Politics and Governance

in a Conglomerate Nation, 1977-2017

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PART TWO
VIII. Autocracy, Violence, and Ethnomilitary Rule in Nigeria

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This revised version of a paper presented at a conference at M.I.T. on State, Conflict, and Democracy in 1997 pulled together key dimensions of a Nigeria that had drifted far from constitutional and democratic governance. State and society had become increasingly criminalized; the educational system and other social sectors were eroding; and many civic and political activists were in detention or driven into exile. A multilayered hegemony resting on military structures, diverted income from petroleum revenue, and a resurgent northern primacy was resented and resisted. The execution of Ogoni environmental activists brought world attention to the deepening traumas. The Abacha regime responded with active outreach to autocratic leaders in West Africa, and even to seek support from African-American political and civic groups. The only exit from this national abasement was the removal in 1998 of its executor-in-chief.

Although Nigeria led the way in redemocratization in Africa during the 1970s, two decades later governance was characterized by autocracy, political violence, and ethnomilitary rule.[1] A country that was once a strong voice for the liberation of the continent from colonialism and apartheid became a perennial target of international action to obtain the release of political prisoners, the observance of human rights standards, the reduction of drug trafficking, and the rapid transfer of power to civilians. The military regime of General Sani Abacha was able to withstand these pressures, however, because of Nigeria's strategic importance as the most populous African nation, a major oil exporter, and the possessor of one of the continent's largest armed forces.

Despite its ample resources, the gap between Nigeria's potential and its achievements has steadily widened.[2] Though it had some of the greatest potential among countries that achieved independence in the post-World War II era, Nigeria now exhibits a profound crisis in virtually every dimension of public life.[3] Moreover, the criminalization of state and society has extended to countries to which its people have emigrated. The impressive educational infrastructure

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[1] An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 1996, titled, "The Nigerian Nation-State and the Resurgence of Authoritarianism in Africa."

[2] T. Forrest, *Politics and Economic Development;* Joseph et al., "Nigeria"; Diamond et al., eds., *Transition Without End*; and Beckett and Young, eds., *Dilemmas of Democracy*.

[3] Soyinka, *Open Sore of a Continent*. For my review essay of Wole Soyinka's book, see the *Journal of Democracy* (January 1997). The extent of Nigeria's shortfall is reflected in the fact that its prospects were once considered favorably in comparison with other Asian nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea.

constructed at all levels after independence in 1960 has steadily eroded, as have the public transport and health systems.

Nigeria has survived intact as one sovereign nation despite these travails and, in addition, has overcome one of Africa's most devastating wars of secession (1967-1970). Nevertheless, the failure to establish a stable democratic political order since then has deepened Nigeria's predicament as a state and aspirant nation. The political contortions of Nigeria as it shifted between military and civilian regimes since 1966 are well known.[4] There are three dates in 1993 that mark the end of the long held hope that Nigeria would establish a state structure that enjoyed legitimacy and authority and would, in turn, enhance the sense of nationhood: June 12, June 23, and November 17. On the first date, a presidential election was held in which the unofficial winner, Moshood Abiola, obtained 58.5 percent of the vote and his opponent, Bashir Tofa, 41.5 percent.[5] On the second date, the elections, although assessed by all independent observers to have been peaceful and fair, were annulled by the military government of Ibrahim Babangida. On the third date, General Sani Abacha, a leading member of several military juntas, pushed aside an interim civilian government and established himself as the most dictatorial ruler Nigeria had ever known.

The traumatic events since these fateful dates have followed inexorably from the victory, against the odds, of Moshood Abiola of the Social Democratic Party, who was elected president on the basis of a different alignment of national forces than had prevailed in each of the previous civilian eras.[6] These events include the cancellation by military fiat of this victory (and the expressed will of the people that it represented), the harsh suppression of all acts of protest against the military regime, and the assumption of power by a ruthless army officer who proceeded to impose yet another "democratic transition" accompanied by extensive human rights abuses and restrictions on civil liberties.[7] The arrest and prolonged detention of numerous journalists, trade unionists, human rights and pro-democracy activists, and former government leaders such as Olusegun Obasanjo; the execution of environmental crusader Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow Ogoni militants; and the driving into exile of many prominent citizens including Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka and veteran politician Anthony Enahoro are just some of the prominent actions of the unprecedented political repression in Nigeria between 1993 and 1998.[8]

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[4] For comprehensive discussions, see Diamond, "Nigeria"; Diamond et al., eds., *Transition Without End*; and Beckett and Young, eds., *Dilemmas of Democracy*.

