THE POLITICS OF NEOLIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA

USMAN A. TAR

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To Fatima and our children – Mustapha, Abubakar and Aisha – for being great companions. And, to our extended families for all the unconditional support.

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Abbreviations

ASUU	Academic Union of Universities
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BOCODEP	Borno Coalition for Democracy and Progress
CAC	Corporate Affairs Commission
CAMA	Companies and Allied Matters Act
CAPP	Community Action for Popular Participation
CBOs	Community-based Organisations
CD	Campaign for Democracy
CDD	Centre for Democracy and Development
CDHR	Committee for the Defence of Human Rights
CFCR	Citizen's Forum for Constitutional Reform
CLEEN	Centre for Law Enforcement Education
CLO	Civil Liberties Organisation
CNN	Cable News Network
CRD	Centre for Research and Documentation
CRP	Constitutional Rights Project
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSPN	Civil Society Pro-democracy Network
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
DFRRI	Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure
ERN	Electoral Reform Network
ETP	Economic Transition Programme
EU	European Commission/Union
EU-EOM	European Union Election Observation Mission
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FGN	Federal Government of Nigeria
FRN	Federal Republic of Nigeria
GFSA	Gani Fawehinmi Solidarity Association
HRM	Human Rights Monitor (Nigeria)
HRW	Human Rights Watch (USA)
HURILAWS	The Human Rights Law Service

IFES	International Federation of Election Systems
IFIs	International Finance Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
International IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IRI	International Republican Institute
JACON	Joint Action Committee of Nigeria
JDPC	Justice, Development and Peace Commission
LASCO	Labour-Civil Society Coalition
LEMT	Labour Election Monitoring Team
MAMSER	Mass Mobilisation for Social Justice and Economic Recovery
MULAC	Muslim League for Accountability
NADECO	National Democratic Coalition
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (USA)
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NLC	Nigeria Labour Congress
NPC	National Planning Commission
NPTA	Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance
NSF	National Consultative Forum
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
PTP	Political Transition Programme
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SDA	Social Development Act
SINEC	State Independent Electoral Commission
SSILG	Shehu Shagari Institute for Leadership and Governance
TMG	Transition Monitoring Group
UAD	United Action for Democracy
UDFN	United Democratic Front of Nigeria
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEAP	United Nations Electoral Assistance Programme
UN/UNO	United Nations Organisation

UNO/OSCAL	United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID-OTI	USAID Office of Transition Initiatives
USIS	United States Information Service
WB	World Bank
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
WIN	Women in Nigeria

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Preface

Since the late 1980s, African countries have been experiencing crises of governance and democratic change. In a continent hitherto bedevilled by authoritarian rule and the problems of dependent capitalism, Western donors have sought to foist on African nations 'neoliberal' interpretations of the state, civil society and democracy, with far-reaching implications. Using ethnographic research conducted in Nigeria, this book problematises the neoliberal formula for economic and political development – the notion that if the authoritarian state is rolled back, the capacity of civil society to fulfil welfare needs and energise the population will expand.

This volume questions the assumption that Africa (Nigeria in particular) was lacking the essential components for a spontaneous transition to democracy – on the basis of which donors have imposed 'political conditionality'. It argues that that such assumptions pay little or no consideration to domestic factors such as the dependent and peripheral nature of developing economies in Africa, where capitalist development has not significantly flourished. It also argues that the struggles for democracy are indigenous to Africa/Nigeria and a more vibrant civil society has long been existence there. However, the book notes that the state plays a crucial role in the construction and efflorescence of civil society: pro-state and anti-state as well as pro-democratic and anti-democratic.

On the basis of the above, the book further engages the debate on the democratic potentials of 'pro-democracy' civil society. It finds that as drivers of democratic transition and consolidation, pro-democracy groups have been constrained by a host of limitations, in particular fragmentation and divisions, donor funding and internal democratic deficit – even though they are struggling to overcome these problems. In addition, the book reveals that the state has largely remained autocratic (even after democracy was achieved) while civil society organisations lack unity, autonomy and organisational strength. The book also reveals an

ambivalent mixture of achievements and limitations on the potentials of pro-democracy groups to advance the frontiers of democratic space in Nigeria.

In engaging the ongoing debates on the state, civil society, governance and democracy, the volume demonstrates three key innovations. First, it uses a holistic approach in understanding the dynamic link between the internal and external parameter of democratic change. The book supports Abrahamsen's plea against 'fictitious dichotomies'– that is, 'the tendency to construct a dichotomy between the internal and external and to examine the two in isolation, with little or no attention [paid to] the way in which the two levels of politics overlap and intertwine' (Abrahamsen 2000: 6). Contrary to existing narrow approaches – which often privilege external factors – this book insists that political development in Nigeria and much of the global South is so complex that we need a more encompassing framework of analysis that captures the relative, but contradictory, role of internal and external factors. It is argued that whilst external factors have played an important role in Nigeria's colonial and recent history, we need to refer to enduring domestic structures and institutions to appreciate the dynamics of the relationships between the state, civil society and democracy. A justification for holistic approach is that it simultaneously allows us to highlight taken-for-granted externally oriented policies and discourses vis-à-vis local discourses and realities. That is, it allows for 'a measured awareness to the dynamics of, and the linkages between, the two causal factors – rather than prejudiced preference for either' (Tar 2006: 113).

Second, the book unveils the relationship between the *state* and *society* in terms of structure-agency linkages. It deviates from, and engages, mainstream structural analyses which, more often than not, place higher stress on abstract formalisms embedded in entrenched structures of the state, at the expense of the real and potential agency of society – civil society as well as civil-in-general. As the book will show, events in Africa particularly in the courses of 1980s, 1990s and 2000s have provided sufficient evidence to rethink conventional wisdom about the state, its relationship with society and democracy. Evidently, the structural crises, international interventionism and domestic uprisings that characterized these eras are quite revealing in terms of challenging common opinion of the state, society, governing elites and democracy: for instance, the

'omnipotent' state dramatically lost much of its powers; elites were stripped bare of their unfettered prebendal powers in the face of mass demonstration, popular constitutional conferences and constitutional re-orderings; civil society emerged as a force to contend with in engaging the state on issues of civil liberties and democracy; dictatorships of all ramifications (one-man rule, military intervention, ideology-based rule etc) became an anathema and liberal democracy become a norm. Thus, in addition to engaging all-too-familiar viewpoints expounded by structural-functionalist and statist paradigms, this book attempts to use the vocabulary of social analysis as a means of rescuing the nascent role of society in contemporary events and discourses. In particular, the volume draws inference from the political economy approach which has become less fashionable, even extinct, in academic and policy debates, particularly in the post-Cold War period. This is particularly the case in the 'Great Moving Right Show' (Geras 1986: xvii cited in Bujra et al. 2004: 563) that has characterised the current era, where the realities of politics and class conflicts are overshadowed by the overwhelming ideological and intellectual tides of neoliberalism. The arguments presented in this book not only imply the continued relevance of the approach, but also the need to reintroduce intellectual tools that are endangered and profaned by the intellectual and policy autocracy that characterises neoliberalism.

Finally, the book relies heavily on first-hand primary data in making claims, questioning dominant discourses, and in proposing and supporting alternative argument(s). The data were collected through extensive fieldwork involving participant observation, interviews with key state officials and civil society activists, and archival research carried out in Nigeria between 2003 and 2007. A reliance on ethnographic data allowed claims to be reinforced with concrete first-hand evidence, and provided a much-needed relief for presenting, indeed emphasizing, local voices, narratives and realities in (vis-à-vis external narratives) – a missing gear in most mainstream books.

Map of Africa
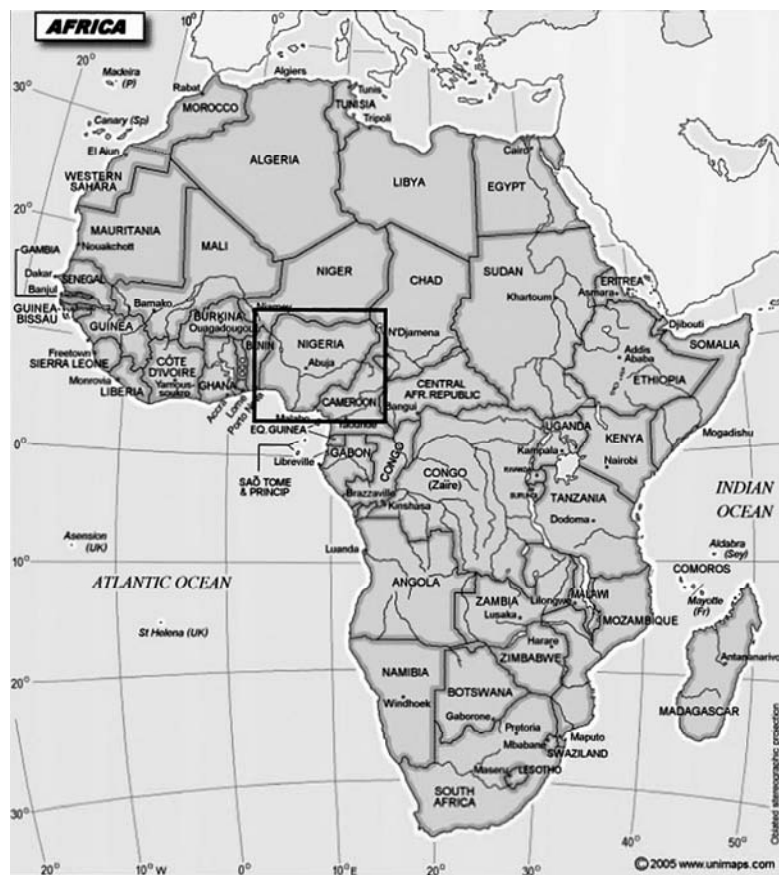
Map by Unimaps.com – used with permission.

Map of Nigeria

Source: Tar and Zack-Williams (2007: 541).

Introduction

This volume questions the assumption that Africa (Nigeria in particular) was lacking the essential components for a spontaneous transition to democracy – on the basis of which donors have imposed 'political conditionality'. It argues that that such assumptions pay little or no consideration to domestic factors such as the dependent and peripheral nature of developing economies in Africa, where capitalist development has not significantly flourished. It also argues that the struggles for democracy are indigenous to Africa/Nigeria and a more vibrant civil society has long been in existence there. However, the book notes that the state plays a crucial role in the construction and efflorescence of civil society: pro-state and anti-state as well as pro-democratic and anti-democratic.

Using ethnographic research conducted in Nigeria – as a case study of how African countries are coming to terms with contested and controversial experience in neoliberal economic and political development – this study problematises the neoliberal formula: namely, the thesis that by rolling back the authoritarian state, the capacity of civil society to fulfil welfare needs and energise the population will expand. In particular, the study questions the assumption that Africa was lacking the essential components for a spontaneous transition to democracy – on the basis of which assumption donors put in place such initiatives as 'political conditionality', 'good governance agenda', 'civil society capacity building' programmes. It is argued that such assumptions pay little or no consideration to domestic factors such as the dependent and peripheral nature of developing economies in Africa, where capitalist development has not significantly flourished and where modes of social and political relations are conflictually tied to weak capitalist structures and pre-capitalist norms: culture, tradition, belief system. Nevertheless, I shall show that struggles for democracy are indigenous to Nigeria and suggest that a vibrant civil society has long been in existence there.

In exploring the foregoing problems, this book focuses on a fraction of 'civil society', namely *pro-democracy groups* which include donor-driven civic associations on the one hand, and, on the other, the labour movement and professional associations. They emerged initially in the

independence movement, then re-emerged in struggles against military rule demanding freedom, justice and democracy, and are now engaged in the process of consolidating democracy following the shift to civilian rule and multipartyism. A key feature of these associations is that they are largely urban in origin and dominated by urban professionals and manual workers, claiming to represent both their immediate social constituencies as well as the wider population. In other words, they share common, but also contradictory, class positioning and urban origin. However, they also differ in some respects: for instance, with reference to their urban character, many trade unions have established branches in rural and urban centres and local government areas (local counties), as compared to civic associations which are based predominantly in urban areas. Similarly, while labour and professional associations are deeply rooted in Nigerian colonial history, the civic associations considered in this study are a recent phenomenon that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in response to domestic and international realities. In this study, *pro-democracy groups* are examined both individually and in comparison with one another to determine their social history and character, mode of organisation, sources of funding and relative experience in engaging the state. Similarly, since some of these associations (not all) constitute key targets of donor governance and capacity building programmes, as well as being the main beneficiaries of 'civil society' aid packages, a case can be made for how they emerge, envision and practise democracy in a domain populated by different forms of associations. A case can similarly be made for the contradictions between donor-driven pro-democracy associations (civic associations) and others that are considered antithetical to the neoliberal agenda (especially the Labour movement). Equally important, there is potential for exploring their class character, style of organisations, relative success in engaging the state and their experience in forging an alliance for confronting the state – a common enemy.

The ecstatic bravado that followed the global neoliberal 're-invention' of civil society as alternative to the state has led to questions over its 'real life' capacity in domestic democratic struggles (Allen 1997: 329–37). In the context of African pro-democracy movements it is argued that while they have 'taken great risks in challenging incumbent regimes with long-standing reputations for corruption, repression and disrespect for human rights', their numerous limitations 'have thrown up a lot of reasons for scholars and observers to become sceptical about their real intentions and their ability to replace existing governments and consolidate democracy' (Ihonvbere 1997: 78). He continues:

Many are urban-based and elitist in their location and operations. As well, many of the pro-democracy groups are so dependent on foreign funding that they look more like branches of European and American … organisations rather than Africa-based movements struggling for genuine mobilisation, empowerment, self-reliance, accountability and social justice. Finally, the vast majority of the movements lack internal cohesion [and] are led by opportunistic politicians and professionals who have been marginalised from existing power structures (ibid.).

In the state sector, the visible signs of failure that pervade many African states (poverty, misery, and 'democratic deficits' for states that have managed to democratise), in spite of neoliberal development, reinforce the doubts cast on the potentials of neoliberalism, in particular, the 'unfinished' nature of change, the transformatory possibilities of civil society and the willingness of (repressive) states to open up their public arena for inclusion and change (Lumumba-Kasongo 2005; MacEwan 1999). In Africa, there are concerns that the state has remained strong, domineering and authoritarian, in spite of liberal democratisation. 'Democratic reversals' (return to a *de facto* one-party system) continue to threaten nascent hopes of democratic transformation: in states where democracy has been achieved, the state has sought to reinvent its authoritarian character by seeking to repress democratic demands from society, in particular, civil society.

The foregoing exposes theoretical and empirical challenges of immense proportions, both in Africa and the global South. In the wake of a triumphant neoliberal agenda and theory, asserting a somewhat biased version of the state of affairs and pushing any alternative thinking backstage, there is a seeming lack of theoretical alternatives. Yet, potential tensions rage between, on the one hand, normative constructions of the state and civil society that dominates 'received', often narrow, Western perceptions and, on the other, empirical realities (and discourses) (Mamdani 1995a, 1996; Eke 1992). In this study, I have sought to engage the globalist liberal visions on the construction of, and relationships between, the state, civil society and democracy by highlighting the role of domestic classes and institutions (*vis-à-vis* foreign influence).

Accordingly, this research focuses on 'contested spaces' – civil society (pro-democracy groups), and the state – in the context of their visions and reactions to neoliberal political and economic reform. Thus, the volume not only critically explores the contested relationship of state to civil

society, but does so in a manner that brings the public interests into the limelight. The latter category is of interest because it is that part of civil society which both the state and civil society often claim to represent and protect. In exploring such contested relationships, the research uses first-hand ethnographic data: personal reflections from individual citizens, state officials and pro-democracy activists, as well as first-hand participant observational and archival materials gathered between January and December 2003, and post-field work research carried out since then. The timing of the field work for this research was deliberately planned to tally with the Nigerian general elections held in March/April 2003 to enable the author to observe and participate first hand in events and to interview election officials, election observers and voters. It also enabled encounters with established and working civil society activists in a context that rekindled their memories of long-standing struggles. Time was also allowed to encounter and observe the (voting) public, revealing issues and circumstances that were contrary to the claims both of state officials and civil society groups.

The key finding of this research is that democratic development in Africa and Nigeria in particular has exposed the relative, but contradictory, role of internal and external factors. It is argued that whilst external factors have played an important role in Nigeria's colonial and recent history, we need to refer to enduring domestic structures and institutions to appreciate the dynamics of the relationships between the state, civil society and democracy.

Conceptual Matters: Key Terminology

Certain terms and concepts are used frequently in this book, and need to be operationalised. It is necessary to specify the limited sense in which the terms are used, not least because most, if not all, social science concepts are contested and prone to diverse conceptualisation.

The State

This is defined as an entity with a defined population, territory and monopoly of sovereignty, elaborate government, security and diplomatic structures arguably capable of providing welfare, security, unity and equity of its citizens. Above all, it is distinguished by its *ideal* attribute of providing a legitimate space for power struggles and, formal structures that lay claims to democratic principles, political participation. Yet in *practice*, such ideal capacities become subject to contestation between and among its leaders and constituent elements – a key focus of this research.

In this research, the state is assumed to be represented by the dominant political class and institutional gatekeepers. It is not seen as an abstract term; rather, it is seen as an objective reality representing specific classes and interests. In its relation with 'civil society', the state is adjudged by the visions and actions of its 'gatekeeper' institutions and ruling political classes.

State is conceived here as an institution whose character and behaviour are defined by the conflicting interests and agency of the political beings inhabiting it (see for example Beckman 1982; Osoba 1978; Forrest 1986). Beckman's thesis, written in the context of power and state-building in Nigeria, seems to convey the key defining character of the state : the state promotes the interest of the ruling class and its metropolitan paymasters – that is, the ruling classes of industrial economies to which the former is beholden (Beckman 1982: 45).[1] At issue is the fact that the state is first and foremost an agency in the hands of the ruling classes who manipulate it in achieving desired objectives. Thus, phenomena such as democracy and development are at the mercy of dominant, albeit conflicting, political interests of the ruling classes. By implication, given that it represents the interest of ruling political oligarchies, the state is insensitive to the wishes and aspirations of the society. This explains why since independence, state policies only seek to promote the conflicting interests of the ruling class.

Civil Society

The term 'civil society' is broadly defined as the participatory space between the formal apparatus of the state and informal settings of families and atomised individuals, where groups emerge to forge associational ties, articulate interests and participate in public affairs. Much has been written on the concept, yet it remains one of the most controversial concepts in social science. There are debates between 'Western' liberal and alternative constructions as well as between idealistic and realistic viewpoints. In this study, a case is made for noting the domestic dynamics of civil society *vis-à-vis* 'Western' discourse and influences. Whilst the term appears to be too vague and vast, it makes better sense if it is used in a specific context and streamlined to specific organisations within it. Therefore, in the context of this study, civil society is limited to specific associations, in conformance with my focus on *pro-democracy groups*.

Pro-Democracy Groups

This refers to a fraction of civil society, in particular organisations claiming to work on democratic issues. It comprises organised associational entities

only in so far as they claim either to represent the public interest and/or directly or indirectly challenge the state on questions of democracy, specifically the expansion of the political space. This includes civic associations, labour and professional movements as well as some 'sectarian' associations. The aim is to compare their role in anti-state and democratic struggles. It is noted that civic associations constitute a key choice within the neoliberal paradigm and, for foreign donors, are seen as precursors of democratisation and a force for engaging the state. I shall ask how far they justify such privileging as compared to others that are perceived as sectarian, undemocratic, uncivil – specifically, groups based on particularistic tendencies such as labour organisations and so on.

Civic Associations

In this study, the term 'civic association' refers to donor-driven associations that emerge to promote a whole range of liberal interests and visions: human rights, women's empowerment, accountability and transparency, media rights, constitutional and institutional reform. They emerged as a key innovation of the neoliberal discourses and institutions and, in particular, changing donor paradigms, that emphasise the rollback of the African state. Consequently, civic associations emerge as a bulwark for supplanting key state functions – not least service provisions and democratic institution-building and advocacy. A distinctive feature of civic associations is that they claim to be voluntary, not-for-profit organisations, autonomous from the state and capable of transcending particularistic interests (even where they appear to be furthering such interests – for example women's groups). This claim is often underwritten by considerable donor funding through governance and capacity building programmes, but in reality civic associations can and do become an opportunity site for the promotion of material interests of its social actors. Another feature of civic associations is that they are dominated by urban professionals (and to a lesser extent workers) and, therefore, are largely urban-based. Finally, civic associations are constructed as inherently democratic and democratising. These features are vetted in this study by critically interrogating the democratic and organisational potentials of civic associations and comparing them with much older sites of anti-state and democratic struggle – *the labour movement*.

The Labour Movement

The term 'labour movement' is interchangeably used with 'organised labour' and 'trade unions' to refer to associations of wage labourers

formed for the purposes of promoting and protecting workers' interests and welfare against employers. As will be revealed in this study, in Nigeria, the rise of labour struggles and, indeed, other associational entities, is closely rooted in the process of colonial conquest, and dependent capitalist state and class formation. Traditionally, trade unions emerge as sites for promoting better conditions of work for their members through the usual channels of industrial relations and collective bargaining – union–management negotiations, work stoppages, militant strike actions. However, in the context of Nigeria and indeed other developing societies, the petty-bourgeois-dominated state – often the dominant employer of labour – emerges as a protagonist of capital, local and international, little concerned with the conditions of labour. Hence, in addition to workplace struggles, trade unions are known for participating actively in wider socio-economic and political struggles, in particular, in contesting unpopular state policies and making demands for democratic change. This is obviously because the broad constituency which the Labour movement claims to represent – workers and masses – are often at the receiving end of those policies, which makes it necessary to organise and challenge them.

Professional Associations

This refers to associations that emerge to represent the interest of formally educated professionals and skilled workers. In the context of Nigeria, professional associations are closely related to, indeed rooted in, the mainstream Labour movement. This is because as wage labourers themselves (few are self-employed) they became politicised through the same process of 'proletarianisation' – for example lawyers, teachers, doctors, journalists. But there are distinctions between professional associations and the labour movement. By virtue of their Western education and skilled work, professionals turn out to be relatively better-off and enjoy a much better quality of life – hence they are often classified as the *middle class*, occupying the middle space between the dominant local petty-bourgeois ruling classes and labourers. Not surprisingly, in Nigeria, professional associations have emerged with their own 'customised' sets of interests, which often contradict, but also complement, those of Labour unions. Similarly, depending on contexts and issues at stake, professional associations straddle labour radicalism and middle class conservatism.

The Voting Public

This refers to a fraction of the entire society constituting individual citizens (by birth or naturalisation) of a particular state who are domiciled within the state and overseas and who claim to be its nationals. More narrowly defined, the *voting public* refers to a percentage of the public who are franchised to participate in elective decision making – elections, plebiscites, party activities – which define and shape the policies and power of the state. In this study, the voting public is seen as a fraction of political society: a constituency in its own right as well as one in which both the state and civil society justify their claims and action of promoting the public interest.

Democracy

This is defined as an institutional arrangement that involves open political competition, multi-party participation, legally sanctioned political rights, a mechanism for ensuring the transparent conduct of public affairs, all mediated by periodic elections where citizens elect, re-elect or depose their representatives. By extension, 'democratic expansion' refers to institutional and attitudinal transformations aimed at providing maximum democratic rights and institutions for the people. It depends largely on dialogue and negotiation as well as actions and reactions (protests, policies, pro-grammes) of citizens aimed at influencing the choices and behaviour of state institutions and actors. Also, democracy carries the potential for alternating governments. In this study, the emphasis is on liberal democracy,[2] not least because it constitutes the recurrent political system (alternating with military regime) instituted in post-colonial Nigeria. Nigeria has never practised socialist democracy, even though it has often been advocated by some segments of the population, in particular students, workers, teachers and a radical 'minority' in the military. The only time Nigeria fortuitously came close to adopting socialist democracy was in 1986 when a *Political Bureau* appointed by the government of General Babangida recommended social democracy, in conformance with overwhelming public support. This too was ostensibly rejected by the Western-influenced military ruling class.

Class and Class Analysis

The word 'class' is used, in this study, to define diffuse groupings within a given national population who are stratified in terms of their conflicting interests in the economic system (or the productive process) which influences and is influenced by their unequal access to, and control of, the structures of power. These features determine 'the hierarchical distinctions

between individuals or groups in societies'[3] and provide a basis for political action. There is a debate on the definition and conceptualisation of class and, in particular, their applications to developing economies like Nigeria, which I shall explore in Chapter 6. There is a lot of recent interest in class analysis, both as a objective reality and a method of social analysis, despite recent intellectual and political developments, argued to have signalled the 'death of class' (Crompton and Scott 2000: 1; see also Edgell 1993: Chapter 7). In this study, a case is made for bringing 'class' back in to analyse contested relationships between what appear to be categorised as social actors in the 'state' and 'civil society' in the context of neoliberal democratic expansion.

Contested Spaces

This refers to specific relational social and political categories (for example the state, civil society, state official, state institution, civil society activists) characterised by their real and potential conflicts of interest. Three broad contested spaces are identified and explored in this research: the state (judged by the action of its institutions and ruling political class), civil society (represented by pro-democracy associations) and the voting public (representing society-at-large). These spaces are viewed in terms of the specific individual and group interests that drive them. Closely related to the above is the concept of 'political space', which refers to the participatory framework within which citizens engage the state with a view to meeting their individual and collective interests. In the literature, the term 'political space' resembles other concepts such as *public sphere* (see Habermas 1996, 1998; and Monga 1996 in the context of Africa). In a political space, the scope of participation is always relative: it is said to shrink when the scope of rights and participation is narrowed by dominant actors and vice versa (see Kasfir 1976).

Contextual Matters: The Scene of Investigation

Nigeria offers interesting ground for exploring the dynamics of power politics, in terms of the contested links between civil society, the state and public – not least because the political history of the country has been, and still is, riven with crises of governance. Since independence Nigeria has experienced more authoritarian than democratic regimes – out of over four decades since the nation's independence, almost 30 years have been under military rule. Political change has assumed the pattern of repeated transitions from military dictatorship to constitutional democracy and vice versa (Jega 2001).

The vicious cycles of political change involve factors both internal and external to the neocolonial nation-state. The interplay between these variables was very apparent in the 1980s and 1990s, which saw the increasing influence of neoliberal political and economic reforms imposed by Western donors on most low-income countries, specifically countries undergoing structural crises. The changing paradigms of *global* development and balance of power had a tremendous impact on Nigeria's *domestic* political and socio-economic realities, leading to several thought-provoking queries. Under what international and domestic conditions did civil society groups emerge to challenge the state to democratise? To what extent are the internal and external factors of political and economic change complementary and/or conflictual? A deeper reading of the Nigerian military and post-military experience will show that the military and militarism are deeply rooted in public life today and we must ask why authoritarianism is such a pervasive force in Nigerian politics. To what extent has military rule influenced the rise of democratic struggles?

The time span covered in this book is *largely* limited to the period since the mid-1980s. This period witnessed the worst forms of military rule, state repression, unpopular economic policies and human rights violations. It also witnessed the politics of structural adjustment and the dramatic upsurge of popular protest and civil society struggles to challenge the state. The period also saw dramatic transformation in the global balance of power leading to neoliberal economic and 'political conditionality' imposed by developed Western countries and international financial institutions (Baylies 1995). Specifically, the research focuses on the period of military rule (1987–99) and democratic restoration (post-1999). This is necessary because these two epochs provide different enabling (or disabling) environments for the flowering and agency elements of civil society to participate in political space. Much of the analysis in this study is focused on the era of military rule, particularly, the rise of popular protest and civil society struggles to protest the miseries caused by structural adjustment as well as the failure of the military to democratise. In the context of the period since the exit of military from power, this study pays specific attention to the general elections of 2003 when, for only the second time in the nation's history, civilian democratic leaders found themselves in the politics of conducting elections without the supervisory – that is authoritarian – influence of military rulers. The election provided space for investigating how associational groups fared in engaging the state for post-military democratic consolidation.

A lot of work has been done on Nigeria's government and politics,

especially in the period following independence, but few studies have focused on the period since the end of the Cold War. Many of these works are clustered around the topics of authoritarianism, state reform and structural adjustment (for example Beckman, Hannson and Sjogren 2001; Jega 2000; Joseph 1987; Momoh 1997; Ndoma-Egba 2000). Though a significant amount of new works have emerged examining the interface between civil society, the state and democracy in the 1990s and beyond (for example Osaghae 1998; Kukah 1999; Olukoshi 1997; 1998), not much has been done in terms of problematising the real and potential conflicts of class and power relations within and between a range of state and non-state actors: state officials, civil society, citizens. Even fewer studies are dedicated to unravelling the dynamics of how political change is affected by the growth of associational life, and very few have sought to examine how associational life has been organised since the end of military rule in 1999.

Personal Reflections and Inspirations: Genesis of the Book

This research owes its influence to two broad factors. The first factor is borne out of my own previous research and reading of literature on the topic. Both my B.Sc. and M.Sc. dissertations explored the questions of democratisation and military disengagement in Africa (Tar 1996; 1999). Both studies revealed, among other things, that two causal factors – namely internal and external pressures – underpin the process of recent democratic transition in the region. Beyond identifying these causal factors in sweeping terms and subordinating the former to the latter, my earlier research did not explore in detail their complex dynamics. Similarly, between 1997 and 1999 my colleagues and I conducted a series of studies at the University of Maiduguri on understanding the meaning of 'democracy' and 'democratisation' (Tar et al. 1999; Tar and Oumar 1999) and its empirical dynamics in the context of developing economies such as Nigeria (Tar and Sulu-Gambari 1997). These studies revealed the contested and problematic nature of democracy when applied to fragile political systems, and charted blueprints for further study, including a critical analysis of the state-civil society interface in the era of globalisation.

Subsequent reading of the Nigerian and wider literature underscores the fact that internal pressures for political and economic reform spear-headed by organised associational entities representing civil society in Africa constitute a major and formidable force linked through complex discourses and political actions to the 'Western' agenda for democ-ratisation (Beckman and Jega 1995; Ihonvbere 1991; 1996; Barchiesi 1996;

Ibrahim 1997b, 1997d). At issue is not which of these factors is the key or only explanation, but how they are dynamically engaged – for instance, how external intervention limits or promotes change; how internal developments pre-empt or subvert external agendas, and so on. These readings, as well as the critical questions identified, served as a crucial phase of this study, as they helped me develop an unflinching interest to embark on a research project that took over four years to complete.

The second factor influencing the choice of topic for this research is associated with my 'politics', shaped by my modest experience in political and associational life in Nigeria. I have been involved over the years as both participant and observer in Nigeria's transition to civil rule programmes, while serving on electoral and related bodies. In 1987 and 1990, I volunteered as a polling clerk and presiding officer for local government and gubernatorial elections respectively and, in the controversial 1993 presidential election, served as a volunteer for the then Nigerian Election Monitoring Group, a national election observer group founded by the government (implicitly 'pro-democracy') to ensure 'free and fair' elections.

My experience between the late 1980s and the early 1990s convinced me that the political reform process in the country involved only limited organised and purposive participation of domestic forces in effecting or consolidating political change. This was part of the reason why, after years of attempts at democratisation, the military and its political allies were able to avoid or subvert any meaningful democratic transition. As a participant observer, I witnessed the turn of events after the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election by the then regime of General Babangida, when a number of pro-democracy organisations emerged to challenge the annulment and called for the unconditional withdrawal of the military from the political scene.

My experience in political 'service' was matched by a no less eventful participation in associational life: initially as a Student Union member and leader (1991–99) and then 1999–2001 as Secretary-General of a 'home-town' association known as Mallamfatori Educational Development Association (MEDA). MEDA was founded to provide a forum for indigenes of Abadam Local Government Area of Borno State, one of the officially declared 'educationally backward' areas in Nigeria, to engage state officials in prioritising education and providing grants to intending and registered students at all levels of education. Though founded to influence policy through advocacy, MEDA in fact meddled into local politics which often led to clashes with local authorities and politicians. Later, when I

took a teaching appointment at the University of Maiduguri in 2000, I became a member of the Nigerian Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Both the Students' and Academic Staff Unions were, and still are, at the forefront of the defence of democracy in the country (Beckman and Jega 1995; Barchiesi 1995; Mustapha 1999). The issue of getting rid of military dictatorships as a pre-condition for peaceful academic life has been one of the key items in the agenda of these two groups for a long period of time. However, what I then observed was that many groups were bedevilled by state infiltration, infighting, personality clashes, embezzlement, and deficit of internal democracy among others, undermining their capacity to challenge the state.

My own experience raises a number of questions regarding the potential of civil society, in particular civic associations, in any transitional democracy. The fact that most of these groups emerged or reorganised in response to the economic hardships consequent on structural adjustment in the late 1980s suggests that struggle for survival is an important politicising factor, even if such a struggle took distinctive forms at different class levels. The contradictions and instability arising from the short- and long-term implementation of adjustment – the retrenchment of public sector workers, the hikes in the prices of essential and non-essential goods and services, the general decline in the condition of living arising from rising costs and so on – have typically generated reactions from organised labour, professional associations, the student movements and other interest groups who often represent themselves, not only as a united front in this cause, but also as social actors who feel strategically poised to engage the state in the interest of the economy and the people. The point is that economic struggles also have political repercussions.

Furthermore, I noticed that civil society groups were often infiltrated and subdued by state intervention which adversely affected their ability to present a united front or represent the interests of the people. This was not unusual because elements in civil society were not all from the same background, and some even shared an interest in common with state officials and members of the political class. In the case of urban-based civic organisations and NGOs, I noticed that most of them were heavily influenced by 'struggles for survival'. Most of them were busy chasing donor funds while some did not have organisational structures such as a constitution, office space, membership arrangements. Indeed, some such groups are described as 'briefcase organisations' because they are not visible and exist only as a means of scouting for donor funds. Again, this is not surprising because civic associations tend to serve the material

interests of those behind them: urban-based, Western-educated young professionals. Even in urban centres, groups initiated by the organised working class and professionals were often detached from the urban poor and the unemployed – whilst the majority of the people (about 75 per cent of the total population) are based in rural areas. However, it still remains the case that impoverishment brought by SAPs, affected both the relatively privileged middle class *and* the poor masses, and has induced a relative deprivation and common ground for anti-state action among these affected classes. The foregoing challenges and experience led me to undertake a more in-depth study of domestic struggles for democratic rights within the framework of 'civil society'.

Structure of the Book

This book is divided into 6 Chapters. After a brief section that introduces the book and outlines its content and key arguments, Chapter 1 explores the global and local discourses on the state, civil society and democracy. It begins by noting global views on the interface between civil society, the state and democratisation as it applies to Africa. In particular, it questions the notion that the continent is lacking the essential components for a spontaneous transition to democracy. The chapter goes on to explore how the globalist conceptual language of civil society and democracy has influenced not only public policies, but also local discourses – both apologetic and critical. The chapter presents and engages these arguments in a manner that demands the grounding of conceptual argument in local empirical context (and vice versa). Then, the chapter outlines local debates and demonstrates their relevance.

Chapter 2 explores the parameters of neoliberal development and its impact on local political and economic change in Nigeria. In particular, the chapter traces Nigeria's structural evolution starting with a promising beginning in the 1960s but eventually dissenting crises on the late 1970s and 1980s leading to prolonged military rule. The chapter also explores the role of military rule in 'home grown' (albeit externally inspired) structural adjustment, which sparked street protests throughout 1980s and 1990s with huge implications for the efflorescence of civil society and struggles for democratic expansion. The chapter critically explores the symmetries and asymmetries between the external and internal factors as well as their complementarities and contradictions. The chapter argues for a holistic approach (or *Hybrid Perspective*) which captures the synergy between global and local policies and discourses.

Chapter 3 confronts the argument that 'civil society' is alien to Africa.

It argues that whilst the dramatic proliferation of certain kinds of civil society organisations, namely civic associations, is indeed only a recent development in Nigeria, the evolution of 'actually existing civil society' dates back to the pre-colonial and colonial era. The chapter argues that the process of 'proletarianisation' which followed colonialism and the growth of capitalist structures and classes in the post-colonial era, have led given contradictory character both to state and civil society. The chapter emphasises the need to contextualise the evolution of Nigerian civil society in (pre)colonial Nigeria, with a view to understanding its contemporary post-colonial character, especially its relationships with the state and democracy.

Chapter 4 builds on concrete arguments advanced in chapters 3 and 4 to explore the spectre of neoliberal democratic change (demanded by civil society; resisted by authoritarian state actors) in the 1980s and 1990s. The chapter argues that in many ways, donor pressure for democratic change and, in particular, structural reforms that preceded democratic restoration, lend themselves to the vocabulary of class analysis. The intellectual precursor for this argument is rooted in mainstream Marxism and, in particular Gramsci's idea of civil society as a site for sustaining and/or contesting hegemony (Gramsci 1978). The chapter uses an array of historical and ethnographic data to examine the emergence of an authoritarian militarised developmental state, managed by the bureaucratic–military oligarchy, and its tendency to contain anti-state civil society and promote pro-state civil society. In addition, using a case study of 22 associations drawn from the labour movement and civic associations, the chapter examines conflicts and alliance within 'civil society', their sources of funding, their organisational structures, and their successes and failures in engaging the state. The chapter argues that, applied to democratic struggles, there are strong indications that class interests/ conflict (and associated tendencies) are a key determining factor. The chapter analyses such class confrontations in the contexts of two categories of civil society groups – namely labour organisations and civic associations. Given that these organisations came from distinct class levels, the chapter attempts to compare and contrast their styles of organisation, their internal democracy, their degree of fragmentation due to sectarian tendencies and their relative success or failure in challenging the state.

Chapter 5 uses a case study of a pro-democracy civic association, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), to examine the role of 'civil society' in Nigeria's electoral process. The chapter builds on primary data collected

during Nigeria's 2003 general election, conjured by many, including Western donors, as a litmus test for consolidating Nigeria's fledgling democracy. The chapter offers a socio-organisational analysis of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of over 150 civic associations with asymmetric strength and democratic credentials seeking, in principle, to assert their collective voices in the democratic process but, in reality, asserting such voices in the context of constraints imposed by state repression and competitive struggles for donor funding. The chapter argues that even in the 'liberalised' and 'democratised' state, the state provides limited scope for the participation of civic associations in the electoral process. Similarly, confirming the political economy paradigm, the chapter reveals that civic associations provide a platform for advancing conflicting class and political interests of middle class professional who dominate these organisations and state officials who use both stick and carrot to contain dissent and manufacture consent – with far-reaching implications for notions of civil society as an autonomous arena.

Chapter 6 pools together the key arguments developed from previous chapters. It is divided into three parts. First, the chapter rescues key conceptual issues that emerge from the empirical case of political development in Nigeria, as an example of how African countries are coming to terms with the challenges of building neoliberal democracy. Secondly, the chapter recommends the need to balance theory with practice, vision with reality and discourse with counter-discourse. Finally, the chapter maps the key areas of further research and offers a synthetic conclusion.

1
Global and Local Discourses: Civil Society and the Achievements of Democracy

The debate on civil society, the state and democratisation, in terms of their imputed connections in the neoliberal political agenda, needs to be critically explored and engaged. This chapter aims to problematise the key assumptions of the debate and, by extension, the political ideology and practices that frame them. Of particular importance is the assumption that Africa (more specifically Nigeria) cannot build or consolidate democracy since it lacks a strong and active civil society that can engage the state and demand accountability. Closely linked to the above is the fact that civil society, democracy, the state, are portrayed as 'Western' in origin and therefore new to Africa.

In current discourses of 'civil society' and its democratising potential, one is bound to find reference to a particular fraction of civil society: urban-based voluntary civic associations, as a force *par excellence* for engaging the *state* in the interest of the *people*. Civil society is often understood as an amalgam of these civic virtues and as a universal tool for demonstrating and achieving democratic ideals. The founding father of this ideal is Alexis de Tocqueville (1831 [1994a, 1994b]), writing of nineteenth-century post-colonial America, who argued that a strong, vibrant and dense civil society – one capable both of confronting the state and providing a site for associational democratic practice (internal democracy) – was essential for building and consolidating democracy. Within the framework pioneered by de Tocqueville, others construct civic associations as the key space or 'front' that energises the citizenry in confronting the state. 'A "dense network of civic associations",' wrote Foley and Edwards (1996: 38), 'is said to promote the stability and effectiveness of democratic polity through both the effects of association

on citizens' "habits of the hearts" and the ability of associations to mobilise citizens on behalf of *public causes'* (Foley and Edwards 1996: 38; my italics). The tendency in much of recent intellectual and policy debate is to position civic associations as the centrepiece for achieving democracy rather than destroying it (for example Hall 1995). Whilst emphasising the 'voluntary' and 'civic' orientation of 'civil society', Larry Diamond, for instance, views the agency of civil society as central to the global wave of democratisation:

> In this third wave of global democratisation, no phenomenon has more vividly captured the imagination of democratic scholars, observers, and activists alike than 'civil society'. What could be more moving than the stories of brave bands of students, writers, artists, pastors, teachers, labourers, and mothers challenging the duplicity, corruption and brutal domination of authoritarian states (Diamond 1994: 4).

As will be argued later, there is a persistent tendency, particularly in the liberal literature, to equate civil society with civic virtue (for example Putnam 1995; Carothers 2000; Chambers and Kopstein 2001). This tendency has been countered by many who note its 'dark side', anti-social (instead of anti-state) manifestation (for example Ikelegbe 2001a; Fatton 1999). The tendency to exaggerate the 'virtues' and democratic potentials of civil society, in particular civic associations, is a problem that is common not only in practice, but crucially even in theory: 'The distinguishing mark of civil society theory is that it privileges civil society [in particular, civic associations] over all other moments or spheres of social life, on the grounds that civil society furnishes [i.e. defends and epitomises] the fundamental conditions of liberty in the modern world' (Fine 1997: 9 quoted in Grugel 2002: 27). There are several questions arising from the foregoing: How can we define and classify 'civil society', and in relation to democratic struggles? Which fraction(s) can be said to be democratic or democratising? What discourses underpin the conceptualisation of civil society in Nigeria? In other words, how can we usefully engage the global debate on civil society in terms of the local discussions and realities? These questions form the inquisitive frame of this chapter and the study at large.

This chapter begins by noting global views on the interface between civil society, the state and democratisation in Africa. In particular, it questions the notion that the continent is lacking the essential components

for a spontaneous transition to democracy, in particular, liberal political institutions such as 'civil society'. The chapter goes on to explore how the globalist conceptual language of civil society, as briefly problematised above, has been taken up by Nigerian scholars and other scholars of Nigerian society. The chapter presents and engages these arguments in a manner that demands the grounding of conceptual argument in empirical context (and vice versa). On the basis of this, the chapter raises research questions and builds hypotheses.

Rationale for Engaging the Global Debate on Civil Society, the State and Democracy

There are sufficient reasons to engage in the 'civil society debate' (used in this volume as a shorthand term for the broader debate on civil society, the state and democracy), not only for the benefit of deconstruction, but also because of its *timing*. Some argue that the debate had arrived in time 'to temper ideological fervours, to mediate otherwise seemingly irreconcilable difference, and to offer an alternative vision of development process. In addition, it appealed to radical activists as well as powerful international institutions' (Howell and Pearce 2000: 76). In the context of developing states such as Nigeria, the 'timing' of the debate is perhaps more important because it arrived at a critical period when the country was overwhelmed by state authoritarianism, structural decline and the challenge of democratic transformation. The dependency of the state on external donor funding allowed for the imposition of a neoliberal formula for economic and political development – a minimalist state and the substitution of civil society to fulfil welfare needs of the people, energise the population and build autonomous spaces for democratic engagement. Harsh 'regimes' of structural adjustment and political conditionality, foisted by on the country by Western donors as a precondition for debt relief, resulted in the imposition of the idea of a dense and vibrant civil society as a precursor to democratisation.

The globalisation of civil society and liberal democracy also signalled a triumph of the neoliberal intellectual and political formula. Arguably, it also played a role in forging, even if only at face value, common visions of civil society amongst actors of different intellectual and political views. Many, irrespective of their political standpoint, have come to view civil society as 'a euphemism' for a section of society with the potential for fighting against state domination and achieving democracy (Puplampu and Tettey 2000: 253). In the 1980s and 1990s, whilst liberals were celebrating the triumph of their vision of civil society, even radical critics seemed to

have joined the bandwagon, if briefly, with qualified glorification of the concept. For instance, Neera Chandhoke, a neo-Marxist, argues that 'the value of the idea of civil society can be grasped if we remember that it has been resurrected whenever the power of the state has been challenged and sought to be controlled' (Chandhoke 1998: 30).

Yet, others warn against an unconditional subscription to the underlying values or given constructions of the concept. Questions of historical origin and culturally constructed visions of civil society have posed perhaps the greatest obstacle to a universal acceptance of the concept. Some scholars have argued convincingly that, given their 'historicity', many modern political and conceptual terminologies such as 'civil society', 'democracy' and 'the state' are problematic in analysis and application in non-Western societies. Ellen Meiksin Wood, for instance, argues: 'current usage of "civil society" or the conceptual opposition of "state" and "civil society", has been inextricably associated with the development of capitalism' (Wood 1990: 60). The dialectics of capitalism created 'centres' and 'peripheries' and therefore it could be argued that the term 'civil society' is likely to be more problematic in the peripheries than in the centres of capitalist development. Frank Kunz opines that 'given its [European] ancestry, when the concept of civil society is applied to non-European areas, it faces analytical problems, even the charge of ethnocentric bias' (Kunz 1995: 182). Others warn that the tune of civil society discourse privileged some voices, typically liberal, above others. For instance, in his 'Neo-liberal ideology and political theory in an African context', Beckman (1998), argues strongly that radical alternative thought, which emphasises conflict, has been pushed to the backstage in the current neoliberal epoch. Yet, he argues, the perspective provides a useful alternative framework for understanding the dialectic logic of hegemony and inequality. To him, the perspective may also provide clues for the fragmented, sectarian and conflict-ridden nature both of the state and civil society.

In spite of the foregoing caveats, the liberal vision of civil society has gained universal currency as shorthand for understanding and building democracy – a proof of which is seen in the promotion and funding of civil society organisations by international donors in the global South. Given this, it is important to locate the origin and substance of such a privileged viewpoint (for instance, by tracing neoliberalism to mainstream liberal theory or to a particular theorist). This will allow for an understanding of the context-dependency of civil society, and of the link between local and mainstream debates. It will also allow for a

problematisation of the debate in terms of the gulf between the conceptual language and empirical realities; universal and local constructions; secular and sectarian manifestations. It is in this context that we explore below the Western and global meta-narratives and their influence on the local debate in Nigeria.

Another rationale is to acknowledge, as a minimum standard, the importance of civil society as a tool for empirical discourse. Civil society can be used to examine, in empirical/contextual terms, the role of state and non-state actors in democratic transformation. As argued by Pearce (1997), civil society is particularly useful as an analytical tool for exploring the practice and meaning of the democratisation process particularly in less developed countries (LDCs). She identifies at least three uses of civil society discourse in assessing the process of democratisation. First, it offers the means of examining how, and in what circumstances, social events impact on the political process. This provides an alternative framework for democratisation which had hitherto focused on the state, parties, and elites. Secondly, it offers the means for empirically testing the extent to which a vibrant civil society can make a difference to the process of political change in a researchable way. Thirdly, it draws particular attention to the factors which facilitate or hinder the growth of associational life.[1] In this study, Pearce's points are useful as a stimulus to empirical investigation into the relationship between civil society, the state and democracy in Nigeria. The first point allows an exploration of the often conflicting relation between social action (potentially asserted by 'civil society') and political process (controlled by the state) in Nigeria. The second point provides for an empirical mapping of the density and vibrancy of civil society in Nigeria with a view to testing the validity of the current dominant (liberal) claim that a dense civil society is a crucial requirement for achieving and consolidating democracy. The final point provides for an analysis of the state-civil society (-voting public) interface in terms of how the former constrains the latter in its struggles to restore and consolidate democracy.

The Global (Western) Debate

The 'Western' debate on civil society is crucial because it provides a broad philosophical context within which the local debate in Nigeria is framed, either as a response to or critique of it. It is important to highlight the key premise of the global Western debate, which constructs Africa as lacking the vital components of democracy (Herbeson 1994) and then to link such claims to the local debate and realities. The key task is to sketch, in broad

strokes, the main assumptions and then trace the genesis of such debate in mainstream Western philosophy. For the former I recall recent Western intellectual and political discourses while for the latter I explore the telling example of the work of Alexis de Tocqueville (1994a, 1994b [1831]), who provides one of the most oft-cited and relevant versions of the Western classical theory of civil society. I also explore the alternative radical perspective with a view to exposing issues of conceptual and empirical importance that are neglected by the liberal theory. I present these counter-arguments in a language that highlights their influence on the local debate in Nigeria, as well as their relative strengths and weakness when applied to the empirical context of Nigeria.

