, true federalism, revenue allocation principles and shifts of power from the North. The

⁷⁸ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, op. cit., p. 231; 'Reforming Civil-Military Relations', op. cit., pp. 15-16; and also Pinkney, op. cit., p. 121.

⁷⁹ Jürgen Steiner, 'The Consonational Theory and Beyond', *Comparative Politics*, New York, The City University of New York, 1981, p. 346; Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1977.

⁸⁰ The office of the presidency in Nigeria is modelled on the United States system. The executive is both the Chief of State, Head of Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. These attractions have made the election for the presidency hotly contested.

potential for future conflict resides in the contention by the South-east that the election of an Easterner as president in the next federal elections would mark the end of the Nigerian Civil war (1967-70), and fully reintegrate the Easterners into the realm of things.⁸¹ As argued by Doh Shin, 'democratic consolidation cannot be achieved without abandoning the formal and informal institutions, procedures, and arrangements that constrain the performance of a newly democratic regime.'⁸²

Therefore, a collective decision on a system of shared power is once again advanced given the fact that politics, in the traditional Nigerian sense of rivalry, will most likely resume after Obasanjo's first tenure. In this regard, three possible scenarios could be envisaged. One will be a situation where Obasanjo has the support to continue in office after his present tenure. His policies and actions in resolving the present problems will determine the likelihood of this scenario. In scenario two, the Hausa-Fulani may resolve to recapture power, also contingent on how the present administration handles issues of national institutions. The third scenario will be the northernization of national institutions. The third scenario will appear from an expected Igbo demand for a share in control of the centre. The present political equation favouring mostly the Yoruba depicts an imbalance in both the ethnic and class contexts of power structures. There is little likelihood that other ethnic groups would support the expected Igbo demand for federal control when it comes. Generally viewed as colonialists, the Igbo tribe of South-eastern Nigeria is the most resented group in Nigeria.⁸³ The race for the presidency in 2003 will be witnessing a return to the politics of alliance-making, muggumperry and suicidal institutional sabotage which, combined, brought about the collapse of the previous republics.

With the rejection of proportional representation, participation of all groups in the decision-making process and empowerment of the minority, the 1999 transition has left the federal system still in

⁸¹ Enemuo, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

⁸² Doh Chull Shin, 'On the Third Wave of Democratization. A Synthesis and Evaluation of Recent Theory and Research', *World Politics*, 47 (October 1994), p. 145.

⁸³ Arthur Nwankwo, in *The Igbo Leadership and the Future of Nigeria*, Enugu, Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1985, p. 9, argued that Nigerians of all other groups would probably argue on no matter other than their common resentment of the Igbo tribe.

the same poor condition that it was previously. Prescribing a strategy for democratizers, Huntington stated that 'a top priority should be countering the tendency toward executive arrogation of power, and transforming . . . electoral democracies into liberal democracies'.⁸⁴ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan have also emphasized the imperative of democratic completion and consolidation on the 'constitution zone'.⁸⁵ The sooner some constitutional steps are taken to reduce the dangers inherent in the executive presidential system, the brighter the future of democracy in Nigeria will be.

The government also needs to reconcile the range of interest groups that brought it to power. These are the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Obasanjo's party, which is composed of membership broadly divided into four or more groups: among them are the progressives led by Solomon Lar, former PDP national chairman; the conservatives, the inner caucus of the second republic central government party led by Dr Alex Ekwueme; and the late Yar'adua political machinery, inherited by the current vice-president Ariku.⁸⁶ The fourth class, or 'the fifth column' is under the chairmanship of ex-military dictator General Ibrahim Babangida. Altogether, these divergent interest groups correspondingly fit into Huntington's characterization of actors in a transitional setting as made up of radical revolutionaries, moderate reformers and authoritarian reactionaries, all of whom must find agreement before genuine progress can be made. Yet, the easily forgotten majority, the peasantry, deserves some measure of consideration in order to bring about the filtering of democracy down to the grassroots.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this article, I have tried to present the argument that, in the light of the enormous challenges confronting the new government in Nigeria, there is an equal probability for democratic consolidation

⁸⁴ Huntington, *After Twenty Years*, op. cit., p. 11.

⁸⁵ See Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post Communist Europe*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. 3ff.

⁸⁶ Mikail Mumuni, 'Obasanjo's Coat of Many Colours', *Tell*, Lagos, 31 May 1999, pp. 28-9.

as for a reversion to dictatorship, contingent on the opportunities and limitations before the elite and the choices made by them. However, my thesis is that Abacha's regime, especially as it affected the elite, in its nuisance value, has unconsciously fostered conditions to which helped countries like Chile, Portugal, Spain, and others, to achieve some measurable democratic consolidation. The Abacha 'shock-therapy' brought about 1) the decisive compromise reached on the power shift to the South; 2) the strengthening of the resolve of the civil society in the struggle for democratization; 3) the attraction of a higher degree of pressure for demilitarization from the international community, and 4) a clear message, passed to the entire citizenry, that under authoritarianism a common danger threatens everyone — including the elite, the so-called pillars of society.

Still, it appears that the present opportunity may eventually be wasted in view of the numerous constraints confronting the government. The economy is a shambles, corruption looms as large as ever; social and developmental infrastructures are non-existent; and decentralization, power-sharing and the operation of true federalism are subject to procrastination. Radical progressives are preoccupied with the liquidation of military reactionaries of the previous regimes. On top of these problems is the placement of 'old brigades' rather than younger personnel into public offices. Yet, the study by Scott Mainwaring on the resilience of elected governments in Latin America offers some hope for Nigeria, given that these newly-established democracies have managed to endure in the face of similar 'daunting challenges and what initially seemed to be long odds'.⁸⁷ Nigeria's survival is contingent on the elites' close adherence to the various policy measures elucidated by Huntington and others, which one cannot say are presently being put into practice in Nigeria. Nigeria's nascent democracy needs international assistance for the reinvigoration of the economy. With a GNP per capita of approximately US\$280,⁸⁸ the state of the country's economy is far below the US\$6,000-mark considered by Adam Przeworski and others as the stage where 'democracies are impregnable and can be

⁸⁷ Scott Mainwaring, 'The Surprising Resilience of Elected Governments', *Journal of Democracy*, 10:3 (1999), p. 102.

⁸⁸ Nigeria: Back in the Family', *Commonwealth Currents*, 2 (1999), p. 6.

expected to last forever'.⁸⁸ There is a need for the new administration to renew popular confidence in the economy and to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, which has widened over the last fifteen years. According to Huntington, democracy is incompatible with gross inequalities in wealth and income.⁸⁹

Altogether, the expertise with which Obasanjo pushes his policies and manages his cabinet, as well as his detractors, will determine the chances for consolidation. Will democracy in Nigeria survive the 'second election' threshold? The path followed to the year 2003 holds the answer. Nigeria deserves a sound democratic foundation to emerge in the twenty-first century with fresh hope, fresher expectations and stronger unity. Indeed as stated by Sorensen, 'transitions to democracy are rarely based on the complete defeat of the elite who stood behind the previous authoritarian rule'.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Adam Przeworski, in Larry Diamond, Marc Plattner, Yun-hum and Hugo-mao Tien, *Consolidating The Third Wave of Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*, Baltimore, MD, The John Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 297. The \$6,000 figure is purchasing power parity to the US dollar.

⁸⁹ Huntington, *After Twenty Years*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁹¹ Sorensen, op. cit., p. 28.