[5] The tabulation of the results was completed, but their formal issuance by the election commission was blocked by the military regime. For a discussion of this episode, see Lewis, "Endgame in Nigeria."

[6] John Paden discusses the new geographical coalition that supported the victory of Abiola and his vice presidential running mate, Babagana Kingibe, in "Nigerian Unity."

[7] Diamond, "Nigeria," pp. 451-460.

[8] For details, consult U.S. Government, Human Rights Report of the Department of State, 1996 and 1997.

A Multilayered Hegemony

There are four tendencies that coalesced to give rise to a multilayered hegemony in late twentieth-century Nigeria: the domination by the military over all civilian political actors and groups; the deepening of the primacy of the northern region in Nigerian politics; the increasingly predatory nature of economic life based on access to and control of state power; and the autocratic nature of military presidentialism.[9] Each of these tendencies will be briefly discussed. Military rule used to be described as an aberration in Nigeria. In fact, it is civilian rule that now merits such a designation, as civilians have governed the country for less than a decade since independence.[10] Moreover, nearly 15 years of unbroken military rule have elapsed since the overthrow of the carefully crafted Second Republic (1979-1983). This long tenure of power already exceeds by two years the 1966-1979 period that began with a devastating war of secession.[11] To retain power, Nigerian military rulers have had to disrupt repeatedly their own transition programs. In the process, the legitimacy crisis of the military-as-government has been superimposed on the many problems of this fragile and now fragmented nation.

In my study of the creation of the Second Republic, I described northern primacy as "a virtual axiom of the country's political life."[12] In 1914, the northern and southern regions were amalgamated by the British, but they continued to be governed separately. As the drive for independence accelerated after World War II, the coexistence of the more populous, Islamic, and educationally disadvantaged northern region in one polity with the more Christianized and educationally advanced southern region was tackled through several constitutional revisions. Following independence in 1960, this issue underlay the turmoil of both civilian and military regimes.[13]

Since 1983, Nigeria has been ruled by a succession of northern military officers: Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985); Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993); Sani Abacha (1993-1998); and Abdulsalam Abubakar (1998-1999). Because the Nigerian state controls access to the nation's disposable wealth in the form of revenue from petroleum production**,** the fusion of

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[9] Lewis, "From Prebendalism to Predation."

[10] See Joseph, "Nigeria: Inside the Dismal Tunnel," and a more extended version, "Democratization Under Military Rule."

[11] When General Babangida reluctantly left government in August 1993, he handed power to an interim national government led by businessman Ernest Shonekan, whom Babangida had earlier brought into his administration. This administration lasted just three months and was never regarded as more than a facade behind which the military continued to rule until Abacha, its defense minister, was ready to dispense with Shonekan's services. For details, see Othman and Williams, "Politics, Power, and Democracy."

[12] Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics*, p. 130.

[13] See Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity, and Democracy*.

military and northern hegemony has provoked intense resentment in southern Nigeria toward a system of governance widely viewed as biased, exploitative, and repressive. In April 1990, during an attempted military coup, junior officers put forward the radical proposal that five northern states, dominated by Islamic and traditional forces, should be excised from the federation. Since 1993, the sentiment that Nigeria should not continue to exist as one entity has increasing appeal to southern intellectuals. Rotimi Suberu refers to growing southern paranoia regarding northern political domination reflected in continuing public debates on the revamping of the federation in which regret is openly expressed about the 1914 amalgamation.[14]

The predatory nature of Nigeria's political economy is a subject that has also been extensively examined.[15] The financial scams by which Nigerians have enticed individuals in other countries, and the fact that police services in major industrialized countries have created special units to counter fraudulent behavior by Nigerians, are just a few external manifestations of the criminalization of the country's economic life. As Nigeria has become a major transit point in international drug trafficking, the laundering of fortunes from this traffic and pilfered public funds generate a large parallel economy. Such revenues also finance covert political machinations.[16] When the power accessible to individuals and groups via illicit channels is so extensive, state construction on a legitimate basis becomes highly problematic. In his study of the illegal mining and export of diamonds and other mineral resources in Sierra Leone, Will Reno used the term "shadow state" to refer to the networks and structures that sustain these activities.[17] A commission established by Abacha to try and undermine his predecessor, Babangida, revealed that over U.S. $1.2 billion of the windfall in petroleum revenues during the 1991 Gulf War could not be accounted for.[18] This is one indication of the extensive resources available to individuals with access to the shadow state.