A Glimpse of the Global Debate

There is tendency in the global literature and political development dating from the late 1980s to visualise civil society, the state and democracy (in terms of their causal relations) in a manner that resuscitates classical Western liberal theory – in particular, the language used by de Tocqueville and his intellectual successors (for example Putnam 1994; Carothers 2000). An example is the position of Alex Hedenius and Frederick Uggla in a seminal work, 'Making civil society, promoting democratic development: what can states and donors do?' published in *World Development*. They admonished: 'we and others believe that the existence of an active civil society is crucial to the vitality of political democracy' (Hedenius and Uggla 1996: 162). In the context of Africa, the intellectual-philosophical and classical-modern convergence amongst Western theorists and political actors is perhaps more interesting, not least because they eventually coalesce into a standard political formula adopted by international donors in explaining the reasons for Africa's political problems, and in prescribing what ought to be done to achieve democratic stability (see Abrahamsen 2000). The link made between neoliberal theory/agenda and its resonance in Africa is particularly striking. As argued by Chris Allen: 'While it has a long history of political theory, use of the concept 'civil society' has only been current in discussion of African politics … since its close association with the analysis of African struggles for democratisation since 1989' (Allen 1997: 329).

The absence of the 'civil society' debate in Africa, until the 1980s, is not very surprising. African scholars and scholarship are heavily influenced by what Claude Ake called 'the imperialism of social science' (1979) – an intellectual dependence on the West for social theorising. This is re-echoed in Edward Said's *Orientalism* – a 'systematic discipline by

which European culture was able to manage –even produce – the Orient [developing world] politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively' (Said 1979: 3). Thus, when scholars, politicians and development institutions in the global North 'reinvented' civil society (as a concept and an agenda debate) in the late 1980s, after consigning it to the archives for many years, it soon surfaced in Africa as a 'newfound' phenomenon, rather than an existing one: 'in picking on this term in the 1980s and 1990s, the discipline of African studies has borrowed directly from trends … which rediscovered civil society from the usages of Western political thought in the nineteenth century, after avoiding it for decades' (Ekeh 1992: 188).

The assumption of the global Western debate, as handed down to Africa and specifically Nigeria, is that a vibrant and active 'civil society' has been conspicuously lacking and remains the key to achieving democracy. This view is asserted by Naomi Chazan, in a work titled 'Africa's democratic challenges' published in the *World Policy Journal*: 'the nurturing of civil society is widely perceived as the most effective means of controlling repeated abuses of state power, holding rulers accountable to their citizens, and establishing the foundations for durable democratic government' (Chazan 1992: 282). A similar argument was later advanced in an edited work by Herbeson which notes that '"civil society" has crept in quietly and largely unexamined into the literature on political economy in Africa' (Herbeson 1994: 2). The main hypothesis of the volume starkly represents a typical de Tocquevillian argument:

> Civil society is a hitherto missing key to sustained political reform, legitimate states and governments, viable state-society and state-economy relationships, and prevention of the kind of political decay that undermined new African governments generations ago … The idea of civil society has been of central importance for movements of political reform… (Herbeson op cit.).

In the above statement, it is important to note the author's strong prescriptive inclination towards the adoption of 'civil society' as a precondition for political reform in Africa. By insisting that civil society is a 'hitherto missing key' (Herbeson op cit.) the author was emphatic about the need for African states to adopt a kind of political reform in which civil society becomes a core component of democratic transformation. It is imperative to ask the following question: which 'civil society' are these scholars emphasising? It is generally agreed that amongst liberal scholars,

there is emphasis on 'civic associations' as the epitome of 'civil society in general' and a driver of democracy. This biased and limited construction is problematic, especially in a terrain where anti-state and democratic struggles were pioneered by labour unions well before the emergence of civic associations. Second, by emphasising that 'the idea of civil society has been of central importance' (Herbeson op cit.), the authors were taking us back to the role of civil society in Western classical and modern democratic traditions. The danger of these assumptions is that whilst civil society *per se* is not seen as lacking in Africa, it is presented in a language that implies that it is lacking. Obviously at issue here is how we define 'civil society' and recognise it in the real world – an issue which is briefly problematised below.

Liberal scholars often define civil society as a arena that is independent from the state (political influence) and market (economic influence), where individuals forge associational ties, pursue collective visions and aspirations in an essentially 'civil(ised)' manner. The following are examples of liberal definitions:

civil society is often used loosely to mean either society as opposed to the state or, more precisely, as an intermediate sphere of social organisation between the basic units of society – families and firms – and the state … An intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organisations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect or advance their interests or values (White 1996: 179–82).

Civil society is that set of diverse non-governmental institutions, which is strong enough to counterbalance the state, and, whilst not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent the state from dominating and atomising the rest of the society (Gellner 1995: 32).

Civil society is the realm of organised social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from state, and bounded by a legal order or set of shared rules. It is distinct from 'society' in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interest, passions, preferences, and ideas, to exchange

> information, to achieve collective goals, to make demands on the
> state, to improve the structure and functioning of the state, and to
> hold the state officials accountable (Diamond 1997: 6).

In each of the foregoing definitions, we find emphatic reference to such notions of civil society as 'an intermediate sphere'; 'autonomous from the state and market'; 'voluntary', 'bounded by a set of shared rules'. These normative benchmarks which visualise 'civil society', in the cultural mould of Western societies, as virtuous, 'civic' and essentially democratic are then upheld as a key institutional 'export' for unstable societies undergoing democratic change. Hence, we see the obvious influence of de Tocqueville, who called for the adoption of the liberal, specifically the American, model of civil society as a basis for democracy. The key problem is that by exclusively privileging the kinds of groups found in developed democracies, there is the danger of ignoring 'cultural relativism', defined here as the way in which different societies evolve different institutions including the state and civil society. In most developing states, where the state came into existence through colonialism and social relations are only partially capitalised, the relationship between state and civil society is not defined by individualistic or economistic modes of capitalist social relations. Such societies are still governed by authoritarian forces and it is not possible to conceive of civil society as necessarily autonomous, voluntary, democratic, or even 'civil'.

A similar Western vision of the state and civil society in neoliberalising Africa is found in an edited volume that emerged from an international workshop on 'Reordering of the state in Africa', held at the Hebrew University, Israel, and whose contributors were mainly drawn from liberal Africanists based in America and Europe. The volume brought together what its authors called a common 'vision of African politics … [that differs] from the conventional wisdom of the early years of independence [that is state-centrism]' (Rothchild and Chazan 1988: ix). This new vision not only demeaned the state and challenged the state-centric perspective, it also drew attention to the emergence of a vibrant civil society in Africa and newly emerging minimalist states: 'political processes in Africa in recent years display a complex image of government enfeeblement, growing societal activity beyond the reach of the state and heterogeneous forms of political reordering' (Rothchild and Chazan 1988: 325–7). Thus, with few qualified exceptions (for example Bratton 1989), the prevailing opinion is that in Africa, civil society is a 'newfound' construct that needs to be taken on board in building and consolidating democracy.

Table 1.1: The Liberal Conception of the Role of Civil Society

1. Larry Diamond (1994)	2. Gordon White (1996)
Provides the basis for the limitation of state power, hence for the control of the state by society, and hence for democratic political institutions as the most effective means of exercising that control (p. 7).	Can alter *balance of power* between state and society in favour of the latter.
Supplements the role of political parties in stimulating political participation.	Can play a *disciplinary role* in relation to the state by enforcing standards of public morality and performances and improves the accountability of both politician and administrators.
Provides a proactive arena for the development of democratic attributes – for example tolerance, moderation, compromise.	Can play a potentially crucial role as a *intermediary* or a transmission belt between the state and society in ways which condition the relationships between individual citizens and the formal political system.
Creates channels other than political parties for the articulation, aggregation and representation of interests.	Plays *constitutive role* by redefining the rules of the political game along democratic lines.
Generates wide range of interests that may cross-cut, and so mitigate, the principal polarities of political conflict.	
Provides a recruitment and training ground for new leaders.	
Participates in non-party activities such as election monitoring, anti-corruption campaigns, voter education.	
Disseminates information, thus aiding citizens in the collective pursuit and defence of their interests and values.	
Provides arena for sustainable reform and change – winning hearts and minds of the citizenry.	
Gives citizens respect for the state and positive engagement with it.	

The foregoing forms the intellectual bedrock of 'political con-ditionality' adopted by Western nations and donors in foisting the neoliberal political agenda on African countries. The key principle of the donor agenda, as imposed in the late 1980s, was 'reversing the top-down approach to development for a more participatory bottom-up approach' (Osaghae 1998: 5). Associated with this was the focus on civil society as an organised front for engaging the authoritarian state as well as a key facilitator of liberal democratic transformation. As argued by Nelson Kasfir,

> for many scholars and donors, civil society became an instrument, perhaps the most important one, that will make African states more democratic, more transparent and more accountable. In the rapidly changing [policy and intellectual] literature on democratisation, much attention is paid to the public role that civil associations undertake either to confront authoritarian [states] or support newly democratic states (Kasfir 1998a: 1).

In advocating the neoliberal agenda, Western donors and intellectuals developed 'a designer concept of civil society' (Wachira 1998: 137) as part of a web of 'the social formations that have emerged through the history of their societies that can and will lead the movement to reform their governments' (Kasfir 1998a: 1). What they emphasised was 'a small set of organisations with special characteristics [to] form the core of civil society, a concept that has been given a relatively narrow and normative meaning' (Kasfir op cit). Similarly, they emphasised liberal democracy as a necessary solution to the crises of governance that bedevil most developing countries. In other words, donor agendas are anchored on 'the desirability of economic liberalism and liberal democracy … [and the assumption] that donors and creditors in the north all subscribe to and advocate as the model to be followed by the south' (Abrahamsen 2000: x). Both components of the donor agenda (economic liberalism and liberal democracy) emphasise the fundamental transformation of existing crisis-ridden structural institutions of developing countries. The reason why donors imposed their agenda is not far-fetched: it 'entitles the north to develop and democratise the south in its image' (Abrahamsen 2000: x). Needless to say, therefore, the donor agenda is rooted in mainstream Western theory.

The Liberal Conception: de Tocqueville and Beyond
A representative, but certainly core, example of the Western conceptualisation of civil society – one that provides the philosophical

basis of recent intellectual and donor visions of how the state should be politically transformed in the global South – is offered by Alexis de Tocqueville in his ethnographic and philosophical account of civil society and democracy in nineteenth-century America. I have three reasons for focusing on de Tocqueville. First described as a quintessential liberal, de Tocqueville was a French European inspired by what American civil society and democracy had to offer to his native continent. In a way, therefore, he offers a *hybrid* perspective where European and non-European traditions meet and are theorised in challenging terms – as is happening in Africa today. Second, as his thought continues to influence liberal writers, de Tocqueville deserves dedicated attention. An example of one such contemporary writer is Putnam, who argues that 'the importance of a strong and active civil society to the consolidation of democracy, [signals] an acceptance of the Tocquevillian view of achieving society by way of dense associational life' (Putnam 1995: 65).[2] Finally, the reason(s) that motivated de Tocqueville to travel to post-colonial America in search of democratic inspiration is relevant to what obtains in many developing societies struggling with the challenges of installing and consolidating democracy. De Tocqueville's theory (and account) provides an interesting comparative context for Nigerian scholars, some of who endorse his idea perhaps because he focused on a similar cultural setting. The real value of drawing parallels between the two contexts is because de Tocqueville looks at a society recently decolonised and apparently democratising. At the time of Tocqueville's visit, America was a burgeoning post-colonial society, having achieved its independence from Britain only about 50 years earlier.

De Tocqueville offers challenging insights in the context of a post-colonial, plural, and federal society, as Nigeria has also become. In addition, de Tocqueville's treatise provides a meta-narrative on how a vibrant and dense civil society impacts on the expansion and effectiveness of democratic system: a thesis that forms the basis of the Western and local debates, and will be problematised in this chapter and eventually tested in the context of this study on Nigeria. Finally, perhaps more than any other work of its kind, de Tocqueville based his work and claims on an *ethnographic study*, which is the methodology used in this study (see Chapter 3).

De Tocqueville's two-volume study was based on participant obser-vation of American democracy at work. He noted the 'flowering' and *deliberative power* of associational entities, which he described as an asset of American democracy. He observed at first hand, for example, that when

there was a blockage in a thoroughfare which caused traffic congestion, neighbours immediately formed themselves into 'a deliberative body' (a civic group): 'this extemporaneous assembly gives rise to an executive power which remedies the inconvenience before anybody has thought of recurring to a pre-existing authority superior to that of the persons immediately concerned' (De Tocqueville [1836] 1994a: 191). By emphasising the capacity of ordinary people to create deliberative bodies, de Tocqueville seems to assert that civic groups are capable of substituting for the state, at least to some extent.

According to de Tocqueville, the strength of civil society lies in its capacity to pool together into concrete associational frameworks, the visions and aspirations of motley individuals who need each other to present a common front. His definition of an association says it all:

> An association consists simply in the public assent which a number of individuals give to certain doctrines and in the engagement which they contract to promote in a certain manner the spread of those doctrines … An association unites into one channel the efforts of divergent minds and urges them vigorously towards the one end which it clearly points out (De Tocqueville [1836] 1994a: 192)

He extols American associational life as extensive, claiming that the 'associational spirit', political or otherwise, influences 'every act of social life':

> In no country in the world has the principle of political association been so successfully used or applied to a greater multitude of objects than in America. Beside the permanent associations which are established by law under the names of townships, cities, and counties, a vast number of others are formed and maintained by the agency of private individuals (De Tocqueville [1836] 1994a: 191).

The vibrancy of associational life is dependent upon the uncompromising nature of how people treasure their rights. The people see themselves as the protectors, rather than receivers, of their rights and obligations. Rights of association and other rights go hand in hand: 'the free institutions which the inhabitants of the United States possess, and the political rights of which they make so much use, remind every citizen, and in a thousand ways, that he lives in society' (De Tocqueville [1836] 1994b: 105). De Tocqueville notes that Americans of all ages and all conditions constantly form associations. They have 'not only commercial and manufacturing

companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive' (De Tocqueville op cit). He also observed that Americans form associations 'to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they found hospitals, prisons, and schools' (De Tocqueville op cit). They form them even for what may appear as absurd reasons: 'if it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society' (De Tocqueville [1836] 1994b: 106).

These associations are based on *achieving* (as opposed to *'ascriptive'*) *social structures* providing a stabilising mechanism for America's plethora of plural 'settler communities' – a political ecology that contrasts sharply with that of continental Europe. In early (and contemporary) America there were/are ascriptive associations too: 'Italian Americans', 'African Americans'. But because these associations were/are influenced by the achieving social infrastructure and the concept of unity in diversity, they rarely developed sectarian or backward-looking manifestations.[3] De Tocqueville notes the heterogeneous nature of associations in America where potential conflict between diverse groups were seemingly tamed by incentives for unity. He notes that 'there is no end which the human will despairs of attaining through the combined power of individuals united into a society' (De Tocqueville [1836] 1994a: 192). To him, Americans have more opportunity within the framework of an association than if they are acting alone:

> When an association is allowed to establish centres of action at certain important points in the country, its activity is increased and its influence extended. Men have the opportunity of seeing one another; means of execution are combined; and opinions are maintained with a warmth and energy that written language can never attain. (De Tocqueville [1836] 1994a: 193)

Thus he saw more of harmony than 'fault lines' within and between the plethora of associations that are established to promote diverse public causes: safety, commerce, industry, morality, religion and so on. De Tocqueville's emphasis on a heterogeneous but unifying civil society in America seems to run contrary to the situation in developing societies such as Nigeria where there is seen to be conflict *within* and *between* ascriptive and modern achieving associations.

Against this backdrop, de Tocqueville eulogised the virtuous democratic practices which made America stand out as a role model. He idealised the benchmarking features of an ideal democratic society – one he was visioning for his native France and for greater Europe: 'Thus the most democratic country on the face of the earth is that in which men have, in our time, carried to the highest perfection the art of pursuing in common the object of their common desires and have applied this new science to the greatest number of purposes' (De Tocqueville [1836] 1994b: 106). In summary, de Tocqueville sees the potentials of a dense, vibrant and united civil society for achieving and sustaining a democratic system. Specifically his reflections on how America offers a model of developing democracy based on an active civil society seem valid not only for his native country (France) but also for other societies. What is more notable is that linking the success of democracy to the emergence of an active civil society forms the basis of liberal prescriptions for achieving democracy in twenty first-century post-colonial settings.

A key issue in the Tocquevillian (and mainstream liberal) visions of civil society, democracy and the state is that these concepts are often inextricably linked, both in terms of evolution and substance, to the emergence of *Western capitalist societies*.[4] Abrahamsen notes that

> The notion of close affinity between capitalism and democracy is almost as old as liberal theory itself, and it is a commonplace of Western political discourse to regard democracy as the characteristic political form of capitalism. … But while it is obvious to all but the most dogmatic that capitalism and democracy do have a number of features in common, their relationships is far from straightforward (Abrahamsen 2000: 76).

In terms of compatibility, Abrahamsen argues that capitalism and democracy share 'the same anti-paternalistic thrust: the individual, whether as voter or consumer, is assumed to be the best judge of his or her own interest' (Abrahamsen 2000: 76). This compatibility is seen to facilitate the development of civil society, as an independent centre of debate, information and decision making. On the other hand, Abrahamsen argues that in many ways capitalism and democracy do 'pull in different directions' – that is, they are also incompatible:

> Capitalism, with its emphasis on competition and initiative, inevitably creates elites, inequalities and concentration of wealth …

> Put simply, the social and economic inequalities linked to capitalist competition prevent political equality in two different ways. First, those with superior economic resources have more influence over and more bargaining power *vis-à-vis* the holders of state power. Second, they are more capable of 'setting the agenda' because of their economic strength, higher education, more competent mastery of communication techniques and so on (Abrahamsen 2000: 76–7).

It is arguable whether the foregoing argument applies to Africa and the global South, where the state is not the manager of capitalism *per se*. At issue is how liberal notions of democracy and civil society can be applied in societies that are not fully capitalised and are still grounded in pre-capitalist modes of social and economic relations. This draws our attention to important issues that are overlooked by the Tocquevillian and mainstream liberal visions: issues of inequality, class and power which differ from one society to another, depending on their systems of production. Thus, we need to explore the alternative viewpoints of the state, civil society and democracy as offered by the radical theory.

The Radical Conception: Hegel, Marx and Gramsci

Radical perspectives draw our attention to class conflict and power relations within (and between) state and (civil) society. This perspective owes its origin to Karl Marx, Georg Wilhelm Hegel and, later, Antonio Gramsci. This triad of radical philosophy complement each other in terms of the different stress they put on contradictions in the bourgeois state and civil society respectively. The radical theory emerged as a response to liberal understanding which constructs the state and civil society as diametrically opposed secular spheres conditioned by individuality, homogeneity and civility, rather than domains besieged with, and influenced by, underlying struggles for power and influence. It was Hegel who challenged the 'Western' liberal conception of a homogeneous civil society against the state. He argues that civil society is an historically constructed sphere of life which owes its dialectics to the advent of commodity relations and the expansion of market, freeing the domain of economy from politics (Hegel 1820 [2001]).

The transition to capitalism is seen as crucial to the emergence of both the modern state and civil society. The driving force or basic unit of both spheres (state and civil society), according to Hegel, is the selfish political man who had to construct a *civic community* as a means of mediating *system of want*:

> The concrete person, who in particular is an end to himself, is a totality of wants and a mixture of necessity and caprice. As such he is one of the principles of the civic community. But the particular person is essentially connected with others. Hence each establishes and satisfies himself by means of others, and so must call in the assistance of the form of universality. This universality is the other principle of the civic community (Hegel, 1820 [2001: 154])

Hegel defines civic society as 'the realm of difference, intermediate between the family and the state, although its construction followed in point of time the construction of the state' (Hegel, 1820 [2001: 154]). Thus, the state emerges to provide a robust domain with equally robust structures – albeit dominated by some self-seeking men – to regulate unequal social, political and economic relations among 'autonomous' individuals/groups. Opposing the idea of the civil society as an arena of freedom against state absolutism, Hegel constructs civil society (itself and its relations with the state) as an essentially contradictory domain. Far from being a homogeneous, unified entity which is opposed to the state, Hegel argues that both the state and civil society are riven with conflict between classes and groups. By extension, the state (in particular, those in control of power) does not rise against civil society *per se* but is in constant effort to nurture the character of civil society (Hegel, 1820 [2001: 154]). In doing so, the state nurtures, by design and/or default, groups subservient to state visions and those opposed to them. Thus in Hegel we find the earliest traces of how hegemony and anti-hegemony are embedded in the relationship between state and civil society – a position re-invented much later by the Italian revolutionary philosopher, Antonio Gramsci (of whom more later; see also Chapter 6).

On the other hand, Marx casts the existence of, and relationship between, state and civil society in terms of a multi-layered conflict embedded in productive relations. This view is captured by Carmack: 'Contradictions within civil society are *reproduced* within the state; at the same time, that the state reinforces certain interests in civil society and undermines others. Civil society is not just external to the state; rather various and even contradictory groups in civil society permeate the state differentially' (Carmack 1989: 261–90 quoted in Mamdani 1995b: 605). Like Hegel, Marx sees the state and civil society as theatres of class and power struggle. Marx's renowned statement in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* says it all:

the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class [and power] struggles … The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones (Marx and Engels, 1848 [1948]).[5]

Marx's theatrical view of the relationship between state and civil society is taken up by Antonio Gramsci who sees it as a function of *hegemony* (see Chapter 7). In particular Gramsci popularised the notion of civil society as 'a domain in which existing social order is grounded, … a realm in which new social order can founded … [and] an intellectual tool for fermenting change' (Cox 1999: 4–5). Gramsci's main position, as documented in his *Prison Notes* (1978), is that civil society provides an organised arena for legitimising and/or contesting hegemony: civil society either shapes or is shaped by state and societal factors; it is an agency capable of either of stabilising or reproducing power, and a potential instrument of transformation. By taking a broader stance on civil society's emancipatory–hegemonic potentials, Gramsci asserts that forces within civil society operate in a political and social space occupied by different conflicting forces, 'a terrain which is narrowed when there is a close identity between people and their political institutions (in Gramsci's terms, when hegemony prevails) and which is widened when this identity is weak' (Cox 1999: 4–5.).

In the foregoing, one can see many deconstructive claims that question 'simplistic' liberal views of the state–civil society interface. First, the process of decision making, state power and the relationship between apparatuses of the state are potentially contradictory. Second, state interests and policies are shaped by conflicting class interests which reflect on state politics and state–civil society relations. Thirdly, consistency and contradiction within state policies and decision making 'pose the twin possibility of the state being coherent as well as internally fractured, both *reflecting and shaping* the balance of interest in civil society' (Mamdani 1995b: 605). Finally, the state and civil society present twin spaces for creating and reproducing social and political hierarchies. Like the state, civil society carries potential dangers of being undemocratic, violent, repressive and authoritarian – both internally and in its relationship with the state.

In the context of Nigeria, the radical debate carries some weight because it highlights issues of class and power as well as the material foundations of the relationships between the state and civil society –

issues that are conspicuously avoided in the liberal debate but remain crucial to understanding the situation in Nigeria. Together, the radical and liberal perspectives provide opposing meta-narratives that influence the local debate in Nigeria.

Local Discourses: A Critical Overview

A review of the Nigerian literature reveals that most authors bring in the global debate. The effect of Western theory and history on the local debate in Nigeria is not surprising given the country's colonial and post-colonial experience (indeed, such institutions as democracy, civil society, the military, are often regarded with some suspicion, as foisted on Nigeria through Western imperialism). Similarly, the manner in which Western notions of civil society have formed the basis of dominant intellectual and donor ideology and how such ideology has been used to prescribe 'hard' political and economic choices is part of the reason why Nigerian intellectuals are critically apprehensive, at least initially, of the dominant Western liberal debate. However, the local debate in Nigeria also engages several divergent viewpoints, amongst Nigerians as well as Nigerianists, and from diverse perspectives, from social-anthropological to political science.

In Nigeria, as in other parts of Africa and global South, discussions on civil society, the state and democracy emerged at a time when global development thinking had reached an impasse.[6] There is close correlation between the rise of the local debate and recent global donor and intellectual agendas centring on the empowerment of civil society as a precondition for liberal democratic development. Peter Ekeh, reviewing the Nigerian literature, notes that 'content analysis of the use of "civil society" … dating back to the 1950s, demonstrates the absence of this term, or at any rate its thinness … up until the mid-1980s and then a sudden explosion in its application since then' (Ekeh 1992: 187). The relative appearance of 'civil society' in Nigerian intellectual discourse from the late 1980s was not a coincidence: it is indicative of the influence of shifting Western paradigms, which re-invented the concept around the same time as Nigeria was undergoing structural crises. Western donors imposed structural adjustment and 'political conditionality' centring on rolling back the state, strengthening civil society, and provision of rule of law and human rights, as a condition for debt relief. This had enormous implications on the local debate. First, it gave rise to a Nigerian version of the wider debate hinging on resistance to and/or acceptance of the Western model of civil society and democracy. Secondly, when the debate eventually manifested itself in the public domain – for instance, in a national debate organised in 1986 to

discuss the 'national question' (Owolabi 1992: 264) – it formed the basis of social action staged by civil society activists and radical scholars against members of the petty-bourgeois political class, based on their disparate liberal and radical visions of civil society and democracy. Whilst most elements amongst organised labour, students and gender groups based their action on the radical vision (see Adewumi and Adeshina 1999), right-wing elements in human rights and civil liberties groups ascribed to the liberal notion (see Olukoshi 1998).

Nigerian intellectuals often flag off with the Western debate, particularly the de Tocquevillian thesis, initially dismissing it as 'Western' but eventually engaging with it in various ways. However, many often engage, not with a single, but a multiplicity of 'Western' perspectives, in their work. Thus, in terms of philosophical debate, other contending views such as those of Marx and Gramsci are equally acknowledged. For instance, Anthony Asiwaju notes

> the frequent reference which [Nigerian(ist)] political scientists (for example Larry Diamond 1996; Musa Abutudu 1995 and Osaghae 1998) who have significantly expanded the quantum of African literature on civil society and democratisation, make … not only to Western political thinkers like … Alexis de Tocqueville but also such philosophers of history as Hegel and Marx (Asiwaju 2000: 625; references in parenthesis his).

In understanding the Nigerian situation, Asiwaju himself emphatically emphasises the comparative importance to Africa of the wider 'American political dynamics' (Asiwaju 2000: 625) within which de Tocqueville's work is contextually located. Similarly, Beckett makes an interesting comparison of constitution-making or 'the great debate' in US and Nigeria. In particular, Beckett described Nigeria's constitution-making process of the 1970s and 80s as 'suggestive of the summer of 1787 in Philadelphia [that] produced an ingenious plan of constitutional engineering designed to prevent the ethnic/regional sectionalism that was such a prominent and disastrous feature of the first republic' (Beckett 1997: 121). Beckett further notes, 'if the central goal of the US constitutional fathers was a "non-tyrannical republic", then the Nigerian "wise men" of the CDC (Constitution Drafting Committee) aimed above all at the creation of a non-tribalist republic' (Beckett op cit.). Similarity of experience is key reason for constant reference to the American perspective among Nigerian scholars: 'North America and South (Latin) America promise a

rich reward for African experts in view of similar experience with the democratisation process and the roles of civil society and moral authority as crucial factors in that process' (Asiwaju 2000: 625).

In particular, Asiwaju starkly emphasises and locates democratic and associational life in United States in the nineteenth century as an inspiring and influential part of a 'broader spectrum of relevance' to understanding the dynamics in African societies. However, like Osaghae (1998), Asiwaju acknowledges the pivotal role of the 'Western' meta-narratives and historical experience in shaping – for better or for worse – current civil society and democratic discourses in Africa: 'it was partly because of … the rich and diversified intellectual history in Western Europe and partly because of the European colonial impact that the definition of civil society in Africa takes its cues from perspectives developed out of Western experience' (Asiwaju 2000: 625). While Europe and America provide useful reference points for Nigerian scholars in their effort to engage the civil society debate, they cannot be taken as sources of universal wisdom, especially given the contrast between the industrialising West and developing countries such as Nigeria, as noted above.

Amongst Nigerian intellectuals we find opposing viewpoints, even tension, on the civil society argument. On the one hand, there are those who doubt the 'modernity' of civil society as against its nativity, 'primordial' and sectarian nature (for example Ekeh 1992). Some emphasise the huge democratising and liberatory potentials of Nigerian civil society in a manner that endorses de Tocquevillian theory (for example Enemuo and Momoh 1999; Kukah 1999); while others warn of the real and potential conflict that pervades civil society (for example Beckman 1997; Jega 1998). Yet, others bemoan its perverse manifestations (for example Ikelegbe 2001a) and/or potential for reproducing gendered relations and/or dominant forms of power (Pereira 2000; Mama 1997; Abdullah 1993). I contrast the two major perspectives in Table 1.2.

Some Nigerian scholars are swayed by the anti-Western and anti-imperial language adopted by some Marxists and Afro-Marxists, which depict such concepts as civil society, democracy and the state as Western in origin, instrumental in capitalist penetration and, therefore, problematic in the analysis of, and application to, non-Western societies such as Nigeria. For instance Lucky Imade queries whether concepts such as civil society, which evolved from within a specific historical context of Western society [and intellectual tradition] can, with relevance, be applied to an analysis of contemporary Nigeria without forcing an ethnocentric per-spective on the situation. Is it possible to use these concepts without

taking into consideration that they also have a history … which is bound up with colonialism? (Imade 2001: 12).

Table 1.2: Local Discourses on Civil Society[7]

S/n	Construct A: Liberal	Construct B: Radical
1	Democratising Internally democratic; capable of fighting democratic cause.	De-democratising Undemocratic; anti-democratic; hierarchical; incapable of fighting democratic cause.
2	Liberatory[8] Contests domination; liberates itself and others.	Hegemonic Undemocratic; anti-democratic; hierarchical; incapable of fighting democratic cause.
3	Homogeneous United, unifying and singular.	Heterogeneous Diffuse, diverse, plural, and fragmented.
4	Harmonious Peaceful, pacifying and orderly.	Conflictual Conflict-ridden, explosive and disorderly.
5	Modern(istic) Secular, cosmopolitan and urbane.	Traditional Sectarian, primordial, cultural and communitarian.
6	Anti-statist Could be assertive, and autonomous.	Statist Closely tied to and controlled by the state.
7	Idealistic Imaginary, fictitious, simplistic and utopian.	Realistic Empirical, complex and dynamic.

Imade's query echoes Ekeh's emphasis on 'the danger that exists of mis-applying Western political constructs to African circumstances, especially when their analyses concern such history-soaked concepts as civil society' (Ekeh 1992: 188). Similarly, Victor Uchendu notes the contradictions created by Western imperialism, especially its 'imposed discourses and structures' on the understanding of civil society in Nigeria. He writes:

> Colonialism transformed traditional forms of civil society. The idea of civil society constructed from the historical experience of Western Europe could be misleading when exported to Africa …

generalisations do not stand the weight of … Nigerian ethnography … What is typically characteristic of the civil society in Nigeria is the enlargement of the political space, the incorporation of different polities into the one new state (Uchendu 2000: 34–6; my italics).

But why are these scholars so suspicious of the concept of civil society in Nigeria? Is it because of its appropriation by a more dominant argument that excludes peripheral capitalist countries like Nigeria from real democratisation? Certainly, the liberal argument makes pre-emptive, even spurious, assumptions about the lack of democracy and civil society in Nigeria and other developing economies. Thus the 'dismissive' position held by some Nigerian scholars is perhaps a response to the pre-emptive, belittling, even caricatured, notions of civil society and its relation to the state and democracy, held by dominant Western theorists and institutions.

However, because of their political stance, the contentions of Ekeh, Imade and Uchendu – and indeed all other scholars – need to be carefully 'deconstructed if we are to make sense of the dynamics of the democratisation process in countries such as Nigeria' (Jega, 1995: 1). At least three broad issues can be raised in conducting such deconstruction. First, by invoking ethnocentrisms and stereotypical 'othering', it could be argued that all arguments presented by the foregoing scholars have fallen short of giving a concrete critique of civil society theorising – one capable of creatively questioning, rather than condemning, taken-for-granted assumptions. If anything, they are re-casting, in no less ethnocentric terms, what they see as the negative influence of Western thought and mode of political organisation on non-Western societies such as Nigeria. Since social theories are not always conclusive, it is not impossible to question Western theories, and/or re-evaluate their cross-cultural relevance rather than condemn them.[9] If the acceptance of civil society discourse is eurocentric, what could be the alternative conceptualisation that can accommodate Nigeria and other neocolonial societies? How can a 'Western' use of civil society be avoided in the analysis of modern 'neocolonial' Nigeria? Is there any alternative to accepting civil society as an analytic tool in the current era? I am of the opinion that there is no alternative to accepting civil society as a valid construct for empirical study of political change in post-colonial ('modernising', neoliberalising) Nigeria. However, I argue that we need to understand all sides of the debate – the local and global; the liberal and radical – to arrive at a context-specific notion.

In this volume, civil society is operationally defined in the following terms. Firstly, it encompasses a spectrum of associational life, where, in principle, people are free to forge collective ties with a view to pursuing collective interests. In practice, however, the achievement of such freedom is contingent on such factors as the nature and constitution of the state and its political actors, issues of class and power. For instance, as it applies to Nigeria, there are associations that operate beyond the purview of state (such as foreign-based and funded groups) or those operating in less politicised domains (for example self-help). These associations tend to assert more autonomy than those over which the state maintains a direct or indirect control. Secondly, I see civil society as an arena that contrasts with the state, seeking to assert its autonomy in terms of specific societal values and visions – but in doing so, civil society may not necessarily prove effective or even 'successful', not least because of its inherent contradictions. Thirdly, I see civil society as a potential battleground where diverse interests, both of state and non-state actors, conflict and/or build consensus values. Finally, given civil society's potential for patronage, it is an arena where dominant political actors and interests penetrate to influence group interests and/or contain opposition. Here I agree with the view of Julie Hearn who argues that civil society 'constitutes an arena in which states and other powerful actors intervene to influence the political agendas of organised groups with the intention of defusing opposition' (Hearn 2001: 43). I see civil society as essentially diffuse, socially fragmented, politically influenced (but also influential), and materially motivated. To prove these views, it is important to study empirically specific forms of associations, even specific groups, in their relations with the state, and to be guarded about one's claims of such relationships.

A related issue of debate amongst Nigerians is summed up in Uchendu's claim that colonialism 'transformed' the traditional pre-colonial foundation of civil society and, therefore, affected its strength and vibrancy in the colonial and post-colonial dispensations. This claim does not presuppose that colonialism 'obliterated' civil society but it does raise an important question which needs to be addressed: is it possible to speak of 'civil society' in pre-colonial, colonial or even some post-colonial settings in Nigeria?

a) Where there was no state, as in pre-colonial acephalous Igbo societies of South-eastern Nigeria?
b) Where there were many states, as in the ancient Oyo Empire, a

confederal state with (semi)autonomous vassalages and frontier states that stretched right from present-day Western Nigeria down to the Middle Belt (north)?

c) Where there is an overriding authoritarian state which prohibits the agency of civil society, as in the colonial and/or military era?

The prevailing opinion is that, in each of these political formations, there were some forms of civil society groupings and associational life (Crowder 1978; Coleman 1958; Ekeh 1975). Given this, it is inappropriate to dissociate Nigeria's political history from some forms of developing civil society and associational life. On the contrary, while most scholars lament the truncating role of colonialism, some acknowledge its role in creating an arena where the traditional and the modern were forced to co-exist and in the process generated new associational forms.

To sum up, it seems that the density of associational life in Africa encompasses a combination of the so-called 'traditional' ('primordial') and 'modern', both of which make sense in terms of 'localism' and 'nationalism'. In engaging the state and in democratisation, these elements co-exist; albeit with obvious frictions (see Ekeh 1992; Olukoshi 1998: 373; Bratton 1989: 441).

Critical Issues Arising from the Debate

In the following sub-sections, I highlight some issues in a manner that further engages the debate and draws attention to local discourses and realities *vis-à-vis* global visions.

Evidence for the Existence of Civil Society:
Density and 'Cultural Relativity'

Contrary to the view that Africa lacks any significant civil society, the literature on associational life in Africa and Nigeria in particular shows that 'there is prima facie evidence of a nascent civil society in certain African countries' dating back to the pre-colonial era (Bratton 1994: 1). For instance, Bratton argues, in the wider context of Africa, that

> Far from being stunted in sub-Saharan Africa, [associational life] is often vibrant. While many pre-colonial cultures in Africa may have lacked states, they certainly did not lack civil societies, in the broad sense of a bevy of institutions for protecting collective interests. Large areas of Africa have never experienced effective penetration by transformative states and the rural folk there continue to grant

allegiance to traditional institutions such as clan, age-sets, or
brotherhoods. Upon these foundations, Africans invented fresh
forms of voluntary association during the colonial period as a
response to the disruptive impact of urbanisation and commer-
cialisation. Sometimes these new organisations were updated
expression of long-standing informal solidarities … in other cases,
they gave collective shape to new occupational and class identities
(Bratton 1989: 411)

Several key points emerge from the above statement. First, it signifies the
'cultural relativity' of civil society and associational life highlighting, in
particular, that well before the modern state came into being through
colonial conquest, civil society was evident in Africa. Secondly, the
statement clearly emphasises the *density* of associational life in terms of a
'bevy' of associations representing diverse group interests ranging from
traditional to modern associations and from age groups to clans. This
visualisation may sound muddled, even too sectarian, but it depicts the
reality in Africa. Finally, Bratton argues that the bevy of 'informal
solidarities' played a crucial role in giving rise to 'occupational and class
identities' which emerged in the colonial and post-colonial settings
(Bratton 1989).

In the particular context of Nigeria, the historical and sociological
literature on Nigerian politics offers useful material for engaging the
problematic assumption that a vibrant civil society is lacking. It shows that
civil society and associational life were in existence for a long time:

Stretching back from colonial times, Nigeria has always been
remarkable for the vitality of its free institutions and associations
that operate outside state control and have in several instances
posed challenges to the state … newspapers and magazines,
market women associations in several cities, and 'esusu' (exchange)
associations in rural areas, … religious bodies across the country,
… trade unions (Ekeh 1992: 200, emphasis added).

It is instructive to note, however, that early studies hardly used the terms
'civil society' or 'associational life'. Paradoxically, as these concepts were
re-invented in the 1980s and 1990s, the tendency is to assume that
associational life was something new to Nigeria. Nevertheless, while the
term 'civil society' was hardly employed in early studies, its more nuanced
categories – such as 'ethnic associations', 'hometown association', town

union, youth associations, elders' forum, self-help groups, trade associations and so on – have been in use for a long time, indicating not only that deep-rooted primordial and other socio-economic identities provided the basis of associational life, but also that such collective identities were responsive to new circumstances. For instance, in a research carried out among Yorubas in 1939, N. A. Fadipe 'discussed the importance of associational life and identified four principal types – political, religious, occupational, mutual help and convivial' (in Barkan, McNulty and Ayeni 1991: 460). Fadipe's conclusion reflects what obtained and still obtains in contemporary Western Nigeria:

> The tendency to form associations and corporations is very strong among the Yoruba. To a large extent it derives from the organ-isation of the people into compounds. They are formed for the purpose of promoting and protecting common interests in the field of politics, economics, religion, recreation and enjoyment … One interesting result of this tradition of associations is that wherever there is an appreciable community of Yorubas, either outside Yorubaland or even outside their own particular communities, an organisation will spring up complete with officers. This organis-ation will certainly have … its convivial and mutual help features strongly developed (Fadipe 1970: 243 cited in Barkan, McNulty and Ayeni 1991: 460–1).

Similar studies revealed that civil society had existed for a long time. For instance, the work of Coleman (1958) on Nigerian nationalism examined the role of ethnic and voluntary associations. Others like Hodgkin (1956) and Wallerstein (1964) also paid attention to the role of voluntary associations in nationalism and national politics. Similarly, in a study entitled *West African Urbanisation: a Study of Voluntary Organisations in Social Change* Little (1966) credited urbanisation with the rise of associational life. He noted that colonial urban associations emerged in response to sharp social inequalities of colonial urban management policies. In the process, he notes, these associations became creative, adaptive and transformative agents of change.

In sum, it is evident from the foregoing that a dense and active civil society and associational life has existed for a long time in Africa/Nigeria.

Forms of Associational Life in Colonial and Post-colonial Settings
With the establishment of colonialism, new forms of associational life

emerged which eventually coalesced into popular forces for decolonis-
ation. This include cultural associations which later transformed into
political movements and parties – most of which were initially founded by
urban professionals. Some examples in the context of Nigeria are worth
noting:

1) *The Nigeria National Democratic Party* (NNDP) developed out of an
   ethnic/cultural association founded by Western-educated
   professionals. It dominated Lagos politics until 1938 with the support
   of 'Yoruba elements of chiefs, imams, market women leaders, wealthy
   merchants, Christian leaders and Nigerian and non-Nigerian pro-
   fessionals' (Agbaje 1997: 366).

2) *The Northern Elements Progressive Union* (NEPU) emerged in the 1950s as
   a result of 'a political awakening among a new generation of northern
   elites whose exposure to western education had bred reformist
   inclinations and who had become alarmed to discover their region's
   massive and pervasive disadvantage in every aspect of modernisation'
   (Diamond 1988: 37). NEPU was dominated largely by 'anti-
   establishment' young professionals drawn mainly from 'commoner'
   backgrounds.

3) *The Jam'iyar Mutanen Arewa* (i.e. the northern solidarity association)
   initially formed as a cultural association by Western-educated
   traditional elements in northern Nigeria. It later transformed into the
   Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the 1950s. The party maintained
   a steady support from heterogeneous northern groups by exploiting
   pan-northern ideology and contained the expansion of southern
   parties into the region until it was disbanded in 1966. Even today, the
   founding ideology of the party continues to provide a revolving source
   of pan-northern political ideology and an associational platform for
   northern politicians and sectarian groups in civil society such as Arewa
   People's Congress (APC) (see Paden 1986; Ikelegbe 2001a).

4) *Eme Egbe Oduduwa* (initially a cultural Association of the Descendents
   of Oduduwa) formed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his fellow
   Western-educated Yoruba compatriots to counter the emergence of
   the Igbo movement as a national political force. In 1950, it was
   registered as a political party, the Action Group (AG), and became a
   consistent opposition party in the Nigerian national parliament until
   the military coup that ended the Nigerian post-colonial democratic
   experiment in 1966. The ideology of the party provides a central
   politicising vision for politicians and sectarian civil society groups in

south-western Nigeria – for example the Oduduwa People's Congress (see Ikelegbe 2001a for details).

Three key issues arise from the foregoing examples. First, Western-educated professionals spearheaded the formation of civil society organisations, as platforms for social and political action. Initially they represented the interest and visions of educated men in a particular area, thus presenting an ethnic face. Second. these associations became vibrant in the run-up to Nigeria's independence, transforming from non-political to political organisations. Finally, the boundary between the 'political' and 'non-political' civil society became blurred by the reality of national and regional politics.

Colonialism and capitalist penetration not only created new forms of civil organisation, but also allowed for a metamorphosis of existing (pre-colonial) 'civil society' into a new political setting. Thus, it is reasonable to claim that civil society is an enduring feature of post-colonial Nigeria which both pre-existed and survived colonialism. It played a role in the colonial political economy and, in the long run, formed an important pillar of the struggles against imperialism – seen as a popular uprising for democratising or overthrowing the colonial state. There is no way one can understand the political dynamics of contemporary Nigeria without grounding them in the impact of colonialism. Alternatively, it could be argued that colonialism engendered civil society as it centralised oppressive state power as a focus for discontent or resistance. Some of the associations formed under colonial rule obviously borrowed from pre-colonial social formations, while many more emerged in the context of evolving social classes.

However, the colonial state typically sought to control, even eliminate, some groups in civil society. As most pre-colonial associational entities had deep-rooted 'primordial' heritages (culture, ethnicity, religion), which contravened the secular ideology promoted by the colonial state, many of them were repressed through legislation and other means. Nevertheless, the colonial state did not succeed in obliterating such primordial groups – they not only survived but formed an important component of wider civil society. Similarly, as Nigerian colonial state policies were essentially exclusionary, 'the bifurcated state' became characterised by its policy of privileging organisations of the petty-bourgeois, especially associations perceived as friendly to the state – as Mamadani notes for Africa in general (Mamadani 1996: Chapter 1).

Repressive colonial policies became a source of local resistance which helped in strengthening civil society. Among the new forms of

associational life, founded mainly by petty-bourgeois elements, were the labour movement, trade associations, and professional associations, among others. These modern associations co-existed, both complementarily and fragmentally, with the traditional type. Together, these groups protested against colonial policies and eventually coalesced into wider forms of struggles against colonialism. In the post-colonial era, these groups form the core of the movement against military rule and unpopular state policies (Abutudu, 1995). Ekeh argues that in Nigeria 'associations and institutions that enhance the prospect of individual liberties and personal freedom by operating outside the state's control, … possess the capacity to confront the state when these liberties are threatened' (Ekeh 1992: 207).

Conversely, there has been a tendency to exclude from 'civil society' organisations which appear as 'primordial', traditional or rural. Yet these associations still constitute the bulk of associational life in Nigeria/Africa. As argued by Robert Fatton these features make African civil society 'remarkably complex and deeply embedded in all aspects of social, cultural and political life'

> the realm of collective solidarities generated by processes of class formation, ethnic 'inventions', and religious 'revelations'. As such it seldom embodied the peaceful harmony of associational pluralism. In fact civil society in Africa was the prime repository of 'invented' ethnic hierarchies, conflicting class divisions, patriarchal domination, and irredentist identities fuelling deadly conflicts in many areas of the continent (Fatton 1999: 1).

More positively, Monga argues that African civil society comprises 'those birthplaces where the ambitions of social groups have created the means of generating additional freedom and justice … civil society in Africa is informed by all those who are able to manage and steer communal anger [dissent, protest]' (Monga 1995: 363–4). In terms of content, Monga's civil society in Africa consist of churches and mosques, networks of communication and forums of discussion including a 'multiplicity of increasingly dynamic informal groupings, even if these are often established along Weberian lines of sex, age, kinship and religion' (Monga 1995: 360). In short, it can reasonably be argued that the conceptualisation of civil society in this case needs to be extended to include groups that are often overlooked, even under-estimated in the literature. As noted by Patrick Chabal:

> in the African context, civil society, in so far as it can be defined, consists not just of what is obviously not part of the state but also of all who may have become powerless or disenfranchised: not just villagers, fishermen, nomads, members of different age groups, village councillors, or slum dwellers, but also professional, politicians, priests and mullahs, intellectuals, military officers and all others who are, or feel they are, with no due access to the state (Chabal 1994: 83).

However, Chabal is in no doubt about the complex characteristic of African civil society: 'civil society is thus a vast ensemble of constantly changing groups and individuals whose only common ground is their exclusion from the state, their consciousness of their externality, and their potential opposition to the state' Chabal 1994: 83). Chabal further observes that in the African post-colonial context, where the state generally preceded the nation, civil society is necessarily determined first and foremost in its relation to the construction of the state.

In summary, it is argued that civil society in colonial and post-colonial settings includes associations of different hues and orientations excluding, in the process, large swathes of what Mamdani calls 'actually existing civil society' (Mamdani 1996:18).

The Privileging of Urban NGOs and
Civic Associations in the Neoliberal Era

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that civil society is not a 'hitherto missing link' in African politics. What is obvious, apparently, is that the word 'civil society' was conspicuously absent and, in its place, more nuanced concepts – such as ethnic associations – influence intellectual and popular imaginations. It is not surprising, therefore, that with the arrival of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s, only civic associations and NGOs became celebrated icons of 'civil society' theorising and donor support. It could be argued that this stance indicates an obliviousness to Africa/Nigeria's cultural relativity.

Three key types of neoliberal and donor *privileging* are worth engaging here. First, more often than not, donor narratives construct civil society in terms of urban-based, formal, non-governmental, professional organisations:

> Donors are heavily involved in encouraging and financing organisations that fit this notion of civil society. They begin with

the notion of a dense organisational activity in Western European countries and particularly the United States which has both taught its members the democratic skills and promoted interests which governments might otherwise overlook (Kasfir 1998a: 3).

At the programmatic level and in the context of specific context of Africa, Hearn's (2001) close examination of donor support for civil society in Ghana, South Africa and Uganda reveals that such support was selectively channelled to specific groups that are seen to mobilise popular support for donor-friendly economic and political liberalisation. Because donors see civil society from the lenses of a 'given', they overlook the 'realities' of Africa's deeply rooted associational life by subordinating them to a narrow section of the whole picture. In other words, donor support for urban-based civic associations has facilitated these groups and brought them into the limelight; it also neglected a whole range of associations (those perceived as counter-productive to the neoliberal agenda – for example labour unions).