The final tendency, the extensive presidentializing of the military system of governance under Babangida, has transformed Nigeria into a more fully patrimonial system. In my 1987 study, I discussed the "tug" toward patrimonialism in Nigerian politics. However, prebendalism, based on Max Weber's concept of decentralized patrimonialism, seemed more helpful in explaining the pursuit of material wealth via the appropriation of state offices. Nestled within various regions of Nigeria, and especially the north, are political units based on loyalty to

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[14] Suberu, "Federalism" and "Religion and Politics."

[15] Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics*; Lewis, "From Prebendalism to Predation" and "Economic Statism."

[16] See Bayart et al,. *La Criminalisation*.

[17] Reno, *Corruption and State Politics*.

[18] Under Goodluck Jonathan, it was similarly charged that $2.1 billion in oil income had not been transferred from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation to the federal government.

traditional rulers that more closely correspond to Weber's idea of patrimonial administration.[19] After two decades of unbroken rule by northern heads of state (beginning with Shehu Shagari, the elected president, in 1979-1983), Nigeria came to resemble a neo-patrimonial polity in which deference to the authority of the supreme ruler is necessary for gaining appointment to political office and access to wealth-generating opportunities.[20]

Sani Abacha assumed all the powers that Babangida had enjoyed and added to them a more ruthless use of the security services against political opponents and dissidents. It was long felt by analysts of Nigerian politics that the extreme cultural diversity of the country, the existence of dispersed loci of power in the form of hierarchical traditional institutions, and the vigor of civil society, modern institutions, professional groups, and an independent press militated against the consolidation of dictatorial rule. Using his considerable political skills, however, Babangida succeeded in constructing a highly personalist and autocratic system in which control was steadily extended over the armed forces, as well as political and civil society. When he was forced out in August 1993, waiting in the wings was an individual ready to advance this autocratic project involving military dominance, northern primacy, and privileged access to the nation's oil wealth. To sustain this project, the capacity to use state violence against dissidents was enhanced, and the security services were expanded into more ruthless and reliable instruments of rule.[21]

Authoritarian Renewal: The Regional Dimension

After the dismantling of the Berlin Wall began a democratic wave sweeping through Eastern and Central Europe, Africa also experienced a broad drive to demolish political monopolies.[22] That process, however, was paralleled by an equally significant occurrence: the resurgence and renewal of authoritarian systems. These options were anticipated in earlier theoretical formulations: "transitions are delimited, on the one side, by the institution of some form of democracy, the return to some form of authoritarian rule, or the emergence of a revolutionary alternative."[23] In the case of Nigeria, authoritarian renewal and entrenchment have

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[19] Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics*, pp. 63-66.
[20] For an indication of how Nigerian academic scholars were co-opted into the patronage structures developed by Babangida, see Ibrahim, "Political Scientists." What he writes about academics is equally true of businesspeople and politicians.
[21] For the evolution of these tendencies, see Adekanye, "The Military," and Joseph, "Principles and Practices."
[22] Joseph, "Africa"; Nwokedi, *Politics of Democratization*; and Chapter 2 of this book by Crawford Young.
[23] O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions*, p. 6.

been disguised as redemocratization. Such a distorted process has extended beyond Nigeria's borders and has inspired the country's most sustained diplomatic efforts since the Biafran war.

Before 1990, Nigerian governments had usually been reluctant to project the nation's power externally. However, the armed insurgency in Liberia in December 1989 that led to the removal of the military ruler, Samuel Doe, and the substitution of armed factions for the national state, prompted the intervention of regional peacekeeping forces dominated by Nigerian military contingents. After eight years of intermittent conflict and peace negotiations, an elected government was finally established in August 1997 in Liberia under Charles Taylor, who was obliged to accept a strong and continuing Nigerian military presence. The collusion between Nigerian senior officers and Liberian armed factions for several years in exploiting the country's natural minerals and other spoils of war replicated the economic predation by Nigerian military regime at home.[24] The symbiosis of warlordism in Liberia and military dictatorship in Nigeria reached its consummation in an Abacha-Taylor pact reminiscent of the Babangida-Doe alliance of the 1980s.

The emergence of a network of allied military rulers in West Africa has contributed to the containment of democratic forces in the region since the mid-1990s. In March 1996, when Mathieu Kérékou, the former military ruler in Benin, successfully challenged Nicéphore Soglo in a rerun of the 1991 elections in which Kérékou had been defeated, the latter was able to count on direct financial support from his neighbors: Gnassingbé Eyadema in Togo and Sani Abacha in Nigeria. Eyadema overcame a prolonged challenge to his rule and retained power in fraudulent elections in 1993 and 1997. A younger member of this network is General Ibrahim Mainassara Bare of Niger, who overthrew his country's constitutional democracy in January 1996 and then bullied his way to a dubious electoral victory.[25] Bare was able to count on support from Blaise Campaoré in Burkina Faso, who had legitimized his forceful capture of power via boycotted elections in 1991, and on support and advice from Abacha, whom he regularly visited in Abuja, the Nigerian capital.

The convoluted nature of authoritarian renewal in West Africa is also reflected in the political convulsions in Gambia and Sierra Leone. Nigerian troops had long been stationed in

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[24] For a discussion of the financial dimension of the Liberian conflict, see Reno, "Business of War."

[25] Using the term "election" to describe what transpired in Niger in July 7 and 8, 1996, would stretch any plausible meaning of the term. The independent electoral commission was dismissed while the voting was taking place. The new commission, under the Interior Ministry, reported an increase of Bare's share of the vote from 29 to 72 percent and of voter turnout from 61.6 to 93 percent, to yield a 52.2 percent "victory" for the military leader. The Nigérian experience is reminiscent of a similar fraudulent exercise in Liberia in 1985. The then military dictator, Samuel Doe, had the voting boxes seized and counted by persons he controlled, who then reported him elected by a small margin.

both countries prior to the coups that occurred in 1994 and 1997, respectively. By insisting on the restoration of deposed President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in Sierra Leone, instead of accepting the new military junta (and its subsequent legalization via controlled elections, as in Gambia), the Abacha regime found itself in the odd position of calling for economic sanctions against the Sierra Leone junta while resisting international actions against Nigeria for denying power to an elected president. However hypocritical these external actions may appear, they are consonant with the convoluted logic of military politics in Nigeria and the treatment of democracy in a wholly instrumentalist manner.[26]

Abacha launched a program in October 1995 of transition to civilian rule that was supposed to conclude in 1998 with elected governments at all levels of the federation. However, in local government elections in March 1996, individuals who were critical of the government's strategy found their candidacies peremptorily canceled. The continued arrest of journalists and human rights activists, and the driving into exile of pro-democracy leaders, meant that Nigeria's "democratic transition" was taking place alongside widespread exclusion and intimidation. Even academic seminars on democracy were often dispersed by armed soldiers. The five parties eventually granted legal status in 1996 sought to outdo one another in their submissiveness to the junta. All five even nominated Abacha as their presidential candidate in 1998. While the Babangida transition program ended in tragedy in 1993, that of Abacha reduced democracy to pure parody.

In smaller African countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Togo, and Niger, the head of state can run for office and completely manipulate the process in order to be declared the winner. None of Nigeria's military rulers, however, has ever stood as an electoral candidate, which means that they have always (with the exception of Olusegun Obasanjo in 1979) had to devise reasons to postpone the actual transfer of power.[27] In seeking to manufacture an uncontested electoral victory for himself in 1998, Abacha brought Nigeria to the brink of violent political warfare.[28] However this tragic scenario unfolds, Nigeria will continue to pay a heavy price for the fact that both Abacha and Babangida were never willing to transfer power to a civilian government strong enough, and autonomous enough, to put an end to the hegemonies they represented. Moreover, the people of several West African countries will continue to have

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[26] I have described Nigerian tyranny as having become Orwellian and Kafkaesque. See Joseph, "Democratization Under Military Rule."