A second type of privileging is the glorification of a narrow segment of civil society – specifically, urban civic associations – as benign, democratic and democratising; in essence, the potential and actual assets of anti-state and democratic struggles. It is argued that by limiting civil society to specific groups, the dominant paradigm also ridicules the principle of *inclusivity* which forms the cardinal principle of the liberal argument. The exclusion of a vast majority of associational forms in the conceptual 'map' is often informed by visions which deem *only* urban groups/NGOs as 'democratic role models' or beacons of popular will. In Africa, it is problematic to use modernising visions as the only yardstick for inclusion. Writing in the context of Africa and elsewhere, Rita Abrahamsen notes that there are reasons to caution against such an assumption:

> The heterogeneous and segmented nature of civil society … cautions against definitions that treat it as inherently democratic. Civil society in Africa (and elsewhere) embodies a diverse set of traditional, ethnic, professional, class, local, regional and national interests. While heterogeneity itself does not prevent voluntary associations from mobilising for democracy, it increases the likelihood that many may become agents of ethnic and parochial interests, especially where state boundaries are still in dispute and nation-building an incomplete process (Abrahamsen 2000: 55).

A third kind of privileging is the construction of 'civil society', in a narrow sense, as groups in opposition to the state, excising those that are under the influence of the state or those beyond its purview. Indeed, Jean-François Bayart (1986) posits that in Africa the state plays a key role in the construction of civil society, noting groups that are aligned to the state and those against it. Similarly, Bayart argues that in Africa civil society groups are not as exclusively formal, professional, organised and urbane as in the Western democracies. How do we account for groups that are relatively unorganised, or those that operate 'far' from the purview of the state? Or those that have nothing to do with the state? In this volume, I have focused on an empirical investigation of the so-called (privileged) urban-based civic associations *vis-à-vis* other pro-democracy groups. The aim is to argue that the pro-democracy movement comprises groups other than civic associations. If civic associations are privileged in terms of their assumed potential to organise in a conventional way and resist/engage the state, do they in reality demonstrate such potential? To what extent are they controlled by the state? To what extent do they justify donor privileging? To what extent are non-donor-driven civil society associations active in anti-state and democratic struggles? Crucially, to what extent are they driven by common and contradictory class interests and challenges? What comparative lessons can we draw from the experience of civic associations and other associations, in particular, the Labour movement?

By emphasising the need for exploring, comparing and contrasting civic associations with other pro-democracy groups, one is not arguing in favour of limited visions of civil society problematised above. Rather, throughout this book, it is argued that in the context of Nigeria and Africa at large, diverse forms of associations populate 'civil society' – an arena in which the state plays an important role through socio-economic and political policies productive of social differentiation and collective action. I therefore argue that, in the case of pro-democracy associations, they are driven by conflicting, but also occasionally complementary, class interest. It is also noted that the nature of state construction in the colonial and post-colonial era contributed in no small measure in determining, even disrupting, the agency of civil society and its potentially democratising role. Similarly, the privileging of civic groups/NGOs by donors is partly responsible for a limited view of civil society, with implications for a lopsided conceptualisation of what constitutes civil society.

In engaging the debate, this study draws on empirical evidence to identify and compare the profile and democratic potentials of two broad pro-democracy groups: civic associations and the labour movement. A

rationale for this focus is that, as the most privileged group, with easy access to donor funding, and being run by urban professionals, civic associations are noticeably at the forefront of struggles for democracy and claim to engage with the state in the interests of the people. By comparing them with less privileged pro-democracy groups such as labour organisations, it is possible to compare and contrast their organisational profiles and democratic potentials. Equally important, it is possible to reveal a great deal about their density, vibrancy and class dynamics and their capacity to unite in confronting the state.

On the basis of the literature, a number of pertinent questions need to be addressed in understanding the relations between civil society, the state and democratic expansion in Africa/Nigeria. While some of these questions have been partly answered, if discursively, in the theoretical literature and critical issues arising, they nevertheless form the basis of empirical enquiry and hypothesis building: how do the state and civil society present contrasting, even rival, spaces for democratic expansion? To what extent does democratisation depend on the emergence of a network of 'voluntary' associations beyond the state? How do associations or their leaders (mis)represent the interests of the people? What kind of groups and how many could be said to be struggling for democracy? Do they have to be autonomous (of the state, of foreign interest, of business) – in funding, personnel, activities? Do they have to transcend or crosscut other forms of social division (class, ethnicity, religion, gender, region) – what if they coincide with these divisions, and even become an expression of them? Do they have to be political? Even pro-democracy? What if they are politically neutral or anti-democratic? At what stage of democratisation are they significant? Do they have to practise democracy themselves? Is 'internal democracy' a requirement for democratic struggle? How valuable is it as a democratic value? Can they be an independent force for democracy or are they only effective in situations where external pressures for democratisation are strong or where the state provides an enabling framework? What happens in a situation of little or no external pressure and where the state provides a disabling environment? Does it matter if their leaders are instrumental and self-serving, rather than speaking for the politically excluded masses, particularly the 'voting public'? What if their real objectives are jumping on the bandwagon of 'circulation of elites' (Pareto), or accumulation or career building? Do they have to pursue their ends peacefully? Could groups committing violence as a means of political expression serve the ends of democratisation? How do peaceful or violent 'cultures' of political expression impact on the public?

This research cannot claim to investigate all these questions. However, the questions form the basis of more limited working hypotheses:

a) Given extensive critiques of neoliberal analyses and realpolitik in relation to civil society, whether alternative visions and frames of analysis based on radical perspectives, such as those of Gramsci, could be substituted in which civil society is seen as an arena of struggles both sustaining and challenging the state.
b) Whether the framework of class analysis could be made to work in the context of understanding civil society and its relation to the state.

Conclusion

This chapter critically explores the civil society debate in terms of the pivotal influence of Western theories and donor discourses. The chapter argues that the dominant Western argument, which views a dense and vibrant civil society as lacking in Africa, and which has played a key role in influencing donor political conditionality, is problematic. The chapter highlights the substance of such dominant views and traces its origin by considering Alexis de Tocqueville and his account of associational life in America. De Tocqueville's theory is seen as particularly relevant because, in addition to providing a grounded theory for Western notions of civil society, it is also a theory that speaks about the rise of civil society in nineteenth century *post-colonial* America and in a manner that draws attention to plural societies of the global south. The liberal theory is then juxtaposed with radical perspectives to highlight the points of structural contradiction and cultural relativism that are often overlooked in the liberal theory.

It is argued that, together, the liberal and radical conceptualisations influence the local debate among Nigeria intellectuals. Initially dismissive of its Western origins and history, the local debate eventually engages the liberal argument in a manner that lays particular emphasis on Nigeria's cultural specificity, specifically the truncating impact of colonialism and capitalist penetration which impacted on pre-colonial forms of social and political organisations and resulted in the rise of a modern state. On the basis of this, it is noted that some scholars bring in the radical argument to take into account the key issues overlooked in the liberal conceptions, particularly social differentiation and power relations which simultaneously pervade the state and civil society. There is no consensus in the Nigerian local debate, but a key argument is that given Nigeria's experience, a blanket notion of civil society based on 'received' tradition obscures a

realistic construction of civil society. In the main, however, the chapter contends that the local debate is influenced to a greater or lesser extent by global discourses; that is, there are those who are critical and apologetic of the liberal theory or its radical counterpart.

On the basis of the local and global debate, the chapter raised several critical issues on the existence of civil society in pre-colonial Nigeria (where some forms of associational life were confirmed to be in existence in contradiction of the mainstream global debate) and its manifestation in the colonial and post-colonial setting (where the modern secular state emerged as a controller of associational life). It also exposed narrow conceptualisations of civil society which pre-empts a more holistic construction encompassing modern and primordial groups as part of civil society; and the risks of privileging civic associations and NGOs as sole precursors of democracy, excising in the process other vast arrays of associational entities – some beyond the reach of the state but not insignificant. The chapter argues that associational life was evident in colonial and post-colonial era and Nigeria. New forms of associational life emerged in the post-colonial era, in struggles against state authoritarianism/military rule. The assumption that civil society organisations only mean urban NGOs implies that these are unproblem-atically seen as harbingers of democracy whilst at the same time in need of tutelage from global patrons. I shall argue that the privileging of civic organisations in terms of donor funding and state collaboration leads to undemocratic outcomes as they become sources of patronage and power in themselves.

The following key positions emerge from the chapter. First, as an alternative to biases and gaps arising from dominant liberal paradigms, I have endorsed the potential utility of the radical perspective drawing from Hegel, Marx and Gramsci, noting in particular the imbedded contradictions between the state and civil society; in particular (1) the potential role of the state (and its dominant ruling classes) to control certain interests in civil society whilst undermining others and (2) the tendency for certain groups in civil society to support hegemonic interests of the state and vice versa. It is evident that civil society demonstrates mammoth contradictory potentials *vis-à-vis* the state: hegemonic versus emancipatory; democratic versus anti-democratic; state versus anti-state. Finally, it is argued, using historical and ethnographic literature, that contrary to prevailing global intellectual and public opinion that civil society in Africa is 'a hitherto missing link', the continent shows extensive evidence of civil society and associational life.

The argument is further developed in chapters 3 and 4 based on a historical-contextual analysis of Nigeria.

2

External and Internal Dimensions of Democratic Expansion: Towards a Synergy

Before we can address the question of civil society in the current phase of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, we need to look at how 'democracy' arrived in the first place. Democratic expansion in Nigeria has been influenced by an inextricably connected set of internal and external factors ranging from the construction of the authoritarian post-colonial state, structural decline, austerity and structural adjustment, loss of regime legitimacy, the rise of mass protest and civil society struggles, donor-driven neoliberal 'political conditionality' and external 'democratic intervention'. Being a product of colonialism, itself hardly democratic, Nigeria possesses the essential features of a peripheral economy in which class and property relations are rudimentary – existing alongside 'inherited' patterns of communal relations revolving around tradition, culture and local mores. Politics is unstable and coloured by forces of ethnicity, religion and geography. Nigeria's externally controlled oil economy has allowed for the construction of 'a rentier space' (Omeje 2006: 1) where the political class (dominant fractions of the petty-bourgeoisie) are struggling to meet local developmental demands as well as the expectations of foreign capital – often compromising the former for the latter. Domestic structures and processes have been characterised by a vicious cycle of military intervention/rule and state repression which reproduced sharp social inequalities but also provoked an active associational life demanding socio-economic justice and democratic governance. A democratic culture has not yet taken root despite the restoration of civilian rule in 1999.

A defining index of Nigeria's post-colonial political landscape is the long spells of military rule 'sandwiched' between shorter spells of civilian

democratic rule. Military rule has largely been the norm: about three-quarters of Nigeria's post-colonial period was spent under military dictatorships (Agozino and Idem 2001). Given the entrenchment of military rule in most of Nigeria's post-colonial history, it is no surprise, therefore, that the pressure for democratic expansion occurred in the context of reversing state authoritarianism and restoring multiparty democracy. However, a range of internal and external factors influenced this outcome. Internal factors revolve around the structural impediments developed by the authoritarian state, which often provoked popular protests and a clamour for democratic change from civil society, while external factors emerged in the form of donor pressures for neoliberal democratic reform. As we shall see, the two factors overlap and often conflict with each other.

A pivotal factor in Nigeria's political history, exposing the dynamic link between internal and external factors since the late 1980s, were the 'crises of governance' – in particular, mounting foreign debt and balance of payments deficits, rapid socio-economic decline, the failure of military regimes to maintain legitimacy in the face of constant mass protests and civil society struggles. This desperate situation influenced (and was influenced by) interventions from Western countries and donors by way of imposed regimes of structural adjustment and 'political conditionality' as conditions for debt relief. However, rather than delivering democracy and 'good governance', and empowering civil society, donor interventions reproduced socio-economic disparities and repressive state actions which were antithetical to the achievement or survival of democracy: for instance, the withdrawal of subsidies on basic goods/services; the introduction of user charges; the retrenchment of public sector workers; and cuts in public sector spending which benefited the dominant classes (for example through stage-managed privatisation) while markedly impoverishing the lower classes, in particular, the working masses whether peasant or proletarian.

As problematised in Chapter 1, donor interventions were often influenced by the neoliberal assumption that the economic failures of the developing world were caused by the lack of liberal democratic institutions – such as a thriving civil society, civil liberties, multiparty system, a free-market economy. Surprisingly, donor interventions (and the theory behind them) are dismissive or, at best, ignorant of the structure and agency of local institutions. By paying particular attention to these local institutions, it becomes possible to offer a more balanced analysis of the dynamics of these institutions as well as the seldom acknowledged contradictory link between them and externally defined visions/structures – for instance, the

emergence of mass protests and associational life as a *simultaneous* form of response against state authoritarianism (internal) and donor-imposed liberalisation measures (external). In short, while domestic and external factors are at issue, the two are not always compatibly related.

This chapter begins by exploring the parameters of neoliberal development and its impact on global democratic expansion. The chapter then applies the parameters and debates to a contextual analysis of the state, democratic development and civil society expansion in Nigeria.

Neoliberal Development, 'Political Conditionality' and the Internationalisation of Liberal Democracy

Until recently, less than 10 per cent of governments in the developing world were democratically elected. Events between 1980s and 1990s have shown that in Africa 'a large number of military and one party dictator- ships have collapsed in the face of mass civil protest and demands for political change' (Bangura, 2000: 167). Jeff Haynes captures the scenario towards the end of 1990s:

> Dozens of Third World countries have recently experienced demo- cratic elections, some for the first time. In Sub-Saharan Africa there were a growing number of elected regimes: more than half of the region's 48 countries held contested elections during 1989– 1996 (Haynes 1997: 76; my italics).

The crisis of dependent capitalism of the 1970s and 1980s was the key factor in the emergence of a donor-imposed neoliberal agenda – a set of prescriptive conditions aimed at building liberal economic and political institutions. A few years into independence, most developing countries began experiencing a spiralling downward decline in economic growth: balance of payments deficits, unmet debt obligations, meagre returns from export-dependent economies, limited Industrialisation and the persistence of peasant/subsistence production, corrupt state appar- atus, decaying infrastructure, and deepening socio-economic inequality, among others. The externally dependent orientation of state policies and the internally divisive nature of state politics meant that political elites were managing an externally vulnerable and internally volatile state (see Schuftan 1998). By the 1990s, the gross domestic product of most countries 'had been declining steadily for about a decade, and the states' capacity and willingness to meet the welfare needs of their citizens had deteriorated significantly or collapsed altogether' (Abrahamsen 2000: 3).

In desperation, most countries turned to multilateral and bilateral Western institutions (including individual nations) for a funded solution in the form of debt relief, cancellation and further loans. The International Finance Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as well as the London and Paris Clubs – all financed mainly by the most industrialised developed countries of the G8 – sought to compel countries to adopt a variety of contradictory, often socially explosive, stabilisation and adjustment programmes 'in return for a new wave of loans' (Leftwitch 1993: 607). Donors suddenly transformed their rules of engagement; from 'development partners' and 'ideological allies' to the 'setters' and 'imposers' of new agendas supportive of political reform and economic liberalisation. Whereas early development interventions were informed by the strategic constraints of a global balance of power and the principles of state sovereignty, the 1980s created an enabling environment for policy 'imposition' as a result of the end of 'the war of development alternatives', especially in the aftermath of the collapse of Soviet Union and international socialism. The subsequent spontaneous ascendancy of Western powers and their neoliberal ideology reinforced 'Western self-identity' as a role model of liberal democracy (Hipper 1995: 9–12). Western donors and governments have been increasingly involved in compelling developing countries to observe 'political conditionality' or 'aid regime principles' (Baylies, 1995: 322) which included the institutionalisation of a minimalist state, the rule of law, political accountability, multiparty electoral systems, a strong civil society, market economy and individual liberty.

There are several contradictory issues which arise from the seemingly 'united stance' of Western donors in 'exporting democracy' to developing countries (Hobsbawm 2005). First is the contradiction between the *principles* of state sovereignty, particularly 'non-interventionism', and the *realities* of multilateral developmental intervention. As development since late 1980s has shown, state crises have provided Western donors with the opportunity to recast developing countries in their mould, and in a manner that contravenes the basic principles of democracy as well as international law. Second is the contradiction between *external agendas* promoted by international donors and the *domestic context of struggles* for democracy staged by popular forces against state authoritarianism and austerity measures. Whilst there are debates on the relative importance of the two (see, for example Wiseman 1995), it is premature to assume that internal and external factors are mutually reinforcing. External influence

has not always yielded the 'desired' result in terms of providing efficient solutions to the crises of governance: minimising the state or empowering civil society. Indeed, because donor criteria were inconsistent, difficult to define and implement, and often influenced by conflicting foreign policy objectives of different Western nations, external intervention appeared to be geared towards meeting those conflicting external visions rather than providing internal solutions. Thus, whilst structural adjustment opened up national economies to foreign investment and repatriation, most countries found themselves worse off, and some states became more authoritarian than ever.

Third is the contradiction between the so-called 'democratic claims' of the neoliberal agenda and the autocratic approach adopted by powerful countries and institutions behind it. Whilst arguably based on the rhetoric of 'political goodwill' (overcoming structural crises, building democratic culture), in reality the implementation of 'political conditionality' required high-handed compulsion which came in at least two ways. On the one hand, donors have often used the most compelling tools at their disposal – debt relief suspension, sanctions, the exclusion of 'erring countries' from the membership of international organisations, military action – to compel the adoption of democracy in the global South. On the other hand, to secure the future of political reform and economic liberalisation, donors have often supported (or turned a blind eye to) state repression and other authoritarian measures – whether from *compliant* regimes or even 'democratic' ones. This makes a mockery of the visions of democracy and good governance upon which donor interventions are often said to be based.

A final contradiction relates to the current re-conceptualisations of the concepts of state and civil society that we see in the neoliberal era. In the decades following independence, donors were instrumental to the construction of 'strong states' and 'weak societies' in developing economies. In other words, they supported the rise of dictatorships that in turn weakened civil society and suppressed democratic challenge. However, by the 1980s donors were at the forefront in defending democracy, empowering civil society and 'rolling back' the state. This inconsistency draws our attention to the role of discourse in (inter)national politics. It is also clear that 'power' is an essential component of the theoretic and practical (re-)construction of the linkage between the state, civil society and democracy. Similarly, the risk of taking nascent reconstructions at face value becomes clear, especially their real-life value in peripheral, not-yet-full-blown-capitalist-societies, such as Nigeria.

In summary, it is argued that the 'externalities' of the neoliberal agenda seem to have largely shaped the internal political and socio-economic conditions in most countries of the global South. However, local structures have also played reinforcing, but also contradictory, roles to externally induced (democratic) development – an issue that is explored in the following section.

The External and Internal Contexts of Democratisation: Implications for Democratic Expansion in Nigeria

It is generally agreed that given the dynamic and unequal nature of the global capitalist economy where countries are located as centres and peripheries, affluent and poor, stronger and weaker, it is impossible to delineate the internal and external factors of democratisation (Abrahamsen 1997, 2000; see also Amuwo1992). Many scholars oppose any 'fictitious dichotomies' (Abrahamsen 2000: 6) – that is, 'the tendency to construct a dichotomy between the internal and external and to examine the two in isolation, with little or no attention [paid to] the way in which the two levels of politics overlap and intertwine' (Abrahamsen 2000: 7). This argument is more in tune with my take on existing realities in Nigeria and other developing countries where political and economic changes are influenced by countries' location in the international capitalist system, and by dynamic linkages of external and internal structures and processes. This study subscribes to the 'hybrid perspective', not least because it calls for a measured awareness to the dynamics of, and the linkages between, the two causal factors – rather than prejudiced preference for either.

To appreciate the interwoven connection between the internal and external sets of factors in my subsequent analysis on Nigeria, it is important to note these factors as identified in the local debate and wider literature (see Table 2.1).

The Political Economy of the State in Nigeria: Internal versus External Structures and Constraints

Nigeria is not a clear example of a capitalist economy. Alongside neocolonial capitalist structures and institutions, many communities in Nigeria are also characterised by what may be described as 'pre-capitalist institutions' revolving around subsistence/peasant livelihoods and communal modes of social relations rationalised in terms of local culture, religion, kinship and 'tradition'. Writing on the wider context of Africa, Claude Ake notes that

**Table 2.1: The External and Internal
Dimensions of Neoliberal Democracy**

A. External	B. Internal
The 'New World (dis)Order' The appearance of unipolar Western hegemony and disappearance of socialism as an ideological platform and/or alternative option for development/democratisation.	*Structural/economic crises* External dependency; internal failures; socio-economic inequalities, infrastructural decay.
'Interventionism' and 'Unilateralism' Dominance of the developed countries in international institutions: the United Nations System, IMF, World Bank; the rise of the 'neoliberal agenda', 'political conditionality', good governance.	*Crises of legitimacy* Authoritarian state construction; repression, loss of legitimacy.
The rise of US imperialism Forceful 'exportation of democracy' to the global South (for example in the name of 'war on terror').	*Mass protests/pro-democracy struggles* Against internal failures and externally imposed conditions.
Globalisation and 'the collapse of boundaries' Democratic diffusion: contagious/ 'snowballing' of political reforms/movements throughout the world arising from information technology.	

> Africa is not yet a market society … on the average, over 60 per cent of the population in Africa are rural, mostly peasants engaged in subsistence farming … for most people in Africa, the privatisation of interest (entailed by liberal democracy) is meaningless and pernicious. It is meaningless in that the communal element is the essence of the particular existence and pernicious in the sense that such privatisation would imply the dissociation of persons form the context in which modality and integrity are possible (Ake 1994b: 4)

Aside from this, Nigeria's contemporary class structure is not the same as that of an industrialised society (where we find an independent and

thriving bourgeoisie which has successfully drawn the mass of the population into wage labour). Though there is a semblance of 'capitalist classes' – for example the local/national bourgeoisie (an indigenous equivalent of the metropolitan bourgeoisie) and wage labour – there are controversies over their composition, internal logic and potential roles. For instance, there is a debate on the character and orientation of the Nigerian 'national bourgeoisie', as well its potential for delivering national 'autonomy'. Some scholars note that because of its subaltern status as agent of the international bourgeoisie, the domestic bourgeoisie is constrained from delivering such autonomy (Depelchin 1979: 20; Hutchful 1979: 41). Terisa Turner, writing on *Oil and Class in Nigeria* emphasises the self-serving character of state officials, 'technocrats', a local commercial class and middlemen who prevent the state 'from organising the [capitalist] transfer of oil technology and, more broadly, from initiating the development of capitalist production' (Turner 1980: 202; see also Beckman 1981; Hoogvelt 1979). The consensus is that the national bourgeoisie is relatively weak and divided by sectarian differences. It can more appropriately be labelled as a petty-bourgeoisie.

However, in spite of its weak status, the Nigerian petty-bourgeoisie, specifically the military and political classes which recruit largely from it and represent its interest, have established a relative edge over weaker classes, especially labour. However, unlike most African states, where labour often joined local 'developmentalist coalitions' (Barchiesi 1996: 354), the Nigerian labour movement has retained a degree of autonomy and often resorted to militancy in making political demands. Such autonomous moves were more assertive during democratic phases than under military rule, when labour activism was often brutally repressed and/or contained through a combination of corruption and state infiltration (Barchiesi 1996). Yet, compared to other African states, it is generally agreed that the Nigerian labour movement constitutes a key actor in welfare and democratic struggles in the country.

The bourgeois-dominated state has been described as an instrument of class domination in Nigeria: 'The state then, becomes an actor operating on behalf of the dominant classes. Given the weak material base of the petty-bourgeois elements that inherited political power in post-colonial Africa, the state as class dominance must necessarily encapsulate the state's role in class formation and consolidation'(Abutudu 1995: 12). Citing Larry Diamond, Abutudu notes four ways in which the Nigerian state performs its class functions: (1) dominance as key employer and provider of public goods; (2) monopoly of development policies and strategies; (3) manipulation of

patronage and ethnic ties and (4) illegitimate accumulation of public wealth. He adds a fifth role overlooked by Diamond (a liberal scholar): intermediary for 'foreign interests', which, to him, captures the dependent nature of the Nigerian state and its classes (Abutudu 1995: 12).

A key factor that defines Nigeria's internal politics and external dependency is the 'rentier' nature of its economy – a system in which the state and its ruling class depend on taxes and royalties coming in this case from its oil wealth (Ibrahim 1992; 1997b). After Nigeria's 'oil boom',[1] excessive dependence on oil resulted in the weakening or collapse of other sectors of the economy, especially peasant agriculture, affecting the livelihood of many Nigerians who depend on them.[2] Nigeria's 'peripher-ality' in the world capitalist economy is arguable given its status as a major exporter of crude oil and as an active member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). However, in terms of the World Bank (and other) development indicators, it carries the essential features of a developing peripheral economy (see World Bank 1995a; Europa 1996). As a dependent capitalist economy, Nigeria is also bedevilled by the traps of an export-oriented extractive economy (of unprocessed products subject to unequal exchange), a weak, dwindling manufacturing economy and a highly unequal international trade regime.

Today, Nigeria ranks as the largest oil-producing state in Africa and the world's sixth largest exporter of crude oil. On average, over two million barrels of crude oil are produced daily while 'the state receives between 70–80 per cent of its resources from the oil industry' (Zalik 2004: 404). Given the centrality of Nigeria's petroleum wealth, the struggle to control central power and, with it, the structures of resource distribution, has defined national resource politics. Oil wealth has contributed to layers of contradictions. First is the contradiction between foreign capital, which almost wholly controls Nigeria's extractive economy, and the local state – the latter struggling to monopolise the link between foreign capital and redistribute its 'cut' through patronage. The Nigerian oil sector is heavily dependent on foreign capital and, in particular, multinational corporations, for the exploration, production and marketing of petroleum products, as well as for the transfer of technical and managerial expertise. The state is also dependent, especially in times of economic crises, on Western capitalist institutions (such as the World Bank and IMF) and countries (such as the UK, US and Canada) for funds to revamp its oil economy and deliver development. As noted by Rafiu Ayo Akindele, 'The dependent and underdeveloped nature of the Nigerian economy, and its mono-culture character [i.e. oil as the mainstay of the economy], coupled up with

institutionalised corruption and bad management practices, have, over the years, made the Nigerian economy susceptible to external manipulation, dictation and control' (Akindele 1999: 283).

As a result of 'external control', the petty-bourgeois political class has often been forced to adopt economic and political policies that sustained the structures of foreign domination. With reference to the period since the late 1980s, foreign control, in the form of donor-imposed structural adjustment, has prompted state leaders to adopt and entrench market policies which promote the creation of regulatory incentives for foreign investment, the withdrawal of the state from economic activities, privatisation of public corporations, introduction of user charges. These measures were not responsive to the welfare and condition of the masses, including the working class who became immediate victims. Thus, the rise of popular protest and workers' strikes since the 1980s have been closely linked to externally induced economic measures.

A second layer of contradiction is the conflict between the different classes, in particular, within segments of the petty-bourgeoisie in the struggle for state power and wealth, and between dominant and weak classes.[3] As described above, the dependent state is managed by dominant fractions of the local petty-bourgeoisie who struggle, on behalf of foreign capital, to embed themselves on the crumbs of industrial/agrarian development. This has given rise to conflict within the dominant classes (the military, civilian politicians, domestic manufacturers, merchants, con-tractors), as well as between them and weaker classes, for instance the urban-based middle class professionals (civil servants, lawyers, accountants). Like the dominant classes, individuals in the middle class often crave power and wealth and struggle to acquire it. And when their livelihood is threatened – for instance by retrenchment or other reform measures – they frequently agitate to raise popular support to engage the dominant classes.

A third layer of contradiction is 'geopolitical' and resource-based. Nigeria has a population of over 120 million and a rich mosaic of ethnic groups comprising about 400 tribes and dialects. The competing claims of these various ethnic groups, voiced by factional petty bourgeois leaders, on the nation's scarce resources and on formal structures for oil wealth distribution, has resulted in conflict over access to land, quotas for federal political appointment and representation, and fair shares of federal revenue. For many years, Nigeria has witnessed sectarian and resource clashes between the agents of the state – those perceived to be tapping the gains of petroleum wealth – and those who feel economically deprived or

politically marginalised, or whose environment and livelihood are affected by oil extraction and environmental pollution. 'Because the Nigerian state controls access to the nation's disposable wealth in the form of revenue from petroleum production, [this] has provoked intense resentment [by marginalised communities] in southern Nigeria towards a system of governance widely viewed as biased, exploitative and repressive' (Joseph 1999: 361).

Nigerian oil wealth derives mainly from the Niger Delta region, and its proceeds are then 'shared' across the whole country. The contested nature of the revenue-sharing formula from Nigeria's federation account has led to longstanding feuds between the federal state and regions/ states with disproportionate natural endowments – in particular 'oil-bearing communities' whose environment and livelihood are devastated by oil exploitation with no attempt, from the part of the state, to address the destruction caused by exploitation through environmental conservation, reconstruction and social welfare provisioning. A key example of resource conflict in the Niger Delta is the one being staged by the Ijaws and Itsekiris demanding 'fair share' from the federation reserves (see Omeje 2004; Ikelegbe 2001b for details). Here too, the state has been involved in repressing, on behalf of domestic and foreign capital, popular protests and dissent emerging from civil society groups (see Naanen 1995). Where the productive activities of oil multinationals are threatened by worker militancy or mass protests, the coercive instruments of the state are often applied in containing them. Such blanket repressive measures adopted by the state have blurred the boundaries between different forms of protest – oil and non-oil related; minority rights and ethnic rights; workers' and mass protests.[4] A fourth layer of contradiction, which illuminates the constraints of an externally dependent economy, is the inability of the state to channel oil wealth to meet people's developmental and welfare expectations and, in the process, reproducing hardships and socio-economic inequalities. In addition to a decaying public infrastructure (especially road, hospital, schools), even 'basic petroleum products, especially cooking gas [including Dual Purpose Kerosene or DPK], and gasoline are perennially scarce in Nigerian streets and markets. The federal government – to the consternation of many – increasingly imports some of these refined products' (Omeje 2004: 427).

The state and, in particular, ruling fractions of the petty-bourgeoisie, are often blamed for this failure. Omeje argues that millions of dollars channelled, often through corrupt biddings, into turn-around maintenance of Nigeria's local refineries have not yielded any positive outcome. He

blames the Nigerian ruling class for promoting oil importation and sabotaging subsidised domestic refining: 'the importation of refined petrol on behalf of the state is a highly rewarding business for some of the influential members … of the political regime, just one of the numerous contradictions of Nigeria's highly dependent mono[cultural] economy' (Omeje 2004).[5] The failure of the state to cater for people's needs has generated popular protests for economic and political change, and such protests coalesce into struggles for democratic reform.

In summary, it is argued that the Nigerian state is characterised by a contradictory set of structures and processes which define its external dependency and internal instability. These contradictions are played out in contemporary political and economic development in Nigeria and, by extension, the internal and external dynamics of democratic expansion.

The Parameters of Democratic Expansion in Nigeria: Political and Socio-economic Contexts

A root and branch account of Nigerian political history is not intended here. My aim is to highlight the contribution of key political features and socio-economic development to the rise of popular protest and the expansion of civil society. To factor in foreign neoliberal intervention, the responses of Western governments and donors to key political development are noted; in particular, their approach to structural crises and the failure of the military to deliver democracy. This requires attention to the period since the late 1980s when, interestingly, the refusal by successive military regimes to democratise brought them at last into a collision course with international actors as well as local pro-democracy movements. The period also marked the peak of Nigeria's economic decline and entailed the dramas of domestic protest and foreign developmental and democratic interventions.

With the exception of three brief interludes of civil democratic governance – namely the First, Second and Fourth Republics (1960–66; 1979–83; and 1999 to date, respectively)[6] – military rule has largely been the political norm in Nigeria. Democratic regimes were/are largely plagued by 'military hangovers' and inherited, volatile 'national questions'[7] which no 'military-guided' transition to democracy has succeeded in resolving (Ndoma-Egba 2000: 82). Indeed, such transitions contain in them the seeds of their undoing: the military 'withdraw only to return, often within a short period of time' (Tordoff 1997: 11).

Nigerian military regimes reflect (and are reflected by) the pattern of class and ethno-regional hegemony in post-colonial politics. Richard Joseph

identifies four tendencies that 'coalesced to give rise to multilayered hegemony' in Nigeria: 'the domination of the military over 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' (Joseph 1999: 360). Since independence, successive northern military leaders have claimed national power. There were only two curious, isolated exceptions: General Aguyi Ironsi, an Igbo from southeastern Nigeria, who ruled the country for a few months in 1966, following a bloody military coup that extinguished many prominent northern (and some southern) politicians; and General Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba from the southwest, who came to power by default when he was selected, as the most senior military officer, to succeed General Mohammed following the latter's assassination on 13 February 1976 (see Table 2.2).

Whilst the military has dominated Nigerian power politics for most of the post-independence era, military regimes often assumed the form of civic–military oligarchies which sought contentiously to recruit actors from other ethno-regional factions of the petty-bourgeois political class in order to consolidate national power. Each military regime comprised a hierarchical alliance of military personnel (head of state, sole adminis-trators, supreme council members and ministers) and professional politicians serving mainly in ministerial, advisory and technical capacities) drawn from diverse backgrounds. Regimes have always claimed to reflect Nigeria's federal character in distribution of power and resources. However, at any point in time, some sections of the political class, and of the country, feel marginalised by regimes, and northern domination seemed to be the norm rather than the exception. These disparities provided a key rationale and political capital for opposition politics as well as a platform for associational struggles (mainly on sectarian grounds) demanding that the state meet representational and distributive demands.

The legacies of prolonged military rule in Nigeria's body polity are well documented in the literature (see for example Adejumobi and Momoh 1995; Aguda 1991; Ihonvbere 1998).[8] They include the institutionalisation of repression; militarisation of state apparatuses; emasculation of civil society or 'waging of systematic war against trade unions and civic organisations' (Ihonvbere and Vaughan 1995: 74) as well as the failure of regimes to deliver democracy. Together, these factors provoked a whole range of domestic crises – regime crises of legitimacy, mass protests and democratic movements emerging from disaffected citizens and 'civil society' as well as foreign 'democratic intervention'.

Table 2.2: Nigerian Military/Democratic Rulers,
and their Ethnic/Regional Origin, 1960–Date*

Period of rule	Head of state	Govt type	Ethnic origin	How rule ended
1960–66	Balewa	Civilian	Hausa (North)	Attempted coup/assassination
1966	Ironsi	Military	Igbo (South)	Coup/assassination
1966–75	Gowon	Military	Angas/Middle Belt (North)	Coup
1975–76	Mohamed	Military	Hausa (North)	Attempted coup/ assassination
1976–79	Obasanjo	Military	Yoruba (South)	Elections
1979–83	Shagari	Civilian	Fulani (North)	Coup
1984–85	Buhari	Military	Fulani (North)	Coup
1985–93	Babangida	Military	Nupe, minority group in Niger state (North)	Elections results nullified in June 1993, stepped down in Aug 1993
1993	Shonekan	Civilian (interim govt)	Yoruba (South)	Coup
1993–98	Abacha	Military	Kanuri (North)	Presumed heart attack
1998–99	Abubakar	Military	Nupe, minority group in Niger state (North)	Elections
1999–2007	Obasanjo	Civilian	Yoruba (South)	Elections after serving two consecutive terms
2007–date	Yar'Adua	Civilian	Hausa (North)	Incumbent

Note: *Some information added
Sources: Adapted from Frynas (2000: 43); Idemudia and Ite (2006: 391).

Table 2.3: Military Regimes and Transitions to Democracy in Nigeria: Many Failures, Few Successes, 1966–Date

Military regime	Period	Delivered democracy?	Remark
Ironsi	1966	No	No stated programme of transition to civil rule.
Gowon	1966–75	No†	Six-year transition to civil rule programme (1970–76) announced on 1 October 1970; programme aborted when on 1 October 1974 Gowon announced an 'indefinite suspension'
Mohamed	1975–76	Yes	Four-year programme (1976–79) announced by General (then Brigadier) Mohammed. Following his assassination, his successor, General Obasanjo implemented the programme. On 1 October 1979, power was handed to civilian President Alhaji Shehu Shagari, who was in power until 31 December 1983.
Obasanjo	1976–79	Yes	See above
Buhari	1984–85	No	No stated programme of transition to civil rule. General Buhari toppled in a palace coup (nicknamed 'IMF coup').
Babangida	1985–93	No†	Six-year transitional timetable (1987–90) announced in 1986; programme extended to 1992, then 1993. Relatively peaceful presidential election conducted on 12 June 1993 was annulled; General Babangida forced by local and international pressure to hand over to an interim national government in August 1993.
Abacha	1993–98	No†	Following overthrow of interim government, General Abacha announced four-year transition programme (1994–97); programme extended to 1998. General Abacha died in August 1998 while planning to succeed himself following phoney endorsement by five government-imposed parties.

| Abubakar | 1998–99 | Yes | Quick transition timetable (August 1998–May 1999) was released and implemented to the letter by General Abubakar, who succeeded General Abacha. General Obasanjo (retired), who delivered democracy in 1979, emerged as Nigeria's civilian president on 29 May 1999. |

†Commenced transitions to civil democratic rule but failed to see them through to final conclusion.

As shown in Table 2.3, the overall balance sheet of the Nigerian military, in terms of delivering democracy, is poor. An oft-cited adage in Nigeria states that 'the most benevolent military regime is inferior to the worst democratic system'. The key reasons for the failure of the military to deliver democracy are the weakness of the political class and civil society in presenting a united and formidable front capable of compelling regimes to consider disengaging from power; the politicisation of the military institution – a trend that commenced immediately after independence when armed men were drafted into quell political opposition; the military's monopoly (and abuse) of the means of coercion.

Even where democracy is achieved, its lifespan is often dwarfed by political instability: 'Nigeria has undergone several democratic renewals – often following prolonged military rule. Almost always, democracy has not been consolidated' (Tar 2007a: np). The point is that most political projects seem to have failed because of the lack of political will and transparency – particularly of the ruling class, who are motivated by their material and communal inclinations rather than any sense of nationalism (Tar 2007a: 67–105). This dilemma is captured in Table 2.4.

The period since the late 1980s is crucial to any analysis of democratic expansion in Nigeria. This period 'brought out the worst in Nigerian politics: repression, intimidation, violence, corruption, betrayals and the manipulation of primordial loyalties. It has [also] exposed the nature and extent of Nigerian political rot, and provided a still weak and fledgling civil society added strength and legitimacy' (Ihonvbere 1996: 193). In addition to the awakening of civil society, the period also saw increased Western intervention (Ikelegbe 2001a: 8). Several factors are noted during this period. First, Nigeria's descent from 'affluence' to economic decline, which began in the late 1970s and peaked in the 1980s, provoked substantial discontent in society. Second, in the wake of economic decline,

Table 2.4: Democratic Renewals and Consolidation in Nigeria:
An Endless Game

Democratic government	Period	Democracy consolidated?	Remark
Balewa	1960–66	No	**Key symptoms:** Political elites were unable to agree on rules of the game and politics was bedevilled by ethnicity, political victimisation, violence, and zero-sum approach to power. **Repercussions:** In 1966, young 'southern' military officers led by Major Chukwuma Nzegu Kaduna violently toppled the democratic regime, assassinating many notable political figures, particularly from the 'north'. The coup was foiled and General Johnson Thomas Umunakwe Aguyi Ironsi, the highest-ranking military officer, took over power. Successive military regimes took over power until 1979 when Nigeria returned to democracy led by President Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari.
Shagari	1979–83	No	**Key symptoms:** Democracy was hampered by elite bickering, electoral irregularities, corruption, ethnicity, favouritism, nepotism and an abhorrent culture of zero-sum politics amongst political elites. **Repercussions:** Following a spiralling economic crisis and hotly contested violent elections in 1983, the military led by General Muhammadu Buhari toppled the government of Shagari. A succession of military governments remained in power till 1999.
Obasanjo	1999–2007	No	**Key symptoms:** Separation of power remains erratic; a number of institutions for example constitution, electoral law, remain faulty and contested. Corruption, violence, ethnicity and religious

			intolerance thrive on a monumental scale. The rise of political Islam and Shari'a law in many northern states has endangered the rhetorical secularism enshrined in the 1999 constitution. **Repercussions:** Military 'hangovers' beset the country's fledgling democracy – particularly the inheritance of the military's violent and autocratic style of governance
Yar'Adua	2007–date	Remains to be seen	**Key symptoms:** Most of the anomalies that characterised the Obasanjo era are 'inherited' by this government – itself widely seen as midwifed by the outgoing President. **Repercussions:** Democracy has been seemingly 'saved' but remains at the mercy of identified prevailing factors. Controversies surrounding the conduct of the 2007 Elections are likely to undermine this government. The future is highly unpredictable.

Source: Tar (2007a).

the failure of the state and ruling political class to meet people's developmental and welfare expectations, as well as repressive state practices and insidious corruption, weakened the legitimacy of power elites. Third, an 'IMF debate' cautiously initiated by the military state to enable Nigerians to participate in the discussion over whether or not their country should take economic recovery loans eventually culminated in the creation of a much-needed space for civic associations to flourish and engage the state. The IMF debate itself signalled the beginning of a sequence of political and developmental interventions from Western governments and donors aimed at institutionalising economic liberalisation and political reform. Fourth, the imposition of donor-inspired structural adjustment, in 1986 which increased hardships and sharp social disparities, provoked street demonstrations and energised civil society as a force for engaging the state. Finally, continued military rule until 1999 and refusal to democratise led to increased agency of civil society and donor 'democratic interventions'. These issues are critically explored below.

Structural Crises of the 1980s:
Political and Economic Repercussions
By the early 1980s Nigeria's oil-dependent 'rentier' economy had began to plummet dramatically from so-called 'boom' to 'doom'. From a peak of 15.2 billion Naira in 1980, proceeds from oil exports accruing to the state fell sharply to 5.1 billion Naira in 1982. The crisis quickly affected other sectors of the economy:

> It is reckoned that approximately 50 percent of the country's manufacturing capacity was lost in the first few years of the crisis. Thousands of workers from the private and public sectors were retrenched or sent on indefinite leave. An acute shortage of consumer goods and imported food items hit the economy, fuelling an already bad inflationary situation. The country's payment position deteriorated sharply, the budget deficit widened, while the internal public debt rose from 4.6 billion Naira in 1979 to 22.2 billion Naira in 1983 … the GDP which fell by 2 percent in 1982 fell further by 4.4 in 1983 (Olukoshi 1995: 140).

These crises had disastrous social effects, with a sharp increase in poverty levels, severe neglect of the state's capacity for social provisioning in the face of decaying social services and infrastructure, a decline in the currency value, and diminishing purchasing power among workers and peasants. The crisis was exacerbated by several structural factors: 'worsening corruption, mismanagement and conspicuous consumption culture of the ruling classes' (International IDEA 2000: 153); 'the lopsided character of the post-colonial development path followed by the state' which sought to strengthen external dependency (Olukoshi 1993a: 2); and unpredictable prices in the international oil markets (Bangura 1991: 7).

State economic intervention policies and programmes largely failed to improve the economy. The earliest of such measures, which proved disastrous, was taken by the civilian regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari in April 1982. An Economic Stabilisation (Temporary Provisions) Act was signed into law to reduce government expenditure and curtail imports through measures such as import restrictions, monetary control, and financial instruments. After exhausting Nigeria's Special Drawing Rights (SDR) from its reserve with the IMF, the Shagari administration invited the IMF to study Nigeria's economic crises and suggest appropriate remedies. In response, the Fund insisted that the administration should carry out a decisive economic recovery programme, well beyond what was

contained in the Economic Stabilisation Act of 1982. While accepting some of the Bank's recommendations – such as the rationalisation of some public enterprises – the Shagari administration was under enormous domestic pressure to reject other key recommendations, in particular the devaluation of the Naira.[9] Overall, the response of the administration to the economic downturn was described as 'belated and ineffective' (Biersteker and Lewis 1997: 305).

On 31 December 1983, the military overthrew the Shagari administration on the grounds of the rapidly deteriorating economic situation and the turmoil that had followed the 1983 national elections, believed to have been rigged by the President's party (the National Party of Nigeria). While civilians briefly and unsuccessfully sought to handle the situation by using non-volatile options, subsequent military regimes addressed Nigeria's economic decline by using quite draconian laws that imposed austerity, and repressed and silenced social protest – especially from those social groups worst hit by the economic hardships. Notably, the military also rejected the involvement of Western donors in the country's economic management. The key reason for this was that by the early 1980s, Western donors were not very assertive in their relationship with Nigeria. Because of the constraints of global power politics, Western donors feared that any policy imposition might result in the loss of key developing world proxies such as Nigeria.

Economic crises since the 1980s have provided the backdrop for several subsequent developments. They sustained the emergence and dominance of the military in politics. The official reasons given by the military when they first overthrew a civilian democracy in December 1983 (economic mismanagement, corruption, decaying social infrastructure) were the same reasons used, time and again, by subsequent coup plotters. Nigerian crises since the 1980s provided a ripe opportunity for Western governments and donors to intervene in Nigerian politics. However, until 1986, Western economic interventions in Nigeria were mainly suave, courteous and advisory. For instance, both the Shagari administration and the Buhari regime were able to reject donor recommendations and conditional loan offers to revamp their ailing economies. That was to change from 1986 onwards, when Western donors became the architects of structural adjustment. From 1993 onwards Western governments and donors were on a collision course with the military because of the latter's failure to deliver democracy – in spite of its modest record in structural adjustment.

**Austerity, the Repression of Civil
Society and Stalemate with Donors: 1984–85**

The Buhari regime assumed power in 1984 resolving to reverse Nigeria's
deepening economic decline inherited from the previous government. The
regime sought to reduce Nigeria's budget deficits, public expenditure, and
balance of payments deficit. It also undertook a decisive theft-recovery
scheme to plough illegally acquired public resources back into the treasury;
it commenced massive retrenchment of public sector workers; introduced
cost recovery measures in health and education; and imposed an extensive
freeze on wage and public sector employment – measures that proved
'fatal' to the working class and masses of the population (see Olukoshi and
Abdulrahim 1985).

To contain opposition, the regime first proscribed all forms of
protests, gatherings and unauthorised meetings then, to pre-empt popular
demands for democratic expansion, the regime banned all collective
discussion on Nigeria's political future. Several decrees were also
promulgated to ensure 'law and order': Decree 2, which provided for the
detention of persons considered 'security risks' for a renewable period of
months; Decree 4 which curtailed press freedom; Decree 1 which
suspended constitutional provisions relating to personal liberty and
Decree 17 which provided for the dismissal or compulsory retirement of
public officers. Furthermore, the regime established several military
tribunals that ousted the jurisdictional competence of conventional courts
on matters of personal freedom and civil liberties. It also empowered the
State Security Service (SSS) to hunt down opposition to the regime's
policies. The regime placed organised labour and professional groups
under constant surveillance whilst subjecting their leaders to regular
security interrogation. In April 1984, the regime jailed two senior
journalists – Nduka Irabo and Tunde Thomson, both of the *Guardian*
(Nigeria) – for a year for allegedly publishing false reports. The detention
of Irabo and Thomson provided a rallying point for organised civil
society,[10] which collectively and individually appealed to the Buhari regime
to grant clemency to the journalists. When the regime ignored these pleas,
the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) filed a case at the Court of Appeal
– which threw out the case on technical grounds. Similarly the NUJ
announced an award to the 'courageous' journalists and, as a mark of
solidarity, other groups donated generously to the welfare of the
incarcerated journalists and their families.

In 1984/85, a number of associations had begun to canvass beyond
the immediate social concerns of their members. For instance, the

Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) mounted a vigorous campaign against the Buhari regime's creation of military tribunals, arguing that this was undermining the jurisdiction of civil courts. It also demanded that the regime review its policy of detention without trial and consider unbanning several proscribed associations. NBA got its members to refrain from appearing in court until the regime listened to its plea. Similarly, NANS mounted a nationwide campaign against the regime's decision to withdraw food and accommodation for university students. This was followed, in May 1984, by another nationwide boycott of lectures in protest against the introduction of tuition fees in universities and other higher institutions of learning – at a time of considerable hardship for students and their predominantly working-class parents.

The Buhari regime responded harshly to the rising activism and demands of civil society groups. For instance, in response to a strike by the NMA and NARD in February 1985 against government health policies, the regime arrested and detained the leaders of the two associations. It also gave an ultimatum to the striking doctors to either return to work immediately or face mass dismissal. It held good to its threat and throughout the crises, the Nigerian health sector experienced an acute shortage of labour. Rather than subduing civil society, repression and economic hardship boosted their agency.

In terms of relations with foreign donors, the regime briefly commenced negotiations with the IMF for an Extended Fund Facility loan of up to 2.5 billion dollars. It reduced the budget deficit from 6.2 billion Naira in 1983 to 3.3 billion Naira in 1985 and reduced the size of public service by 40 per cent. However, the regime rejected the fund's 'conditionalities' leading to what Olukoshi (1990) aptly terms a 'stalemate' between it and the IMF. Like the Shagari administration, the Buhari regime was 'unwilling to go the full hog with the fund' (Olukoshi 1995: 143) The stalemate led eventually to the downfall of the regime in what is commonly referred to as 'the IMF coup' on 27 August 1985 (because it was generally welcomed by the international community and financial spectators) (Momoh 1996: 20).