[27] It is generally believed that General Babangida enjoyed such popularity during the early years of his administration (1985-1993) that, as the leader of a political party, he would have stood a reasonable chance of emerging victorious even in an election. Instead, Babangida pretended to be preparing to hand over power while preventing the process from culminating in the election of his successor.

[28] His sudden death on June 8, 1998, averted this tragedy.

their democratic aspirations thwarted as part of the defensive strategy encouraged by Nigeria's military rulers.[29]

Ethnoregionalism and Military Rule

Students of Nigerian politics must grapple with the ways in which developments since the overthrow of the Second Republic in 1983 have complicated the country's existence as a nation and a state. There have been notable attempts to conceptualize the "unfinished" nature of this polity.[30] In 1973, Ken Post and Michael Vickers described Nigeria as a "conglomerate society" in which "the basic conflict was the mobilization of people not towards some transcending national loyalty but rather towards identification with an intermediate cultural section."[31] They then described the ways in which a "system of rewards" reinforced these political-cultural tendencies.[32] John Paden has continued such explorations in his recent discussion of a "six zone model of political culture in Nigeria": northern emirate states; Borno and its environs in the northeast; middle-belt minorities (between north and south); Yoruba states in the southwest; Igbo states in the southeast; and southern minorities.[33]

The undermining of this cultural federation by the exacerbation of northern hegemony since the collapse of the Second Republic in 1983 has left Nigerians profoundly disoriented regarding the very nature of their country.[34] In an exploration of the overlap between perception of political and cultural domination in contemporary Africa, René Lemarchand identifies five types of polities: (1) ethnic or ethnoregional hegemonies; (2) "totalizing" polities; (3) neopatrimonial rulerships; (4) factionalized state systems; and (5) liberalized/transitional polities.[35] Using such a schema, it can be argued that Nigeria's post-1983 military regimes, while avowedly pursuing the creation of type 5 (a liberalized and transitional polity), deliberately fostered a combination of 1 and 3: an ethnoregional hegemony and a neopatrimonial autocracy.

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[29] Also included in these transactions has been the French government, which the Abacha regime has actively courted, since democratization has always meant for France the potential overthrow of allied regimes in Africa.

[30] In a special volume of the African Studies Association's *Issue* edited by C. S. Whiaker (vol. 11, nos. 1-2 [1981]), articles by Whitaker, Richard Sklar, John Paden, and myself pull together many of the concerns about ethnicity, religion, democracy, and the nature of the state that are of continuing relevance.

[31] Post and Vickers, *Structure and Conflict*, p. 58.

[32] Ibid., pp. 58-60.

[33] Cited in Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics*, p. 184. Three general studies of continued relevance are Young, *Politics of Cultural Pluralism and Rising Tide*, and Rothchild and Olorunsola, *State Versus Ethnic Claims*.

[34] See Soyinka's ruminations on the elusive concept of the Nigerian nation, which he refers to as a "nation space," in *Open Sore of a Continent*, pp. 17-36.

[35] Lemarchand, "Uncivil States," pp. 184-185.

Yet the Nigerian polity became an even more complicated compound as it included a sixth type missing from Lemarchand's typology: a military system.

The June 12, 1993 election and its aftermath reflect the interplay of these contradictory tendencies: the pursuit of a liberalized polity while strengthening northern hegemony; the development of a civic order alongside military domination; and the construction of a federal state accompanied by autocratic presidentialism. The campaign for a democratic system and civil society in Nigeria, in which universal principles of human rights would be actively fostered, overlapped with resistance to northern political dominance. Southern pro-democracy militants have adopted the expression "the Caliphate" to refer to this multilayered hegemony. The Caliphate of Sokoto was a nineteenth-century theocracy centered in the northwestern state of Sokoto, whose sway over an extensive region via local rulers or emirs covered much of what became the northern region of Nigeria, as well as parts of present-day Benin, Niger, and Cameroon. Although the victorious presidential and vice presidential candidates in the June 12, 1993 elections were both Muslims, and obtained significant support from all areas of the country including the emirate north, Abiola's ethnic identity as a Yoruba from the southwest was used to portray the election as a contest among cultural sections of the country. The Abacha regime largely succeeded in ethnicizing and regionalizing the pro-democracy struggle, thereby diluting the national significance of Abiola's victory.

A subplot of Nigeria's national political drama has been the political mobilization of the Ogoni people in the southeastern riverine area since 1989 to protest environmental degradation caused by petroleum production. They demand a greater share by local communities in the wealth generated by this production. An initially localized conflict exploded into a vigorous challenge to the structure of the federation and the prevailing multilayered hegemony.[36] Although the Ogoni numbered only half-million in a country of approximately 100 million, the full force of the military government was mustered against Ogoni dissidents in a brutal campaign of repression. The increasing militancy of the Ogoni movement was also encouraged by the support it attracted externally from the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva, the General Assembly of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization in The Hague, and specialized agencies of the United Nations.

The Ogoni demanded self-determination for Nigeria's ethnic communities and the transformation of the highly centralized federation into a confederation in which each constituent group would control the greater part of revenues generated in its areas.[37] During the first half of

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[36] This discussion draws on studies that takes up both specific and general issues: Osaghae, "Ogoni Uprising"; Naanen, "Oil Politics" and "Oil-Producing Minoirites."
[37] For the historical background to these confrontations, see Osaghae, "Ethnic Minorities."

1993, a virtual uprising of sections of the Ogoni against the Nigerian state culminated in the appeal by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) for a boycott of the presidential elections in June 1993. Ogoni militancy therefore became a component of the general challenge by southerners who saw "restructuring toward an ethnic confederation or variants of regional autonomy as the answer to pervasive political and economic inequalities."[38] They argued that the structure of the federation, transformed by prolonged military rule into a virtual centralized system, facilitated the appropriation of disproportionate public revenues by a hegemonic regional group.

Ogoni militants perceived the Nigerian state as reflecting a tight circle of causation: oil wealth financed a federal structure, controlled in turn by specific communities, whose representatives were able to determine public policy and allocate national resources to maintain their material advantages and political sway. To end this multilayered hegemony, they contended, the federal structure had to be radically reformed. The execution of nine Ogoni leaders on November 10, 1993, was a grim message from the Abacha regime to all its opponents that such challenges were considered treasonous and would be firmly crushed. The Ogoni struggle starkly illuminates the interwoven nature of the hegemonic forces in contemporary Nigeria. In addition to the despoiling of their communal lands by petroleum production, the Ogoni have paid a huge price for provoking the Abacha regime into displaying how much violence it is prepared to unleash to protect autocracy and ethnomilitary rule.

Derailing Democracy by Threatening Disintegration

Since African countries have widely differing endowments in the cultural composition of their societies, the level of force and the extent of electoral machinations needed to overcome challenges to resurgent authoritarianism vary greatly. The essential elements of this scenario are remarkably consistent across a spectrum of countries: "rulers who resist democratization, whether in Cameroon, Kenya, Togo or Zaire, have a weapon more powerful than all their military armaments, namely tying the fate of their own ethnic group or region to the survival of the regime."[39] It is remarkable how readily political leaders in northern Nigeria, except for a handful of radical and independent thinkers, supported the Babangida government's cancellation of Abiola's electoral victory in 1993. More important to them than adherence to democratic principles, or the turmoil in the country that would result from this decision, was the need to counter what was viewed as a threat to northern interests. The election of a southern president, even one who was a Muslim and a close associate of many northern civic, religious, and military

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[38] Naanen, "Oil-Producing Minorities," p. 49. The demands of the Ogoni also echoed those of a broader movement for national reformation that published blueprints for a confederal republic with eight multistate units. See Suberu, "Federalism."
[39] Joseph, "Africa 1994," p. 1.

leaders, was viewed unfavorably. Even when the Nigerian people were prepared, therefore, to take a step outside "the ethnic trap," the social forces in command of the state refused to allow such an evolution to occur.[40]