The 'IMF Debate' and Structural Adjustment: Donor Influence Versus 'Home-grown' Measures: 1986–93

General Babangida assumed power in 1985 with a pledge to repeal the repressive decrees of his predecessor as well as to reverse its 'austerity without adjustment' (Biersteker and Lewis 1997: 306). General Babangida attempted to strike new deals both with donors and local civil society by

taking confidence-building measures – such as the release of political prisoners and abrogation of the obnoxious Decree 4 which curtailed press freedom (see Amuwo 1995). In what looked like a gesture of fellowship with civil society, the regime initially expressed its commitment to human rights, un-banned key proscribed organisations (such as NANS, the NMA and NARD) and appointed many professionals into key political and advisory posts.[11] 'These and other early steps earned the regime some significant support and legitimacy in civil society' (Olukoshi 1997: 384).

However, the promising relationship between the Babangida regime and civil society was to prove short-lived. As will be seen later, in the course of structural adjustment the regime soon reversed its human rights commitment; evoked and strengthened existing 'repressive' decrees – such as Decree 2 used to resume the detention of persons for six months or more subject to renewal; promulgated more decrees and embarked on ruthless economic and labour policies that badly affected the Nigerian working classes.

As noted earlier, at the time Babangida came to power the Nigerian economy was still deep in crisis. Relations with the IMF had reached a deadlock, and there was little prospect of further international loans. One of the steps taken by the regime was to commence a national debate on the IMF relationship. In October 1985, General Babangida promulgated a National Economic Emergency Decree, providing him with a wide range of discretionary powers to improve the economy over the next 15 months. Soon thereafter, the regime opened up an 'IMF debate' to stimulate public discussion on the merits of an agreement with IMF and 'to defuse tension and sway the people' (Momoh 1996: 20). At the outset, it was clear that some form of agreement had been formalised between the IMF and the regime and the public debate was designed as a forum for softening up Nigerians to accept 'the tough conditions that would follow' (Biersteker and Lewis 1997). Nevertheless, the debate provided a ripe opportunity for the flowering of associational life: 'various groups, including the professionals, students, market women, religious organisations, trade unions, road side mechanics' associations, and a host of others took advantage of the opportunity to air their views and canvass support for their opinion on the question of IMF participation in Nigeria economic-reconstruction efforts' (Olukoshi 1997: 384).

As a regime that later turned out to be deceitful, its negotiations in the adoption of SAP were shrouded with mystery. In theory the procedures used in the formulation of the programme seemed 'democratic' or 'home grown' (Soyibo 1996: 163); in practice however, democratic procedures

were used only as 'cover ups' for 'autocratic' tendencies and 'external pressures'. From all indications, the conduct of the debate was perfectly democratic: all segments of the rural and urban population across class, ethnic, gender, age and geographic lines were painstakingly brought together in different locations and at different times during the exercise to 'participate' in the debate. Similarly, the quality and quantity of public speeches, group and individual position documents, rallies and demonstrations, public affairs discussions, special reports and media interviews generated by the debate offered a view of 'the configuration of supporters and opponents' to the IMF-cultured policy (Biersteker and Lewis 1997). Opposition to the programme (and the regime that proposed it) came mainly from organised labour, supported by professionals, students, academics and journalists, all of whom were hard hit by the austerity measures put in place even before the formal adoption of SAP. On the other hand, minority support for the proposed adjustment came mainly from urban-based indigenous entrepreneurs, professional economists, former IFI personnel and cronies of the regime. Support for and against adjustment was an indication of division in civil society which the regime sought to exploit, albeit to no avail. Many argue, however, that the regime was unaware of the probability of a strong opposition to any dealings with the IFIs; otherwise, it would not have considered initiating the IMF debate (for example Momoh 1996).

Forces hostile to the programme spearheaded by organised labour became even more vocal towards the end of 1985. By December it had become obvious that the regime had failed in its attempt to use public debate to generate support for the programme. Amidst growing public disenchantment, compounded by threats of strikes and boycotts from the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), the regime suspended negotiations with the IMF on 13 December 1985 and backed down on its intention to take a loan. Soon thereafter, the regime resorted to controlling mainstream labour, infiltrated its leadership, sponsored a pro-regime candidate in the NLC national elections and eventually imposed a sole administrator, Mr Pascal Bafyau, when the election reached a stalemate (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, the regime intensified aggressive programmes of mass education to persuade Nigerians of the 'benefits' of adopting an alternative adjustment policy. To the chagrin of oppositional forces, the regime incorporated the most contested elements of structural adjustment into its 1986 budget – the withdrawal of subsidies on many essential services, devaluation of the Naira, sharp reduction in public sector expenditure, the

withdrawal of the state's quotas in public enterprises, retrenchment of public sector workers – all as a means of down-sizing the over-burdened state. Externally, the regime announced economic recovery through 'export diversification, fiscal and balance of payments equilibrium, and stable, noninflationary growth' (Biersteker and Lewis, 1997: 308) as a means of attracting foreign investment and donor participation in economic recovery.

In spite of the fact that the regime articulated and implemented measures which were similar to the IMF-tailored programme (Olukoshi 1990) (and indeed, the so-called 'home-grown' adjustment policy was fully backed by the IMF and other Western donors), it remained committed to its claim that it was a 'home grown' policy intended to bring major 'new' changes. Indeed, in his address upon the announcement of SAP, Babangida repeatedly used the word 'new' and blended it with local rhetoric to press home the beneficial and inventive nuances of the programme:

> *Our* structural adjustment involves *new* uses of wealth, *new* property relations, *new* products and production processes, *new* attitudes to work; *new* consumption habits, and *new* interaction with the rest of the world. *It seeks to harmonise what we consume with what we produce using our own domestic endowment of human and material resources* (Phillips and Ndekwu 1987 cited in Momoh 1996: 21, italics mine).

SAP failed to improve the Nigerian economy; if anything, it compounded Nigeria's economic predicament. The adverse social impacts of adjustment have been well documented (see for example Bangura and Beckman 1993; Bangura 1991). The key impacts are summarised by Momoh:

> SAP has not improved the Nigerian economy and indeed it has left it worse off, the debt crisis has assumed a monumental dimension, in industry there is low capacity utilisation, the peasantry has been further pauperised, the working class social condition has deteriorated with wage freeze, cut in provision of social and infrastructural services, the middle class has virtually decomposed and has been reconstituted, the ruling class now has a new entrant of SAP economic class (Momoh 1996: 22).

To allay discontent arising from the heavy social cost of SAP, the regime announced, in its 1987 budget, the establishment of several institutions

designed to cushion the harsh realities – a Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); a National Directorate of Employment (NDE); a Directorate of Mass Mobilisation for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). This development, together with the regime's insistence that structural adjustment was a short-term measure, helped encourage 'perceptions that the … worst of the economic austerity was already behind the country' (Biersteker and Lewis 1997: 311). However, the regime's campaign was undermined in the eyes of elements in civil society and the masses by the behaviour of state officials, in particular their luxurious consumption habits, as well as official corruption. Against the backdrop of ever widening social divisions, one opponent of the programme spoke to the *Sunday Vanguard* on 18 June 1989: 'in the midst of starvation, nothing can be more provocative to the masses than the vulgar life styles of some of our government functionaries, who have been known and seen to have been building mansions all over the country, whilst people are starving' (Chief Sowemimo cited in Biersteker and Lewis 1997: 316).

Similarly, a former president of ASUU noted that 'a small class that has controlled access to the state and its resources has become fantastically rich through unbridled personalisation of office, theft and graft' (Jega 2000b: 35). Similarly, it has been noted that the regime contributed in sustaining the nascent social inequalities created by adjustment. For instance, to maintain the emerging social-economic order, protect the military and political classes against excruciating hardships of adjustment and to 'buy' their loyalty, the regime regularly awarded lucrative contracts to retired politicians and military officers. It also appointed many more into key political posts. Following widespread national demonstrations against such inequalities – known as 'anti-SAP riots' – armed military personnel and the police were regularly deployed to the streets (see Shettima 1993, 1997).

To obviate more protests, the Babangida regime fortified itself using the authoritarian measures of its predecessor. It became more coercive in its approach to human rights and the rule of law and hostile to dissenting voices in civil society. It eventually became obvious to many groups in civil society – especially those who were brutally suppressed by the Buhari regime before August 1986 – that the Babangida regime was no less oppressive. Some of the measures taken by the Babangida regime against civil society, in the aftermath of structural adjustment, included: the proscription of NANS, the harassment and detention of journalists, and union leaders; the dissolution in 1988 of the NLC; the disaffiliation of

ASUU, NANS, NMA and NARD from the NLC; the proscription of ASUU including the incessant detention of its members often for long periods of time; and the jailing of the leadership of all striking unions. Worse still, several applications submitted to the police by organised groups to stage peaceful demonstrations against economic hardships were prohibited, while the powers of the State Security Service, SSS (by then well equipped and re-organised into three arms) were generously extended to enable it arbitrarily to detain, torture and interrogate dissenting group leaders and members. The extended powers of the SSS also allowed it to form secret groups, as a counter-strike measure, to crack and undermine industrial actions, intimidate students and workers and harass social critics (the most vocal critics of the regime namely Dr Tai Solarin, Gani Fawehinmi, Beko Ransome Kuti, Fela Kuti etc were severally arrested and detained). In addition to repression, the Babangida regime also employed a good measure of co-optive method. For instance, it eventually co-opted the leadership of the NLC. Similarly, it sponsored the formation and activities of several pro-regime associations such as the Association of Better Nigeria, The National Council for Women Societies (NCWS) and think-tanks such as the Centre for Democracy, Abuja and the Centre for Advanced Social Sciences (CASS) based in Port Harcourt. Yet, these actions did not succeed in silencing civil society. Indeed, they further fuelled them as some of the so-called beneficiaries, such as CASS eventually turned out to be ardent advocates of social justice and democracy.

It is clear that Nigeria's 'home grown' structural adjustment involved the 'underground', but no less influential, intervention and participation of Western donors. It also involved significant use of state repression against civil society, which donor agencies did not condemn at any point in time during the course of the programme. However, Nigeria's IMF-cultured, 'home-grown' structural adjustment had exposed several contradictory problems. First, in contrast with donor visions, adjustment actually reproduced sharp social disparities, and disempowered the masses and the working class. Not surprisingly, the 'anti-SAP' riots of the 1980s and 1990s appeared to be simultaneously directed against both external and internal actors who benefited from the programme – state officials, foreign investors, multinational corporations. Second, while claiming to minimise the state, adjustment eventually led to the strengthening of the authoritarian state. Finally, the 'pains of adjustment', rather than its acclaimed 'prosperity', activated the agency of civil society.

Failed Democratic Transitions, Pro-Democracy
Movements and External 'Democratic Interventions': 1986–99

While the military succeeded, with the connivance of Western donors, in imposing structural adjustment, their dismal performance in political reform (the twin of economic adjustment) was to prove disastrous and paved the way for conflict between the military and Western governments and donors who intervened using different, but more severe, tactics to restore democratic order. In the political realm, Western governments and donors contradictorily sought to empower a battered and poverty stricken civil society to engage successive regimes. As we shall see, neither donor 'democratic intervention' nor emerging civil society – some elements of which were sponsored by donor capacity-building programmes, were not able to force the military to democratise until 1999. Throughout that period, civil society organisations 'grew' from a relatively weak front to an active, vibrant and resilient force – the toughest opposition to military rule.

In 1986, the Babangida regime made a pledge to return Nigeria to democratic rule by 1990. Subsequently, a 17-member Political Bureau was set up to conduct a debate on Nigeria's political future and produce a blueprint for the political system that the nation should adopt 'against the background of previous failures [of democratic governance in 1966 & 1983]' (Owolabi 1992: 264). Initially, people's response was 'rather lukewarm … [as a result of] the shrewd calculations that the mass of the people have made, that the Nigerian ruling class is not yet ready for a debate about democracy' (Ibrahim 1986: 42). In the end, however, the Bureau conducted the debate and submitted its report to the government in 1987.[12] The Bureau recommended that the military should hand over power to a democratically elected government by 1990. However, the regime endorsed a minority view that sought the extension of the transition programme by two more years. In justifying its decision, the regime noted the need for

> a broadly spaced transition in which democratic government can proceed with political learning, institutional adjustment and reorientation of political culture, at sequential levels of politics and governance with local government and ending at the federal level. From our past experience, our political programme must be gradual, purposeful and effective. It must aim at laying the basic foundation for new political attitudes or political cultures aimed at ushering in a new social order (Babangida, 1987 in Oyediran and Agbaje 1999: 16).

In terms of the content of the reform, the Bureau recommended in unequivocal terms, the need for a 'socialist' system, as a preferred foundation of a genuine political and economic transformation of Nigeria: 'We therefore recommend that Nigeria should adopt a socialist socio-economic system in which the state shall be committed to the national-isation and socialisation of the commanding heights of the national economy' (FRN 1987: 50). Again, in response, the regime rejected this recommendation on 'ideological grounds': 'Government rejects the imposition of a political ideology on the nation. Government believes that an ideology will eventually evolve with time and political maturity' (FRN 1987a: 14). Given the class orientation of the military institution and, in particular, the 'friendly' relationship between the Babangida regime and capitalist Western donors, it was very unlikely that the regime would have allowed the adoption of socialism as a national ideology or blueprint for the economy. But the regime's role in setting up the Political Bureau and shelving its recommendations was evidence of how the military lavishly used state structures as a means of manipulating the popular imagination and, eventually, imposing pre-emptive values and policies on an expectant nation. This had far-reaching implications for the agitation of civil society.

Accordingly, the regime promulgated Decree 19, outlining what Diamond calls 'one of the most carefully staged and imaginatively designed transitions from military to civilian rule anywhere in recent times' (Diamond 1991: 55). The transition programme was scheduled to start in the third quarter of 1987 and finish by the second quarter of 1992. The lifting of the ban on political activities led to the emergence of several associations seeking to form political parties. However, to the astonish-ment of politicians, the regime rejected all associations that applied for registration. Instead, the regime imposed two brand-new parties: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC). The regime coined their names, designed their logos, flags, mottos, mission statements, manifestoes and constitutions. Indeed the structures of the parties including their offices were all built and maintained by government. The regime described the philosophy of SDP as 'a little to the left' and that of NRC as 'a little to the right'.

The two-party policy of the regime confirmed suspicions amongst critics in civil society groups who had accused the regime of pursuing a 'hidden agenda' of perpetuating itself in power (Oyediran and Agbaje 1999: 16). The regime further frustrated its critics, when it promulgated a new decree[13] banning the older generation of politicians from participating in the transition programme. Similarly, fears were heightened over

unnecessary tampering with transition schedules, often on flimsy grounds. In 1990, elections to state executive and assemblies were postponed. Further, in 1992 the terminal date for the end of transition was pushed from its initial date of 1 October 1992 to August 1993. These extensions to the timetable seriously eroded confidence. Overall, the regime became unpredictable: 'the rules of the political game were frequently altered by the Babangida regime, usually on very short notice' (Beckett and Young 1997: 4).

In the midst of unpredictable regime behaviour, domestic and international pressures mounted. The annulment of the presidential elections held on 12 June 1993[14] and a subsequent military re-intervention in November 1993 led by General Abacha (following a short interlude of a Government of National Unity from August to November) was pivotal to the coalescence of domestic and external pressures. In addition to groups with a long-standing profile of engaging the state previously on economic issues – for example, ASUU, NLC, NBA, NMA, NARD, NUJ (discussed above) – several 'new civic associations' emerged to join forces in pressing the state towards the actualisation of democracy.[15] It is worthy of note, however, that most elements in the so-called new groups were closely linked to the old groups. For instance, from the NBA emerged such groups as the CLO, NADECO.

Thus, in the aftermath of the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections, particularly following the re-intervention of General Abacha and the regime's detention of Chief Abiola (after he declared himself a president 'in keeping with the people's mandate'), civic associations became more aggressive, politicised and united in engaging the state. Groups embarked on massive street protests across the country: 'for the first time since independence, these organisations endeavoured to sustain mass resistance across ethnic, religious and class lines' (Ihonvbere and Vaughan 1995: 81). Indeed, the protests involved even gender groups.[16] Massive street campaigns were co-ordinated by the Campaign for Democracy, CD and, later, the United Action for Democracy, UAD, and the National Democracy Coalition, NADECO. In addition, the NLC, Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers Union (PENGASSAN) and the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) carried out continuous workers' strikes which brought the economy to a brink of collapse. Most of these groups were proscribed and their leaders (for example Frank Kokori of PENGASSAN) were detained several times.

Several controversial issues emerged from the growing activism of civil society post-1993. First was the significance of political ethnicity

(see for example Ikelegbe 2001a). Both the leadership of, and support for, most pro-democracy groups was from the Yoruba of the southwest, who perceived that their 'son' (Abiola) was denied the mandate of the people. In other words, the movement for democracy assumed an ethnic form, though it was promoted largely on the basis of nationalistic rhetoric – such as the 'Nigeria has spoken', 'the people's mandate', 'the first truly national election in Nigeria'.[17] Second, some groups were clearly led by opportunistic politicians and retired military officers with political ambitions – as an opportunity to launch themselves back into mainstream politics in the midst of political turmoil created by the continuance of military rule. For instance the Association for Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria (ADGGN) was founded and led by General Obasanjo, a Yoruba, former military head of state, 'a strong critic of the military and a defender of democracy', who eventually became the civilian president in 1999. Third, after 1993, Western donors and governments became more supportive of urban-based civic associations, hostile to the military and antagonistic to the state – an issue that is discussed below.

The annulment of the 1993 presidential election and subsequent military re-intervention provoked widespread international reaction, particularly, from Western governments and IFIs. General Babangida, who had been very popular among Western donors following his implementation of structural adjustment, had not anticipated that the annulment would bring such hostile reactions. On the eve of the presidential election, when an Abuja High Court restrained the National Electoral Commission from going ahead with the elections, the US government had threatened to lead 'an international campaign against any attempt by the Babangida administration to stay in power beyond 27 August 1993' (*Newswatch*, 5/7/1993). The Unites States Information Service (USIS), Lagos, also cautioned that 'any postponement of the election would cause great concern to the United States Government' (quoted in Akindele 1999: 271). The regime responded by expelling Michael O'Brien, the USIS Director, from the country. But when the election was annulled in keeping with another court injunction, the US government issued a more decisive 'policy statement on Nigeria':

> The United States deplores the outrageous decision of Nigeria's military regime to annul the result … the United States govern-ment has strongly and consistently supported the restoration of civil rule in Nigeria and calls upon the military to hand over power

to the duly elected leadership on August 27, 1993, in keeping with its previously announced transition plan. The failure on the part of the military regime to respect the will of the Nigerian people and transition to democracy will have serious implications for US-Nigerian relations

We are in the process of reassessing our relations with Nigeria. There are serious options available for responding. We are closely examining each one to see whether employing it might help the Nigerian people successfully express their political will. All aspects of our bilateral relations, including our $22.8 million in bilateral assistance, are currently under review (in Akindele 1999: 272).

Following the re-intervention of the military in November 1993 the US President, Bill Clinton, issued an Executive Order banning the beneficiaries of the coup from entering the US. Indeed, the US ambassador to Nigeria, Walter Carrington, confirmed that 'all requests for visas by high government officials have to go the State Department for review' (*Guardian* (Lagos)*, 6/11/1993: 1). Subsequently, the applications of two key regime officials – Dr Dalhatu Tafida, the Minister of Health and Social Services, and Mr Solomon Lar, the Minister of Police Affairs – were rejected by the State Department.

Meanwhile, like the Americans, the British government expressed in strong terms its displeasure over the turn of event in the months leading to the annulment. In accordance with the 'Doctrine of Good Governance' propounded by Douglas Hurd, the British Foreign Secretary (see Hurd 1990), Britain described the failure of the military to restore democracy as 'regrettable'. Subsequently, the British government withdrew its military advisers from the Nigeria War College, threatened to withdraw a £14.5 million aid package, and threatened to disallow the visa applications of key Nigerian government officials. Furthermore, the then British Prime Minister, John Major, informed the House of Commons that his government would liaise with other European Union member countries to end all forms of bilateral and multilateral economic assistance to Nigeria (*National Concord*, 5 December 1993). This was further confirmed by Baroness Lynda Chalker, Britain's Minister for Overseas Development. In a public lecture in London on 'Multilateral Aid', Baroness Chalker stated that Britain was considering invoking its powers in the Paris Club, the IMF and the World Bank, to stop any further loans to Nigeria and to reschedule existing loan obligations (*African Guardian*, 30 May 1994).[18]

The response of many IFIs to Nigeria in the aftermath of military re-

intervention confirmed the resolve of Western governments, which wield significant influence in these institutions, to use their power to impose liberal democracy on Nigeria (see Abrahamsen 2000 for an African analysis).[19] Both the IMF and the World Bank refused further loans to Nigeria, particularly the funds needed to implement structural adjustment and execute key developmental projects. Similarly, the London Club insisted that, to be considered for further loans or rescheduling, Nigeria must get a clean bill of health from the IMF – meaning that the IMF must assess and approve Nigeria's political climate and economic policy – and show clear evidence of debt repayment.

Whilst Western governments and donors stopped funds to the *state*, they increasingly transferred their 'favour' to opposition and civic groups. By 1994, good governance and 'civil society' had become a key agenda that Western donors were anxious to promote (see World Bank 1994; see also Abrahamsen 2000). Until Nigeria's political crisis of the 1990s, donors had been more interested in structural adjustment than in good governance. Similarly they were not interested in funding (empowering) civil society – indeed the contrary was the case! Earlier in the 1980s, donors supported Nigeria's structural adjustment – which badly hit many elements in civil society. However, from 1993 onwards, donor attention shifted increasingly to empowering civic associations (in addition to punitive measures against the state) as a means of restoring democracy in Nigeria. For instance, the US directed its ambassador to Nigeria, William Swing, to 'initiate high level contacts' with key figures opposed to the regime (*Newswatch*, 5 June 1993) – following which more funds were made available to key civic groups, especially the Campaign for Democracy and, later, the United Action for Democracy and NADECO, to coordinate an anti-regime movement: 'the pro-democracy movement in Nigeria had, at least for the time being, a formidable supporter in Washington' (Ihonvebere and Vaughan 1995: 86). The British too set up a 'Governance Fund' which targeted and benefited civic groups. It is worthy of note that donor programmes on civil society and democracy in Nigeria, which are theoretically informed by the neoliberal vision, tended to assume that only civic groups carried the potentials of struggling for democracy in Nigeria – virtues extolled by de Tocqueville in the case of America (De Tocqueville 1831 [1994a, 1994b]; see Chapter 2). This is a lopsided interpretation of the situation in Nigeria: as we argued earlier, some elements in civic groups, including those who benefited from donor funding, were influenced by political and sectarian motives.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that dominance of the military in Nigerian politics and the contradictory policies they implemented played an important role in the flowering of civil society and demands for democratic expansion. However, whilst internal structures remain crucial, external factors were also influential in determining political and socio-economic processes in Nigeria. On the one hand, by supporting the military in imposing structural adjustment, Western donors facilitated a process that reproduced sharp social disparities, strengthened the state, and allowed the military to unleash repressive measures in containing the tides of anti-SAP demonstrations. On the other hand, by supporting democracy and civic associations in the aftermath of the 1993 presidential elections, Western governments and donors facilitated a process that sought, albeit belatedly, to empower civil society and restore democracy. But it is arguable if the kind of groups they supported, or their assumption of democracy and civil society, was still instrumental to the achievement and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria in May 1999.

Several key issues may be discerned from this chapter. First, it is noted that repression breeds activism. In other words, there is a correlation between the despotic policies of the state and the rise of an anti-state emancipatory reaction from civil society. Second, in addition to state repression and often reinforcing it, socio-economic injustice, in particular impoverishment and immiseration, breeds activism. However, such activism comes not from a particular class or group but all those affected by state repression or gross inequality in the distribution of rewards from the economy – that is, not just the working class (a class between the dominant petty-bourgeoisie and the masses of the population, who mainly earn their living through wage labour), but cross-class and political alliances. Nevertheless, it is noted that the Nigerian working class and urban-based professional elements of the petty-bourgeoisie stood at the forefront of economic and democratic struggles. This is not surprising because though some of them originated from the lower classes, Western education, professional training, gainful employment, workplace struggles, have placed them in a strategic location to engage the state and its dominant classes on issues ranging from workers' welfare to wider societal struggles. However it is premature to conclude that the working class represent the interest of the masses or are ready to sacrifice theirs in the process of defending 'public interest'.

Third, it is noted that civil society associations are concerned particularly with democratic expansion – even though it is noted in the

context of Africa that mass protest and civil society struggle 'was first and foremost demands for better standards of living, that is for *change* rather than for democracy *per se*' (Abrahamsen 2000: 99; her emphasis). In the case of Nigeria, socio-economic struggles eventually galvanised into democratic struggles, particularly in the 1990s. It is noted that from then on, civic associations became committed, to 'a point of no return', to the vision of actualising Nigeria's democracy as a minimum condition for social stability and improved conditions of life. But what have we learnt from their activism? Is civil society a recent phenomenon? When do they first appear and who funds them? To what extent are they a front for external ambitions? What exactly are their relations with 'external' actors? Do they always emanate from particular class, ethnic groups or regions? If civic associations were supported by external donors, how does this affect their relations with other groups – for example the Labour movement – and the state? To what extent is civil society in Nigeria dense and vibrant and what are the implications for achieving democracy? How far are these groups internally democratic? These questions are addressed in the following chapters.

3

The Evolution of Civil Society: Contemporary Character and Democratic Potentials

This chapter seeks to fill a gap identified in previous chapters, namely the tendency, particularly amongst liberal intellectuals and developmental institutions, to construct 'civil society' as either lacking or a recent phenomenon in Nigeria/Africa. More often than not, it is visualised as the 'gold standard' of a neoliberal agenda which Western donors have been promoting vigorously in developing countries and, to that extent, an initiative of external actors rather than an institution rooted in domestic history and social dynamics. In the context of Nigeria, the upsurge of pro-democracy groups since the 1980s – which coincided with the era of donor-imposed structural adjustment and 'political conditionality' – seems to reinforce the view that a robust civil society was previously lacking in Nigeria's convoluted journey towards liberal democracy. This chapter argues that the tendency to credit 'civil society' to Nigeria's externalities is flawed, not least because it obscures a whole range of longstanding domestic features and structures: 'trade unions, student movements and other forms of civil society have been waging struggles in Africa for over half a century … *civil society cannot be said to be a new phenomenon in Nigeria or indeed any other part of Africa*' (International IDEA[1] 2000: 199–201; emphasis added).

Whilst the dramatic proliferation of certain kinds of civil society organisations, namely civic associations, is indeed only a recent development in Nigeria, it is grounded in Nigeria's complex associational life dating back to the pre-colonial and colonial era. Hence I emphasise the need to contextualise the evolution of Nigerian civil society in (pre)colonial Nigeria, with a view to understanding its contemporary post-

colonial character, especially its relationships with the state and democracy. This process is deeply rooted in the pattern of class formation and social differentiation institutionalised during colonialism and carried forward to the post-colonial era. Like other developing economies of the global South, colonialism truncated Nigeria's pre-colonial forms of social and political organisation and imposed new intervening structures. The most decisive and controversial of these new structures were the 'modern' (neocolonial) state and new social classes – whose dialectics contrast sharply with what is known to exist in developed capitalist societies (see Chapter 2). In this scenario, civil society emerged as (1) a realm where dominant ruling classes legitimised their hegemony through both overt and covert instruments of the state; (2) an exclusionary space, controlled by the state, where some classes/groups are privileged, while others are oppressed; but at the same time (3) a domain of resistance populated by several indigenous groups, but often led by urban professionals and wage labourers, to challenge the state and (4) a diverse and fragmented sphere besieged by the clashing discourses of modernity and primordiality.[2]

Given the cultural specificity of civil society and associational life in Nigeria, an analysis of its class character and contemporary manifestations (density) will allow us to engage productively with the key assumptions of the dominant global liberal debate – for instance, the view that a vibrant civil society was lacking in Africa and needed to be constructed. Similarly, it will allow for an empirically informed assessment of the all-too-familiar Tocquevillian argument that a dense and vibrant civil society is essentially democratic and crucial to the achievement and consolidation of a democratic state (see Chapter 1; also Putnam 1995; Narsoo 1991).

This chapter uses historical and ethnographic data to trace the process of class formation and social differentiation in Nigeria and its implications for civil society. This is followed by a contemporary mapping of civil society organisations to determine their 'density',[3] in particular, why some parts of the country and classes demonstrate more tendencies towards civil society organising than others; or why some periods allow for greater flowering. Finally, using first-hand data on the democratic content of selected civic organisations in Nigeria, the chapter engages the debate on whether a dense and vibrant civil society is essentially democratic. Following from this, the chapter reveals that in spite of common assumptions, in Nigeria, civil society is not a new phenomenon that emerged in the 1980s – rather, it is rooted in the historical patterns of class formation and social differentiation in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. Secondly the chapter finds that, contrary to common

postulations, civil society is not limited to civic organisations; 'older' forms of associations such as the labour and professional unions also constitute a substantial part – one which is however largely disregarded because of the tendency in current neoliberal thought to construct them as not constituting part of civil society. Thirdly, in terms of public perceptions and narratives from activists, the chapter finds a mixture of viewpoints which reveals overall that civic associations are not regarded by the public as essentially democratic institutions. The key reasons for the above unsavoury perceptions, as argued in this and the following chapter, include civil society organisations' internal constraints as well as limitations posed by state actors and structures.

The Evolution of Civil Society in Nigeria:
Class Formation, Social Differentiation and Associational Life

An overview of class formation in Nigeria will help bring out 'the defining forces and movements in the construction, evolution and composition' of civil society (Agbaje 1997: 365). The same logic can be applied in tracing the social character of the state's ruling class. Unlike much of Western experience, in which civil society preceded and played a decisive role in the construction of the modern state system (see Keane 1993), the reverse has largely been the case in Nigeria and other African countries where the 'modern' state preceded and influenced the formation and constitution of contemporary classes and civil society (Hann and Dunn 1996). The 'modern' Nigerian state and social classes came into existence following colonialism. It is pertinent to note briefly that prior to colonialism, Nigerian pre-colonial states – both the empire-states and stateless (or acephalous) types[4] – had evolved some fairly organised socio-economic and political structures with a strong evidence of active associational life (see Afolayan 1997). Indeed, popular groups in some of these states participated in resisting colonial conquest.[5] Throughout colonial rule, the tempo of local resistance was sustained as associational groups, rooted in these pre-colonial systems, survived alongside new organisations responsive to colonial transformation.

Colonialism not only truncated and conquered pre-colonial political formations, but also superimposed novel structures. It set in motion new social forces which eventually played a decisive role in shaping the social and political structures of Nigeria. The British colonialists sought to mould these new social forces and political structures in their own image and privileged those that were to serve their interests. On the one hand, the 'capitalising' economy needed a local-type bourgeoisie and

intermediary class[6] to provide dependable allies in the process of capitalist penetration and exploitation. To begin with, the British colonial project encountered a shortage of manpower to administer and exploit the colony. By the turn of the twentieth century, there was only one British administrator to 100,000 Nigerians in the north and one administrator to 70,000 indigenes in the south (Crowder 1978). At the time the colonial enterprise was wound up in 1960, the colonial state had nurtured a large enough local petty-bourgeoisie to take over power, as a proxy ruling class, deeply aligned to the metropolitan centre, and a dependent partner in the neocolonial era. On the other hand, the colonial economy needed labouring classes (namely a proletariat and peasantry) to provide cheap manpower for forms of 'primitive accumulation'.[7] This was achieved through the introduction of wage labour – a product of monetisation, trade and taxation. Typical of capitalist penetration and expansion, unequal spatial development gave rise to urbanisation, rural–urban migration, and migrant wage labour mainly in urban centres of production. The exploitative character of the colonial economy meant that migrant wage earners soon began to organise and unite to negotiate conditions of pay and workers' welfare. Some of Nigeria's earliest workers' unions were formed to meet the demands of urban migrant labour (see Chapter 4). They brought together workers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds in a common struggle. In addition, given their rural background, migrant labourers organised to promote cultural and social interests which they brought from their home areas – for instance, rural development, burial, local shrines, ethnic solidarities, and 'traditional' values. In other words, urban areas became complex and volatile spaces for forms of association which incorporated both contemporary class struggle and concern for the traditional rural lifestyle.

In addition to migrant wage labour, colonialism gave rise to a cadre of Western-educated middle-level skilled professionals (a privileged fraction of the local working class) who were needed to complement high-ranking colonial administrators in the newly emerging colonial bureaucracies.[8] This became a 'privileged' working class drawn from a cross-section of society – affluent and/or poor families, villages, townships, ghettoes – who joined the formal sector by virtue of their Western education and skilled training, as auxiliary administrators, accountants, teachers, architects. To these Western-educated middle class, their key to the colonial system – commonly perceived as a an alien monster organised by the metropolis with the aid of local manpower to benefit the colonial superstructure – was their skills and competence necessary to complement, rather than

replace, the ruling agents of the colonial state. Their proximity to the colonial structure and 'acquired' social status, which often contrasted sharply with their 'inherited' familial and cultural backgrounds, placed them in a good position to understand the inherent injustices of the colonial system and to eventually become instrumental in forming associations that engaged the colonial state on a range of issues ranging from local education and taxation to social welfare. In addition to forming professional associations of their own (for example the Nigeria Civil Service Union founded in 1912; the Nigeria Union of Teachers formed in 1931; and the Nigeria Society of Engineers), they also became active in wider labour struggles through the solidarity movement. This shows that some urban professionals were partly rooted in trade unionism – that is, they were first unionists before venturing into other forms of associational life. Nevertheless, professionals were noted for being active in urban associations – both of the *sectarian* and *secular* kinds – and partisan politics. Examples include the Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM) and Ibo State Union (ISU).

NYM was founded in 1934, initially as the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM), by former students of King's College, Lagos and Lagos-based urban professional men. LYM opposed colonial education policy which was in favour of elementary, technical and vocational training, by advocating the expansion of schools, reform of educational curricula, and the provision of overseas scholarships to deserving indigenes – the latter route was to give rise to the proliferation of these professionals. In 1936, LYM transformed into a political party, NYM, and became a contending actor in Lagos politics, which had hitherto been dominated by the Nigeria National Democratic Party, (NNDP, also founded by urban professionals). NYM won control of the Lagos City Council and Lagos's three seats at the regional Legislative Council and remained dominant until its collapse in 1941 following leadership crises with ethnic undertones generated by party nominations (see Agbaje 1997). On the other hand, ISU was a pan-Igbo association formed in 1947 by Dr Nnamdi Azikwe, a doctoral graduate of an American university and the founder of the first indigenous newspaper, the *West African Pilot*. It emerged to curb the rising influence of a rival pan-Yoruba organisation, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* (Association for the Descendents of Oduduwa) formed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1946. Both organisations transcended their ethnic roots to become part of rival political parties: the ISU joined the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) while *Egbe* transformed into the Action Group in 1950 (Sklar 1963).

The point from these examples is that urban professionals in colonial Nigeria were largely instrumental in creating associational groups that fervently opposed the colonial state and eventually provided an organised space for party politics. In addition, as demonstrated by the NYM, civil society organisation provide a space for *representing* the interest of the under-privileged in society – youths, the unemployed, urban men – and *contesting* relations of exploitation and repression attributed to the colonial state. To achieve these dual aims, it became necessary for NYM to join the bandwagon of party politics. At issue, therefore, is the capacity of civil society to galvanise specific, even narrow, interests as a means of contesting repression, even if that means shedding a non-partisan orientation – often attributed to civil society – to delve into the murky waters of politics. The tendency to transform from 'civil society' to 'political party' became prevalent even after independence because in Nigeria partisan *vis-à-vis* non-partisan politics seem to provide the most efficient tool for making political statements, influencing policy and, ultimately, capturing power and its defining structures.

We have noted that the colonial structure was complicit in the process of class formation and, by extension, the emergence of class-based associational life. But how was this achieved? It was achieved both *directly* through state legislation and *indirectly* through systemic policies. Directly, the colonial state adopted repressive and exclusionary regulatory policies which benefited specific classes and associations, particularly those valuable to the system, whilst repressing others. For instance, the Co-operative Societies Ordinance of 1934 promoted the formation of 'white-settler' and farmers' cooperatives at the expense of 'native' associations, particularly those perceived as 'divisive'. Similarly, the Trade Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance, introduced in 1939, restricted strike action by labour organisations whilst encouraging 'voluntary' arbitration and conciliation. It also discouraged the formation of umbrella organisations by allowing 'a system of numerous small and financially weak organisations [leading to] factionalisation and bitter rivalry between trade union federations' (Edame 2000: 175). Colonial legislation granted enormous powers to colonial administrators, particularly the Governor-General and District Officers (DOs), who became both the agents of repression and gatekeepers of exploitative colonial policies. Key beneficiaries of colonial regulation included associations founded by the colonial petty-bourgeoisie (both local and metropolitan) – for example merchant associations, credit societies, urban polo clubs, and conservation societies. These associations were encouraged not least because they were

seen as modern, secular and very unlikely to oppose state policies. On the other hand, the state banned groups formed for localised interests, even if they carry modernising features. For instance, in colonial Lagos, voluntary neighbourhood groups founded to develop non-European quarters, were restricted because they were seen as aspiring to 'equalise' spatial divides and, thereby, challenge a sanctioned social and economic hierarchy (see Little 1966).

Structurally, the colonial economy reproduced social inequalities and differentiation through contradictory policies on commerce, education and urbanisation, among others. First, the economy provided massive opportunities for an emerging commercial class and local entrepreneurs, described by Claude Ake as 'marginal capitalists' (Ake 1982: 74). This class emerged by both design and default:

> the exploitation of the colony's resources, the orientation of the colonial economy outwards and the growth in international trade associated with it, gave opportunities which enabled some of the indigenous people to became marginal capitalists, for instance by acting as lower level middlemen in the export trade. The concentration of the labour force in specific geographical locations, which came with colonialism, created demands for such services as shops, tailoring, food and furniture supplies. Some Africans were able to take advantage of such opportunities to become marginal capitalists.

While some people acquired wealth through commerce and ancillary economic activities created by local demands (transport, tailoring), the colonial administrative system created and privileged its own fraction of the 'marginal capitalists' particularly petty contractors and powerful chiefs who were employed to carry out public duties such as the collection of taxes, the construction of roads, which the 'marginal capitalists' exploited to their advantage. Consequently, as the wealthy acquired the means to send their children to schools, education became an important means of class-grooming (as well as reproducing gendered and other forms of hierarchies).

In addition to commerce, the colonial state adopted a highly divisive policy on education which was primarily designed to deliver basic literacy – Reading, Writing and Arithmetic (3Rs) – and citizenship training (aimed at indoctrinating subjects into an acceptance of the civilising values of the colonisers). Secondly, it emphasised technical and vocational skills needed

for menial and auxiliary work – typing, shorthand, plumbing, masonry, carpentry, metalwork. Thirdly, it targeted and empowered specific groups for a privileged education. This was achieved through the creation of a few distinctive 'model schools' which became the recruitment ground for potential leaders and entrepreneurs. 'Model schools' contrasted with 'common schools' in terms of providing higher socio-economic and career opportunities to those who attended them. Examples of model schools in colonial Nigeria included King's College, Lagos and Barewa College, Katsina. John Paden notes that these schools trained most of the Nigerian national politicians, military men and bureaucrats who later took over power at independence (Paden 1986). The curriculum of these schools emphasised the acquisition of privileged knowledge such as 'leadership training' (as opposed to 'citizenship education' provided to pupils of 'common schools') and courses were taught mainly by white teachers recruited from the metropole. Enrolment into 'model schools' targeted the sons of those who had achieved higher status in society, particularly traditional chiefs, their loyal courtiers and other prominent wealthy people.[9] Through such 'selective breeding', the sons of the prominent and wealthy became obvious candidates for leadership roles. This became more evident in the run-up to Nigeria's independence.

Whilst colonial education favoured particular classes, even in its basic 'common' form it unwittingly produced and radicalised an under-privileged category who eventually challenged the injustices of the colonial system. Some of those who attended 'common schools' even acquired overseas education through such rare opportunities as funding from voluntary associations (Little 1966). Most of them were employed in the economy or in the civil service, but later became involved in civil society activism and anti-colonial struggles. In terms of the class character of the anti-colonial movement, it is misleading to assume that it was composed only of an undifferentiated, united working class. Needless to say, the working classes were divided along other lines of social differentiation such as ethnicity, religion, which affected their unity of purpose. In addition, the anti-colonial movement was eventually joined by other members of the society – for example dominant fractions of the 'marginal capitalist', in particular elements from traditional institutions, high-ranking 'native' personnel and petty-contractors, who were noted to have eventually dominated the struggle, finding colonialism a constraint on their profitable expansion (see Paden 1986). The point is that the class character of the anti-colonial movement was diverse and divided, but its emergence provides strong evidence of the development of civil society in Nigeria.

Finally, colonialism promoted sharp regional and spatial inequalities, as well as disparate urban centres of commerce and power with their rural peripheries. Even within urban settlements, there were divisions between affluent European areas and shanty African neighbourhoods often located on the fringes. There were several reasons behind the rise of urban centres, each with implications for civil society and associational life. First, some urban areas emerged because of their economic and domiciliary potentials for the colonialists. In Nigeria, these cities were mainly spread along the coastline ranging from Badagry to the Bight of Biafra: for example Port Harcourt, Benin, Calabar and Lagos, as well as some in the hinterland, for example Jos. Coastal cities were located in more moderate climatic zones, with fertile land for plantation agriculture, and a vast array of rivers, lagoons and ocean for trans-Atlantic maritime commerce. Other modern cities emerged because of their already dense population which provided a ready-made pool of cheap labour and a market for finished products. Examples include Kano in the north and Ibadan in the south. Finally, some cities emerged for political and strategic reasons. They were mainly small towns that were transformed into large cities following the location of colonial residential quarters, military and bureaucracy. Examples include Jos, Zaria and Kaduna in northern Nigeria and Ibadan and Ogoja in the south.

The process of proletarianisation and social differentiation was marked in urban centres. In the context of 'centres of commerce and industry', there was influx of migrant labour which created an urban population explosion and infrastructural insufficiency as well as cosmopolitan populations. In the context of urban 'centres of power', there was marked differentiation between traditional rulers, colonial administrators, emerging professionals, manual workers and the urban poor. Internally, colonial urban centres were highly segregated.[10] Kenneth Little notes that the conditions of urban slums provided an impetus for urban associations, as a response to the deplorable conditions of life (Little 1966). The names of these associations indicate their objectives: for example the Calabar Improvement League, Bauchi Improvement Association. Whilst exclusive to particular ethnic groups they were by no means 'primodialist' in outlook: their formation and objectives were new and challenging. In addition, the rural origin of settler urban communities meant that urban associations also became tools for 'the modernisation of rural societies from which their members came' (Ake 1982: 79). Consequently, from the first half of the twentieth century onwards, urban centres witnessed a marked efflorescence of associational life centred mainly on issues of local

housing and education, neighbourhood development, mutual aid and self-help, legislation, custom and taxation, and land distribution (Sklar 1963). A key feature of most urban centres was the tension between European colonialists and the colonial state on the one hand, and, on the other, the existence of 'an ever-expanding group of Nigerians educated abroad and those educated at home in missionary-sponsored schools, returning freed slaves of Nigerian and other African extractions, and members of the traditional power structure, who began cautiously to engage the state' (Agbaje 1997: 366). Thus, in most urban centres the colonial state was as instrumental in generating more radical elements out of marginalised groups as in grooming a loyal bourgeois class. In other words, contradictions in state policies were reflected in the construction of civil society.

In sum, it is argued that the rise of civil society in Nigeria is closely associated with the process of class formation and the operations of the colonial state. The colonial state was complicit in this process through contradictory regulatory and developmental policies which reproduced deep social inequalities. This precipitated the rise of associational life amongst specific classes and in specific geographic locations. In essence, civil society assumed a diverse class character; it also assumed other contradictory features such as civil/political, modern/traditional, secular/sectarian. which were manifested in the post-colonial era.

The Contemporary Manifestations of Civil Society in Post-colonial Nigeria

In the struggle for independence, civil society organisations became more vibrant, radicalised and politically active, whilst also retaining the unitary and divisive features developed during the colonial era. While some became focused on seizing state power,[11] other groups such as labour unions and professional associations largely retained their narrower class character and ideology. Despite this, they provided a strong social and ideological base for the anti-colonial struggle aimed at routing the 'exploitative' colonial system. However, as the colonial enterprise drew to an inevitable close, the departing British colonialists set in motion a process that eventually enabled the dominant factions of the 'marginal capitalists' to lead the anti-colonial settlement. For instance, the 'struggle' was turned into 'dialogue' through a series of independence conferences held in Lagos and London. The representation of delegates was strategically restricted to traditional and regional political constituencies – which effectively advantaged ethnic/ regional parties and traditional rulers

– rather than including socio-economic groups such as labour as a representational component. Nevertheless, independence was achieved with a relative degree of unity and a common sense of purpose amongst all indigenous groups and actors. This unity proved to be short lived.

In the post-colonial era, it is generally agreed that, relative to other African countries, Nigerian civil society has been 'fairly developed [and] organised associational life has been vibrant and its role in shaping both the society and the state has increased over the years' (Jega 1995a: 3). Nonetheless, 'as its activism and its role have increased, so also have its contradictions' (Jega, ibid.). Such contradictions are influenced by the dynamics of social interest that shape them and the fluctuating landscape of national politics and economy. Below, I explore this changing map in terms of the following complementary levels of analysis:

- *The geopolitical dispersal of associations*: Nigeria demonstrates marked incongruity in the concentration of civil society groups between different regions, as well as between human settlements (urban vs urban; urban vs rural).
- *Changing vibrancy of associations over time*: to determine which era provides for a greater flowering. For instance, there was a marked rise of civic organisations in 1980s and 1990s compared to the preceding era.
- *The distinction between anti-state and pro-state associations:* to ascertain the structural factors responsible for the rise of the two forms of associations.
- *The social character of associations:* to determine the dominant social actors and interest in the identified associations and implications of social and political action. This is explored further in the following chapter.

The Fluctuating Vibrancy[12] of Civil Society Organisations in Post-colonial Nigeria

At independence in 1960, civil society emerged as a vibrant, more united, promising and democratically inspired sphere, having actively participated in a popular anti-colonial struggle. However, there were some immediate constraints. The most crucial, perhaps, was the regionalisation and ethnicisation of national politics – a divisive political culture promoted by the departing colonialists and carried forward to the post-colonial era. This adversely affected the autonomy of civil society. Civil society now

> operated within a regional single party structure which effectively prevented the creation of an autonomous political space either

> from which it could exert major check on governmental excesses, or articulate its own distinct project on such basic issues as accountability and responsibility to the governed. The tendency of the dominant party in a region to co-opt all groups, or suppress resisting ones, did not encourage the development of a dynamic civil society (Abutudu 1995: 9).

Yet, while regionalisation affected the agency and autonomy of some groups, not all were repressed. It is evident that most groups in the labour and professional associations remained assertive and autonomous (see Barchiesi 1996). These groups cut across regionalism as well as sectarian divisions of ethnicity and religion, struggled to overcome the limitations arising from these divisions, albeit with difficulties, and continued to engage the ruling political classes and parties on issues ranging from workers' rights to public good.

In the context of the relationship between the emerging ruling class and civil society groups, a decisive development in the post-independence period was that the fragile unity exhibited by these diverse classes in the course of anti-colonial struggles collapsed soon after independence, with implications for class relations and state–civil society dichotomy:

> The nationalists rapidly stepped into the shoes of the colonialists and excluded popular and mass organisations from government … the power elites that governed sought to use state structures to maintain their power and privileges. Thus, [some] civil associations were incorporated into the state system and those that asserted independence were smashed and replaced with those that co-operated with the state (International IDEA 2000: 202–7).

Similarly, given that independence was achieved through negotiation (involving complex sets of social, economic, political and defence pacts between Nigeria and Britain), the emergent ruling political class was constrained from transforming the policies and structures of a dependent 'capitalist' state. Repressive colonial ordinances and socio-economic policies, especially those relating to labour, were retained and reinforced. Similarly, state officials used secular ideology to contain assertive sectarian groups whilst also paying lip service to religious ideology to buy support from society. It was not long before disappointed elements in the labour and professional associations turned to anti-state protest. During the first five years of independence Nigeria witnessed several workers' strike and

civil strife. An example was the 1960 protest against the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact, staged by opposition groups drawn from political parties, workers, students, youths, teachers and others. It is generally agreed that, as a result of state control, the 1960s witnessed a mixture of vibrancy and division in civil society. Where labour, students, youths and professional associations achieved a relative unity, activism was also reinforced by the fervour of the international social/radical movements of the 1960s.

In the 1970s – the decade of Nigeria's oil 'boom' – economic stability briefly allowed for a relatively 'responsible' state, albeit under military control, but one which could afford a welfare package that benefited society. Stable economic growth gave rise to regional groups and cooperative societies that became active in negotiating more equitable distribution of oil revenues to their constituencies. In this period too, 'trade unions and student associations actively agitated for the interest of their members and their self-declared allies' (International IDEA 2000). However, solidarity and cross-organisational activism was minimal and restricted to isolated issues and sectors, which left them divided or weak in the face of military regimes. The Gowon regime (1966–75) exploited Nigeria's huge oil revenues to consolidate its post-civil war peace building programme of reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation (3 Rs). The military's post-war peace building programme was largely welcomed and favoured by civil and political societies. Following the demise of General Gowon, the succeeding Murtala/Obasanjo regime (1975–79) carried forward and consolidated the peace building project. Macro-national issues such as democracy were not on the agenda of many groups in civil society, perhaps because the 1970s was also a period of 'benevolent' military rule.[13] The Gowon regime ensured the welfare of workers, built infrastructure, imported and distributed basic goods to workers and the general public – these measures calmed civil society if only temporarily. However, it is premature to conclude that the era was characterised by a 'silent and complacent' civil society. On the contrary, given a high level of corruption and waste which favoured the ruling classes, as well as regional and social disparities reproduced by lopsided 'White Elephant' developmental projects, the regime faced growing pressures from students and labour. Conversely, the 'radical' military regime of General Murtala Mohammed, which overthrew General Gowon in 1975, introduced an anti-imperialist foreign and domestic policy that not only enjoyed massive support from labour and other popular associations, but also radicalised them – a tradition that was carried forward to the following decades. This is an important context within which these groups became more vibrant

and energised in the late 1980s when structural adjustment was debated and its pain contested.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed fundamental changes in the Nigerian political economy, with huge implications for the flowering of civil society. The period was

> Characterised by authoritarian and arbitrary rule, widespread human rights violations and little consideration for the rule of law. Although the country had been under military dictatorship for the greater part of its independent history, the repression and human rights violations that characterised this phase of military rule provided the impetus for an upsurge of human rights NGO activism (Ibhawoh 2001: 38; see also Chapter 3).

In this period, 'more civil organisations were registered than in any other period in the post-independence history of Nigeria, with the largest percentage of NGOs currently in existence registered in this period' (Obadare 2005: 268). Between 1985 and 1995 alone, 'at least 30 such organisations were established' (op cit). Key organisations established in this period include, among others, the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Campaign for Democracy (CD), Democracy Alternative (DA), National Conscience Movement (NCM) – the list is by no means exhaustive. Figure 3.1, based on a UNICEF survey, shows a marked increase in the establishment and proliferation of civil society organisations since the 1980s, though it is important to clarify what was being counted here.

Figure 3.1 is based on the following limited criteria of inclusion: (1) non-governmental organisations registered with a government ministry, agency or some other organised body; (2) organisations which must have existed for a year prior to survey; (3) organisations which also have evidence of projects carried out; (4) organisations drawn only from states in which UNICEF was operating (i.e. Lagos, Oyo, Cross River, Kaduna, Bauchi and Plateau – Nigeria has 36 states); (5) 'primordial' and 'sectarian' organisations were excluded even if they were involved in development activities. Whilst Figure 4.1 indicates a marked increase in the establishment of selected civil society organisations in the 1980s and 1990s, its criteria need to be exposed. In particular, its prejudice against, and exclusion of, 'primordial' and 'sectarian' associations is problematic: these associations are apparently seen as 'divisive' and 'destructive'.[14]

**Figure 3.1: Distribution of Civil Society Organisations
in Nigeria by Year Established**
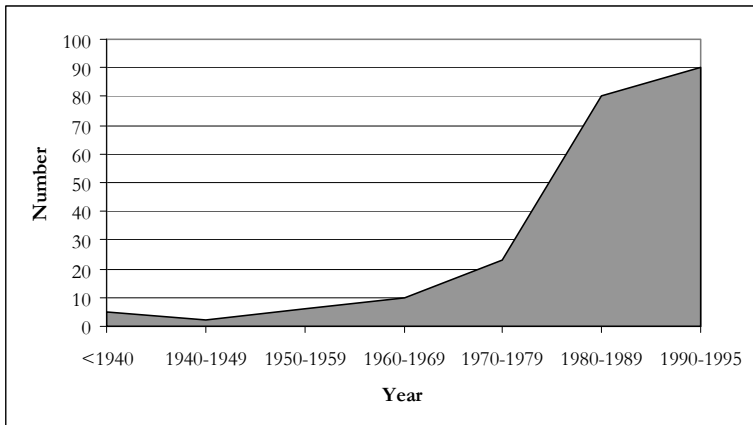
Source: Developed from *UNICEF Directory* (Ngeri-Ngwagha 1995)

However, in reality, whilst their focus is narrow, many 'sectarian' associations are part and parcel of political and economic life. They are indispensable to development in heterogeneous developing societies such as Nigeria. It is perhaps in the light of this reality that a recent United State Agency for International Development Report acknowledges that sectarian associations are a 'necessary' component of Nigeria indigenous associational entities and that they need to be considered in the promotion of democracy and development in Nigeria (USAID 2004). This acceptance by a core liberal international development institution that sectarian associations are 'necessary' signals a nascent change of attitude and promises a reversal of the perception of sectarianism as inherently counterproductive, rather than inevitable and potentially constructive.

Following the restoration of democracy in 1999, more civil society groups have emerged, particularly civic organisations and NGOs. For instance, my enquiries in 2003 revealed that 'over a hundred more organisations have emerged since 1999 and many more are still emerging' (interview with Official, ERN, Abuja, 25 August 2003). Most of these organisations are founded and run by young professionals and retired public sector workers. The key factor influencing the steady increase in the number of these associations was the roll back of the state sector, which followed the introduction of structural adjustment in 1986, creating huge gaps in the capacity of the state to provide employment and social

services. These organisations emerged to fill these gaps, but perhaps more crucially, became a much-needed alternative source of livelihood for the petty-bourgeois elements who founded them, who were badly hit by the impact of adjustment. In the context of pro-democracy groups, donor funding created a huge opportunity for grants which enabled these groups to thrive profitably in the name of engaging authoritarian rulers to restore democracy. The foregoing is not to question genuine visions of socio-economic and political change amongst groups, but to contextualise what seems to be the materialist foundation of their emergence. Evidently, whilst adjustment and donor funding influenced the rise of civic organis-ations, older and 'sectarian' groups did not benefit from such funding. This is in spite of the fact that these latter groups took the risky gamble of protest against the military state much earlier. Again, the reason is clear: these groups did not fit into the straightjacket of the liberal construction of civil society promoted by donors.

In sum, it is evident that an active civil society exists in post-colonial Nigeria and it would appear to have expanded hugely in the period since the 1980s. It is noted that new entrants – civic pro-democracy and civil liberty groups – have eventually overshadowed 'older' groups (in terms of the large numbers that spontaneously emerged) such as professional associations and labour organisations, in spite of the latter's outstanding record of democratic and anti-state struggle explored in Chapter 2. Thus, I argue that there is a need to cast as widely as possible the social definitions of Nigeria's pro-democracy movement to include both 'old' and 'recent' forms of associations. In the following sections, I examine the geographic dispersal of these pro-democracy civil society organisations and compare their relative numbers. My aim is to eventually explore their democratic potential in a subsequent section, and in the following chapter.

Anti-state and Pro-state Civil Society:
The State and the Construction of Civil Society

The social landscape of civil society in Nigeria comprises a mixture of associations that have been created to protect the interest of the state and the ruling class and those operating against the state. Surely, there are some associations which are in the middle or 'sit on the fence'.[15] Whilst anti-state groups have been noted in this and many previous studies, there is a risk in overlooking the existence of pro-state organisations, especially when mapping the complex terrain of associational life in post-colonial Nigeria. By noting them, we can understand not only their location in the social map of civil society groups, but, perhaps more importantly, the role

played by some in promoting a hegemonic agenda. We can also understand the extent to which the state can penetrate the ranks of civil society.

The state in post-colonial Nigeria has shown a tendency to intervene, to a greater or lesser extent, in the regulation and activities of civil society groups (see the following sub-section). However, the phenomenon has taken a stronger and more deterministic turn since the late 1980s, an era that surprisingly coincides with the emergence of the neoliberal agenda. In this era, authoritarian military rule and donor influence have combined in strengthening, rather than minimising, the state; they also functioned, at least before 1993, in weakening civil society. Most pro-state groups emerge in times of national crises, when the perceived threats of mass protest and societal unrest, often led by elements in civil society, are higher (see also Chapters 2 and 4). It is premature to assume that every actor in civil society will join the bandwagon anti-state protest. As revealed during Nigeria's national economic and political crises of the 1980s and 1990s, elements in civil society, including those hard-hit, have apparently been 'honey-trapped' by regime leaders through economic inducement, corruption, and promises of political appointment. The key point is that the structures of the state, in particular the nature of socio-economic and political policies, are instrumental in moulding the character of civil society. Equally important, the local ruling classes, who control the commanding structures of the state, particularly military regimes, leave no stone unturned in casting civil society in their desired shape, by undermining anti-state associations, promoting pro-state associations and never minding those 'sitting on the fence'.

Apparently, the nature of state politics and policy determines the character and vulnerability of civil society. Whilst pro-state groups and individuals may be drawn from both the modern and older forms of association, it has been noted that 'comparatively, the old civil society organisations with roots in the social soil were more difficult to penetrate and/or dislodge' (International IDEA 2000: 124). Similarly, whilst noting Narsoo's (1996) conceptual distinction between 'organisations of survival' and 'organisations of resistance', Obadare observes that, in the context of Nigeria, organisation of survival (such as labour movements) were 'apparently better prepared for the vagaries of penetration' (Obadare 2005: 271). In other words, it is easier for the state to penetrate the modern associations than the older ones. Nevertheless, it is important to note that regime penetration and state control of civil society is context-specific: the socio-economic and political dynamics that define both state and civil society differ from one regime and period to another. For instance, in the

context of the state, the previous section reveals that in the early 1970s – the era of 'benevolent' military rule – the state's preoccupation with, and prioritisation of, post-civil war[16] peace building and development ensured that both the state and military enjoyed relative support, albeit not total or 'unconditional', from civil society. In this context, the Gowon regime did not have to worry about 'threats of insecurity' from civil society as much as its successors did in the 1990s. Here, the nature of state politics and structural crises was so volatile and contested that both the Babangida and Abacha regimes had to rely on a double-edged measure of promoting their own pro-state 'brand' of civil society and taking draconian measures to ward-off the anti-state ones.

State (regime) control and penetration of civil society assume different forms: infiltration, buy-over, corruption, inducement. A witty measure described by Mathew Hassan Kukah as 'cloning' involves the instant establishment of loyal civil society groups as arrowheads for promoting a hegemonic, often anti-democratic, agenda (Kukah 1999). These include first, 'voluntary' and 'charitable' initiatives directly or indirectly linked to state officials who seek to construct a 'civil society' that is at peace with the government of the day. One example is the Better Life Programme formed by the wife of General Babangida, Mariam, set up ostensibly to improve the conditions of rural women but converted into an avenue for enriching men and women cronies of the regime.[17] Another is the National Council for Women Societies (NCWS), an organisation formed by the government to facilitate unity amongst women and ensure their equal development, but which became the state's conduit for buying women's loyalty through 'discourses of womanhood' that preach submission to patriarchal and masculine power (see Pereira 2000). Second, we have groups originating from 'society' (but with an apparent client–patron relationship with the ruling regime) that seek to promote particular regimes and policy continuity. Examples of such groups include the Association of Better Nigeria (ABN), which was accused of playing a controversial role in the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections, and myriad associations – an estimated 157 – formed during the Abacha regime to campaign for his transformation into civilian president (1994–98) (*Sunday Vanguard* (Lagos) 14 June 1998: 21).[18] Most of these associations operate as 'one-man bands' – that is, they emanate from individual(s) with connections to the regime as a means of drumming up popular support. They cease to exist when regimes come to an end. These groups are politically corrupt and deeply connected to political and military elites. One example is Youth

Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA), which demonstrates most of the foregoing features. In March 1998, YEAA organised a jamboree of 'two million Nigerians' to persuade Abacha to contest the presidency. Delegates for this fiesta were drawn from all 774 local governments of the federation and were transported to Abuja at the full expense of the state. The cost of the event, an estimated 30 million Naira, was underwritten by the regime. Many politicians, traditional rulers, artistes and celebrities attended the event and gave speeches – indicating elite support for pro-state civil society and its hegemonic activity. When General Abacha died in August 1998, YEAA and its agenda dissolved immediately.

Apart from supporting regimes, pro-state groups are united in promoting regime policies and complement one another in checkmating anti-state pro-democracy groups in civil society. Consider, for instance, the following statement of Chief Emmanuel Okereke, the leader of SAINT, made in May 1998 barely two months after the YEAA carnival: 'we know the pro-democracy groups are planning something but we are going to subdue them. We would crush them' (cited in Obadare 2005: 276).

There are three points that emerge from the foregoing: first, the importance of locating pro-state associations in the social map of civil society. Second, the importance of noting the roots of these associations in times of national crisis and their construction by regime leaders and loyalists in mainstream civil and political societies; and finally, the hegemonic and anti-democratic character of these pro-regime organisations, which work tirelessly to undermine the efforts of those struggling to achieve democracy. That is, civil society is not merely anti-statist or pro-democratic, it can be quite anti-democratic and undemocratic. A key issue is the role of the state and, in particular, ruling political and/or military classes, to use, abuse or manipulate the state apparatus, in regulating civic associations – supporting those that are friendly to the state or undermining those that are critical of it. But how do regimes regulate civil society organisations, or form their 'own civil society' (Obadare 2005: 78)? Below I highlight some of the regulatory instruments used by regimes in achieving this objective.

The Regulatory Framework of Civil Society in Nigeria
In assessing the regulatory framework of civil society organisations in Nigeria, it is imperative to note that there is a contrast between civilian democracies and military regimes. The latter, used as reference point here,

are noted for being highly absolutist and repressive. However, this emphasis should not be taken to mean an unproblematic acceptance that the civilian democratic era is an 'easy' one for civil society. On the contrary, recent experience shows that even in democratic phases, the state attempts and often does carry out harsh regulatory actions that are quite unpopular and repressive of civil society organisations. This is exemplified by the passage of the Labour (Amendment) Act, 2004, which, according to unions, was aimed at disempowering organised labour by giving unfettered power to the Minister of Labour and, in essence, stripping Nigerian workers of the ownership of labour unions.

In Nigeria, the regulatory instruments employed by the state, or its ruling military classes, generally aim to constrain civil society groups, rather than provide them a free and benign space for participation. This stance is common in most authoritarian African states, and was particularly so during the 1980s: Matembe observes that in most African countries, civil society organisations 'cope with government suspicion' (Matembe 1993). Registration requirements are often abused by agents of the state to punish defaulters, in particular groups who are critical of the state: 'draconian powers of de-registration hang over all registered civic organisations. Those who forget that the government possesses such powers often find themselves proscribed or driven into expensive lawsuits' (Wachira, writing of Kenya, 1998: 136–7).

In the context of Nigeria, it is generally agreed that state regulation of civil society was extremely severe during military rule, in particular during the mid-1980s and 1990s. Ironically, this period also witnessed a massive proliferation of civil society organisations. For instance, at the peak of the Babangida military regime in 1991, a civil liberty activist complained that: '[Though] the Nigerian constitution[19] does not require NGOs to register officially; but for purposes of access to officialdom, NGOs are compelled to seek registration under the Companies and Allied Decree. Under this Decree, the minister can frustrate the registration of NGOs that are critical of government.' (Agbakoba 1993b: 121).

This demonstrates starkly how military regimes constrain some groups, whilst supporting others. State and regime officials often abuse the legal and institutional apparatus of the state in suppressing civil society groups. Table 3.1 provides a picture of the legal and institutional framework of state regulation of civil society under the military. It is worthy of note that these provisions and institutions are quite sporadic and unpredictable as they have been regularly reviewed and recon-stituted by different regimes.

Table 3.1: The Regulatory Framework of Civil Society Organisations under the Military

A: Legal framework	B: Institutional framework	C: Key state officials
Federal (for example):	Federal (for example):	Federal (for example):
The Constitution† Military Decrees for example: Company and Allied Matters Decree (CAMA) Social Development Decree Cooperative Societies Decree Subsidiary regulations such as court injunctions (selectively applied as they suit the regime)	Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) National Planning Commission (NPC) Office of the Federal Director of Cooperatives Independent National Electoral Commission Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (regularly reconstituted)	Head of state/ commander-in-chief of armed forces and other key regime leaders The Registrar, Corporate Affairs Commission Registrar of Trade Unions The Federal Director of Cooperatives The Federal Minister of Labour The Federal Minister of Women Affairs/Social Development
State/local (for example):	State/local (for example):	State/local (for example):
The constitution† State military edicts/local government bye-laws for example Community Development Association Law (CDARL), 1995 (Kaduna State) Voluntary Association (Registration) Law (VAL), 1988 (Benue State)	State ministry/local government unit of social service/ development State planning commission/local planning unit State/local cooperative division	The state governor/local government administrator State commissioner of social development/local head of social services State commissioner of planning/local director of planning State director of cooperative/local government director of cooperative

† Partially functional at some stages of military rule, fully functional during civil democratic rule.

Decrees constitute the bulk of legal tools used by military regimes (see Table 3.2 for a selected list). They were classified and 'restricted' from public criticism, in line with a military tradition of 'institutional secrecy' (Odetola 1986). Because most of them are promulgated instantaneously or

Table 3.2: Selected Military Decrees Relating to Civil Society and Associational Matters in Nigeria[20]

Decree	Year	Provision
Decree 17 – Public Officers (Special Provisions)	1984	Gave government agencies the right to dismiss their employees.
Decree 4 – Public Officers (Protection against false accusations)	1984	Gave legal immunity for regime and political leaders to take repressive action against unions
Decree 1	1984	Suspended constitutional provisions pertaining to the rights to personal liberty and freedom of association
Decree 2 – State Security (Detention of Persons)	1984	Gave regime the power to detain individuals for up to three months without interrogation, trial or compensation
Decree 14	1984	Abolished the right of *habeas corpus*
Decree 20 – Special Tribunal (Miscellaneous Offences)	1984	Provided for military tribunal to try public offences, including strike actions; stipulated a record 20 years of imprisonment for political offences
Decree 16	1986	Eroded university autonomy and increased government supervision of universities
Decree 17 – Trade Unions (Miscellaneous Provisions)	1986	Disaffiliated professional associations from the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the central labour organisation
Decree 37	1986	Empowered military governors to deduct special levies from workers' salaries without consultation
Decree 23 – National Electoral Commission[21]	1987	Empowered the National Electoral Commission to regulate all aspects of elections, including election monitoring
Decree 47	1987	Gave university authorities absolute powers to disband students' associations and expel members of banned associations
Decree 47 – Student Union	1989	Stipulated that any student involved

Activities (Control and Regulations)		in demonstration, peaceful or otherwise, would be liable to five years' imprisonment and/or a fine of US$5,000
Decree 9	1990	Insulated regime leaders from civil actions in court
Decree – 12 Teaching (Essential Services)	1993	Declared education an essential service and banned industrial actions in the sector
Decree 35	1993	Empowered the military to confiscate and prohibit the circulation of any publication that undermines state security; Required all existing newspapers to re-register afresh

in anticipation of a given political issue or group action – for instance, to neutralise perceived popular discontent over a particular public policy – they are many and deal with wide-ranging issues. In 1994, a national daily reported that 41 military decrees were in operation with clauses ousting the jurisdiction of regular courts; while another 37 infringe constitutional rights; special tribunals are set up under 13 decrees, 12 violate property rights, 11 curtail the freedom of expression while one violates the right to free association (*Vanguard* 17 December 1994: 11). Writing on the Babangida regime (1986–93) Momoh reports the haphazard manner in which decrees were promulgated:

> Decrees were used to subvert public opinion, freedom of movement and association. Retroactive decrees were promulgated to undermine the rule of law and basic human rights of individuals. Government officials through immunities were given immunity including that from criminal prosecution. For every error of omission or commission, for every misrule, recklessness of high-handedness of the regime, a decree was introduced to legitimise the act (Momoh 1995: 48).

On the quantity of decrees promulgated, Momoh further reports that 'no government official [under General Babangida] could confidently attest as to how many decrees were in existence at the time of his inglorious exit. Indeed, because of the haste with which some of the decrees were passed,

some of them were unsigned, undated or ungazetted … Between 1985 and August 1993, the government promulgated no less than 300 decrees' (Momoh 1995: 48). By 1999, when the military finally left office, the number of decrees may have doubled. Even though not all were promulgated in response to civil society organisation or 'protest', all were/are invariably repressive and undemocratic.

It is imperative to note that in addition to repressive legal and institutional instruments, and as a factor that reinforces them, is the nature of patrimonial practices that pervade regimes and play a key role in how regimes manipulate civil society groups. Where repression fails, regime officials often resort to corrupt practices to buy support for state policies from 'willing' elements in civil and political societies – a useful locus to understanding pro-regime/pro-state civil society.

Table 3.2 shows that under the military, the regulatory structures of civil society tend to be typically repressive and rigid. What is less obvious is that they were subject to abuse and manipulation by the ruling classes, who made them flexible for pro-state groups and rigid for anti-state associations. Despite the withdrawal of military rule, military decrees remain in force, *de jure*. Most decrees, in particular the highly repressive ones, are archived, while others are reviewed and re-enacted through democratic process – as exemplified by the Trade Unions Decree 26 of 1996, which was revised and passed into law in 2004 as the Trade Unions (Amendment) Act by the Nigerian House of Representatives. Though they are carried forward into the democratic dispensation, a clear manifestation of 'military hangover', they are rarely invoked in their original form, but some are reviewed and converted to Acts of Parliament.

Measuring Civil Society: Density, Activities and Social Character

There is no generally agreed count of civil society organisations in Nigeria today – a problem that is complicated by a lack of official statistics of civil society organisations in Nigeria. There have been several attempts to measure their number and *density*, but the results of these surveys have diverged widely – not least because different criteria have been applied in these measurements. A key problem is that in terms of definition and inclusion, no account can be taken to be all-inclusive. For instance, if 'civil society' is defined as groups autonomous of the state in particular, those opposed to state policies or struggling to democratise the state, there is a risk of excluding groups that are 'friendly' to the state – i.e. pro-state organisations. Similarly, if civil society is restricted to 'civic organisations', as is often the case amongst liberal scholars, there is a risk of excluding

others such as professional associations, labour movements, and student unions –as well as the plethora of 'sectarian organisations'.

To cast the conceptual and empirical net wide (before narrowing down to pro-democracy groups), civil society is defined here as all organised groups that operate outside the state, even where the social actors that operate them are influenced or co-opted by the state. It thus includes pro-state and anti-state groups and, by extension, the labour movement, professional associations, civic organisations, sectarian organisations. The above 'net-casting' allows for a glimpse of the whole landscape of civil society in Nigeria. I start with a picture of total distribution and then focus on their specific dispersal. The first and the most 'generous' count, offered by Edwin Madunagu, apparently includes all of the above as 'NGOs'. He claims that 'there must be at least 250,000 NGOs in Nigeria with no less than one quarter of them based in Lagos alone. Cross River State accounts for not less than 2,000 and I have personally counted about 500 in Calabar' (Madunagu 2000: 404).

Earlier studies are no less ambivalent: 'there are probably thousands of non-governmental organisations nation-wide. In fact, within a small settlement, there might be several' (CASSAD 1992: 3). By contrast the UNICEF Directory already cited, authored by Georgina Ngeri-Ngwagha (1995), based on survey data and perhaps the first of its kind in Nigeria, identified 224–6 'development-oriented organisations'. However, the survey covered only states where UNICEF operates – fewer than half of Nigeria's 36 states. A DfID-commissioned study (2000) identified 400 'organisations and individuals … fundamental to the functioning of civil society in Nigeria' which include professional associations, trade unions, women's organisations, NGOs of various kinds, CBOs (including home-town associations and unions and community development associations), human rights organisations, credit and income generating organisations, traditional/ religious leaders, opinion leaders and the press (authors: Gass and Adetumbi 2000: 4). The point that emerges from the above counts is that there is no acceptable figure of civil society organisations in Nigeria; all counts are imperfect. Nevertheless, they provide a rough picture of civil society organisations in a terrain where no official statistics (or an acceptable figure from non-governmental sources) exist. My own attempt to come up with an estimate on my research and using my own criteria had its limitations.

My enquiry was focused primarily on *pro-democracy associations*, in particular civic associations, professional associations and labour movements, and not 'civil society' in general. In the course of my research

**Table 3.3: Geopolitical Distribution of Selected
Pro-Democracy Associations in Nigeria**

Location	Total	%	Overall regional %
Federal Capital Territory (FCT)			
Abuja	36	29.5	29.5
South			
Ibadan	19	15.6	41.0
Lagos	31	25.4	
North			
Kaduna	12	10.0	
Kano	9	7.3	29.5
Maiduguri	5	4.0	
Jos	10	8.2	
Total	122	100	100

Source: Field data

I eventually traced 122 such organisations. As revealed in the Appendix to this book, these organisations were identified both by design and default. As my field investigation covered the federal capital (Abuja) and selected areas in the South (Lagos, Ibadan) and North (Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Damaturu, Lafia, Maiduguri, Bauchi), my list is inevitably skewed towards these sites (see Table 3.3). As the criterion for the selection of these 122 associations, I chose organisations working or claiming to work on 'democracy' (for example the civil liberty movement, pro-democracy struggles, election observation, parliamentary lobbying). I determined this by studying their objectives and mission statements as well as interview claims. I also included some 'sectarian' organisations, if they claimed to be working for democracy – for example women's organisations – as well as those claiming to be civic but which some adjudge to be promoting sectarian causes.[22] Similarly, some of the organisations I selected were 'branches' of larger organisations.

The data shown in Table 3.3 are suggestive of the large number of pro-democracy associations in Nigeria and indicate something of the pattern of distribution. The table provides a basis for the following modest observations. First, we note variation across regions and cities.[23] Overall, there is a higher concentration of pro-democracy organisations

Figure 3.2 Geographic Density of Civil Society in Nigeria

(a) Densely Populated Regions
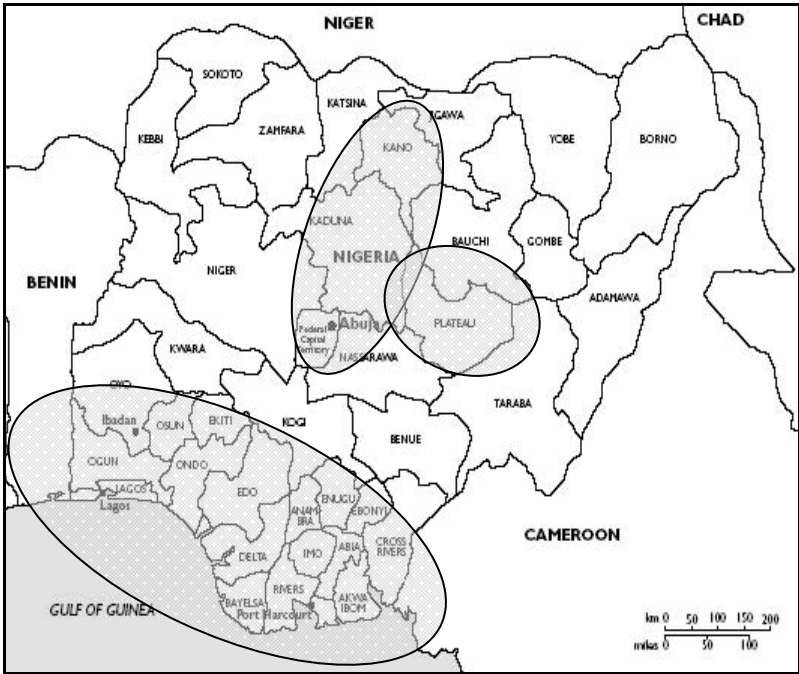
in the south compared with the north and the federal capital. In addition to the north–south divide, it was noted that most associations were based in urban areas.[24] This reflects the south's higher degree of urbanisation and industrialisation, and hence higher population density per square kilometre, and its higher literacy rate than the north (World Fact Book 2006). As argued earlier in the context of colonial Nigeria, these factors are known to generate both social differentiation and associational life more broadly.

The southwest in particular has a longstanding profile of working-class movements, being the birthplace of most of Nigeria's labour unions and professional associations. The region also provides a nesting space for ethnically framed anti-statist politics, exacerbated by the oil issue, as a manifestation of protest against the dominance of the north in national politics. Perhaps, more importantly, donor funding has also influenced this regional variation, in terms of the larger number of pro-democracy and civil liberty groups that were funded in the south to promote

(b) Moderately Populated Regions
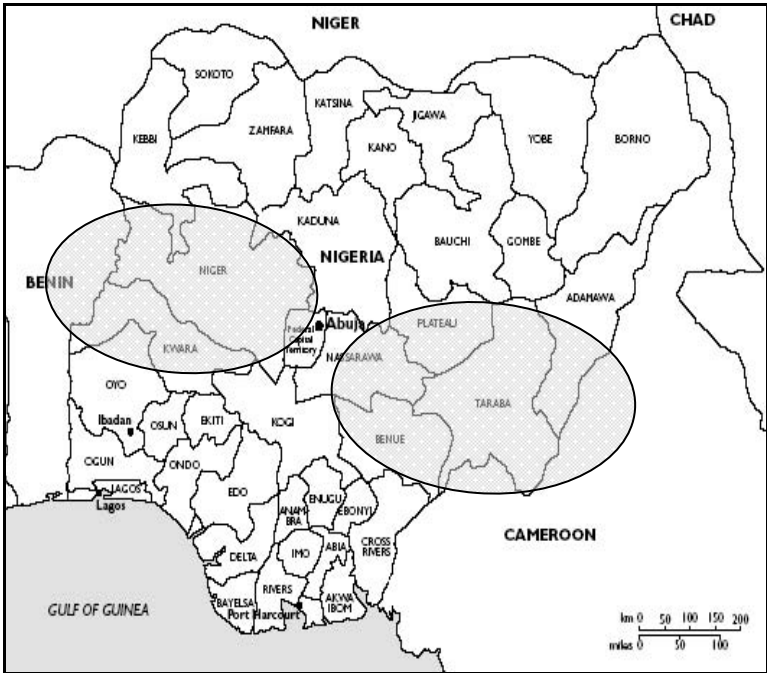
national democracy. A recent report describes pro-democracy organis-ations based in the region, in particular the 'Lagos–Ibadan axis' as 'donor darlings with privileged access to funding. They are seen as having no notion of regional imperatives but pretend to speak for the whole country' (International IDEA 2000: 210).

Second, the federal capital has a very high concentration (29.5 per cent). This unsurprising feature is overlooked by most recent work (for example Madunagu 2000). However, Bonny Ibhawoh, writing in the context of Nigeria since 1999 (post-military era), confirms my finding: 'a noticeable trend within the [Nigerian] NGO community is that a number of organisations have begun to shift the focus of their activities from Lagos to Abuja. Some organisations have established branches in Abuja with specific programmes and mandates aimed at responding to the new realities of democratic rule' (Ibhawoh 2001: 49).

The movement and/or establishment of civil society organisations to Abuja began much earlier, in 1990, when Nigeria's capital was moved from Lagos to the new 'neutral' federal capital. I have observed that the

(c) Sparsely Populated Regions
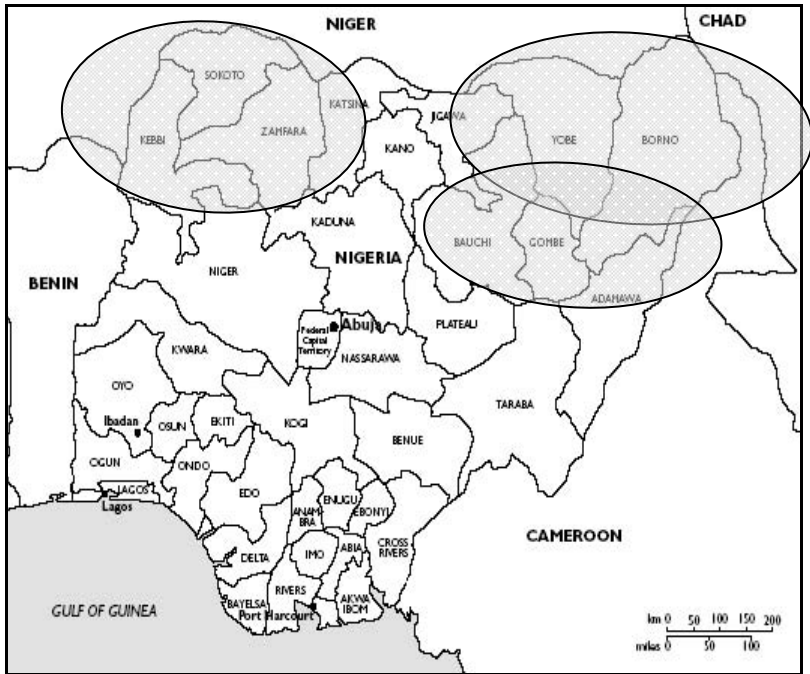
'exodus' intensified in the period since 1999, following the restoration of democracy. Most civic organisations need to be near to the centre of national power politics to engage more effectively with state actors and justify their anti-statist worth in the eyes of donors. This was confirmed by a respondent who noted why a move to Abuja became necessary for his organisation: 'to establish our presence near the arena of power, to enable us to confront state officials and institutions in the interest of the people … our donors want proof of our activities, they want value for money' (Interview, Programme Officer, Association 1,[25] Jos, 21 June 2003).

As donor funding became more scarce and competitive following the restoration of democracy, local civic organisations and activists became 'very concerned by the apparent switch again to state and international NGOs in funding priorities of the international community in Nigeria' (International IDEA 2000: 210). Pro-democracy associations now relocated to Abuja hoping to compete with state institutions for donor funding and, perhaps, more importantly, to be noticed by donors in this 'new site' of national power.

Distribution of Organisations: Activities and Social Character

It is pertinent to highlight the distribution of Nigerian civic organis-
ations in terms of their activities and to determine their inherent social
character and, by extension, understand the basis of their political action
(examined in the following chapter). To begin with, there is strong
evidence of the class character, in terms of personnel, objectives and
programmes, of the 122 organisations I traced. In a study of 'organised
interests and democratisation in Nigeria', Jega notes that while most
labour and professional associations were founded in the earlier period,
avowedly pro-democracy and civil liberty organisations emerged much
later, particularly in the period since 1987, indicating the influence of the
neoliberal agenda: 'foreign funding by donor agencies has contributed a
lot to their growing activism' (Jega 1998: 3). The key points that emerge
from Jega's study are: first, Nigeria's pro-democracy movement
encompasses a plethora of associations that includes, in addition to the
so-called donor-driven civic associations, 'labour movement,
professional associations, special interest groups and religious
organisations' (Jega 1998: 3). Secondly, these organisations are mainly
urban-based and are, not surprisingly, dominated by urban professionals
and workers, and reflect their interests. Thirdly, donor funding has
resulted in new forms of association (civic organisations) that are
nonetheless dominated by urban professionals – it has also resulted in
undermining others (labour, special interest groups, sectional groups).
Jega's count is presented in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 shows that the highest percentage of pro-democracy
organisations in Jega's list come from labour, followed by groups focused
more specifically on democratisation. Jega claims that together these
groups 'have a national spread and are quite active politically, often
branded or perceived as enemies by successive military regimes' (Jega
1998). Perhaps more importantly, Jega's six key categories include those
emphasised in liberal theory ('pro-democracy groups' and civil rights
groups) and large swathes of *actually existing civil* society: those that often
demeaned as anti-liberal – for instance labour groups. In the context of
Nigeria, other studies have shown that labour and professional
associations provided the pioneering bedrock for anti-statist activity, well
before donor-privileged civic organisations came into existence (for
example Olukoshi 1997; Kukah 1999).

My own dataset of 122 organisations somewhat reflects whilst also
contrasting with Jega's data (1998). The key similarity is that both counts
are based on pro-democracy groups. The key difference is that while Jega's

count claims to be 'national', mine is based on data collected from specific regions and cities (not all) – hence the smaller overall count. Secondly, my data collapses all of Jega's categories into four identified pro-democracy associational groups: labour movement, professional associations, civic associations and sectarian groups (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.4: Distribution of Pro-democracy 'Interest Groups'
in Nigeria: Jega's Count (1998)

S/n	Organisation/activity	No.	†%
	Trade unions	68	33
	Professional associations	25	12.1
	Special interest groups (gender, youth, ethnic)	27	13.1
	Religious groups	15	7.3
	Pro-democracy groups	42	20.4
	Civil rights groups	18	8.7
	Others	11	5.4
	Total	206	100

Source: Adapted from Jega (1998); † added details.

Table 3.5: Distribution of Selected Pro-democracy Groups
in Nigeria: Field Count

S/n	Organisation/activity	No	†%
	Civic associations	63	52
	Trade unions	39	32
3.	Professional associations	16	13
4.	Special interest groups	4	3
	Total	122	100

Source: Field data

The significant proportion of the so-called non-civic organisations in my dataset, particularly pioneers in the struggle for democracy like labour and professional associations, allowed me to *compare* and contrast them in terms of their styles of organisation, internal democratic practices, success/failures in engaging the state, and their inter-organisational

contradictions and complementarities. These issues are taken up in the next section and the following chapter.

Public Debate on the Democratic
Potentials of Civil Society in Nigeria

Nigerian civil society is currently overcrowded, with more groups emerging and multiplying by the day, especially in urban areas. Does the existence or 'mushrooming' of a large number of pro-democracy associations amount to cohesion and economy of energy, especially in engaging the state? We need to address questions raised by Bratton:

> Is there internal democracy in the organisations of civil society? Or do these structures mirror and reinforce the personalistic and authoritarian patterns of rule that prevail at the centre? Are the values of participants truly civic in the sense of recognising the need for moderation and compromise within a broad political community? (Bratton 1989: 430)

As noted in Chapter 2, the dominant discourse on the relationship between a dense civil society and democracy, sees a vibrant civil society, constructed in the mould of voluntary, urban-based civic associations, as an epitome and guarantor of democracy: 'a robust, strong and vibrant civil society strengthens and enhances democracy…the destruction or disappearance of associational life signals the demise of democracy' (Chambers & Kopstein, 2001: 837; see also Narsoo 1991). The key assumption is that a dense 'civil society' is essentially democratic and, therefore, qualifies as a vanguard for achieving national democracy. Some empirical studies seem to reinforce this view. In a study of eight Latin American and African countries, Gridle (1996) offered evidence that a vibrant civil society demanded and achieved democracy from authoritarian leaders engaged democratic leaders for democratic consolidation, expanded the scope of public debate over governance and accountability and energised the public for increased enlightened participation.

However, as revealed in this section (and in the next chapter), while struggling to vindicate themselves as 'democratic role-models', even pro-democracy groups are internally constrained – which adversely affects their democratic claims and struggles. In addition, they are often judged by the public and state officials as 'opportunist', with no sense of democratic practice. This revelation reinforces the conclusion of a study by Remi Aiyede:

> [Nigerian] civil society organisations do not generally observe
> democratic principles in their own internal processes and the leaders
> of such organisations do not always uphold democratic principles
> in engaging the state. This is because the systems and processes of
> control employed by authoritarian regimes affect the strategies civil
> society organisations adopt in carrying on their agenda. These
> processes and their consequences also reflect the character of civil
> society organisations, their relations to the mass populations and,
> thus, their capacity to fulfil their role (Aiyede 2004: 5).[26]

Aiyede's emphasis on structural constraints and the 'character of civil
society' provides an important analytical framework with which to criti-
cally explore civic organisations. I begin with a public discourse on the
subject matter that I encountered during fieldwork in Nigeria.

Pro-democracy Groups in the 'Democratic' Spotlight: The International IDEA Report and the Start of Public Discourse

My fieldwork coincided, fortuitously, with an ongoing debate which
commenced in 2000 on the future of Nigerian democracy. A crucial issue
forming part of the debate was democratic practice amongst pro-
democracy civil society organisations. Many considered this debate timely,
not least because of the disappointments and setbacks, rather than relief,
which followed the restoration of democracy in 1999. At the national
level, 'civilian democrats' were slow to initiate significant changes that
could justify their claims to have returned to democracy. Amongst the
signals of continuing neglect of public opinion include incremental
continuation of structural adjustment measures (commenced by the
military in 1986!) despite public hostility and rejection, in particular, the
withdrawal of fuel subsidies, the freeze on public sector employment and
salary increases; official corruption which was worsened by the failure of
the government to prosecute top government functionaries in previous
regimes; governmental instability, in particular, a clash of interest between
the Presidency and the two houses of parliament over legislative and
policy matters. Amongst civil society groups, the end of military rule
created crises of relevance to their democratising agenda, but also
concerns about their internal cohesion and readiness to engage the state in
the era of democratic consolidation. This was especially the case for pro-
democracy groups, who, hitherto, had capitalised on the urgency of ending
authoritarianism and, in the process, insulated their internal structure and
activities from any critical scrutiny.

To counter rising discontent, the federal government invited an international NGO, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), to commence a 'democratic audit'. In conducting its project, International IDEA adopted a participatory method and created diverse forums for Nigerians in all walks of life – civil society activists, public officers, elected representatives, workers, professionals, market women, students, water vendors, youth – to contribute to a 'dialogue'. The key values that underpinned International IDEA's methodology include the following:

- *Participation* of individuals and organisations from various segments of society – governmental and non-governmental, women and men, leaders and followers etc – which were 'valued and accorded with equal weight' (International IDEA 2001: 15)
- A *result-driven approach* aimed at deriving 'definite strategies and proposals on how to implement activities that strengthen democracy' (International IDEA op cit.)
- An emphasis on *dialogue rather* than on the top–down approach which often underpin the teaching of subjects or the imparting of skills. In the case of its Workshops, for instance, International IDEA claims that they were 'anchored on an exchange of ideas in rapid, creatively secured sessions. There were no lectures or the sharing of papers…' (International IDEA op cit). Other values include:

a) The adoption of a *workshop format*, which meant that 'participants actually worked together to generate the substance of the Report, rather than rely on facilitators and resource persons for the interpretation of ideas'.
b) An emphasis on *building consensus* on key issues and proposals.
c) A focus on *strategic directions* that could indicate priorities for activities supportive of governance in Nigeria.

In addition to national and regional workshops and conferences, the project involved other methods such as focus group discussions, conversations and interviews, conducted by resource persons and field researchers, to elicit the views of the Nigerian public. This project also involved an institutional survey of key governmental and non-governmental organisations ranging from the military, and the legislature, to civil society.

The dialogue had two outcomes. The first was a report entitled

Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogues for Nation-Building, produced in 2000. The following year, a follow-on report entitled *Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogues Report of the Zonal Workshops* was published. Both reports were widely distributed throughout Nigeria, and were constructively critical.

The 2000 report is divided into 14 chapters[27] and its chapter on civil society is particularly relevant to this study. The report claims that the project's team of field researchers consulted individual and group players in the civil society grouping on some key issues in a democratic audit which include, among others:

- *The capacity of civic organisations to engage the state*: the reports asked: 'what are the gaps in the capacity? What is the resource and funding situation of civil organisations currently?' (International IDEA 2001, 208)
- *The degree of cohesion of civil society crucial for collective action*: 'what therefore is the level of unity of purpose? Which alliances and coalitions have been archived and which have been sustained or discarded and why?' (International IDEA op cit.)
- *The state of internal democracy in civil organisations*: 'what are the internal governance issues faced by civil society in Nigeria? These are very important if democracy is to be sustainable, as it is not only the state and polity that needs to be democratised, but civil society as well.' (International IDEA op cit.).

Overall, the report noted several limitations of pro-democracy groups whilst also noting some of their potentials in engaging the democratic state. Its observation on democratic practice amongst organisations is particularly revealing:

An important challenge is the state of internal democracy and the internal governance situation in civil society. These were found to be very poor indeed. Some organisations have not been holding regular meetings. The term in office is overstayed by long periods without re-election. In many organisations, there are no constitutions. In some cases where there are constitutions, provisions are made for life leadership for the pioneering leader. In some others, provisions exist for leadership change only after the leader has reached a ripe old age, in one case, 70 years (International IDEA 2001, 211).

The report made a number of recommendations to improve the ailing profile of civil society. For instance, it suggested the need for 'creating internal governance structures that facilitate accountability', and that 'new civil society organisations' should only be encouraged in 'weak areas' such as consumer rights, and in geographical regions where they remain less vibrant (International IDEA 2001, 213).

The report had two implications for this research. First, it pushed wider democratic issues and, in particular, the question of civil society's vibrancy and democratic role-modelling potentials into the public domain. Hitherto, these concerns had been raised mainly in intellectual debates or amongst civil society organisations themselves.[28] In other words, it sparked off a public discourse ready to be tapped into from an ethnographic perspective and, perhaps more importantly, generated widespread interest amongst the members of the general public and allowed for enthusiastic access to respondents. Secondly, the issues raised by the report provide a useful framework for analysis (see next chapter).

The report both initiated and popularised the public debate on Nigerian democracy and civil society in particular. It provided the much-needed space for reflections on Nigeria's journey towards democracy and the future. The International IDEA report is quite unlike previous exercises, which were largely initiated and dominated by the state and failed to achieve their objectives.[29] A notable distinction and strength of the International IDEA exercise was that it was, perhaps, the first national debate that involved cooperative and enthusiastic participation of the government and civil society. As a result, the Report's reflexive findings and recommendations were widely accepted by the state, civil society organisations and the public. In addition to publicising the key challenges of Nigerian democracy, the International IDEA *dialogue* revealed, in the context of pro-democracy groups, their shortfalls and the urgency of internal democratic reform amongst organisations: it provided a provocative vista for action. An official of one civic association, a man and young lawyer informed me humorously: 'All this while, many of us have assumed that being "democratic" is our second name. This IDEA report has proved us wrong. It shows how imperfect some organisations are. It shows our state of democratic disrepair and the urgent need for repair' (interview with the official of Association 7, Lagos, 17 September 2003; see next chapter for details).

In sum, the previous section has revealed that pro-democracy organisations are not as 'democratic' as their image depicts. In particular, these organisations demonstrate democratic deficit in spite of their benign

claims to be achieving Nigerian democracy. Why is there this contradiction between claim and reality? Is it connected to any faulty organisational 'structures' and values built by associations and activists? Or is it linked to constraints arising from the state and state officials? What are the implications of funding sources for autonomous action? These issues are explored in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter reveals that Nigerian civil society is far from being a recent phenomenon: it is deeply rooted in domestic history and, in particular, the process of state formation, social differentiation and class dynamics which are deeply associated with colonialism and capitalist penetration of Nigeria. Equally important, it is noted that the state, both during colonial rule and in the post-colonial dispensation, has been instrumental in moulding the character of civil society through socio-economic and political processes that reproduced social differentiation and inequality. As a result, civil society emerged, both by design and default, as an arena of both anti-state and pro-state activities; it also emerged as a terrain constantly besieged by ruling political elites and divisive political discourses. This became manifest in Nigeria's post-independence era when the state became an instrument for divide and rule in the hands of ethnic and regional fractions of the ruling class. In this scenario, civil society fell prey to both repressive and divisive tendencies whilst also struggling to wield unity and solidarity. The advent of military rule since the 1960s threw down a plethora of challenges to the organisation of civil society: it graduated from being anti-statist in the 1960s to complacent (whilst also assertive) in the era of 'oil boom' (1970s), a victim of repression (1980s) and a force vulnerable to cooption (1990s). In essence, it is evident that the character of civil society was influenced, in no small measure, by state politics and societal realities.

Similarly, evidence from this chapter unveils some flaws associated with the dominant liberal discourse, in particular, the view of a dense and vibrant civil society as essentially autonomous, independent, 'democratic' and crucial to the achievement and consolidation of a democratic state. First, in terms of 'density', the chapter shows that the landscape of civil society in Nigeria contains a plethora of organisations, apparently more than are conceptually estimated in the liberal literature. It emerges as a domain populated not only by civic associations but also older forms of associations, particularly the labour, professional and 'sectarian' associations. Indeed, these latter organisations provide the foundation on

which civic organisations emerged since the 1980s. Thus, it is risky to divorce civic organisation from a milieu populated by other associations, particularly labour – an issue explored further in the next chapter and in the context of class confrontation between 'civil society' and the state.

A second conclusion relates to the claim that civil society carries enormous democratic credentials, as argued by some liberal scholars (for example Putnam 1995; Herbeson 1994a; 1994b). The Nigerian situation suggests that while pro-democracy groups may be instrumental in pioneering and achieving democratic governance, they are not themselves necessarily democratic (see also Beckman 1997; Jega 1999). Pro-democracy groups could be beset by internal constraints as well as by structural bottlenecks and, therefore, it is not surprising if they demonstrate a democratic deficit. In other words, there is a disparity between claims about the structures and role of pro-democracy groups and their real-world performance and perceptions.