As disenchantment increased in Nigeria with each postponement of the date for transfer of power under Babangida, demands mounted for a national conference to revisit a range of constitutional issues including the structure of the federation. Suberu quotes Bolaji Akinyemi, a former Nigerian minister of external affairs, as saying that if a sovereign national conference had been convened in the mid-1990s, it would have voted "for the dissolution of the Nigerian entity."[41] Eghosa Osaghae concurs: "a national conference appears to be an invitation to a possible dissolution or division of the country."[42] During the remarkable debates that preceded the creation of the Second Republic in 1979, the need to find creative ways to strengthen both national consciousness and state legitimacy was reflected in a number of official documents. In its final report, the Constitution Drafting Committee of 1976 declared: "the State shall foster a feeling of belonging and of involvement among the various sections of the country to the end that loyalty to the nation shall override sectional loyalties." After the republic collapsed seven years later, Sylvester Whitaker acknowledged that little progress had been made in the pursuit of these objectives: "despite the dreams of dedicated Nigerian nationalists, national institutions and identity today exercise less of a hold on popular sentiment than at any time since the nation's founding."[43]

While discussing the deepening political predicament of Nigeria as a nation-state in 1987, I identified three possible courses of action. First, Nigeria could continue the search for a fully pluralistic democracy, only to find that the vessel of the nation-state cannot sustain the pressures and temporary rescue must be provided by the armed forces. Second, acknowledgement could be made of the need for a provisional semi-authoritarian governing framework, modified as much as possible by conciliar institutions of representation and entrenchment of procedures to ensure accountability. Third, one of the more thoroughgoing authoritarian twentieth-century ideologies, e.g., Leninist or corporatist, could be implemented.[44]

The political predicament of late twentieth-century Nigeria is reflected in the fact that what was advanced as alternative scenarios in 1987 became concurrent strategies of a

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[40] Joseph, "Ethnic Trap." The term "ethnic trap", as described in the essay reprinted in *Nigerian Crucible*, describes how sectional identities determined voting behavior, despite constitutional and legal mechanisms that encouraged parties and candidates to make cross-ethnic appeals to the electorate.
[41] Suberu, "Federalism," p. 24.
[42] Osaghae, "Ogoni Uprising," p. 343.
[43] Whitaker, "Unfinished State," p. 6.
[44] Joseph, *Democracy of Prebendal Politics*, pp. 184-185.

government under siege. At one level, a program was instituted to create a pluralist democracy with sequential rounds of elections. At another, the regime utilized the mechanisms and structures of semi-authoritarian governance by appointing civilians to ministerial offices, commissions, and councils to deliberate on issues of public concern.[45] An elaborate operation called *Vision 2010*, for example, was created to bring prominent Nigerians together to share reflections on the major issues confronting the nation. At a third level, Nigerians were subjected to the iron hand of a ruthless dictatorship that penalized opposition by nightly visits from security agents, detention without trial, and executions disguised as armed robbery attempts.[46]

The derailing of democracy in Africa by deliberately heightening fears of national disintegration has had devastating consequences. Ethnic hegemonies that relied on repressive structures were forced to undertake political openings in the early 1990s: in Rwanda via power sharing and in Burundi via multiparty elections. The brutal halting of these processes catapulted these fragile nations into genocidal conflict. Juvénal Habyarimana, Rwanda's president, was killed on April 6, 1994 to prevent the implementation of the 1993 Arusha agreement for power sharing among Hutu and Tutsi representatives. A year earlier, in 1993, Melchior Ndadaye was elected president of Burundi. Power was then transferred to him by Pierre Buyoya who had headed a military regime since 1987. Buyoya, a Tutsi, had helped stifle an attempted coup in early July against the new, predominantly Hutu, government. Three months later, the putschists succeeded, and Ndadaye and other members of the government were killed. Each of these events triggered rounds of bloodletting between Hutu and Tutsi. With the collapse of a government in Burundi in July 1996 based on power-sharing between political parties representing both groups, Buyoya returned to head a military (and therefore Tutsi) government. Meanwhile, militias of both groups conducted reprisals and counter-reprisals, often against unarmed citizens.