A third concluding remark relates to the 'autonomy' of civil society. Evidence from this chapter suggests that, given the role of the state in regulating civil society, 'infiltrating' the ranks of civil and political societies, 'cloning' its own associations, particularly in times of national crises, it is problematic to conceptualise civil society as a sphere autonomous of the state. The risk of constructing civil society as autonomous is further vindicated by the nature of state power as well as the potentially corrupt framework for regulating civil society organisations (especially during military rule). It is also exposed by the potential divisions and animosities that exist within civil society organisations, in particular, the disparity between pro-state and anti-state activists in terms of their materialist motives.

4

Confrontations with the State: Labour Movements and Civic Associations

In the previous chapter it was noted that the rise of civil society in Nigeria is closely associated with the process of class formation and dynamics in which the petty-bourgeois-dominated state plays a central role (see also Tar 2007b). This indicates that 'class' plays a key role in understanding the relationship between the state and 'civil society'. We have also seen that civil society organisations assumed a diverse, but contradictory, character – civil/political; pro-state/anti-state – which manifested in Nigeria's post-colonial era. The chapter further demonstrated that civic associations constitute 'new entrants', as compared to 'older' groups such as professional associations and labour organisations, and that the former have dominated the imagery of 'civil society' in spite of the latter's pioneering record in democratic and anti-state struggles. At issue is the risk of privileging civic associations in a milieu populated by many forms of associations – pro-democratic and anti-democratic; pro-state and anti-state, and so on. This chapter builds on the foregoing discoveries to explore the labour movement and civic organisations, as different, albeit related, fronts for class confrontation against the state. Crucially, this chapter draws our attention to the following theoretical and empirical issues:

1) The need to understand the relationship between 'civil society' and the state in terms of class confrontations and struggles – that is, the materialist and existential factors underlying the anti-state and democratic struggles staged by 'civil society' in general.
2) The need to 'problematise' the very conception of civil society as an all-encompassing concept and to recognise its diversity.

3) As two examples of 'civil society', labour and civic associations demonstrate a number of commonalities, but also differences that can be usefully and critically explored: the material conditions giving rise to them, their organisational profiles, methods of engaging the state as well as their democratic potentials and limitations.

4) In the context of labour and civic associations as two potentially exposed examples of 'civil society', the need to explore interorganisational relationships, as a demonstration of class alliances where these occur.

Data for this comparison come mainly from fieldwork interviews, participant observation and archival research. Most claims made are context-specific, and are 'qualified' in terms of location and date of event, issue in question, as well as interviewee (and my) positionality.

The State, Labour Movement, Civic Associations and Democratic Struggles in Nigeria: Analytical Issues

This chapter employs class analysis to examine state–civil society relations in the context of democratic change. An upfront problematising of 'class' is imperative, not least because it allows for categorisation and analysis of the relationships between social actors in state and civil society.

Defining Class and Classifying Social Actors in State and Civil Society

The word 'class' is often used to denote different, often conflicting, social groups defined by their differential access to socio-economic resources and political power – at its clearest in a capitalist economy where class divisions are the most manifest.[1] In this regard, Rosemary Crompton and John Scott, note that classes 'are seen as forming a set of layers or strata in a *hierarchy*, as in terms of 'upper', 'middle' and 'lower' class' (Crompton and Scott 2000: 1). More specifically, but still at an aggregate level, they note, class has been used to capture 'occupational groupings', 'status groupings' or 'prestige ranking' (Crompton and Scott op cit.), arguing that these labels have implications for power relations. A useful distinction has been made between two conceptualisations of the concept, both rooted in classical sociology. The first conceptualisation, rooted in Max Weber, sees class in terms of specific indices: wealth, income, social status, political influence and power. Crucially, 'these indices produce more than abstract social categories – they create groups which are aware of their position in society and may act to transform it' (Bujra 2004: 3). Hence, the emergence

of such tangential terminologies as *class consciousness, class interest, class relations* and *class conflict*. Class consciousness and conflict emerge when individuals become aware of their unequal socio-economic and political status and strive, consciously and in unity, to advance and protect them. In other words, class relation is interest-driven and conflictual.

The second conceptualisation, rooted in Karl Marx, sees class in term of relations of production,[2] in particular, the process of domination and exploitation that defines economic power. For Marx,

> class relationships are embedded in production relationships; more specifically, in the pattern of ownership and control which characterise these relationships. Thus the 'two great classes' of the capitalist society are bourgeoisie and proletariat, the former being the owners and controllers of the material means of production, the latter owning only their labour power, which they are forced to sell to the bourgeoisie in order to survive (Crompton 1993: 23).[3]

Whilst Weberian and Marxist definitions of class are both rooted in sociology and focused on the same context– capitalist societies[4] – they differ in some respects. For instance, Weber emerged with simplified class categories – namely upper, lower and middle – defined by 'indexical' status differentiation rather than on the structure of the capitalist economy. On the other hand, Marx emerged with more discrete categories – proletariat, petty-bourgeoisie, bourgeoisie – defined by their stake in capitalist economic and political structures.

An important issue of nomenclature that derives from the Marxist typology is the term *petty-bourgeoisie*. In Marxist terminology, the term applies strictly to *capital* including those who produced goods (small manufacturers) and services (for example medical, transport, legal). Indeed, it logically includes peasants in so far as they hire labour; the hiring of labour being a basis of capitalist accumulation. Marx's subsequent work has clouded this original narrower meaning: first, the intelligentsia, even those employed by the state, are often seen as ideological mercenaries of capitalism. Second, the expansion of state employment globally has squeezed out independent professionals (often denoted as petty-bourgeoisie), incorporated into welfare state. Third, in developing economies where capitalism is weak (dependent economies), state employees (such as bureaucrats, administrators) come to play a significant role. These are people with borrowed power, not capital, though indigenous policies such as privatisation may potentially give them

access to capital. They are often described, for instance, as 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie', 'petty-bourgeoisie' or 'compradorial bourgeoisie' in developing world/Africa literature (see Alavi 1982; Lubeck 1987). These terminologies are often extended to politicians as well as bureaucrats. Hence, the term 'political class' is more appropriate in developing economies, as it recognises that politicians, bureaucrats, are recruited from professionals and/or small capital.

In essence, the relevance of capitalist labels to developing economies of Africa, where capitalism has not been fully established, is a matter of debate. Here, industrialisation has not significantly flourished; societies are predominantly poor, rural and agrarian, while the precise character of class relations is atypical and ambivalent. Janet Bujra puts it more incisively, and is worth quoting at length:

> We are not referring here to societies with large wage labouring class directly exploited by a bourgeoisie whose power has been consolidated. We are witnessing the process of class formation in a context more appropriately described as primitive capital accumulation.[5] Peasant and subsistence cultivators, though still the majority, are subject to increasing and brutal pressure from encroaching capitalist farmers and multinational agrocapital. There is the consolidation of a political class which controls the state through often parasitic forms of accumulation such as land grabbing and corruption, and which is served by an artificially inflated category of state functionaries. A small industrial/commercial/financial sector, dominated by multinational capital, has called into being a minority wage labouring class who are usually from rural areas. Other elements such as a growing army of domestic servants or burgeoning petty commodity producers of the urban informal sector are dependent on other class fractions for their survival (Bujra 2004: 4).[6]

In the particular context of Nigeria, the foregoing conceptual and empirical challenges were noted in Chapter 4 of this volume, where I argued that Nigeria's contemporary class structure does not mirror that of industrialised capitalist economies, and that pre-capitalist structures and modes of livelihood are still prevalent. Nevertheless, I have also noted that Nigeria demonstrates a semblance of 'capitalist classes' – for example the local/national bourgeoisie (the petty-bourgeoisie), labour and the peasantry (see also Onimode 1982)[7] – and engaged the debate over the

existence, composition, internal logic and potential roles of the petty-bourgeoisie (for example Depelchin, 1979: 20; Hutchful, 1979: 41; Turner 1980). The following key arguments are worth noting in this chapter. First, whilst capitalist relations of production are not well entrenched, Nigeria's oil economy has generated massive development of capitalist structures and institutions with capitalist classes and class relations. In consequence Nigeria is described as one of 'Black Africa's most developed capitalist states' (Lubeck 1987: 383). It is apparent that as a dependent capitalist economy, dominant fractions of Nigeria's foreign 'manufactured elite' (Onimode 1988: 101),[8] particularly the military, politicians, Industrialists and local contractors, have been able to dominate the state, though they are also heavily constrained from consolidating their power because of the divisive and regionally uneven nature of Nigeria's national politics. Nigeria's 'rentier economy' operates to the benefit of dominant foreign bourgeois and 'subservient' local counterparts. In particular, Nigeria's local petty-bourgeois ruling class has been able to maintain an edge over weaker classes: urban professionals, wage labourers and the peasants (see Forrest 1987: 334).

Framework of Analysis

This chapter aims to examine class confrontation between, on the one hand, the state, represented by a dominant petty-bourgeois ruling class, and, on the other, labour and civic organisations, represented by wage labourers and urban professionals. Over the years, the latter have evolved contrasting, but also complementary, styles of organisation in engaging the state on socio-economic and political issues which clearly demonstrate that they are involved in forms of class struggle against the state. Secondly, they probably constitute the most powerful players in the 'field', which allows for comparison and perhaps some guarded generalisation.

It is worthy of note, however, that these two groups stand apart – for instance, in terms of historical evolution and social origin of actors. On the one hand, labour unions and workers' struggles in Nigeria date back to the colonial era and have traditionally been aimed at contesting relations of production against those who protect the interests of capital (to which the colonial state was a party – being the largest employer of labour). In other words, trade unions were aimed at providing better material conditions for labourers, even though, in doing so, they were often compelled by circumstances to join the bandwagon of wider social and democratic struggles that aimed to satisfy the wishes and aspirations of actors other than workers, in particular, the masses beyond that tiny

Table 4.1: The Labour Movement, Civic Associations and Class Struggles in Nigeria: An Analytical Framework

Organisational profiles: organisational history and styles of organisations, including structures, objectives.

Funding sources and implications for autonomous action.

Internal democratic practices[9]: the extent to which groups can mount a cohesive front for engaging the state. The aim is to highlight the organisational structures and practices with a view to showing how organisations accommodate inclusivity, observe regular elections, hold meetings.

Fragmentation and conflict resolution: the extent to which each group is united and/or divided and implications for agency and conflict resolution.

Relative success in engaging the state: the extent to which groups withstand the state in their struggles.

Cross-organisational conflict/cooperation: the extent to which groups forge ties and build collective fronts to press home their demands. This also includes the extent to which common experience – for example SAP, which affected both professionals and labourers – led to contrasting types of organisations and/or the creation of alliances to confront the state.

minority in employment. On the other hand, civic organisations, particularly the pro-democracy and civil liberties movements considered in this chapter emerged in the 1980s onwards, founded mainly by urban professionals, with the intention of struggling for legal/institutional and democratic reforms.

Such professionals are themselves largely wage-labourers employed by the state, though by virtue of their education and scarce skills they command privileged wages and style of life. Not surprisingly, therefore, there are areas of convergence between the two, which have occasionally led to united action. Given their social status *vis-à-vis* dominant state officials, actors in the labour movement and civic associations have found themselves in alliance to contest relations of domination against the state. Certainly, they share a common fate in terms of being at the receiving end of harsh economic policies adopted by the state. Indeed, they were amongst the worst hit by the effect of structural adjustment policies adopted since the 1980s. Such policies provoked protest and from workers and professionals alike. Similarly, workers and professionals may, and often do, share a common world view of politics and governance, particularly on the desired democratic system that can forestall hardships

and build socio-economic justice to which they are often subjected. This is explored in terms of a framework developed in Table 4.1.

Below I examine the Nigerian labour movement and civic associations as different 'fronts' of anti-state and democratic struggles.

The Nigerian Labour Movement: Structure, Activities and Struggles
The Nigerian labour movement emerged from working-class struggle accompanying the process of class formation, in particular, 'proletarianisation' (see Chapter 3). The process started in the colonial era, but was carried forward to the post-colonial era. The emergence of industries and bureaucracy led to the rise of migrant wage labour and it became necessary for workers to organise and protect their interests. By the turn of the twentieth century a number of unions had emerged, particularly amongst railwaymen, teachers and factory workers, to advance the interest of wage labourers. Key examples include the Nigeria Civil Service Union (NCSU), founded in 1912; the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NTC), formed in 1931; and the Railway Workers' Union (RWU), founded in 1931. These unions contributed to the struggle for independence, alongside other indigenous groups. Throughout the post-independence period, the labour movement has been at the forefront of workers' struggles and anti-state movement – a key rationale for the military state to intervene in the reorganisation and control of labour.

In 1978, the military state imposed a Decree which sought ostensibly to amalgamate hitherto acrimonious trade unions into a single labour federation, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). Apparently, and for obvious reasons, the Decree aimed to contain labour struggle and radicalism: first, the Nigerian state acquired a stake in the labour sector as the greatest employer of labour. Second, the petty-bourgeois political class (and its foreign capitalist financiers) have a vested interest in capitalist accumulation which they often promote through the state's instruments of coercion and labour regulation. Nevertheless,

> while it has had its own problems, and while military rule has seriously mediated its influence and autonomy, the labour movement remained one of the most persistent opponents of military rule in Nigeria. For this posture it suffered proscription, government intervention in its affairs, the promulgation of draconian decrees and edicts regulating union activities (Ihonvbere 1997: 80).

As further noted by Adesina, 'organised labour in Nigeria had since the 1940s developed a reputation for militant defence of workers' rights and policy advocacy in issues that concern the working people – even if fractiously so' (Adesina 2000: 143).

Organisational Profile

The Nigeria labour movement is led by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) which, as we have seen, was formally constituted as a single federation of trade unions in 1978. Its mission is generously radical and ambitious:

> to organise, unionise and educate all categories of Nigerian workers; defend and advance the political, economic, social and cultural rights of Nigerian workers; emancipate and unite Nigerian workers and people from all forms of exploitation and discrimination; achieve gender justice in the work place and in NLC; strengthen and deepen the ties and connections between Nigerian workers and the mutual/natural allies in and outside Nigeria and lead the struggle for the transformation of Nigeria into a just, humane and democratic society.[10]

NLC has developed 'as the sole national labour centre' with a strong membership base of over 1,000 national industrial unions and state councils (Beckman, Akwetey and Lindström 2000: 25). Before the emergence of NLC, there were four labour centres: the Nigeria Trade Union Congress (NTUC), Labour Unity Front (LUF), United Labour Congress (ULC) and Nigeria Workers' Council (NWC), each with several affiliated unions. Relations between these labour federations were highly acrimonious during the colonial era but compounded in the decades following independence. When it came to confronting the state and/or employers, these federations exhibited both unity and disunity.

With a membership of about 4 million and spanning Nigeria's public and private sectors, NLC emerged as the key labour organisation in post-colonial Nigeria, representing 10 percent of Nigeria's total labour force (an estimated 50 million).[11] It has 29 affiliate unions and 37 state councils – each affiliate also has a corresponding structure at the industrial/state levels. There is 'internal politics' both within NLC and between its affiliated unions. Given Nigeria's oil economy, oil sector unions have been more assertive and stronger than non-oil sector unions. This became apparent in the aftermath of the annulment of the 12 June 1993

presidential elections, when the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) 'spearheaded' NLC's anti-military and democratic struggles, when the NLC national executive was infiltrated by state influence. Ihonvbere (1997) notes that these oil-sector unions coordinated a series of industrial actions which brought the Nigerian economy to a halt, demanding that the military withdraw from power and restore a democratic system. Similarly, compared to NLC's northern branches, those in the industrialised southern part of the country have demonstrated a more resilient anti-statist profile, particularly in the post-1993 period.

Given the potential strength of the labour movement in Nigeria, the state has long sought to control it. In 1978 the military regime of General Obasanjo brought the four labour federations together into the single Nigerian Labour Congress, under state domination. Since then, it has sought to stop the formation of unions in key strategic sectors. For instance, successive Trade Union Decrees have excluded military and para-military personnel as well as some public sector establishments (designated as 'essential services'[12]) from forming industrial unions, let alone joining the NLC – this is reinforced by the Essential Services Decree of 1977 which states that these organisations cannot form labour unions or participate in industrial action. Paradoxically, the state failed in its bid to declare the Nigerian oil sector an 'essential service' or stop oil sector workers from joining the labour movement – as it previously did in the education sector through the Teaching (Essential Services) Decree of 1993 which effectively (but temporarily) banned the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU; the national union of university teachers), and disaffiliated it from the NLC.

In sum, the Nigerian labour movement comprises a variety of unions that represent the specific interest of workers. They struggle for the rights and welfare of workers, in particular for 'decent' wages and improved conditions of service. Where negotiations fail to achieve the desired result, labour unions are noted for resorting to *militant action* – such as stay at homes, work to rule, demonstrations and street protests – which are capable of not only grounding the particular production process but, sometimes and more crucially, the economy. Such struggles are directed at both private and public sector employers and at the state and its alliance of ruling classes who generally protect the interest of capital whilst seeking to regulate labour. Apart from struggling for workers' welfare, most labour unions in Nigeria claim to represent the interests of the socially

marginalised and oppressed segments of society, in particular, the masses and peasants who, like workers, are seen as standing at the receiving end of unjust state policies.

Funding Sources and Implications

In spite of its large membership and impressive profile of worker militancy and anti-state activism, the NLC lacks independent and adequate sources of funding. There are two sources of funding, each controlled by either the state or the employer (public/private sector organisations). The first source is membership subscriptions, but these are normally collected by the employer and then handed over to the union leadership. The money is then shared between the national body and the local branch. The second source of funding is government subvention, which is common when the union is in serious financial crisis. Military regimes have exploited NLC's lack of money by underwriting its bankruptcy and awarding it monetary incentives in return for conformity. This has come close to regime 'take over'. At the slightest of excuses, regimes have capitalised on NLC's financial and other vulnerabilities to sack union leaders and appoint Sole Administrators under state orders. Regime interventions have often been justified in terms of intra-union skirmishes, corruption, but in reality they were intended to contain dissent and ensure government control of the Congress.

In times of industrial action, employers are empowered to withhold the collection and/or transfer of union dues to the union leadership, as a means of compelling a return to work. This has often left union leaders with a stark choice: either to submit or to make do with no funds. Another key problem is the manner in which membership dues are spent. NLC leaders are often accused of financial impropriety, leading to disunity and lack of trust, especially within local branches. This creates opportunities for the state to intervene in their activities.

Until recently, the NLC and, in particular, manual workers, have not been beneficiaries of foreign donors, who viewed them, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, as a 'radical', 'socialist' or 'anti-capitalist' force (see Adesina 2000: 515). Because donors channelled their resources to civic associations, labour activists tried to overcome this financial handicap by networking with civic associations or forming new organisations under union control. Following Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the NLC allied with some civic associations and became part of joint bids for donor funds. For instance, during the 2003 elections the NLC's Civil Society pro-Democracy Network (CSPN) was granted funding by the EU, the United

Nations Development Programme and the National Endowment for Democracy. Donor funding has enabled the NLC to overcome its over-dependence on the 'controversial' membership dues and state subvention. However, as expected, donor funding for labour unions carried serious implications in terms of their capacity for autonomous action.

Internal Democratic Practices

The NLC demonstrates, on face value, a robust organisational framework which seeks to accommodate the diverse interests of its members and affiliates. As a large-scale organisation, it has been prone to conflict and fragmentation. At the topmost level is the National Delegates Conference (NDC), which brings together delegates from all industrial unions affiliated to the NLC and takes crucial decisions on constitutional matters. The NDC is run by an executive who serves a term of two years. The second level is the National Executive Council (NEC), charged with the responsibility of formulating key decisions and policies of the union. Members of the NEC represent the NLC in industrial negotiations and collective bargaining with employers and the state. The Central Working Committee (CWC), a third organ, is charged with 'strategic' responsibility, in particular the planning and staging of industrial action. The National Administrative Council (NAC) administers the union. Finally, a Secretariat, headed by a General Secretary (GS), is responsible for the daily operations of Congress and executes policies and decisions of organs. Deputy and Assistant General Secretaries (DGS & AGS) oversee specific departments[13] which are run on a day-to-day basis by paid professional staff.

A formal description of the organisational structure of the NLC reveals very little about the reality of internal democratic practice. Certain key factors adversely affect the NLC's structure. First, by law, the state has substantial legal control over the union. These powers are granted by the Labour (and Associated Matters) Decree and the Trade Unions Decree, which are regularly reviewed to reinforce the state's powers. With these legal powers, the state can legally intervene in the affairs of unions. This was a common practice in the era of military rule, when arbitrary action was initiated against union activities – for example proscription of unions, detention of leaders/members. Second, at some points in time, particularly during national political crises, the NLC finds itself politically divided and fragmented, with different state branches and members from different ethnic groups and regions supporting conflicting tendencies. Equally important, the NLC has struggled to combine and unite these tendencies.

Third, too often the NLC is resource-starved, leading to corrupt practices and internal crises. Finally, the space of autonomous and democratic action by the NLC is highly contingent, ranging from one political period to another. The NLC was 'freer' and more democratic during civilian phases of government (1960–65; 1979–83; and 1999 to date). For instance between 1979 and 1983, when the NLC witnessed a great degree of autonomy and was led by very popular unionists, there was a marked spirit of 'solidarity' amongst members and democratic practice was regularly applied. Conversely, between 1985 and 1999, when Nigeria was under military rule, the NLC reached its lowest point in terms of democratic practice. Even though state repression further agitated anti-state protest, it also diminished the space for autonomy and democratic action.

Drawing on field enquiries and observations carried out in 2003 at the NLC's national office in Abuja, I noted that the NLC combines a contradictory observance and violation of democratic criteria (identified above; see 'Framework of analysis'). On the one hand it seemed to operate fairly democratically, both nationally and in local branches – particularly in terms of regular elections, meetings, constitutionalism and due process. Regular meetings are held to discuss union and societal matters. Elections are held regularly in which members participate in electing local and national officials. Local representatives to the NDC and other national bodies and events are drawn from, and elected democratically in, local branches. The NLC has a constitution, which is reviewed regularly and forms the legal framework of the union. It has a website and in-house newsletter, the *Labour News*, distributed to members, even though the flow of information is hampered by a host of factors, ranging from apathy amongst members to lack of resources to maintain publication.

Although showing signs of democratic practice as outlined above, the NLC showed an inherent failure in the area of social inclusivity, especially of women and those from minority ethnic groups. In the case of women, a count of those currently in leadership position at the national level showed that out of 13 officers, only two were women. This lack of inclusivity has also been the prevailing trend in most individual unions. Given that women constitute a significant proportion of Nigeria's workforce and wider civil society struggles (International IDEA 2000: 123), this distribution is indeed disproportionate.[14] In other words, like other organisations in Nigeria, the NLC is dominated by men. It is also weak in the area of consensus-building, with members often divided by sectarian interests, in particular religion, ethnic and regional differences (see below). Another key problem of the NLC, until recently, was its poor

record on maintaining transparency and accountability. Scandals involving the abuse of funds by union officials are common. Thus, the NLC cannot be said to be very democratic. This is confirmed by the NLC's own self-criticism, which emerged in the context of a post-military situation analysis:

- Internal operations of the trade union movement in Nigeria give cause for great concern. Military rule and the attendant might-is-right ethos have impacted on civil society, including unions, occasioning some acute imitative militarism. Some of the worst manifestations in the movement can be seen in an officership culture that is not founded on principles of democracy and union rules and values.
- Major decisions on policies are occasionally adopted without broad consultations or debates within the union and its various organs.
- Harmony and synergy between union leadership and membership have in some cases been subverted by poor officership, involving no consultation and legitimacy. Thus, the membership is not able to own the union or its decisions and tends to be apathetic.
- Observed lapses and sharp practice in relation to finances exact a heavy toll on resources and funds, with the attendant consequences of weakened capacity and trust.
- Modes of internal communication are inadequate (NLC, 2006).

However, while the lack of internal democracy constitutes a serious blow to claims of 'democratic struggle', the NLC does have the potential to generate worker and mass solidarity, in particular, to mobilise popular support for anti-state action. Aiyede argues that 'The labour movement owes its prominence less to its internal democratic structure or its technical capacity than to its ability to mobilise as a vehicle to create space for democratic debate and contestation, or even constrain the state, especially when the leadership is urged on by pressure from below' (Aiyede 2004a: 226).

Fragmentation, Divisions and Conflict Resolution
In spite of a strong profile of anti-statist, pro-worker and popular activism, the NLC has been 'riddled with disunity, factional struggles and inter-union competition with consequences up to the present' (Barchiesi 1996: 356). To be sure, the labour movement is relatively weak and fragmented, even though it is at the forefront of opposition against state policies (see following section).A number potential factors underpin fragmentation in the

Nigerian Labour Movement: political, socio-economic and cultural; each underpinning factor is define by specific context – for instance, military rule vs civilian democratic era. Politically, some unions are more assertive than other and this tends to create a 'bone of contention' over power and influence. This factor was spectacularly displayed in the 1990s when, due to state control, the national organ of the NLC became less assertive. As will be seen below, the struggle was timely carried over by oil-sector unions. Another source of fragmentation is the contingent positionality adopted by certain unions – especially union leaders – in respect of certain political issues which had huge implications for union-wide solidarity, trust and harmony. For instance, between 1994 and 1998, there were alleged divisions between 'northern' and 'southern' unions over support for the ruling Abacha Regime. Southern-based unions adopted a 'hard-line' and militant approach to engaging the state: for instance, along with most civil society organisations and pressure groups based in the Lagos-Ibadan Axis and the Niger Delta, labour became part of a formidable underground network that supported, among others, (a) immediate withdrawal of the military from power as a minimum condition for a return to 'normalcy' (b) the entrenchment of civil liberties denied by the military (c) urgent 'repair' of the economy, particularly abandonment of the World Bank inspired structural adjustment programme (d) establishment of a sovereign national conference (popularly known as SNC or confab) as a nation-wide nerve centre for addressing key national questions: for example power and resource sharing, military intervention, federalism etc (c) reinstatement of Mashood Abiola, the winner of June 12 1993 election, then imprisoned by the Abacha Regime, as the legitimate president of Nigeria. Apparently, the hard-line and militant approach of the southern-based unions was at variance with those of their northern counter-parts who were seemingly sympathetic of a less militant and 'soft' solution to the country's national crises. Associated with this debacle were tendencies for stereotyping: southern unions were construed as 'patriotic', 'progressive' and 'die-hard', while northern unions were jeered as 'conservative', 'saboteurs', 'sale-outs'. However, it is premature to use a blanket ideational stereotype to describe northern-based union. In terms both of approach and opinion, there were indications of convergences and divergences that reinforce either solidarity or division. For instance, while they were less sympathetic of militarist *approach or* sovereign national conference, in terms proposed by the southern-based labour and NGOs, northern-based unions too adopted hard-line position on such *issues* as putting an end to military rule, entrenchment of civil and political liberties and suspension structural adjustment.

Socio-economically, the Nigerian Labour Movement has been characterised by divisions over existential matters: the collection and management of union funds, acceptance or rejection of state subvention, which is seen to risk autonomy, as well as approach to state-foisted economic policies such as privatisation of public enterprises, introduction of user charges on public goods and services, retrenchment of workers and devaluation of naira, the national currency. As will be seen below, division over these matters is often between union leadership, particularly when such leaders are imposed by, and beholden to, the military, and common members. Similarly, allegations abound regarding 'embezzlement' of union funds by corrupt union leaders, sparking intra-union skirmishes, emergency conventions, votes-of-no-confidence and, ultimately, state intervention. Furthermore, union members are, more often than not, opposed to accepting state funds – a temptation which has proved difficult to avoid for union leaders, particularly those beholden to the state.

Finally, there are *cultural* and geo-political undertones to conflict and fragmentation in the Nigerian Labour Movement. For instance, in the period 1994-1998, there were divisions between northern and southern unions regarding cultural affinities of particular union members/official to specific 'political' matters. Southern-based unions were disappointed with their northern colleagues for allegedly supporting a regime led by their fellow northerner, General Abacha. It is worthy of note, however, that such division were driven more by suspicion, allegation and stereotyping than by logic and fact. Nevertheless, it presented an apparent source of conflict capable of undermining the strength of efficacy of the Labour movement.

In resolving its internal problems, the Nigerian Labour has significant capacity and in-built mechanism for intra-union and inter-union conflict management, particularly compared to other civil society organisations. As an organisation of based on solidarity, if in principle, unions have a higher reserve of political good will and trust to overcome differences, as demonstrated in the following sections.

In sum, the factors of fragmentation and conflict emanate from two key sources:

- Within the labour movement as an umbrella organisation comprising diverse members and organisations with equally diverse interest and approach to issues Within unions, internal conflicts and rivalries have had the effect of dwindling, dividing and destabilising the NLC. This

has been particularly apparent in times of national political crises, as examined below.

- The state, which often dabbles into, and strategically exploits, intra-union divisions as a means of control. Aside from manipulating fragmentary conflict, the Nigerian state always to claim the monopoly of regulating labour reserving the right to intervene at will and on flimsy grounds, particularly when the interest of the governing class are at stake. Successive governments have often exploited the NLC's internal weakness: 'civil and military regimes maintained an interest in fragmentation of the union movement [which increased] a general sense of distance and distrust between union activists and professional politicians' (Barchiesi 1996: 356).

The foregoing factors are captured in the dramas of labour-state relations which is examined in the following section.

Engaging the State: Successes and Failures

In addition to traditional workers' struggles, and closely associated with them, the Nigerian labour movement has a strong profile of acting as a bulwark of opposition against the excesses of the state and unjust policies, and remained relatively strong and autonomous until the 1980s. This profile is closely linked to Nigeria's relatively strong development of capitalism, especially the emergence of the oil economy. Isa Aremu asserts that labour's political autonomy is manifest in the following: 'direct party formation'; its measured cooperation with the 'progressive national bourgeoisie in an attempt to improve workers' conditions'; and 'contact with international communist movements which favoured the abolition of exploitation and the enthronement of a new social order', even where such contacts were against the wishes of the ruling state actors (Aremu 1997: 174). These assertive measures were a strong indication of autonomous action.

The NLC has always been closely associated with party politics where these were allowed to flourish. In Nigeria's First Republic (1960–66), a section of the labour movement formed the Socialist Workers' and Farmers' Party (SWAFP) and the Nigerian Labour Party (NLP). In the aborted Third Republic, the NLC applied to the National Electoral Commission to register its own party, the National Labour Party (NLP). Its application was rejected. Currently, there is a movement within the NLC to revamp the NLP. Indeed, the NLC's policy on politics states that: (1) Nigerian workers desire their own party; (2) Workers could be organised to create and

develop their own party; (3) the leadership of a worker's party must emerge from the ideologically most advanced, committed persons having their deep roots within the labour movement; (4) the party of the working class must have a programme distinct from all other parties; (5) the party of workers should be based on working-class membership and should be sustained by workers, not by assistance, or 'alliance' with segments of the ruling class.[15]

In terms of engaging the state, the NLC united workers, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, against the tyranny of powerful political and economic classes, in particular military regimes. It also mobilised public opinion against the excesses of the state and its ruling political classes on issues of workers and public welfare – health, education, security, energy, as well as democratic change. In the process, the NLC encountered several frontlines, with success and failures. Below, I examine two contexts of the struggle.

NLC and Socio-economic Struggles

A classical example of labour–state stalemate is in terms of workers' response to austerity and adjustment measures adopted by the state which 'aggravated deterioration in the quality of life of workers' (Barchiesi 1996: 362). For example, the Babangida regime aroused the expectations of workers by promising to abolish obnoxious anti-labour decrees promulgated by the preceding Buhari regime, to expand the scope of workers' freedom, increase their salaries and improve their material conditions. These was soon exposed as empty promises as the regime not only withdrew subsidies on basic products and retrenched public sector workers in keeping with IMF conditionalities, but also promulgated more decrees to repress protesting workers, including one proscribing the NLC. Secondly, in the run-up to the adjustment programme, the Babangida regime imposed on workers their own share of the 'sacrifice' for adjustment, at a time when they could least afford it. In October 1985, the regime declared a National Economic Emergency which was to last for 15 months. As part of the emergency, the regime announced massive pay cuts (between two and 20 percent) for public sector workers. The amount accruing from this deduction was to be paid in to the National Economic Recovery Fund (NERF). Jimi Adesina notes that

> this decision was made unilaterally and without consultation of any sort with the NLC or any other union within the trade union movement. Over the next three years the general impact of adjustment fell severely on the working people. The defence of the

occupational and pecuniary interest of its members brought the Congress into ever more open confrontation with the regime (Adesina 2000: 145).

In 1987, the NLC responded vigorously to General Babangida's argument on the removal of the 'oil subsidy', defending its position with comparative international data on minimum wages and real income. A worker recalled his experience:

> We became one of the most pauperised segments of the society. Our salaries became very insufficient and were not reviewed despite several strikes, negotiations and agreements. The value of the Naira [Nigeria's national currency] swiftly fell; so also were our income level, purchasing power and living standards. In short, we became poor, very poor and constant strike actions became the only way to channel our anger and demands (Interview, Maiduguri, 15 March 2003).

In essence, the situation was extremely desolate and created real pressure for mass protest led by workers. In a study on the impact of structural adjustment on occupational groups in Nigeria, Sina Kawonise and his colleagues concluded that 'SAP, though in an inverse manner, did much to arouse the citizenry to political action' (Kawonise et al., 1998: 56). As noted by Otobo (1992) 'the build-up to the (third triennial delegates' Conference at Benin) was largely influenced by events within the economy, notably the impact of the structural adjustment [programme], (SAP) on wage earners and citizenry in general, and the reaction of the NLC to these' (cited in Adesina 2000):

> The NLC expressed contrary views to those of the government on practically all issues: … unilateral deduction from salaries of public servants in 1987; cost of living indices; the official claims of the 'gains' of the structural adjustment policy; the exchange rates of the Naira; removal of petroleum subsidies; educational policies; human rights records; to political appointments (Otobo, 1992, cited in Adesina 2000).

The above position greatly displeased the Babangida regime, which adopted different measures in response to workers' protests and industrial action. First, it sought to neutralise the NLC itself. The 1988 NLC

Delegates' Conference provided a potential opening for this 'game play'. In the election held at the conference, the regime put up a candidate for the NLC presidency, Takai Shamang. He was soundly defeated, winning just four votes as opposed to the winning candidate, Comrade Ali Chiroma's 280 votes. The regime's candidates to other elective posts in the NLC suffered similar excruciating defeat, inviting an advanced, more decisive, phase of the 'game play'. Adesina puts it better:

> The sealing of the NLC Secretariat by armed security personnel on Monday 29 February, marked a new shift in the government's overt effort to rein-in the NLC. This was followed with the Babangida regime evoking the National Economic Emergency Powers Decree of 1985, and dissolving the leadership of the NLC. A sole administrator was appointed to run the affairs of the Congress (Adesina 2000: 145).

Having succeeded in bringing the NLC under a pro-regime administration, the military sponsored a phoney election in which pro-regime candidate Pascal Bafyau was handpicked by virtue of his status as a candidate acceptable to the regime. On 30 December Bafyau and others were sworn in as elected NLC leaders. Despite the repressive manipulation, in February 1988, labour protest against workers' deteriorating living conditions did not abate: if anything, the protests grew. Thus, in March/April, a series of strike actions staged by workers and students against increasing fuel prices compelled the government to negotiate with the very union leadership that it had dissolved six weeks earlier. Nevertheless, as noted by a former NLC activist: 'The regime's mendacity to retain a discredited [NLC] leadership,[16] plus the hardships of SAP [structural adjustment programme] did not stop us from keeping the flag of strikes flying. We continued our strikes, which was more satisfying than returning to work with an empty stomach' (Interview held in Abuja, 16 August 2003). While the Bafyau-led NLC continued to 'do business' with the regime and defended its policies, agitation amongst shop-floor workers and students continued to increase. Indeed by 1992, from Lagos to Sokoto and Port Harcourt to Maiduguri, Nigeria was rife with industrial action. These strike actions proved decisive as the country prepared for the June 1993 presidential elections.

NLC and Democratic Struggles
While it was reined in by the military in the course of a period of painful

socio-economic change, the NLC proved assertive, at least in a different context – democratic struggle. Paradoxically, the events following the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential elections revealed that the NLC leadership was compelled by shop-floor pressure to take anti-regime action, including strike action. A respondent described how the NLC's style of engaging the state changed post-12 June:

> Babangida and his cronies had many cards to play in our earlier encounters. By June 12, his card had finished and his cookies had crumbled. Things were falling apart and Babangida was not able to come to terms with the damage he had done. He eventually lost control of our Union [NLC] and we became part of the angry wild cat who forced him to quit (interview, Abuja, 16 August 2003).

Following the regime's annulment of the election on 26 June, the Central Working Committee (CWC) of the NLC met in Lagos on the 28th and issued a critique of the regime's decision to annul the election. It argued that the deepening political crisis was exacerbating the severe economic hardships faced by workers and the masses. With this declaration, argues Julius Ihonvbere, 'The NLC [in particular the CWC] showed that it was opposed to the military, supported most of the demands of the pro-democracy groups and other popular movement, and was prepared to commit itself to a popular struggle for military disengagement from politics and the restoration of democracy' (Ihonvbere 1997: 83).

Subsequently, following the meeting of its National Executive Council (NEC) in Port Harcourt in July, the NLC released a list of demands which the Babangida regime was asked to meet or risk a general workers' strike. The Congress noted that the country could not afford another round of elections (suggested by the military) and its attendant wastages, and, therefore, demanded the immediate release of the annulled presidential election results (*Sunday Concord*, 16 June 1993). On 9 July the NLC issued a strike notice in which it gave the military regime a 12-day ultimatum demanding the immediate release of Chief Mashood Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the election. It also called for the cessation of politically motivated arrests and detentions which the military began after 12 June. The regime failed to meet these demands and invited the NLC for dialogue. In a subsequent declaration released on 15 August, the NLC reiterated its determination to embark on the strike if the regime did not quit by 27 August. It also called for the 'proclamation of the 1989 constitution and transfer of power to the senate' (Adewumi and Adesina 1999: 56).

On 27 August 1993 General Babangida was forced to resign in the face of mass action led by the NLC. However, rather than conceding to NLC and popular demands, the regime handed over power to an Interim National Government (ING) – and not to the House of Senate as demanded by NLC. The NLC and its affiliates rejected the ING and directed all its members and affiliates to embark on a national strike against the ING with effect from 28 August. The NLC insisted that the leader of ING, Chief Ernest Shonekan, must hand over power to the Senate, in line with the provisions of the 1989 Constitution.

The key point that emerges from the above account is that the NLC was able to present a united front for anti-state, pro-democratic action. However, the resignation of General Babangida signalled a more challenging period for the NLC, not least because democracy was far from view – it took another military regime and eight more years of struggle (during the Abacha Junta, 1994–98) before democracy was eventually restored. Throughout the struggle, the NLC gained and lost the confidence of its members and other Nigerians, but nevertheless provided perhaps the most formidable front for democratic struggle (see Ihonvbere 1997). Indeed when the NLC was weighed down by internal setbacks, the workers' struggles were carried on by the strategic oil sector unions, in particular, the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN).

NLC and Workers' Strike, July 2003:
A Repeat Drama in a Post-military Democratic Era

The foregoing drama of labour activism staged during the era of authoritarian military rule (1980s and 1990s) was later repeated in a different context (the democratic era). In this section I offer an account of the Nigerian workers' strike held from 1 to 8 July 2003, an event I witnessed while I was in the field. I observed that the strike action was rooted in existential issues, which persisted even under democratic rule. I also witnessed the democratic state 'rediscovering' its authoritarian trait (four years after the exit of the military) to contain mass protest and labour activism.

In mid-June, the newly re-elected Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, announced in his post-inaugural speech a plan to increase the price of petroleum products as a measure of reversing fuel scarcity. The scarcity had affected the economy deeply. Productive activities had virtually stalled as the cost of living became prohibitive, especially amongst the poor. The presidential announcement generated an outcry from the

workers and masses. In response, the NLC issued a statement calling the federal government to reverse its intent. Government ignored the plea and, instead, authorised, in late June, a substantial increase in the prices of premium motor spirit (PMS) from 26 Naira per litre to 50. Similarly, the prices of domestic purpose kerosene (DPK; used for domestic cooking) and gasoline (GPO; used mainly for heavy machinery and mechanised farm power) were increased by about 70 percent. The NLC issued an ultimatum on 30 June asking the government to abandon the price increases or risk a national strike. Again the government remained obdurate, accusing the NLC and other anti-price hike pressure groups (students, car owners, commercial drivers) of sabotaging its economic policy.

Between 1 and 8 July, the NLC called on all workers to embark on a nationwide strike. The action was joined by many disaffected groups and individuals: transport operators, passengers, students, farmers and so on. The NLC had put in place strike coordinating committees in all major cities and the strike proved effective, at least in urban centres of commerce and power. It brought the Nigeria economy to its knees as many workers in both the private and public sectors, including self-employed workers (such as commercial drivers, mechanics) refused to return to work. Indeed, many heeded NLC's call for continuous street demonstrations. There were reports that security men arrested and detained some labour leaders and protesters, students, journalists and commercial motorcyclist (popularly known as *okadar or achaba*). Many were killed or injured in the process. For instance, in Abuja two protesters were killed in Wuse old market but 'the incident did not stop protesters from voicing their opposition to the hike' (*Newswatch* 14 July 2003: 48).

Labour leaders too were also victims of the state's repressive action. For instance, Nwugo Chimere Nwugo, the acting Secretary-General of the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) was arrested together with a journalist while fielding questions from the latter. Similarly Christy Edwards, Vice President of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), who was in charge of special duties in her union, also fell victim of police canisters. Daniel Onjeh, the President of NANS, was brave in speaking during a rally in the federal secretariat complex condemning the federal government in 'exuberant' characteristic of student union leaders (*Newswatch* 14 July 2003: 48.).

Sensing the impact of NLC's action, President Obasanjo and top government officials were forced by the worsening situation to agree to re-consider the fuel price rises. The new price agreed by government was one Naira more than what the labour leaders demanded. The strike was

temporarily[17] suspended and a relative success achieved, albeit at a costly a price of state repression. On 8 June 2004 President Obasanjo sent a Bill to the National Assembly seeking to amend the Trade Unions Act. The President argued that the Bill aimed to reform the organisation's trade unions to make them more 'responsible and democratic'. However, the NLC argued to the contrary:

> The attempt [by the Bill] to outlaw the NLC and turn the movement into a motley aggregate of weak organisations under the guise of removing a monopoly is aimed at denying workers the benefit of collective organisation, which other professionals and productive functionaries enjoy.
>
> This is patently discriminatory, smacks of class-bias and aims at weakening the capacity of workers to defend their rights and interests in the world of work and in relation to policy and governance (NLC 2004).

The Trade Union Act was eventually amended, granting substantial power to the Minister of Labour and the Registrar of Trade Unions; and introducing fundamental reorganisation of labour unions, not least the need for unions to hold a referendum before embarking on a national strike. The foregoing indicates that the democratic state resorted to legislation as means of controlling the NLC.

In sum, though the NLC had achieved a mixture of success and failure in engaging the state, it was certainly at the forefront of socio-economic and pro-democracy struggles.

Civic Associations: Structure, Activities and Struggles
As noted in the previous chapter, civic associations, in particular civil liberties and pro-democracy movements, emerged from the mid-1980s onwards and have multiplied tremendously over the past three decades. These organisations constitute 'recent arrivals' in the frontline of democratic struggles – that is, they were preceded by labour and professional associations that pioneered anti-state and democratic struggle with all the risks involved. In the wake of cut-backs in state employment, more professionals became independent private providers; the latter provided leadership of civic associations and, with donor funding, civic associations allowed them potential autonomy. However, there are overlapping boundaries between labour and civic associations. For instance, most civic organisations involve the participation of professional wage labourers, while

many civic associations benefited from the experiences and structures of anti-state struggle pioneered by the NLC. Similarly, to press home their demands, labourers and urban professionals – the key actors in the NLC and civic associations – have formed networking relationships, albeit with problems, opportunities and challenges. In essence, the labour and civic associations forged a class alliance – an issue explored in later sections.

Organisational Profiles

This section draws from ethnographic data obtained from 15 civic organisations (see Table 4.2) a sub-set of the 122 pro-democracy organisations identified in Chapter 4 (see Figures 4.4 and 4.7). For ethical reasons, I have devised pseudonyms and slightly altered revealing details of their profiles. I have decided not to point fingers at organisations or individuals, whilst trying as much as possible to put my accounts in context. Given their diverse range – some are very small and led by a single or few individuals, others are larger; some dominated by a particular ethnic group(s), others more encompassing – the profiles of these organisations provide clues to their organisational styles; in particular, how organisations construct organisational frameworks for collective action and methods of engaging the state. They also provide a basis for exploring their internal democratic practices for example the regularity of meetings and elections; and the degree of autonomy, that is, the extent to which groups are economically and politically independent. Though the selected organisations are pseudonymous, the profiles and analytic reflections capture the reality.

In terms of organisational structure, there are variations from one association to another – for example between those founded and still run by a single or few individuals and those claiming to be 'depersonalised'. However, most associations claim to have developed clearly defined structures to carry out their activities. Typically, at the top of most associations are a 'National Advisory Board', 'Board of Directors' 'Governing Council', 'Plenary' or 'Convenors' group, charged with the responsibility of advising 'elected officials' of the organisation. The 'elected officials' are responsible for formulating the programme and activities that are implemented by the 'secretariat', managed by elected officials and dedicated salaried professional staff such as accountants, clerical assistants, computer operators. The foregoing organisational structure shows the ideal that most organisations claim to have developed. In practice, however, such structures are subject to constraints which determine the extent to which an association is autonomous, internally democratic or inclusive – an issue that is explored below.

Table 4.2: A Sample Profile of Pro-democracy Civic Associations in Nigeria

Pseu-donym[18]	Profile	Relative Size†
Assn 1	Established in 1994 by retired university professor in response to 'criminal annulment of June 12 presidential election'. Moved from its original base to Abuja (the centre of national power) in 2003. Motto: 'do not grieve, mobilise'. Objectives: to promote democracy and good governance in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Struggled against the military from 1994–98; and participated in the 1999 and 2003 general elections on voter education.	Medium
Assn 2	Established 1986 in Lagos by two friends, a lawyer and a journalist to provide awareness of the dangers of military rule. Motto: 'Democracy must prevail'. Mission: 'to fight against the military in words and in action'. Engaged in anti-SAP protests and anti-military campaigns since 1988. Abacha regime forced leaders into exile in 1994–98.	Large
Assn 3	Established in 1990 in Lagos by young professionals, has offices in Abuja and major Nigerian cities. Motto: 'democracy for Nigeria, social justice for all'. Mission: 'to struggle against military rule, to campaign for the respect of human rights and to protest against economic policies which have caused hardship'. Participated in pro-democracy struggles since 1990s. Lagos office raided several times by the State Security Service.	Large
Assn 4	Established in 1997 by academics as a democracy think-tank with head office in Lagos and branches in Ibadan, Kaduna, Jos and recently Abuja. Mission: 'to advance the frontiers of people's knowledge of democracy as a means of empowering them'. Organised a number of conferences on Nigerian democracy, etc; participated in the 1999 and 2003 elections.	Large
Assn 5	Established in 1995 by journalists, academics and other professionals in Kano. Involved in human rights and democratic education and advanced social and developmental research and advocacy in Nigeria. Participated in 1999 and 2003 elections in monitoring and voter education.	Medium
Assn 6	Human rights activists established it in 1986 in Lagos	Large

	(branches in Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna and Owerri) to provide free legal aid to prisoners, promote human rights and democratic governance. Participated in pro-democracy struggles since 1990s. Deployed own monitors in 2003 elections.	
Assn 7	Established in 1990 by young professionals with offices in head office in Lagos and branches in Ibadan and Owerri. Involved in legal aid, human rights advocacy and legislative lobbying and public awareness.	Medium
Assn 8	Established by civil society groups and activists in 2003 in Abuja as a lobby for electoral and constitutional reform. Drafted a model electoral Act for Nigeria and submitted to parliament. Inputs ignored when the Act was passed into law. Participated in the 2003 election on voter education and election monitoring.	Medium /large
Assn 9	Established by university teachers in 1992 in Maiduguri Northern Nigeria. Engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights. Mounted advocacy and campaign for good governance. Participated in the 1999 and 2003 elections on voter education and election monitoring.	Medium
Assn 10	Established in 1998 in Abuja by women professionals with branches in many Nigerian cities. Motto: 'Empower the woman, empower the nation'. Objectives: to empower women politically and economically, and to fight against all forms of injustice against women. Participated in the 1999 and 2003 elections on programmes of women's awareness.	Large
Assn 11	Established 1990 in Maiduguri by a retired civil servant. Objectives: 'to raise people's awareness on all aspects of national life, to participate in policy discussions and to alleviate the sufferings of the people'. Worked mainly on capacity building for local government but participated in the 1999 and 2003 elections on voter education.	Small
Assn 12	Established in 1988 in Lagos by unemployed young graduates. Branches in major Nigerian cities. Motto: 'Democracy, justice and progress'. Objectives: 'to rout out oppression in Nigeria, to plant democracy, and to nurture good governance'. Participated in protests against the military, and organised several national conferences since it was founded.	Large

Assn 13	Established in 1993 in Lagos, by journalists, lawyers and academics, moved to Abuja in 2000. Objectives: 'to nurture the foundation of good governance'. Participated in anti-military protests. Leaders forced into exile in 1995, returned 1998.	Medium
Assn 14	Established in 1988 in Ibadan by professionals. Engaged in campaign for women's rights, and the provision of free legal assistance. Participated in lobby for legal reform pertaining to women's rights. Participated in 1998 and 2003 elections.	Medium
Assn 15	Established 1997 in Kano by a retired civil servant and her two friends. Motto: 'Equality for women'. Objectives: to raise women's awareness on social justice and equality, to politically empower women and to fight for the constitutional rights of women. Participated in the 1998 and 2003 election on voter education for women.	Small

† Estimates based on respondent claims and organisational documents. Small = fewer than 100 members; medium = 100–500 members; large = more than 1000 members. Source: Field data

In sum, the following common features apply to civic associations. First, leaders (including paid staff) are highly educated. Second, they have professional jobs, whether as active, retired or aspiring workers. Most professional civil society activists would have previously served in public and/or private sector organisation but were forced by retrenchment, which characterised the era of adjustment and austerity, to 'venture-out' and reinvent jobs to enable them to make ends meet. This says a lot about the remarkable survival instinct of the professional middle class, whether in developed capitalist societies or peripheral economies as demonstrated in the case of Nigeria. Third, associations see themselves as national even when addressing particular issues, or are seen to be promoting 'sectarian' causes – for example women. Finally, all associations are established in large towns and cities, indicating their urban origins.

Funding Sources and Implications

All the case study associations were dependent on donor funding. Key sources of funding identified include international governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental institutions from Europe and North America. Governmental sources include, among others, the United States

Information Department/Office of Transition Initiative (USAID/OTI), the United States Information Service (USIS), Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the Canadian Fund for Civil Society (CFCS), the British Council, Department for International Development (DfID), the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) as well as the British, Canadian, Australian, German, Norwegian and Swedish High Commissions/embassies. Inter-governmental sources include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Commission (EU), IMF and the World Bank; while international non-governmental sources include, the Swedish NGOs Foundation for Democracy, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Carter Centre and Global Rights (all based in USA), the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and so on. While some funding organisations have been in existence in Nigeria for a very long time (for example the British Council, USIS), others arrived recently (for example DANIDA, CFCS). A key factor that defines the expanding interest of all these funders in Nigeria is that they are overwhelmingly committed to the ideals of neo-liberalism. Overall, their support is channelled towards civic associations (as opposed to 'sectarian' organisations): voluntary, 'non-political', not-for-profit, 'civil'. In addition to demonstrating support for liberal values, they expect beneficiaries to supplant some of the key roles of the state and, by extension, provide formidable opposition against its excesses.

As argued earlier, there is a contradiction in donor approach to civil society and democracy in Nigeria (see chapters 2 & 4). Before 1993, donors were instrumental in disempowering civil society and strength-ening the state, with the expectation that the military state was committed to liberal economic development and a return to civilian rule. It is also argued that the military state disappointed its traditional donors, particularly the IMF, World Bank and bilateral sources, by failing to deliver democracy in spite of its 'impressive' performance in structural adjustment. This discrepancy compelled donors to 'rediscover' civil society through a variety of programmes ranging from 'civil society capacity building' (USIS) to a 'good governance fund' (DfID).

Civic associations lack credible alternative local sources of funding, without which most them would simply cease to exist. Though some associations (such as the Civil Liberties Organisation, CLO) have attempted to explore local sources of funding through membership subscriptions, sales of publications and local fund-raising activities, these efforts have had limited success and they are unable to break away from the cycle of dependence or 'donor handout'. Most groups confessed that

they were 'donor-trapped' – having to fall back on donors to fund every activity and struggling to meet donor requirements. Donors are rigid about what they expect from their local beneficiaries, rather than what can empower them to engage the state. While their insistence on adherence to transparency, accountability and 'best practice' are not wrong *per se*, they nevertheless carry potential dangers and implications for autonomous action. First, as can be expected, donor funding exacerbates enmity between the state and anti-state civil society groups, which invites state interference in their autonomous action. Second, by improving the economic fortunes and providing means of livelihood to leaders and officials, donor funding expands the social gap between activists and the poor. This contradicts the populist visions on which most civic associations are founded. It is not unusual to find that, no matter how credible their activities and their democratic goodwill, civic association leaders are perceived by state officials and the masses as 'opportunists' who 'cash in cheap resources from the developed world'.

Third, donor funding carries the risk of compromising personal and organisational values. For instance, an official in Association 1 informed me that his organisation does everything, including 'lying', to satisfy donor conditions for funding. He recounts how his Association 'got around' donor regulations: 'one of our donors was very strict on this issue of non-political stand. In our case, we incorporated these requirements into our proposal, just to satisfy this particular condition. In reality, we cannot claim to be non-political, certainly not in Nigeria' (Interview held in Lagos, 13 October 2003). Fourth, 'chasing donor funds' has pushed many groups to devote more energy to grant-seeking activities, at the expense of activities that can make a social impact.

Fifth, it is noted that donor funding breeds rivalries and blind competition over resources. Celestine Ikelegbe puts it well: 'groups in some cases proliferated because of crass opportunism in the competition for funds. Such groups were to some extent part of the non-governmental organisations industry supported by funds from the West' (Ikelegbe 2001a: 10). Ikelegbe further notes that these groups witnessed squabbles and conflicts attributed to the lack of accountability and so on. A respondent told me that when he was an official in Association 13:

> It was money that started to separate us … When good funding started coming from Canadian and American donor agencies, we were split up on how to spend … There is problem of corruption among our leaders [at the upper level]. We have been suspecting

… [the leader] for mismanaging some of our money. We don't know how they spend them (Interview held in Bradford, 22 December 2002)[19].

Finally, much as they were key beneficiaries of donors, especially during the military era, civic associations are equally at the mercy of changing agendas of donors – a noticeable trend following Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 when 'civil society' was again abandoned in favour of state institutions:

The tendency of most international donors now was to channel their support more towards the state programmes rather than NGOs … [this]has left many NGOs unable to tap on their traditional sources of funding support … In the haste to support and strengthen emerging democratic state institutions, donors tend to place less attention on the civil society organisations that they supported under the past authoritarian dispensation (Ibhawoh 2001: 81).

Internal Democratic Practices:
'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly'[20]

The accounts in this section are based on data from participant observation and interviews carried out in 2003, but their content refers back to the 1980s and 1990s and the era of military rule as well as current democratic struggles. My concern here was to explore the extent of internal democracy as defined in the previous chapter. In a study of this kind, it is unlikely that all organisations will exhibit the same level of internal democracy or lack of it. In my field encounters, I have seen many kinds of organisations with different organisational practices. Similarly, I have attended the activities of many organisations and interviewed respondents in all of them. I observed that almost all groups claim to be democratic and/or struggled with the challenges of being seen to be democratic. My regular question on whether or not groups practise democracy within their domains (*vis-à-vis* wider democratic struggles) were answered in the affirmative by virtually all my civil society respondents. Many tried to show me the way things worked in their organisation, suggesting the observance of due process relating to change of leadership, elections, meetings and consensus-building within them. Though most members construct their organisation as 'perfect', 'democratic' or 'transparent', these were ambitious claims which not all groups matched in practice.

Based on my 'contextual' and situational knowledge, I have classified

these organisations into good, bad and ugly. An organisation is *Good* if, at the time in question, it demonstrates a significant degree of internal democracy in terms of the following yardsticks: regular meetings; regular free and fair elections; addressing the 'incumbency factor' (for example founders not perpetuating power or unduly influential); constitutionalism and due process; free flow of information; social inclusivity in leadership; conflict resolution and consensus building, (in terms of continuous unity rather than irreconcilable division); accountability; and financial autonomy. On the other hand, an organisation is *Bad* if it demonstrates a significant violation of such measures or has no procedures for implementing these factors, and *Ugly* if it fails to observe any of these key factors.

Only two organisations were observed to be *Good* at the time of the research: Associations 3 and 7. In these organisations, I noticed that there was little conflict on most, if not all, of the key factors. On the question of regular meetings and general elections, for instance, I noted that both the members and officials of these organisations were confident that the organisation held these exercises regularly. This was proven by the documented records of meetings and elections held since they were formed, in conformance with the provision of their constitutions which I was allowed to see. In Association 3, there were five leadership changes and one re-election, while founding members were not in office and/or adjudged by any to be unduly influential. In Association 7, there were six elections with leadership changes. In terms of meetings in Association 7, I observed participants in a meeting held in Abuja to discuss strategies for participating in the 2003 election. Though I was not allowed to join the meeting, I was informed that all ten attendees were national officers (out of 13). I also noted that four of the ten officials in attendance were women. On financial autonomy, Associations 3 and 7 claimed that their dependence on donor funding has not led them to compromise their ideals. During the INEC election of 2003 which I attended, the Chair of Association 3 presented a position paper in which he publicly condemned donor partners for unduly attempting to influence the activity of the coalition; influence which, he claimed, his organisation resisted. He suggested there should be a law or a benchmarking standard for governing the relationship between donors and a desperate local civil society so that the latter does not become mere cannon fodder for the former. This was indeed heroic in a competitive world of donor funding. If the foregoing situational 'facts' are sufficient reasons, Associations 3 and 7 then qualify as internally democratic.

Most organisations were *Bad*, violating a significant number of key

internal democratic factors. This was the case in most of the organisations (all Associations except 3, 7 and 15). They ranged from inclusive and socially diverse organisations consisting of people of different ethnic, religious, gender and age groups (for example Ass. 2, 5, 12, 13) to those founded and still dominated by a single or few individuals (for example Ass. 1, 11). In the case of the 'diverse' organisations, two examples are worth citing. First is Association 12, on which fieldwork enquiry was carried out in Lagos. It was founded by young Yoruba graduates in 1988 with a motto: 'democracy, justice and progress'. It aimed to end military rule and domination by northern leaders, and install 'democracy' in Nigeria.

Its leaders and followers participated actively in democratic struggles of the 1990s, and were forced into exile in 1995 by the Abacha regime. The Association grew quickly and opened branches in major Nigerian cities and claimed to be non-partisan and non-ethnic. In reality however, many agree that, then and now, the Association has been ethnically biased towards Yoruba demands and therefore hardly democratic in the national context. Some respondents see the Association as not accommodating non-Yorubas, contrary to its claims of pursuing a nationalist agenda. In this case, heterogeneity and tolerance, as democratic markers, were not respected. In spite of this alleged ethnic bias, the organisation was able to secure some of the most lucrative funding in the late 1980 and 1990s, not least because of its ability to persuade donors, at least in theory, that it was engaged in 'national democratic struggles' through public campaign and protest. In doing so, officials of the Association successfully inflated the image and exaggerated the activities of the Association. Because donor funding underwrites wages and organisational expenses, and therefore overcomes the personal hardships of those involved, the officials of Association 12 were economically comfortable but certainly dependent. Another observed weakness of the Association was the lack of regular meetings. Meetings were held mainly to pursue funds or spend them, and rarely to discuss matters of public campaign or advocacy. In addition, the Association showed a poor record of holding 'national' meetings: 'we are supposed to hold Plenary Sessions very regularly but that has not been the case. The last time we held plenary was in January 1999 [four years earlier!]' (Interview with the Secretary-General, Association 12, Lagos; 20 October 2003). The 'incumbency factor' was also found to be most pronounced in Association 12. The founding leaders of the Associations before, during and after returning from exile, were in firm control of the organisation. The constant practice has been to 'recycle' those founding

members, mostly men, in leadership positions both at national and branch levels.

Though Association 12 does have a constitution, it has not been reviewed since it was written in 1989 and almost never followed in running the organisation. There was an observed disparity in power relations between different categories of social actors within the organisation. On the one hand, the Association was clearly dominated by men compared with women, both in terms of leadership and paid staff: the ratio of women to men in leadership positions (founding members) is 1:12 and that amongst paid staff is 5:20. The second level of disparity is between founding members (very powerful), members who joined later (less powerful) and paid staff (powerless). In terms of information flow, in particular from leadership to paid staff, Association 13 was observed to be highly secretive and selective. Founding members were very careful in allowing only some members and staff to access 'strategic' organisational information. For instance a paid official informed me that they were given only 'operational' and not 'strategic' information. The former involves information relating to project implementation (for example the conduct of workshops) while the latter refers to vital information (for example copies of proposals submitted to donors, described to me as a 'secret recipe'). In essence, social inclusivity, transparency, accountability and unity were lacking in Association 12.

On the other hand, Association 13 was founded in Lagos by young professionals in 1993, immediately after the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election. The Association's birthplace (i.e. Lagos) and its foundation date again suggest a Yoruba ethnic agenda. Because of its anti-military political stance, its leaders were forced into exile in 1994. This raised the Association's image, especially in the eyes of local supporters and donors. I was informed that between 1994 and 1998, when the exiled leaders returned to Nigeria, Association 13 received an estimated £250,000 from different donors, while the exiled leaders ran the Association from London and Washington with the help of underground officials and members and staff resident in Nigeria. Whilst it enjoyed huge donor support, reinforced by the 'brave' image of its exiled leaders, it was and still is perceived as closely aligned to the pan-Yoruba cultural and political organisation *Afenifere*. This ethnic bias was largely concealed in relating with donors, the state and the public. Because of personal and generational interests, the Association is divided into two factions. All other yardsticks of internal democratic practices – regular meetings, elections, constitutionalism and due process, transparency, free flow of

information, consensus-building and conflict resolution – are at the mercy of a deep-rooted enmity that pervades the two factions.

In organisations run by a few individuals, the practice of democracy was largely absent, indeed rendered impossible, by virtue of the way they were founded and structured. They would be better described as a 'family business' or an 'NGO business' as noted by some respondents. My experience in Association 11 proves the point. This organisation was founded in 1990 in Maiduguri, the headquarters of Borno State, with a retired civil servant as the Chairman, his wife as the Director of Finance and his cousin as the Secretary. It has no branch elsewhere but claims to have a liaison office in Abuja. This leadership structure remained the same up to December 2003. The Association has a modest office facility in Maiduguri with two employed staff managed by the Secretary, a graduate with incredible skills in drafting good grant-seeking proposals for donor funding. Since it was founded, Association 11 has won a number of funding bids, particularly in the areas of voter education (1999 and 2003 elections) and, in the early 1990s, on capacity-building training for local government officials and workers. The Association also depends on a pool of paid resource persons from the University of Maiduguri (including myself) to deliver its capacity-building and other projects. I have observed that this organisation has more space for grant-making than democratic practice or even 'struggle'.

Finally, I noted only one organisation (Association 15) as having a very poor record of democracy – judging from its 'owners'' confession of poor internal democratic practice whilst claiming to work on democracy-related issues. It was founded in 1997 and run by a woman and her two friends (both women) with an office based in the founding leader's residence – located in a wealthy neighbourhood in Kano. It has neither constitution nor membership list. The woman claims to be the 'President' and that organisation's 'beneficiaries' are a women's awareness project funded by USIS. 'My home is my office', she admits, 'I don't need any democracy, constitution, or secretary to fight for the people' (interview held in Kano, 24 June 2003). In this Association, no democratic practice can be expected. Ironically, the Association did benefit from modest donor funding and was often involved in 'women empowerment' activities in urban Kano.

In sum the overall picture that emerges is that civic organisations do not demonstrate a very good record of internal democratic practice. Though it is risky to generalise or dismiss all organisations, we can claim that most organisations were not democratic, while some have been

struggling to rectify their deficiency. A report produced for the Danish Centre for Human Rights reinforces some of my findings:

> [A] limitation that has been identified in the organisation of some human rights groups is lack of transparency and participatory opportunities in their internal decision-making process. Although some NGOs have taken initiatives to democratise and make their internal decision-making processes more transparent, there remain significant organisational constraints in this regard. In some organisations the decision-making processes tend to be narrow with the head of the organisation being the sole decision-maker. There is also a relative absence of women in prominent positions … with the exception of organisations specifically dedicated to women's rights issues (Ibhawoh 2001: 50–51).

Given their internal democratic limitations, it is not surprising that civic associations encountered significant hiccups in their proclaimed role as a vanguard of wider democratic struggles – an issue I return to below.

Fragmentation, Divisions and Conflict Resolution

The question of fragmentation, actual or potential, amongst civic organis-ations is pertinent in understanding their capacity to resolve internal conflict and construct a united front for engaging the state. Several sources of con-flict were noted amongst the civic associations studied: ethnic and political motives of activists/associations; gender and generational interests. Whilst most associations were potentially or actually confronted with these sources of conflict, it is imperative to note that they also strove to overcome them.

As examined above, some civic associations, in particular Associations 12 and 13, were plagued by allegations that they supported sectarian causes, were dominated by specific groups, or pursued the interests of specific ethnic nationalities. Whilst claiming to be non-political and non-sectarian, both Associations 12 and 13 ally openly with sectarian organisations, in particular, the *Afenifere* and the Ooduwa People's Congress – two interest groups that emerged to campaign for Yoruba causes following the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election (seen to be won by a Yoruba candidate). Association 12 and 13's support for Yoruba interests had serious implications for their image as a united front for democratic struggles. Nevertheless, Association 12 tried to transcend these divisive tendencies by opening branches in other parts of Nigeria and opening its membership to all interested persons. A

respondent informed me that 'by reaching out to other parts of Nigeria, my Association sent a clear message of its commitment to democracy rather than personal or communal interest' (Interview with former official of Association 12, Lagos, 16 October 2003).

Another key dimension of internal tension, noted in Association 13, particularly after the restoration of democracy in 1999, was the clash between young professionals and 'old veterans' on equal access to leadership positions and in the management of organisational struggles and affairs. It resulted in the division of the Association into two factions. To resolve this problem, attempts have been made to bring the factions to the negotiating table, but this has so far failed.

It was also noted that some civic associations were avowedly political, with some transforming into political parties and joining the ethnically driven terrain of Nigerian politics – this was particularly evident in the context of the 2003 general elections. It was also noted that the political motivation and agenda of some civic associations and activists affected the image of others claiming to be non-political (see Chapter 7). Nevertheless, civic associations and activists wanting to engage in party politics were allowed by their peers to do so in the spirit of democratic freedom and the provision of the 1999 Constitution. To that extent, what could have generated conflict was handled more tolerantly.

In sum, it is noted that while there are actual and potential sources of fragmentation and division within and amongst civic associations, some civic organisations tried to transcend these divisions, especially in facing a common enemy – the state – with mixed results.

Engaging the State for Democratic Expansion: Success and Failures

Pro-democracy civic organisations emerged under varied circumstances. There is a distinction to be made between two broad sets of organisations: the *civil liberties movement* and the *democratic campaign movement*, though there was overlap between them in terms of personnel. Civil liberties associations emerged largely in the 1980s to campaign for individual freedom and liberty. On the other hand, democratic campaign associations emerged largely in the 1990s to demand democratic restoration and the military disengagement from power. One of the earliest donor-driven civic associations in Nigeria was the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), formed in 1986 in to demand the improvement of prison conditions. Later more associations emerged, all from frameworks founded to campaign for individual and personal freedom and liberty. Two significant examples are

worthy of note. The first is the Gani Fawehinmi Solidarity Association (GFSA) founded in the 1990s to fight for the freedom of the lawyer and human rights activist, Chief Gani Fawehinmi, following one of his long detentions by the military regime of General Abacha. Chief Fawehinmi was arrested and detained for campaigning against the regime's 'hidden agenda'. The second example is the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), which emerged from the informal network that struggled for the release of Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti and Femi Aborishade in the late 1980s. In the 1990s, democratic campaign associations emerged, benefiting hugely from struggles founded in the civil liberties movement and other older associations (especially the labour movement). The Campaign for Democracy (CD) emerged in 1990 in response to the failure by the Babangida regime to hand over power to civilian democrats, and others followed suit. Together, both civic liberties and democratic campaign associations joined forces in spearheading democratic protests of the post-12 June 1993 election.

Civic associations emerged in times of hardship and misery when united and coordinated efforts were needed to confront the state, a 'common enemy'. However, the same hardships also led to rivalries, cut-throat competition and divisive tendencies that affected the capacity for cohesive organising. The situation in Nigeria shows that a sense of unity was/is often lacking or, where constructed, it crumbled in the face of irreconcilable differences, petty rivalries and the mistrust that bedevils groups. In the 1990s, key civic organisations, including the Campaign for Democracy (CD) formed in 1991, the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) formed in 1994 and the United Action for Democracy (UAD) founded in 1994, emerged to forge unity amongst diverse groups and to coordinate popular energies needed for confronting the military state. Most of the case study Associations in this chapter were or have been part of these coalitions – for example Associations 2, 3, 6, 12, 13 & 14 had been active in both CD and NADECO. Writing on the above coalitions, Jega notes that they

> have been constrained either by stigmatisation, petty squabbles at the leadership levels, or by the divide and rule tactics of the state and the ruling class. The intense mobilisation of ethno-regional and religious identities in the period of economic crisis and structural adjustment, has basically added to the obstacles confronted in the task of building a popularly effective broad coalition for democracy (Jega 1997: 5).

Despite its nationalistic title, NADECO, and the groups that formed it, were all part of the parallel ethnic coalition known as *Afenifere*, committed to the actualisation of what Jega called the 'so-called Yoruba agenda' (Jega 1997: 5)[21] – which aimed at shifting national power from the Hausa north to the Yoruba southwest: 'in this way, its efficacy on mobilising nationally has been subverted' (op cit.). In addition to the dangers of ethnic division, other associations such as the United Democratic Front of Nigeria (UDFN – in which Associations 6 & 12 were active), and which was formed in the late 1990s led by Professor Wole Soyinka, abandoned dialogue and resorted to violence, in particular, bombings of government facilities as a means of political expression. This affected their democratic claims, since democracy operates on the non-violent premises of peace and dialogue. A final factor which led to the collapse of past coalitions is mutual suspicion and accusations amongst groups on the vexed issue of connivance with various military regimes and, therefore, with their repressive agenda. Such suspicion was the actual reason for the collapse of the Campaign for Democracy (CD) in 1994.

Thus, the democratic struggles of the 1980s and 1990s were carried out in the absence of unity and cohesion amongst civil society organisations. In other words, they were enacted with each civic group operating in its own orbit, some pursuing the same objective and consistency – for example Associations 2 and 3. This led to a waste of resources and duplication of energy. Again, writing on some of my case studies (Associations 2 and 12 inclusive), Jega observes that they were all publishing annual reports and basically repeating the same sentiments over and over again: 'some of the publications seem to have been propelled by donor requirements, which are kin to the culture of publish or perish, without due regard to quality of research or presentation. Joint research projects and information dissemination are hardly pursued' (Jega 1997).

Since the restoration of democracy in 1999 a number of new coalitions have emerged – examples include the Electoral Reform Network (ERN), the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), and the Citizens' Forum of Constitutional Reform (CFCR). Many of my case study associations now form part of these organisations (for example Association 1 is a member of all three while Association 7 is part of TMG). These broad coalitions have made a critical contribution to the legislative lobby, especially in the passing of the Electoral Law, the Freedom of Information Bill and the Anti-Corruption Act. However, like previous coalitions, new coalitions were/are full of internal crises and fragmentation.

Comparative Reflections on the
Labour Movement and Civic Associations

There are a number of issues that emerge from the foregoing analyses of the NLC and civic associations. The first point is in terms of organisational history and profile. In the context of civic associations, it is noted that most of them were founded in the 1980s – the earliest in 1986 (for example Association 6) and the most recent in 2003 (for example Association 8). Most urban professionals emerged from state employment, which was the most viable source of income until the retrenchment of 1980s. With austerity, professionals were forced to scout for alternative sources of work and income, enabling them to form private enterprises and regroup around privatisation and donor funding. This contrasts sharply with the history of the labour movement, which was rooted in migrant (manual) labour, dating back to the colonial era, but which was re-organised by the military state in 1978. The retrenchments of the 1980s left little or no existential opportunity for manual labourers, as it did for urban professionals. At issue is that different civil society organisations develop different organisational styles in keeping with the exigencies of social actors behind them. However, it is also noted that, like the labour unions, some civic organisations were formed either by labourers or urban professionals (for example Association 4) – an indication of their partial 'roots' in the labour movement. To that extent there is a potential infrastructure for joint action and alliance formation, especially in confronting the state – an issue discussed in the following section.

The NLC and civic associations have developed different styles of organisation, having emerged at different times and pursuing different missions. For instance, the NLC is much larger, with a membership of five million workers, while most civic associations are much smaller – with membership ranging from less than 100 to a few thousand. The Labour movement pioneered anti-state struggles in the 1980s, and bore the brunt of state repression well before civic associations emerged. This experience fed into labour resilience in confronting the state during the democratic struggles of the 1990s. Also, there is a difference in terms of origin and spread. Typically, most civic associations were formed by a few professionals and began operations in one city or region but gradually spread into other parts of the country. This contrasts sharply with the NLC, which boasts of a local base of grassroots unions, has a membership base of five million, and operates as a single labour federation with branches in all states of the federation. However, it is worthy of note that

both the NLC and civic associations are largely urban-based because urban settings are the sites for the class formation which they reflect.

The second key issue is funding sources and their implications for autonomous action. It is noted that civic associations are donor-driven while the labour movement still depends largely on state subvention and poorly collected membership dues. However, as a survival mechanism, it is noted that the NLC has embarked on collaborative initiatives with civic associations to enable it to access donor funding. It is argued that, in different ways, both the NLC and civic associations are financially constrained – which adversely affects their potential for assertive action. In the case of the labour, the state and employers stand in the way of autonomous action whereas in the case of civic associations donors stand in the way.

The third key point relates to internal democratic practices. It is noted that neither the NLC nor civic associations are particularly democratic, but both struggle with the challenges of internal democracy. This has adversely affected their wider democratic claims. At issue is whether or not an organisation has to be perfectly democratic to constitute a frontline for democratic struggle.

Class Confrontation against the State:
Alliance between the Labour Movement and Civic Associations[22]

It was in the early 1980s that the Nigerian labour movement and civic associations, in particular, pro-democracy and civil liberties movements, began to realise the necessity of forging alliances and cooperation to confront 'a common enemy': the state or the ruling classes. To be sure, cooperation was necessitated as much by their common difficulties arising from 'unjust' and impoverishing state policies as by the need to pool energies together to provide a united, formidable resistance. We have noted that due to economic decline of the 1980s and 1990s, the state failed in its custodian and welfare roles and lost its legitimacy. In the process, the power of the ruling classes to subordinate non-state centres of power and to compel loyalty from society was compromised. To ensure conformance, ruling military regimes therefore resorted to corrupt, repressive, despotic and authoritarian practice as a means of 'commanding' obedience from citizens. Civil society groups were eventually agitated to confront the militarised state and its repressive policies, both individually and in alliance.

Before forming alliances, both the labour movement and civic associations were involved in engaging the state, as a first step, on

common 'existential' issues. In other words, they all share common experience of state repression and hard policies. In the case of labour, resistance was mainly around workers' rights and welfare, austerity, retrenchments, and the withdrawal of subsidies on essential goods, while in the case of the civil liberties movement, resistance was against issues ranging from prison conditions and abuse of human rights to the basic conditions for human freedom. Civic associations emerged at a time when state employment and salaries were cut back. These different organisations turned to alliance-making and wider pro-democracy activism when the military state became more arbitrary in its policies and, in particular, in its response to existential demands. Two types of co-operative alliance were noted. The first type is an 'informal' (or moral) alliance in which groups come together to share experience and strategies. Informal cooperative activities were common in the 1980s during the early stages of anti-state struggles. They were often initiated and discussed during workshops, *ad hoc* meetings and in the preparation of public rallies. The second category is a 'formal' (or actual) alliance when groups formalise relationships by signing memoranda of understandings, set up joint committees and, eventually, agree to form a network or alliance with one name, mission, set of objectives, logo, constitution. Amongst groups in which the NLC and civic associations actively participated were the Campaign for Democracy (CD), the United Action for Democracy (UAD) and the Joint Action Committee of Nigeria (JACON) – all founded in the 1990s. More recently, the NLC spearheaded two alliances with civic associations: the Civil Society Pro-democracy Network (CSPN) formed in 2000 and the Labour-Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) formed in August 2005. These latter networks are housed within the NLC Secretariat and have played a considerable role in consolidating the NLC's touch with segments of civil society and, particularly, in taking joint action. Also the networks allowed NLC to influence agenda whilst offering better potential access to donor funding.

However, inter-organisational cooperation brought problems as well as opportunities for labour unions and civic associations. On the one hand it allowed for symbiosis, especially in areas where some associations or activists do not have the required expertise or resources. For instance, in 1988, CLO provided free legal service to NLC officials who were arrested or detained by security agents for authorising a workers' strike. On other hand, within the alliances mentioned above, labour activists brought their longstanding experience of anti-state struggle to bear on deciding strategies for resistance and coping mechanisms. Other advantages of

cooperation include the construction of a common front capable of mobilising mass action; sending a much stronger signal of resistance to state actors; pooling energies together and avoiding duplication, particularly in keeping with donor requirements.

While it carried tremendous reinforcing advantages, there are key problems associated with the labour-civic association alliance. First, both the NLC and civic associations have internal problems of their own. As we have seen, some were plagued by issues of internal democracy, in particular, allegations of financial impropriety, lack of inclusivity and absence of regular meetings. These internal problems were carried forward to, and adversely affected, the alliances that were built. A key example is the CD which was destroyed by inter-organisational rivalries arising from allegations of 'conniving' with the military (see Ihonvbere 1996). Secondly, there is the problem of differential organisational values, orientation and experience. While the NLC has a long history and experience in pioneering anti-state struggle, it is a novice in forging alliances in a non-traditional, non-labour terrain. In other words, the NLC is used to forging 'solidarity-type' alliances with national and international labour movements and not with civic associations: 'differences in organisational structure and processes sometimes stand in the way of sustained cooperation. Organisational solidarity and competition have also been a major source of quarrels' (Aiyede 2004a: 231). The dominant organisational value with the NLC, until the late 1980s, was the 'workers' struggle', couched in socialist and leftist slogans rather than the liberal discourses promoted by civic associations. However, the stereotypical radical 'political stance' of the NLC has been reversed by recent development. In the 1990s, as a result of state intervention and international political developments, the NLC (and some individual unions within it) seemingly joined the liberal bandwagon:

> the unions not only adopted the language of rights, but some trade union activists – in concert with members of the human rights community – also established NGOs for the promotion of specifically labour-based rights, plugging into donor funds in order to do so. Prominent amongst these is the Centre for Workers' Rights (CWR), formed in 1994 to campaign against the crackdown of labour unions, and the Campaign of Independent Unionism (Aiyede 2004a: 230).

While the above seems to demonstrate an ideological and institutional

compromise within the rank and file of the labour movement, it is worthy of note that many within the NLC and affiliated unions still identify themselves with the ideals of socialism, workers' struggles and solidarity. However, as an inevitable but measured approach, the current NLC leadership claims to ensure a balance between maintaining the relevance of the NLC and consolidating its relationship with other civil society groups. This approach is couched in a policy known as 'the New Beginning':

> The New Beginning is a decisive response to the imperative of *rebuilding the movement in a direction that makes it more relevant to union members and other segments of civil society*, which believe in its empowering and socially redemptive vision and capacity. It is also about enhancing inter-movement linkages that can help the movement project power in the labour market. In particular, it aims at firming up the capacity of each union and segment through solidarity actions involving the resources, experience and general organisational acumen of the entire movement (NLC 2006a; emphasis added).

Another key obstacle to labour-civic association alliance is in the differential degrees of vulnerability to real state intervention between the labour and civic association. Until 1999, the NLC has been in a precarious and weak situation. It is worthy of note that compared to civic associations, the NLC was more prone to direct state intervention – this was not surprising given (1) the role of the state in industrial relations and the regulation of labour and (2) the domination of the state by the petty-bourgeois political class. As a constant victim of arbitrary state action, the NLC became both an asset and liability in forging and/or leading the pro-democracy alliance – an asset because its leaders and members were tougher and more resilient; and liability because as an organisation the NLC remained weak and at the mercy of the state. Furthermore, different class interests often stand in the way of unity: the professional class fraction could hope to move into the political sphere directly, perhaps even as state ideologues and functionaries. Such a route is less open to manual workers, even if organised.

Finally, differential privilege, in particular donor funding, and, by extension, fear of influence and power have adversely affected cooperation between the labour and civic associations. To be sure, petty jealousies and rivalries were common amongst organisations and activists. In particular, some unionists tended to be wary about the rising influence

of civic associations, in terms of resources and organisational capacity. This fear is justifiable given that labour pioneered the groundswell of popular anti-state and democratic struggle. The fear is that these 'new groups' may eventually take over the leadership of popular struggles, a terrain that has always been dominated by labour. In essence, there were/are disagreement and distrust which stand in the way of alliance.

Conclusion

This chapter draws our attention to the following key issues. First, it confirms the class character of the state and civil society. The chapter shows that as two examples of 'civil society' organisations, the labour movement and civic associations are largely led by privileged fractions of urban professionals and wage labourers; on the other hand, the state is found to be dominated largely by dominant fractions of the petty-bourgeoisie ruling class (see Forrest 1986). This disparate class character of actors in civil society and the state largely defines the conflicting relationship between the two realms. Second, the chapter demonstrates conflict, but also complementarities, within civil society in engaging the state – a common enemy. The key factors here are organisational styles, sources of funding, internal democratic practice, and experience in engaging the state. In particular, the chapter notes that in constructing a common front for democratic struggles, the labour movement and civic associations have demonstrated the possibility of class alliance, with all its associated risks and benefits.

Third, the chapter reveals that Nigeria's pro-democracy groups are not inherently democratic – they are bedevilled by internal democratic deficit, arising from the years of military rule and the extinction of democratic culture, no matter how desirable. Nevertheless, the absence of internal democracy has not proved to be an overwhelming obstacle to struggles for democracy in national terms.

Finally, the chapter argues that the Nigerian labour movement, in particular workers' struggles, pioneered the groundswell of popular anti-state struggles, and paved the way for the emergence of civic organisations. By extension, actors in the labour movement (including urban professional associations) provided recruits for both civil liberties and pro-democracy movements. To that extent, it is argued that there is a problem in isolating, let alone privileging, civic organisations *vis-à-vis* labour.

5
Civil Society and Electoral Process: From Illusion to Reality

As noted in the previous chapters, civic associations have earned a visionary reputation, particularly amongst liberal scholars and institutions, as key drivers for the achievement and consolidation of democracy. This vision is problematic, not least because it over-rules the structural, internal/organisational and societal limitations that bedevil civic associations. As revealed in Chapter 3, pro-democracy groups in general and civic associations in particular are not immune from a host of structural and human constraints, in particular attempts by the state to undermine their autonomy and/or create pro-state associations which advocate for and carry out activities that support authoritarian state policies. Building on the above, Chapter 4 catalogued the key internal problem of civic associations ranging from inter-group conflict and competition over donor funding, to lack of internal democracy. These factors challenge any unthinking claim about the democratic potential of civic associations (*vis-à-vis* other pro-democracy associations).

This chapter further engages the above problematic, drawing on a case study of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), one of the largest civic associations in post-military Nigeria, and in the particular context of the 2003 Nigeria general election. My account is structured into pre-election, election-days (12 April [National Assembly elections]; 19 April [Presidential and Gubernatorial elections] and 3 May [State Assembly elections]) and post-elections activities. The aim is to critically examine how the case of the TMG addresses broader issues of the civil society debate, and how the occasion (an election) allows for a critical reflection on the role of civic associations in multiparty liberal elections. This chapter is predicated on the perception of election as a cornerstone of liberal democracy[1] – where civic associations *vis-à-vis* other social and

political actors play varying roles, defined by their incompatible interests. In the context of Nigeria, the construction of 'democracy' has always been framed in terms of the liberal model. But Nigeria's experience with liberal democracy has been largely unstable, chaotic and impermanent – as a result of sectarian/ethnic politics, faulty constitutional engineering and military intervention, among other things. In such an atypical setting, it is useful to examine how civic associations fare as key drivers for the achievement and consolidation of democracy. Nigeria provides a challenging empirical context for critical reflection on the 'towering' role of 'civil society'[2] as emphasised by liberal theorists and/or its conflict dimension as counter-argued by radical theorists. Evidence from this chapter suggests that in attempting to play a role in influencing the health of electoral democracy, civic associations had to confront enormous predicaments – both of their making and those imposed by the state.

An important challenge facing most democracies (including emerging, fledgling and fragile democracies) is how to conduct free, fair, transparent and orderly elections. Equally important are the effectiveness and efficiency of the formal mechanisms for administering elections and resolving conflicts arising from them – for instance, court litigation instituted by defeated contenders over the credibility of elections. In addition, the extent to which informal actors – such as the organisations of civil society – participate freely in engaging and/or complementing state institutions is crucial to the success of liberal democracy. These provisions, being the bedrock of the democratic process, are said to enable citizens to hold their representatives to account for their actions and inactions and, simultaneously, impact on the substance and orientation of public policy. The ideals of liberal democracy cannot be said to apply to all societies, even developed democracies.[3] And in developing plural economies – where power and legitimacy are at the mercy of elite manipulation – elections have often been abused in reproducing dominant forms of power. They turn out to be rigged or violent. The gulf between the formal rules and how they are implemented is illustrated in the following firsthand account.

On 12 April 2003, during Nigeria's National Assembly Elections, I carried out participant observation in Polling Station 'A' located at the premises of Chad Basin Development Authority (CBDA) in Old Marte, a small town of about of 5,000 people who are mostly engaged in agriculture and local government service. Old Marte is about 120 kilometres northeast of Maiduguri, the political headquarters of Borno State and the hometown of one of the contestants to the Senate, a serving

representative and nominee of the ruling party (PDP). I went to the polling station at 7.00 am, an hour before it opened. I found party agents and a small queue of voters waiting to be accredited. Election officials and security agents turned up an hour late (9.00 am), apologising for delays caused by logistic problems. There were two accredited domestic election monitors, both from the TMG (Transition Monitoring Group), and none from international observer missions. Voter turnout seemed high compared to other voting stations reported in the media (about 400 out of 700 on the voters' register). Some residents told me that this was 'the highest in recent times' as they turned out en masse to vote for their 'son' (the Senator). I noted that most voters who turned out early were young men and women who wanted to cast their votes before going to their farms or to market, even though on election days all economic activities were officially banned. Throughout the voting day, I saw a number of irregularities that transgressed the guidelines produced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) guidelines. Party agents canvassed freely for votes, and money was exchanged; there was violent fighting and skirmishes between young boys and adult men of rival parties over the sharing of 'voting money'; there was multiple voting, underage voting and ballot 'stuffing', negotiated and carried out by agents and supporters of rival parties. The following excerpt from my field notes says it all:

> It seemed to me that the agents of some 'rival' parties were bribed by those of the better-off ruling party to 'cooperate' while the uncooperative ones were simply subdued. The two election monitors from the Transition Monitoring Group were frankly told only to 'observe but not intervene' – the kind of condition given by INEC, the electoral institution. At the end of the day, only a handful of the votes cast were done in the approved manner. Even then, several votes were voided as some voters, especially the old and women could not vote correctly: with their hands shaking, some do not even know which column to print their thumbs on let alone making a choice out of a very long list of thirty political parties presented to them in an elongated ballot paper. 'Son of the soil' eventually won in his hometown. The agent of the winning party PDP told me: 'what a successful election, the end justifies the means!' (Field notes, 12 April 2003)

For the subsequent Presidential/Gubernatorial and State Houses of Assembly elections, held on 19 April and 3 May respectively, I decided to

observe in Maiduguri, an urban historic and market town, and a centre of administrative power, to enable me to compare events with my earlier experience. I decided to observe a station located at Dr Mala Kachallah Housing Estate in peri-urban Maiduguri, a housing project executed by the incumbent governor whose tenants were therefore expected to vote for him. I also observed at a polling station located in Mairi Primary School, Bama road. As in the National Assembly elections, the two latter elections were characterised by a number of irregularities, as local and national political dynamics were intense at that stage of the elections. For instance, several losing parties threatened to boycott the elections. However, in both polling stations the election results showed people did not vote for the incumbents. The rejection of incumbents in these two stations seemed to be 'protest voting'. In reality however, a host of social, economic, political, ethnic, religious and cultural factors seemed to be influencing voters' behaviour. Violence and fighting were observed between the supporters of rival parties while exchange of money for votes was again done in the open. Apparently, the presence of local election monitors, both from the TMG, did not deter irregularities. Given the violations, voters do not expect real choices; rather, most people, particularly the poor, preferred to make the best use of this hopeless event by selling their votes.

A number of issues emerge from the foregoing account. First, it reveals the practical problems of building liberal democracy in an unstable developing economy. It shows that much as competitive electoral politics carries different faces even within different parts of the country, the whole reality contrasts sharply with what is understood to obtain in advanced democracies. In the context of post-colonial Nigeria, violence and irregularity have become commonplace in electoral governance. In particular, the 1964 and 1983 elections were characterised by massive electoral fraud and wanton violence, resulting in military intervention, often lasting for more than a decade before democratic restoration. Second, in the case of voting in Marte, we have noted the presence of a number of actors, each with their vested role and interest – election officials, security agents, party representatives and local election monitors (civic associations). In particular, it is noted that in conniving to rig the election, government officials and party representatives were not deterred by the presence of local election monitors. Given this, we need to rethink the potency of civic associations in consolidating unstable democratic systems.

This chapter argues that in the context of an unstable developing

economy such as Nigeria, the participation of civic associations in the electoral process is limited and far from the model formulated in developed liberal democracies – which is itself rendered imperfect by practical realities.[4] The chapter argues that though they struggle to make a difference, these associations leave much to be desired: they are largely donor-driven and serve the materialist interests of the social actors behind them. The chapter argues that the real-life performance of civic associations is far below the lofty imagery often advanced by liberal theorists. It argues that power and material interests are key drivers of civic associations in their participation in an electoral process.

Civil Society and the Electoral Process:
A Glimpse of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG)
This chapter examines the participation of a fraction of civil society – namely civic associations – as represented by the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) and its affiliates in the Nigerian General Elections of 2003, which was only the third such political event in post- colonial Nigeria organised by democratically elected civilian representatives (all other elections were conducted in the context of military-guided transition to democracy). Its significance lies in the fact that in addition to providing a space for understanding how civilian democrats seek people's electoral mandate, the election stood as a test-case for Nigeria's democratic consolidation – one which commenced following the restoration of democracy and the exit of the military from power in May 1999. Perhaps more crucially, the election allowed for a firsthand contextual study of TMG, as an example of how civic associations engage in the electoral process. Three crucial issues in particular are noted in this chapter. First is the nature of state structure of electoral governance and how it is often abused in containing the agency of civic associations. Second is how civic associations come to terms with structural constraints. Third is the degree to which civic associations themselves prove to be imperfect as a result of their organisational limitations.

The engagement of civic associations in Nigeria's electoral process is a relatively recent phenomenon (Obi and Abutudu 1999: 292). For a long time the mechanism for monitoring elections and ensuring order has been vested in, and monopolised by, the government – particularly electoral commissions. The first national election monitoring initiative was the Nigerian Election Monitoring Group (NEMG), which was sponsored by the government to monitor the 1993 election. Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of the election, the NEMG issued several

reports that were favourable to the government. It was perhaps because of the flaws associated with government-organised election monitoring that the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) invited international monitors to observe Nigerian elections in the early 1990s. This did not actually occur until 1998 (see Enemuo and Momoh, 1999). The 1998 election itself was perhaps the first time local and invited international elections observers were allowed by state authorities, even if reluctantly and with obvious limitations, to participate in monitoring the conduct of elections in Nigeria (Nwankwo, 1999: 157).

Far more civic associations participated in the Nigerian election of 2003 than in the 1998 elections. They include a wide array of organisations working on areas such as human rights and legislative reform, as well as those working primarily on the election – the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), the Electoral Reform Network (ERN), the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), the Labour Union Election Observation Team (LEMT), the Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC), the Federation of Muslim Women Associations (FOMWAN), and the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO). This chapter is based on a case study of the Transition Monitoring Group, a coalition of over 170 civil liberty and pro-democracy organisations, including many of the organisations discussed in Chapter 5, most of which emerged in response to the authoritarian posture of military rule and its failed transition-to-civil-rule programmes. These associations blame both the military and politicians for this vicious cycle of transitions:

> We have been used to the military promising to hand over power to elected representatives through competitive multiparty elections only to scuttle the process in the eleventh hour on grounds of foul play. We have also been used to seeing politicians carrying out electoral malpractice. We wanted to overcome these problems (interview with the Coordinator of TMG, Abuja, 15 August 2003).

Following the death of General Abacha in August 1998, hopes of democratic restoration rose as the succeeding regime of General Abubakar took convincing steps to hand over power to civilian democrats within months. Whilst politicians braced for the challenges of forming new political parties, actors in civic associations found succour in strengthening their ties through the formation of networks, such as the TMG, as a means of reinforcing their participation as 'non-partisan' actors. To be sure, the immediate concern of the founders of TMG, given the dramatic

turn of events that followed the death of General Abacha, was how to ensure a level playing field for all political aspirants and a stable political environment for citizens to exercise their franchise:

> the decision to monitor the elections under the Abubakar transition was taken against the background of protracted military rule in the country and the high public interest in the transition-to-civil-rule programme subsequently announced by the Abubakar government. It was in response to this that a group of human rights and civil society organisations came together and established the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) to observe the elections (TMG 2000: vi)

A Social Analysis of TMG:
Composition and Organisational Structure

TMG was formally launched on 1 September 1998 at a meeting held in Lagos attended by 16 representatives from 12 civil society groups, mainly from southwestern Nigeria. A follow-on meeting held at Arewa House, Kaduna, on 2 November, saw several groups based in the north and east Nigeria joining the network. By the end of November, when the TMG secretariat first sent a list of member groups to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to satisfy the requirement for accreditation of TMG and its observers, membership strength had risen to 44, then 63 after the election. Today, the TMG boasts of over 170 organisations in its membership list, one of the largest in the country.[5] While TMG's large membership may indicate, on face value, organisational strength and increased chances of pooling donor funding, it evidently has limitations. The first problem relates to the set-up and operation of the Group. The TMG is a network of diverse organisation operating on 'a Committee System of decision-making [reinforced] by a Secretariat' (TMG 2000: 44). The key structures include the Coordinating Committee (CC), the Report Assessment Committee (RAC), the Training and Drafting Committee (TDC), the Logistics Committee and the Financial Committee (LCFC). These committees constitute the framework within which affiliated associations struggle for and aim to 'capture' the TMG. A breakdown of organisations indicates that they are by no means equal, in terms of size, resources, individual membership and 'organisational politics'.[6] These factors determine the unequal influence of each organisation within the TMG framework. As a network of diverse social groupings, TMG carried some palpable contradictions, not least the potential clash of interest between larger and weaker member organisations. It was noted that some

organisations such as the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), the Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN), Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP) and the Human Rights Monitor (HRM) were clearly in control of the TMG – having produced, in 'rotation', the core of its leadership since it was founded. Smaller associations such as the Shehu Shagari Institute for Leadership and Governance (SSILG), based in Sokoto, and the Borno Coalition for Democracy and Progress (BOCODEP), based in Maiduguri, seemed to be less influential in TMG's scheme of affairs.

Another issue relates to the representation of women's groups both in the network and in leadership positions. To its credit, TMG has a relatively high number of women's groups as affiliates,[7] and women activists in leadership posts. For instance, at the TMG plenary meeting held at Abuja (25–26 June 2000), Ms Ayo Obe, the President of the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) emerged as Chair, Festus Okoye (the Executive Director of the Human Rights Monitor, HRM) as Vice Chair and Innocent Chukwuma (the Executive Director of the Centre for Law Enforcement Education) as Treasurer. Other members of the Executive Committee include Clement Nwankwo, Ms Nkoyo Toyo, Ms Bisi Olateru-Alagbegi, Dr Mairo Mandara, Eze Onyekpere, Nimi Walson-Jack, Emma Ezeazu, Otive Igbuzo, Anyakwee Nsirimovu, Ms Sylvia Akpala, Moshood Erubami and Alhaja Lateefa Okunnu. Clearly the TMG leadership was dominated by men, but compared to many other civic associations and networks, there were more women in its leadership (the President and five Executive Committee members).