The crisis of state and nation in Africa that Rwanda and Burundi exemplify, but which may be portrayed as pathological cases, cannot in fact be so easily categorized and dismissed. These countries are also governed by multilayered hegemonies that have succeeded one another rather than yield to political liberalization.[47] In the case of Rwanda, a Hutu-based militarized autocracy has been succeeded by a Tutsi-based reformist alternative under Paul Kagame. Nigerians, as other Africans, know that the extremes of inter-communal distrust and enmity in Rwanda and Burundi are not inconceivable in their own societies. Chronic eruptions of

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[45] For a discussion of this mode of governance, see Joseph, "Principles and Practices."
[46] No one apparently enjoyed immunity from such actions, as demonstrated by the assassination of Kudirat Abiola, wife of the detained Moshood Abiola, in broad daylight on June 4, 1996.
[47] In 2017, Uganda and Kenya both reflect multilayered hegemonies that resist, to differing degrees, political liberalization.

communal conflicts in since the 1970s make this evident.[48] There are unsettling parallels since 1993 in Burundi and Nigeria:

Period	Burundi	Nigeria
June 1993	Election of Ndadaye	Election of Abiola
June-July 1993	Attempted military reversal of electoral victory	Nullification of electoral victory by the military regime
Oct.-Nov. 1993	Military coup, assassination of Ndadaye, end of democratic transition	Military coup, neutralizing of Abiola, end of transition[49]
1993-1998	Dictatorship and ethnoregional polarization and conflict	Dictatorship and ethnoregional polarization and conflict; Abiola dies in prison

In Burundi, the ethnic hegemony of the Tutsi, who represent 15 percent of the population, rests on total control of the armed forces and a level of communal violence that Nigeria has never experienced in a sustained way. Moreover, the greater diversity of Nigeria's population and the multiplicity of socio-cultural zones have prevented the emergence of the sharp ethnic lines of division that now cut across Rwanda and Burundi.

Nigeria did not descend into armed conflict after 1993 because of the capacity of a militarized state to stifle all challenges from the pro-democracy movement. Oil income financed an aggressive policy to co-opt and silence opponents at home and abroad. Nevertheless, ethnoregional polarization since June 1993 was exacerbated by the harsh treatment of dissidents in the southwest and the increasing resort to violence by anti-regime forces. Whether Nigeria will succeed in renewing its political and cultural federation greatly depends on whether post-Abacha governments are largely civilian in composition, and on their organizational capacity and democratic commitments.[50]

Conclusion

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[48] See Suberu, *Ethnic Minority Conflicts*.

[49] When Abiola fled Nigeria in August 1993, he stated that he did so in response to warnings about his likely assassination. After he returned, he was politically neutralized by his arrest and prolonged detention. In June 1996, his wife Kudirat Abiola was assassinated in the course of making arrangements to obtain asylum overseas.

[50] Comparing Nigeria to Rwanda and Burundi reflects the tensions of the time of the late-1990s. In Nigeria, the resumption of complaints about a restored northern hegemony in 2015 again features a year after Buhari returned to power.

Nigeria is no longer an exception to authoritarian and ethnomilitary systems of governance in Africa. Between 1994 and 1998, it became a leading example of such a polity. During the late 1970s, it was believed that Nigeria would serve as a model for democratic renewal. On the eve of the twenty-first century, it is more pertinent to inquire if Nigeria will rediscover such a path. So much effort has been invested in the construction of a Nigerian polity resting on the willing consent of its diverse peoples that this aspiration will not be easily extinguished. On June 12, 1993, the Nigerian people surprised the Babangida government by voting peacefully for a party whose support transcended major regional, ethnic, and religious lines. That vote remains a testament to the freely expressed desire of the Nigerian electorate for a system of pluralist and consensual governance.

A continent that has witnessed the collapse of the apartheid regime and the inauguration of a democratic polity in South Africa is unlikely to abandon hopes for a similar transition in Nigeria. After the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and his fellow Ogoni in November 1995, I wrote that Nigeria under Abacha had become a rogue state that "refuses to abide by prevailing international ethical and legal norms in the conduct of public affairs."[51] This assessment was repeatedly confirmed, as the regime defied every diplomatic effort made to get it to change course. The sudden deaths of Sani Abacha on June 8, 1998, and Moshood Abiola a month later, have created opportunities for reconstruction and reconciliation. If this course is followed, it will require the transformation of many of the entrenched features of governance discussed here. Having been subjected to so much deception and obfuscation by their leaders, both military and civilian, the Nigerian people must now discover untapped resources to revive the faded dream of a unified, constitutional and democratic republic.

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[51] Joseph, "Nigeria: Inside the Dismal Tunnel," p. 194.