Another issue relates to the social composition of actors both within individual associations and in the TMG. There are two social categories within these associations: activists and paid employees. My key focus was on both activists (urban professionals) who founded civic associations and those employed as accountants, clerical staff, solicitors. The two are related but essentially the former serves as the employer of the latter – in other words, such organisations expand opportunities for professional and career development. Almost all affiliated associations were based in Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Calabar, Kano, Kaduna and Jos – a key reason why their coverage of rural areas in election monitoring is far less than urban areas. From these organisations has emerged a group of social actors struggling to maintain their hold in a competitive donor-driven 'civil society industry' *vis-à-vis* the 'hostile' state (officials), the latter having eventually become concerned with the rising influence of urban professionals reinventing themselves from the 'pains' of adjustment and

launching a new 'trade': an emerging 'business' of NGO work. The formation of the TMG in 1998 signalled the desire by these associations to pool together their individual energies. Thus, the TMG and its affiliates present themselves as non-partisan, committed to the principles of liberal democracy: 'the mission of the Group shall be to promote the development and practice of democratic values and to monitor democratic institutions and electoral process' (TMG Constitution 2001: 1). The member organisations of the TMG took four 'affirmative steps', each confirming the civic associational character of the Group:

a) *Maintaining* independence *from partisan associations and promoting the image of impartiality:* the TMG affirmed its intention to 'promote an image of impartiality, which may also be described as being neutral, non-partisan, apolitical, independent or objective' (TMG 2000: 43).

b) *Communicating clearly and regularly:* TMG considered that its credibility would be enhanced by pursuing a policy of communicating openly with the political parties, the government, the media and the public. These communications took the form of press conferences, press releases, advertisement, newsletters, telephone calls and personal interviews.

c) *Ensuring the integrity of TMG's plans and methodology:* the TMG noted the need to formulate and execute methodologically transparent activities which were 'logistically and financially feasible and must, assuming that they were properly executed, appear capable of accomplishing established goals' (TMG 2000: 44).

d) *Executing plans:* the TMG recognised that its 'plans and methodologies are irrelevant if they could not be properly executed, in which case the operation would lose credibility'. It further noted that it required 'the proper personnel and resources and, above all good training' to perform impartially, objectively and professionally' (TMG 2000: 44).

Other objectives include the following: to promote accountability, transparency and responsiveness among political leaders and in the public sector; to encourage and promote the participation of citizens, especially of women and marginalised groups in the political process; to provide civic education and democratic capacity building to public institutions; to encourage the wider dissemination of voter education materials and to lobby and campaign for the promulgation of human rights and people-oriented legislation to assist in mediating and resolving disputes arising within the electoral process (TMG 2001: 2–3).

These commitments were crucial for accomplishing TMG's key claims to be developing the integrity of the Nigerian electoral process by monitoring and reporting on the degree of compliance of staff INEC officials, party agents and voters with approved guidelines for the conduct of the elections. However, as we will see later this proved to be a Herculean task, because of a host of structural, political and financial reasons.

TMG as a 'Designer' Association: Negotiating Participation in a State-dominated Domain

TMG emerged as a network of civic associations with a 'designer' mandate to engage in the administration and governance of elections. Prior to its formation, only a few associations were actively engaged in the 'field' of elections. This was mainly because of the constraints imposed by the state, in particular the Elections Commissions, which has since independence monopolised the administration and oversight of elections.[8] The key problems of electoral commissions which affect their impartiality, particularly in the eyes of civic associations, are that they are quite weak, dependent and politically inclined towards the governing classes. This 'has been a source of worry for those who believe that the government of the day, specifically a civilian one, may deliberately starve the electoral body to acquiescence' (Jinadu, 1995: 86). In the case of INEC, these problems were particularly emphasised at the 2003 post-election conference organised by the Commission to deliberate on 'lessons learnt' at the 2003 election. There was consensus amongst participants that INEC was financially and bureaucratically dependent on the state, while INEC Commissioners and key personnel were working at the behest of the Office of the President of the Federal Republic who is responsible for their appointment (Participant Observation, INEC post-Election Conference, August 2003).

When it was eventually formed, TMG became a specialist network committed to monitoring elections. Soon after the 1998 elections, TMG produced a report in which it adjudged that the election was far from free and fair, but sufficiently so for Nigeria to claim to have returned to democracy. Because of the urgency of getting the military out of power, TMG and other international observer groups conceded that that the 1998 election was the best that could be achieved given the entrenched militarisation of Nigerian society (TMG 2000; see also Carter Centre/NDI, 1999). However, TMG noted that in future elections, the imperfections of the exercise should serve as a lesson for improvement

and not as precedent for further irregularities. The TMG learnt a number of lessons from its participation in the 1998 election, not least the fact that state officials and institutions are almost always wary of local observer groups and, therefore, seek to control their participation. They thus have to be resisted with unflinching determination.

In preparation for the 2003 elections, the TMG mobilised 1,000 observers who were trained to monitor some of Nigeria's 120,000 polling units. In doing so, the group had to deal with suspicion from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which objected initially to the participation of TMG. When it became apparent that TMG would participate anyway, the INEC issued a stringent code of conduct for the TMG and its team of monitors.

'Elections 2003': Contending Issues and Challenges from TMG

As the 2003 general elections approached, there were concerns about the challenges and outcome which it portended. To be sure, the election offered a distinct moment for 'renewing' democracy, in a context that could make or mar Nigeria's fledgling liberal democracy, outside the usual norm of military-guided democratisation:

> '[Election] 2003' will mark a defining moment in Nigeria's history … [it] will show whether Nigeria will break the circle of its inability to transit from civilian-sponsored democracy to subsequent civilian administration. This observation is made against the backdrop of the fact that the first and second republics collapsed and were supplanted by military rule due to inability of the political class to manage electoral conflict and democratic process (TMG 2003a: 2).

Thus, compared to previous transitions managed by the military, the 2003 election was seen to provide a rare moment to test the extent to which those in power were ready and willing to abide by the rules of competitive electoral politics. From my perspective, it allowed for scrutiny of the participation of civic associations with their claim to be 'impartial participants' in an environment where almost every actor is politically motivated. At issue was the extent to which these civic associations could vindicate their non-partisan claims.

In the run-up to the election there were particular concerns among civil society groups and oppositional political actors that need to be singled out here because of their pivotal implications for electoral and democratic stability. The first concern was the so-called 'incumbency

factor' or *Tazarce* – which involves the use of state power and resources as well as illegally acquired wealth by representatives in government positions to re-gain (consolidate) their power. *Tazarce* is a Hausa term meaning 'go on representing or ruling'. The term was coined during the regime of General Sani Abacha when the dictator built an elaborate campaign machinery for succeeding himself through civilianisation – that is, resigning from his military commission to contest (and ultimately win) as a civilian democratic head of state as was/is common in many West African countries (Tar 1999). In 2003, *Tazarce* was at issue for several serving representatives, and diffused into other languages in the country. Rather than conceding a desire to hang on to power, it is commonly invoked by proponents and supporters as a guarantee of 'continuity'.

Tazarce was only one of several problems that cumulatively posed a threat to the success of the election. In a press statement, the TMG emphasised these problems as 'pointers' that would be likely to jeopardise the coming elections:

> The pointers include the falsification of 2001 Electoral act by the incumbent government; the *massive irregularities that attended the selection and nomination of candidates* for the various elective offices under the present dispensation, the *insistence by all the incumbent governors on running for a second term* in office, the *late release of electoral timetable* by the Independent National Electoral Commission, the deliberate *commercialisation of party nomination processes* by the political parties and Independent National Electoral Commission, and the spate of *targeted killings of opponents and political violence*, which have permeated and pervaded each and every aspect of the electoral process and the attempt at *stripping the contest for political power of ideological issues in favour of ethnicity and religion* (in Democracy Watch, TMG 2003b: 14; emphases added).

These issues dominated civil society discourses and their engagement with the state and the voting public before, during and after the elections. They also served as the rationale for civil society participation in the elections, as well as their targeted aims.

Pre-election Activities – Getting Ready for D-Day
The period before the election was characterised by a mixture of fear and anxiety. By January/February 2003, there was a buzz of activity: civic associations organising workshops and rallies; intense media activity with

heavy newspaper coverage of events, radio and television stations airing jingles, animations and dramas educating the people on how to vote (state-owned media were noted to be broadcasting openly in favour of incumbents); officers of the National Orientation Agency and other government information departments organising public awareness activities, some meant to bolster support for incumbents; convoys of parties and politicians touring villages, towns and cities, campaigning to win people's votes, INEC issuing guidelines, Registering voters and re-registering them; military and para-military personnel conducting exercises on the outskirts of almost every city in case they had to intervene during the elections. Obviously all these events had a bearing on the outcome. Below, I examine how civic associations participated in the run-up to the elections.

The Politics of Inclusion
Struggling to be Accredited by State 'Gatekeepers'

Civil society groups were not automatically accepted as observers in the electoral process. They had to undergo a frustrating 'rite of passage' a political struggle that included an audit of organisational activities, security checks on the list of proposed monitors, and subjection to bureaucratic 'red tape' – before being accredited by INEC. This posture is indicative of the unwillingness by the state (both during military rule and in the democratic era), in particular, electoral commissions to allow pro-democracy associations to engage freely in the electoral process. In the case of TMG, the root of this 'politics of exclusion' started in the 1998/99 elections when it set a precedent by threatening to defy the procedure, if domestic observers were deprived of the right to participate in the election. The reluctance by the State Security Service and INEC to concede civil society associations sufficient space for participation was based on flimsy excuses, as can be discerned from the following account of former TMG Chairman, Clement Nwankwo, recounting TMG's experience and response during the 1999 elections:

> The State Security Service … were not enthusiastic [to allow for free participation]. They were concerned about what they called 'the confrontational posture' of the leading groups in our coalition, particularly our previous opposition to the military government. We responded by reiterating our determination to monitor the [1998/99] elections. To underscore our seriousness, we told the officials that we are determined to observe the elections with or

without official accreditations. At the end of the meeting, the election officials reluctantly promised to issue accreditation for 360 observers.[9]

The problem of denial of space for participation, as shown by the experience of TMG in 1999, was a problem carried forward to the 2003 elections. To participate in the 2003 election, TMG had to re-negotiate for accreditation in the same defiant manner. TMG's new crop of officials, most of whom were lawyers, journalists and retired civil servants, informed me that they had to confront INEC in unwavering terms, as did their predecessors, before they were reluctantly accredited:

> We are used to suspicion and controlling posture from the state, which we confront with logic, dialogue and persuasion. What we cannot compromise is our right to participate as a non-political group in educating the electorate to make informed choices, monitoring the [2003] election and in revealing institutional failures. We can go to any extent to fight for these rights and even defy any attempt to deny us those rights (Interview with TMG official, Abuja, 15 August 2003).

An INEC official asserted that activists in civic associations 'claim to participate genuinely in the electoral process, but in reality they are using it to make money, buy big houses and jeeps. Some have ended up contesting the coming election [themselves]' (Interview with INEC official, Abuja, 13 January 2003). This statement indicates that state officials attempt to place themselves on the moral high-ground by criticising actors in civic associations.

TMG succeeded not only in getting INEC accreditation, but in deployed the largest number of local election monitors – even though TMG claimed that its list of monitors was reduced by INEC. Again, INEC informed TMG and other prospective domestic monitors that 'the overall monitor of elections in Nigeria is INEC' and 'you are allowed to only observe, report back to INEC on what you see and not to intervene in any way' (Interview conducted with INEC official, Abuja, 13 January 2003). These conditionalities tend to show that state 'gatekeepers', and the dominant political interests which they serve, were concerned that the participation of civic associations may lead to some counter-productive outcome, such as usurpation of state power and/or the exposure of electoral malpractice.

Ironically, while TMG was struggling to become accredited as a domestic election monitor, their overseas counterparts and funding partners – international election monitors – seemed to cross state hurdles with less difficulty as the state provided them with all the necessary diplomatic and logistic support. One probable reason for this is that by opening up the space for participation of international organisations, the state authorities stood to make a lot of political and material capital – election-related assistance, international recognition of the triumph of 'transparency' and democracy, and so on. The need to attract donor funding was a bone of contention between civil society and the state. In the context of 'Election 2003', both civic associations and the state were noted to be competing for donor funds. By 2003, donors had re-established their favour for the democratic *state* and had started channelling resources to democratic consolidation programmes such as 'good governance', and human rights training for security agencies, capacity-building for elected representatives and election officials, among others. However, most donors such as the British DfID provided generous funding both for state and civic associations under reorganised governance funds. Thus, funding created a thriving 'civil society industry' competing intensely with state institutions.

The Struggle for Funds: Opportunities and Limitations

Aside from accusations of money-making, there was, perhaps, a stronger reason why some state officials held civic associations in contempt: their view of activists as politically ambitious, having amassed sufficient resources from non-governmental work to underwrite entry into the struggle for power. There is some truth in this. Since 1999, some civil society groups (a few of which were affiliated to the TMG) have transformed themselves into political parties (for example Democratic Alternative (DA); Joint Action Committee for Democracy; National Conscience (NC)).[10] Also, several activists have openly joined the political race as political contestants (for example Gani Fawehinmi, Olisa Agbakoba, Arthur Nwankwo and Comrade Sylvester Ejiofor all contested in the 2003 election as presidential candidates under the Nigeria Conscience Party, the Green Party (GP) and Party for Social Democracy (PSD) respectively), or became political appointees. These transformations carried huge implications. For instance, they put into question the liberal notion of civic associations as non-political. By deciding to transform into political parties, civic groups and their activists lost their civic and non-partisan image. However, their new status creates tensions for their former

partners and colleagues, not least over whether or not the latter should support the former in their struggle for power. The Nigerian experience shows that many civic associations and activists, albeit not all, have supported their 'former colleagues' in the run for power.

Similarly, there was suspicion and petty jealousy amongst civil society groups themselves in terms of financial ambitions and struggles for funding. An ex-member of a TMG-member organisation told me: 'there is no doubt that money occupies a centre stage of our action. It was "the blood of the devil" [money] that bred hatred among us' (interview held in Bradford, 22 December 2002). If activists in civil society are divided by money, there is sufficient reason for the voting public and state officials to suspect them (as revealed in Chapter 5).

In the context of 'Election 2003', the TMG provided an opportunity for its member organisations and other affiliates – small- and large-scale NGOs with asymmetric bargaining power – to come together and maximise their chances of competing in the 'world aid market' while at the same time retaining and pursuing their individual and organisational interests. Funding is a sensitive issue in what is now commonly referred to in Nigeria as the 'civil society industry' or 'non-governmental entrepreneurship'; terms used to describe donor-driven organisations and their activities. I often received evasive or inadequate answers from civil society officials to questions regarding their sources of funding (see Chapter 5). As observed in that chapter, most urban civil society groups get their funding from foreign donors (see also Goldsmith 2001: 415). This proved to be the case for the TMG. Given that donors were more willing to support joint action and networks than stand-alone organisations or projects, the TMG provided a strong mechanism and a truly nationwide consortium of civic organisations in Nigeria, to effectively attract donor funding. In an interview, a TMG official informed me that a variety of donor agencies come to their aid, often to support specific activities:

> In the past we got assistance from the National Democratic Institute [NDI][11] for capacity building and OSIWA [a West African civil society initiative] for monitoring of democratic process: a two-year programme from dealing with political parties and appraisal of INEC. We also got assistance from the British Department for International Development [DfID] for election monitoring as well as the German Embassy, which has rendered similar assistance to many CSO coalitions. For the 2003 elections, we got funding from

the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] in conjunction with DfID and United Nations Electoral Assistance Programme [UNEAP] (Interview held in Abuja, 15 August 2003).

Building on its performance since the 1998/99 elections, TMG succeeded in attracting a joint funding project known as *Heading toward the 2003 Elections* from DfID, UNDP and UNEAP. Being the largest domestic observer group and the most-funded civic association placed TMG, its officials and member organisations, in a privileged position for funding their joint and individual organisational activities. To shoulder this burden, the TMG 'leadership' decided strategically to decentralise activities to its constituent member-associations and to leave the main organisation to focus on coordination. Though key decisions on the management of funds involve donor representation and influence, TMG provided the organisational and support structure. It provided a standard office complex with a conference hall situated in Cairo Road, Wuse II, Abuja and Zonal offices spread across the country with a well-paid standing professional staff of more than 20 (Central and Zonal coordinators, accountants, programme officers, administrative assistants and so on). This is in addition to a 17-member Coordinating Committee drawn from member organisations that makes strategic decisions. TMG's 'robust' organisational structure required extensive funding obtained, on grounds of 'sustainability' and 'capacity-building' from both governmental and non-governmental donors.

TMG Strategies and Activities

TMG's first strategy in the 2003 elections was a civic education pro-gramme, which kicked off in December 2002 with an advertisement placed by TMG and funding partners inviting prospective civil society groups, including TMG coalition members, to submit proposals for projects. In January 2003, a team of assessors[12] drawn from donors and the TMG met at the TMG conference hall to assess over 100 proposals, out of which 55 were selected and allocated two million Naira each (about £10,000) to carry out civic education activities throughout the country. Progress made by beneficiary organisations was monitored and reported back for evaluation (TMG 2003c; 2003d).

The second project was associated with the training of state gate-keepers, specifically law enforcement officials to complement the state's efforts. However, TMG officials informed me that this project was not particularly welcomed by the state, in particular INEC, which claimed that

the TMG was going beyond its limits. Nevertheless, the TMG went ahead with its training programme, under which state security agents were trained by civil society activists, and hired consultants and resource persons. In addition, TMG distributed thousands of documents on 'human rights standards for the prevention and control of electoral violence' to state institutions, and sponsored adverts in national dailies and the electronic media (TMG 2003b: 16). Their third project was election-day observation, which involved the training and deployment of domestic election observers. Ten thousand volunteers drawn from over 150 TMG member organisations were mobilised to observe voting in polling station throughout the 36 states of Nigeria (TMG 2003e: 7; 2003f: 1). The training of election observers was delivered using a cascading method (training of trainers and step-down training) as well as a series of methodology workshops (TMG 2003g: 12–13; 2003j: 3–7). The final project was associated with post-election activities and involved the deployment of monitors to observe the procedures and sittings of election petition tribunals.

Voter Education:
'Educating the Electorate for Informed Elections'?
The above slogan is quoted from a voter education workshop organised by a TMG affiliate, the Centre for Research and Documentation (CRD) based in Kano, which I attended. The workshop was held in Maiduguri from 31 March to 2 April 2003. CRD was one of the 55 NGOs that benefited from the TMG/UNDP/DFiD joint funding tagged 'Heading towards 2003 Elections in Nigeria'. CRD delivered this workshop to 'train the trainers' (TT) mainly in the cities of its target zone (northeast) and specifically Damaturu, Maiduguri and Gombe – followed by structured cascading or 'step down training' to be delivered by TT participants to their communities and neighbourhoods living in urban, peri-urban and rural areas. I observed the workshop held in Maiduguri as well as its cascading impact in Konduga LGA (rural); Mairi area of Maiduguri (peri-urban) and in Maiduguri metropolis (urban).

The organisers constructed the workshop to complement the state's voter education campaign (delivered by the National Orientation Agency, INEC and other concerned agencies). The Maiduguri workshop was held in two phases, each attended by a group of about 50 participants drawn from local organisations, in particular representatives from civil society groups, political parties, traditional institutions, community leaders, youth groups, women's groups and the public service. These participants were

drawn from urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Each phase took two days and each day was divided into two sessions – morning and afternoon. During the two days a total of six modules were delivered 'interactively' by a team of resource persons drawn from the University of Maiduguri, media organisations and civil society groups. The modules covered the following topics: 'Using participatory methods to combat political violence'; 'Human rights and the electoral process: revisiting citizens' rights and duties'; 'The roles of political parties and pressure groups in the orientation of an informed electorate'; 'Voting and voting behaviour'; 'Elections'; and 'Conflict management and prevention in an election period'. Each module was delivered using learning aids such as OHP, cardboard sheets, markers, jotters and pens. The manner in which the training workshop was executed suggests 'professionalism'. It assumed a high level of literacy and education amongst the participants.

The organisers' 'empowerment' position seems to fit into discourses held by Nigerian civil society and academics on the gap between state and society (government and governed) and the potential of civil society organisations for mobilising the citizenry. This in its turn becomes a rationale for donor support. However, some TT *participants* held different expectations from the organisers. One elderly man, a party leader from a rural area judging by his dress and the local dialect in which he spoke, told me that 'we are more interested in getting money [per diem] and delicious food to fill our stomachs than this noise they are making' (informal conversation, April 2003). This difference in perception is underscored in an article by Samuel Oyovbaire, one of Nigeria's outstanding Professors of Political Science and a statesman in his own right (having served as a former minister of information and adviser to General Babangida). The gap between the voting public and political representatives is yawningly wide, he argues, with implications for the functioning of democracy (Oyovbaire 2001). In this piece, Oyovbaire not only glorified the role of civic associations in what he calls 'constituency relations', by which he means their capacity to facilitate a fruitful link between those in power and those who elected them, but also classified civic associations as the most proactive constitutive elements of a political constituency. This conception seems to tally with the discourses common in civic associations themselves both before and after the 2003 elections. In these discourses, it is common to find references to civil society as the bridge between government and the governed – as a vanguard of popular yearnings and aspirations and one better equipped than the people themselves to actualise those visions. These claims were echoed by some

organisers of the Maiduguri workshop as shown in the following field notes, which I wrote on the second day:

> One of the organisers told me over a lunch break that 'we are interested in educating the people to make informed voting choices for many reasons. First, we are very much aware of their needs and secondly the state is not living up to expectations of doing so. As you can clearly see from the design and delivery of our workshop package, we are conscious of the stuff that is really needed by the people to enable them make informed choices during the elections. This workshop's modules cover, in the context of the coming elections, conflict management, citizenship rights, participation, political parties and pressure groups'. A second organiser told me much later: 'we need not blow our own trumpet. The people know that we are conscious of their needs in a democratic set up. We are not claiming to provide them with material provisions, which are contractual obligations of the state … But we are capable of giving them the tools for getting their democratic rights and entitlements as well as standing by them in getting those rights.' It seems to me that civil society groups and actors construct themselves not only as bastions of people's democratic needs and aspirations, but also in engaging the state, portraying themselves as frontline vanguards of those visions.

A common, but insidious, self-imaging amongst activists in civic associations observed during the workshop and throughout fieldwork was that they consider themselves not only as a better-educated members of the society, but more skilled in the language and tactics of engaging the state. To be sure, these are signs of claims to exploit popular struggle, when in fact without the support and participation of those perceived to be at the lower echelons of society, the activities of the civic associations would lack any credit since they always claim to be meeting people's interests.

Paradoxically, the voting public and, to some extent even participants at the TT workshop, seem to disagree with the 'empowerment' claims constructed by such leaders of civic associations. One TT participant, a civil servant from Maiduguri, spoke cynically of the workshop organisers as a privileged class and as opportunists: 'they are rich people from the cities, they get more money from this event than us. We are only being recorded in this machine [showing me a video recorder focused on the

participants] to establish evidence that they have trained us' (conversation, Maiduguri, April 2003). As a state official, he might well have been suspicious of civic associations, but he seemed to be carried away by the material opportunism which donor-funded voter educators seemed to be making out of 'Election 2003'. Throughout the workshop, even though some participants paid rapt attention to the plenary sessions and participated actively in small-group workshops, others appeared to be more interested in such 'trivial' matters (at least, in the eyes of the organisers) as breakfast/ lunch time and menu (especially when the menu list did not arrive in time to enable them to make a choice), and queries on mileage and other allowances (usually directed at the programme officer and accountant during breaks).

On the whole, the workshops finished with the desired results, both in the opinion of the organisers and as confided to me by another participant: 'I have learnt something on peaceful voting which I will carry back to my people. This stuff [billboards] are really useful as self-explanatory displays and my people will understand what is contained in the papers.' At the end of the workshop, each TT was given their much sought-after per diem and allowances as well as a pack containing about 80 copies of illustrated cardboard sheet-sized billboards which contained messages on peaceful voting, women's right to vote, how to vote and other rules governing elections. Each board was presented in English (official language) or in one of two vernaculars (Kanuri or Hausa). The aim was to enable each participant to use the materials both as public display of campaign messages and as learning aids to train people in their communities. The organisers also nominated, from among the team of resident resource persons, followers-up and evaluators who were to track TT participants in targeted communities to see if voter education messages had reached them, and respond to any queries.

In view of the fact that it was easier to track down the communities than the evaluators, I decided to visit three communities three days after the workshop and about a week before the National Assembly Elections. In Konduga, the TT participant had not displayed any of the materials given to him – in fact, as soon as I alighted from the commercial bus I found a woman bean-cake seller using some of the papers as wrapping sheets for her bean-cakes. I asked the woman if she knew anything about the papers. All she knew was that some young lads had sold them to her. I asked a group of local people what they knew about voting, and whether anybody had come to educate them recently. One middle-aged man told me: 'Look, the only people who come to tell us anything are the politicians

with their money. Our votes are already cast, don't waste your time … you security man, journalist or whatever you call yourself' (Field notes April 2003). Another man told me almost immediately 'vote is money and money is vote. The two go together' (Field notes, op cit.). In another group, a man told me 'Yeah we get some words from the local government information unit and from Maiduguri' [perhaps the National Orientation Agency?] (Field notes, op cit.). Because Konduga was a predominantly Muslim community, I was not able to question any women apart from the bean-cake seller, who was a Christian and the wife of a police officer.

However, in Mairi, a suburb of Maiduguri metropolis, I saw voter education posters displayed in party offices and the motor park, and on the door of the workshop of a TV/radio mechanic. I asked some residents about the posters. Some of them informed me that a local political leader had come to post the bills but did not bother to tell them anything. At the party office, I met the man (TT participant) who told me that I should praise him for displaying the posters. He said, 'People were aware that money came out of the workshop. I lied to them, said that I did not attend the workshop but got some bills for our party from the organisers. If I try to explain, they will think that I am trying to avoid giving them the workshop money. I was in a difficult situation.' In Maiduguri metropolis, there were several displays of the posters but nobody seemed to know who had put them up.

From the foregoing, it seemed that CRD's voter education project in Maiduguri and environs, like those organised by other civic associations in other parts of the country, was heavily flawed and influenced by material gain (and even perceived gains!) on the part of organisers and participants. The message failed to reach its target – the voting public – and their behaviour on election-day was largely innocent of the well-meant training they should have received. Nevertheless, it is premature to cast aspersions on the genuine motives associated with civic associations' voter education programmes. It can be argued that while these voter education exercises had only a limited effect, it does not mean that the TMG and CRD were not genuinely making an effort. Certainly, in my participation at the training workshop, I noticed the goodwill and determination of the trainers to have a positive impact on the electoral process. My conversation with one of the evaluators of the Workshop revealed that he certainly felt fulfilled and vindicated. He informed me that if this exercise were conducted by a government department, no one would turn up because all the participation per diem would be squandered and, more

importantly, people are generally fed-up and disappointed with state officials. Thus, it is evident that not all the feedback that I obtained from the people was truthful. In particular, some of the corrosive cynicism expressed cannot be divorced from the sense of despair that has accrued from years of state neglect and marginalisation of the people.

Party Registration and Primaries

Given that the party system provides an arena where contests for power take place between stronger and weaker contenders, there have been concerns since 1999, especially amongst civic associations, that the dominant parties and their representatives in government were likely to undermine attempts at expanding the party space. This particular concern stems from the military era, when party formation took place in a dictatorial and repressive atmosphere often characterised by regimes' outright refusal to register parties on subjective grounds such as threat to national security, even if they had met all requirements for registration. The source of this problem has been noted in chapters 4 and 5. Having followed the 'high level' activities of several parties in January 2003, TMG claimed that the process of party registration and activities were generally staged against a backdrop of a 'non-inclusive political and electoral systems [which were] legacies of [past] military dictatorship (TMG 2003d: 6). By blaming the previous authoritarian dispensation for the limitations of the electoral process, in particular the limit on forming new political associations and the lack of a level playing field, the TMG was, in fact, calling for a radical reform of the electoral process to make it more encompassing, inclusive and transparent – as provided for in a liberal democracy.

The inauguration of a civilian regime in 1999 was followed almost immediately by a huge tide of pressure from the press, civil society groups and marginalised politicians calling for additional political parties. These pressures were either ignored or stifled by INEC and dominant interests within the national assembly and the executive authorities until the very eve of the 2003 elections. At this stage, two factors seemed to push INEC and the state authorities to accept the idea of expanding the space for participation. First was the conviction, possibly held by dominant political interests within state institutions, that if new parties were allowed to register at such a late stage of electoral politics, they would not be able to make any meaningful impact on the playing field. The second factor was a court order in November 2002 which eventually forced INEC to register more parties. The first factor probably influenced the first party

registration exercise held in June 2002 in which only three new parties were registered out of about 50 prospective political associations, a concession described to me by a TMG official as 'too little, too late' (Interview held in Abuja, 15 August 2003). The court verdict influenced a final registration exercise in November that saw the inclusion of 24 new parties described by the same official as 'too much, too late' (op cit.). In either case, the deliberate constraints and delays caused by the authorities adversely affected the natural course of party formation and seriously jeopardised the legitimacy and trustworthiness of those institutions. Such constraints created a gap between dominant parties which control state institutions and weak new parties which aspired to snatch power from established interests.

By the time new parties had been registered, most established dominant parties and their candidates in positions of governance had used their incumbency factor – *Tazarce* – to hold lavish fund-raising activities using state resources to augment their huge support and resource base and gain the upper hand in campaign activities. Conversely, politicians in new parties began with a low support base and a pittance provided by INEC in the form of take-off grants.[13] As explained below, the gap that existed between old and new parties was further exacerbated by deliberate acts by INEC, for instance, delays in the release of the election timetable caused confusion in the electoral process. What are the impact of these structural limitations and gaps in the activities and performance of political parties? How did TMG respond to these limitations and gaps in terms of its activities?

Between 3 and 10 January 2003 two dominant parties (ANPP and PDP) and two new parties (NDP and UNPP) held their presidential primaries, all attended by TMG observers. It should be noted that by February, while old parties (AD, ANPP & PDP) had held their conventions and primaries to elect candidates, limitations caused by a weak resource and support base prevented several of the 27 new parties either from holding party conventions or nominating candidates through conventional methods in which delegates from across the country or electoral constituency gather to choose party flag bearers. Indeed, the report of the Constitutional Rights Project, an affiliate of TMG, noted that many of them did not even produce candidates for Presidential, Gubernatorial or National Assembly Elections (CRP 2003).

In spite of this, politicians and serving representatives in government praised the conduct of presidential primaries as a successful exercise. However, after participating in those activities TMG raised some

criticisms. In a press statement released on 15 January 2003, TMG observed that in spite of their superior resource and support base, PDP and ANPP primaries had been characterised by several irregularities:

> The near hide and seek process of accreditation of delegates, particularly the PDP, negatively impacted on the election such that delegates were mentally and psychologically exhausted, harassed, intimidated and effectively worn out before the elections were conducted. The state of confusion and disinformation that pervaded the convention of PDP and ANPP was carefully orchestrated as part of an overall strategy aimed at dis-empowerment of the delegates to exercise their rights to democratically and freely elect their party flag bearers … there was widespread bribery of delegates with sacks stuffed with money to influence votes,… the process of voting was flawed, particularly in regard to the secrecy of vote… (TMG 2003h: 1–3).

On the other hand, the statement praised the relative success and transparency of the primaries of the National Democratic Party (NDP) as a marked departure from others: 'the process was less cumbersome, smooth and orderly. A notable innovation in [its] accreditation process was the use of membership identity cards with names and photographs of delegates embossed thereon before they were admitted into the convention ground…' (TMG 2003h: 2). In view of the foregoing, the TMG indicted INEC for its delays in the release of the election timetable:

> The seeming confusion, rush, manipulation and abandonment of appeal process by most of the political parties are the logical outcome of the late release of election timetable. Early release of the timetable would have given the parties enough time to plan their activities in order to avoid the situation that gave the leadership of political parties the opportunity to perpetuate all sorts of electoral irregularities in the name of meeting up with INEC deadline for the submission of the list of party nominated candidates (TMG 2003h: 5).

The delay in the release of the timetable fuelled suspicions held by opposition parties and civil society groups about the partisan nature of INEC being compromised by the funding it receives from the state and the overwhelming power of the president to hire and fire its members. By

contrast, TMG called on the leadership of all parties to make the conduct of their internal affairs more open, transparent and democratic to demonstrate 'internal democracy', an issue that is highly contested within CSOs themselves (see Chapter 5).

TMG and Grassroots Party Politics: from Suspicion to Absence

At the level of grassroots party politics, it was noted that the TMG – indeed many civic associations – were relatively absent (for example party electioneering campaigns). Yet, they were quite active in high-level party conventions and in some events that had significant influence on the grassroots (for example voter education and registration). In addition their campaign banners and posters on voter educations were noticed in urban, peri-urban and some rural constituencies.

While the message of civic associations may have reached various targets, it is doubtful whether they were physically present or active enough to make any difference at the grassroots level, where their message matters most. For instance, after participating in a five-day campaign tour of Party 'B' in northern Borno, I asked the Secretary of the party, the holder of a bachelors degree in political science, whether any civil society group was observing the tour. He gave me the following answer:

> I am not aware if any civil society is observing this tour. I think these civil society people are more interested in what happens at top-level party activities. They don't participate in local politics neither do they know the language of politics in Nigeria. As you can see, real politics takes place down here [at the grassroots]. We don't want them here because they are spoilers who cry wolf where there is none … they are good at producing bulky reports that take days to read after attending occasions for only few minutes (Interview held in Maiduguri, 10 March 2003).

Much later, the same question was posed to a TMG official who told me that her organisation was heavily constrained by the inefficient nature of the political process and that they had a more important task to fulfil:

> INEC delays in the release of the election timetable made our agenda very compact. At the time of campaign and rallies, we were busy with our voter education programmes, which we thought could deal with any mischief likely to be planned by any party. We believed that voter education was the key to solving several related

problems of election. In addition, we were pre-occupied with other activities like attending INEC stakeholder meetings (interview held in Abuja, 15 August 2003).

Conversely, an INEC official noted that TGM and other civil society groups were regarded with suspicion at the grassroots level because most of them are ambitious, while some are themselves engaged in party politics. I did learn that some civil society activists were campaigning personally for their comrades in civic-associations-turned-parties and their candidates. The above accounts show that political parties had just as much contempt for civic associations as they did for state gatekeepers and officials. This is perhaps because the boundary between them and state officials is very thin.

It was noted that 'dirty politics' takes place at the grassroots level where TMG activists choose to be absent. I draw my account from two party functions – a rally and campaign tour respectively staged by a new and an old party – both of which I attended in Borno state in March 2003. I attended the rally of a new Party, 'A', in Maiduguri, the headquarters of Borno State, while the campaign tour of an old Party, 'B', took place in Northern Borno which covered the following local Government Areas: Monguno, Guzamala, Kukawa, Gubio and Nganzai. Party 'A' was registered a few months before the election and its rally was staged both to open its new office in Maiduguri and to campaign for its presidential candidate – a very wealthy man, highly educated, a 'southerner', non-Muslim, who previously served as a minister during the military era. A fellow rally attendant (not of the party faithful, it seemed to me) told me: 'with the exception of his wealth, none of his [other] characteristics could win him a single vote in this part of the country. He is not one of us, but some hungry people may vote for him because of his money. Yet, the wise ones like me will not do so even after chopping [eating] his money. There is more to politics than money. For money we cannot sacrifice our religion and culture.' Another participant who seemed to be a party supporter and of the same ethnic background as the presidential aspirant gave a different view of the political game:

This party is here to break barriers. We are here to win people's power by appealing to the majority of Nigerians who are poor and hungry. If you read our manifesto and constitution, you will see that we mean business. I will get them [constitution, manifesto] for you after this rally. As for our candidate, he is a wealthy and highly

educated elder statesman the like of whom have all died. He served
with first generation politicians and has this rare potential of
bringing his experience to bear on governing this country. He
offers us a rare opportunity to salvage this country (Field notes,
March 2003).

Note how the second respondent manipulated those aspects of the
candidate's social characteristics that might have adversely affected his
chances, glossing over the disadvantageous ones and highlighting the few
beneficial ones. It seemed to me that the only factor that was launching
Party 'A' was the wealth of its founder and presidential candidate.

The campaign tour of Party 'B' was a splendid affair, vindicating the
'power' of the incumbent and others contesting on his platform. The
incumbent governor and his supporters had recently decamped to this
party because his previous Party ('C') had been 'hijacked' at the national
level and another gubernatorial candidate was 'imposed' under its
platform. It took me days and some 'follow-ups' before my application to
participate in party 'B's' tour was conditionally approved by the Zonal
Headquaterrs: the condition was that I should just 'observe' and neither
sabotage party activities nor act as a spy from other parties. This 'cross
carpeting' (a common terminology in Nigeria for changing party or leaving
one party for another) was to make politics a very charged game in Borno
State. In terms of organisation, the use of state resources (government
vehicles, buildings), support base and appeal to primordial sentiments,
Party 'B' had the upper hand compared to 'A'. The former is an old party
with representatives still in power while the latter is a fledgling party,
crippled by delays in party registration. My notes at the time conclude that:

the calibre of people who participated in the tour as well as the
kind of cars used for the journey suggests that the incumbent
governor is funding the candidate. Most of the flashy four-wheel
drive cars had official number plates. Other private cars belong to
aspirants and their well-wishers. Some people I observed also
talked of money withdrawn from the bank by candidates on the
eve of the tour (Field notes, March 2003).

Throughout the tour, huge congregations of stalwarts came out to
demonstrate their support. However, there was a local political dynamic to
this campaign tour – the deserted Party 'C' posed a challenge to Party 'B'.
There was speculation among the supporter of Party 'C' that because the

incumbent (Party 'B' nominee) was insulating himself with corrupt, unpatriotic and untrustworthy politicians who were said to only benefit themselves and do nothing for the voting public, their candidate and Party would easily defeat the incumbent's. It should be noted that, being established parties, both parties 'B' and 'C' had similar potential – a highly organised party militia, access to government resources and an elite base in power. In spite of such potential, Party B was roundly defeated at the gubernatorial elections by the candidate of Party 'C'. The presidential election was won by a fourth party, with parties 'A', 'B' and 'C' all defeated.

My experience suggests that even though weaker parties have less bargaining power than their established counterparts when it comes to pulling crowds and influencing voting behaviour, there are exceptional cases where political irregularities (illegal use of militia) and class indices such as wealth play a decisive role in party activities no matter what party a politician comes from. From party activities and the subsequent election I observed, several decisive factors of the Nigeria party system emerged: 'money politics' or political corruption which involves established politicians using illegally acquired money to buy votes during campaigns; private party militias, the use of rented armed militia for protection, intimidation of rival contestants/voters and demonstration of 'power'; and the 'power of incumbency' or *Tazarce* which involves the brazen use of state resources such as money, vehicles, ongoing projects or those in the 'pipeline', award of contracts, and the use of communication facilities (especially *Thuraya* satellite phones which are an important tool in campaigning) to unduly influence voters.

The foregoing account reveals that grassroots politics is a highly politicised, messy and unpredictable terrain. Here, civic associations find it difficult to participate optimally as non-partisan actors. Throughout my participation in the activities of parties 'A', 'B' and 'C', I did not identify any observer or participant from civic associations. These associations ought to participate actively at grassroots levels, by establishing a good rapport with communities, educating them directly (rather than through the cascading method described above) and serving proactively as a conveyor belt between the electorate and representatives/state institutions.

TMG and Voter Registration Exercises

Based on the belated timetable released by INEC, voter registration was scheduled for 12 to 21 September 2002. Well before the release of the

timetable, however, there was tension between dominant political interests, especially *Tazarce* forces (representatives, governors) and their supporters on the one hand and opposition or marginalised politicians on the other – the former desperate to retain power while the latter was desperate to capture it. This tension heightened the premium placed on 'voter registration' as the first ground to maximise opportunity in the political landscape. By getting more supporters registered, these rival forces expected to boost their chances of obtaining more legitimate votes. Conversely, the registration exercise could also provide the earliest chance for political manoeuvres: the illegal 'wholesale and retail' of voter identification cards through organised syndicates (identified by TMG 2003d: 4). While getting supporters registered is a legitimate activity in terms of constitutional rights and civic duty, the often overlooked 'trading' of voter cards by political aspirants and organised gangs is illegitimate, even criminal, as stated in the Electoral Act (2002) and INEC regulations.

To ensure that voters were registered through the legitimate process, state institutions employed means of mass mobilisation, in particular state-owned media and traditional institutions.[14] As an incentive for maximising voter registration, the government warned that state benefits, in particular the immunisation of children, the distribution of farm inputs the construction of public facilities, would only be given to registered voters. On the other hand, to influence their prospective supporters to register, political parties and aspiring politicians outside of government mainly used grand promises. Indeed satirical jingles and dramas were sponsored by civic associations lampooning aspiring politicians making promises such as the following: 'if I am voted into power, I will make Nigeria a country where every tap flows with milk and honey, delicious cooked chicken flies onto your dining table and farming becomes a luxury' (*Voting Time*, a Hausa Drama, the Nigeria Television Authority [NTA], March 2003). Similar satires were employed in the voter education programmes of the TMG and its affiliates. In spite of this, the TMG expressed fears that the registration exercise would be marred by such irregularities as 'multiple Registrations', 'proxy registration', and 'ghost registration' (see TMG 2003i),[15] all of which feed into the thriving voter card 'black market'. I struggled to trace this market but it is not open to observation; it was mysterious and dangerous undercover terrain even whilst people claimed it was a thriving political business.

During the ten days of voter registration people came out in huge numbers but in the end many were disappointed. In the words of a prospective registrant who had not succeeded in registering by the close of

registration on 21 September, 'registration materials mysteriously developed wings and escaped into the thin air' (interview held in Maiduguri, 10 February 2003). By the end of the exercise, it was obvious that the insufficiency of registration materials had left many Nigerians disenfranchised. The TMG expressed the dismay of those affected: 'An overwhelming number of Nigerians stayed in the queue for the duration of the exercise [10 days] without being registered. Married men, the old, the sick and the disabled all trooped out to exercise their legitimate constitutional rights and quite a substantial number of them went home disappointed' (TMG 2003i: 3).

As a result of the failures of the first registration exercise, the TMG and many others called for an extension that would enable all eligible voters to be registered (TMG 2003i). The registration exercise was repeated in mid-January 2003, but still left many Nigerians unregistered. However, at the end of the registration exercise, INEC claimed to have registered 61 million eligible voters, far beyond initial estimates.

In sum, the previous section shows that TMG interventions in the voter registration process were in evidence before, during and after the exercise. However, in spite of its early warning signals, the TMG was not given sufficient attention by the INEC. As result, and coupled with the ineffectiveness of the registration process, the first 2002 voter registration exercise failed. It took concerted pressure from the TMG for a second round of voter registration to be carried out. Still the process was flawed as not all eligible voters were registered – a mystery of the Nigerian electoral process.

Election Day: One Arena, Several Power Struggles

As a local election observer group, the TMG found itself in an arena populated by other local and international observer groups. Key International Observer groups that took part in the 2003 general election include the EU Election Observer Mission (EU-EOM), the Commonwealth Observer Mission, the Joint National Democratic Institute/Carter Centre Observer Group and the International Republican Institute Observer Group.[16] Neither the state nor local observer groups were happy with the 'colourful' appearance and dominance of international observer missions, they could not avoid the fact that foreign observers serve as a conveyor belt for funding and international legitimacy. International observers not only donated funds, but also participated actively in monitoring the election – with huge implications. TMG and other local and international election monitors entered into the

murky waters of politics and produced, soon thereafter, judgements that portray them as pitching their tents either with the victors or the vanquished in the electoral contest. Thus, while election monitors may have constructed themselves as 'neutrals' or 'ambassadors' (as in the case of international observer missions) in reality they appear to be labelled as leaning towards one side or the other, especially after issuing their statements which are then used by contending political forces as indices of electoral fraud or otherwise. This way 'election observers unwittingly become politicised, as their reports become ammunition in a charged debate over the legitimacy of polls' (Owen 2003: 5). TMG and its affiliates struggled to influence the conduct of the elections and, by extension, justify their donor funding and create future opportunities. However, in a charged political climate, interim statements were also released by international observers which not only eclipsed the reports of domestic observers, but also placed the two in collision course. These dynamics will be explored in the following section.

Election Monitoring: Opportunities and Collisions

TMG and its member organisations participated actively in 'Election 2003' as 'domestic observer groups, which between them deployed over 40, 000 observers' (Owen 2003: 4). In particular, TMG's 10,000 observers accounted for a quarter of the total number of domestic monitors and greatly outnumbered the international observers. Compared to the previous 1998/99 election, there was a massive rise in the number of domestic observers, due largely to donor recognition of their local knowledge and cost-effectiveness:

> they have far superior scope and coverage, know the terrain and specific issues of politics in the local area, are present for a long time – permanently, in fact – before and after elections and are a tiny fraction of the cost of international missions with their hotel bills, four wheel drive vehicles and satellite phones. Increasingly donors prefer to target assistance to such groups, especially in cognisance of the results they achieve (Owen 2003: 4).

However, Owen's claims about the local knowledge and 'comparative advantage' of domestic NGOs should not obscure the fact that these groups are held in suspicion by politicians and voters alike – seen as participating for material and political ambition. Observer funding creates a material opportunity for petty-bourgeois activists and monitors. In the

context of TMG, Owen notes that as a large and longstanding recipient of donor support, TMG and its affiliates found themselves in a position of offering cash per diem expenses to polling-booth observers. He notes that 'while I am not casting aspersions on their integrity or observation overall, comment from various people made it seem as if there were a reasonably large number of locally recruited TMG observers who were primarily in it opportunistically – another chance to make a few naira in the election season carnival' (Owen 2003).

Without its funding and organisational base as well as the monetary inducements which it offered to volunteers, TMG would not have managed to recruit and train the largest number of domestic monitors. The relative efficiency with which the organisation participated in and quickly released preliminary reports made TMG appear to be on a par with the superior, privileged and influential international observer missions (TMG 2003f; 2003b; 2003c). The content and quality of TMG reports were relatively richer and more grounded than those of international observers. Some respondents viewed TMG reports as 'less damaging' to domestic sensitivities compared to those of international observers who published their reports in national dailies. This is because most of these reports were quite critical. As a result, some like the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM), found it difficult to publicise their findings using the government-controlled electronic media. Nevertheless, international election observers' limitations were overridden by their access to the internet and inter-national mass media, in particular the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Cable News Network (CNN), the *Guardian, Times* and so on who broadcast their findings almost immediately. It seemed that the views of international election observers were aimed at a Western audience, rather than at Nigeria's domestic constituencies.

On the other hand, TMG utilised diverse local means of mass com-munication. In addition to nationwide public and private televisions stations (such as NTA and Minaj who granted prime-time slots for TMG officials to comment on issues and problems), TMG exploited its widely distributed in-house bulletin, *Democracy Watch*, and the bulletins of member organisations, such as *Equal Justice* published by the Human Rights Monitor. Throughout the elections TMG was able to broadcast its findings much more widely to the public than were international observers. However, the TMG reports, too, were very critical.

TMG reports raised a number of critical points in relation to the elections; from exposing multiple voting to electoral violence. In addition,

using an index of evaluation, the reports were able to track successes recorded from one stage of the election to another (TMG 2003j: appendix). This does not mean that there were no problems: it has been argued that because of structural and human limitations, there were limits to vigilance (such as the deliberate delay of results by officials until the early hours when monitors had retired) beyond which both international and domestic monitors lost track of the collation activities. Unsurprisingly, it was in those moments that most of the high-level irregularities 'were perpetuated, not by orchestrating fraudulent votes, but simply by altering the results sheets with a stroke of the pen, or by entering inflated results with the connivance of friendly officials' (Owen 2003: 5). Such difficulties were faced both by domestic and international observers, but the reports of international observer missions eventually overshadowed those of the TMG. However, what looked like a setback for the TMG would prove to be a strength in the longer run: despite being sidelined and overshadowed by international observer missions TMG organisations still had the energy to confront post-election issues long after international teams had left. Given this experience, in the post-election period the TMG began to argue that election monitoring should be 'indigenised' (Okoye 2003).

Post-Election: From Conflict Resolution to 'Lesson Learning'
In the following section two issues are examined: TMG investigation of post-election judicial contestation of the election results, and its review of the electoral process.

Election Tribunals: Resolving Post-electoral Contestations
TMG participated actively in the resolution of conflicts carried forward from the elections to the post-election period. To enable it to observe the sittings of the Elections Petitions Tribunals (EPT), it planned to deploy qualified legal practitioners and lay monitors to serve as volunteers in at least two states of Nigeria's six geopolitical regions. The choice of states to be selected was dependent on the number and type of petitions being filed by the contestants. In each, two principal monitors were scheduled to observe an average of two cases to enable them to closely follow the proceedings and report back (TMG 2003b: 17).

On 25 April 2003, the Chief Justice of the Federation, Justice Muhammad Uwais, inaugurated EPT for each of the 36 states of the federation. Each tribunal comprised a chairman, a judge and four members drawn from the judiciary and sections of society, including civic associations. Over the next couple of months TMG monitors reported in

detail on the sitting and verdicts of the tribunals. However, because the Nigerian judiciary is relatively independent and closely guarded, elections petitions were handled in a relatively peaceful, uncontentious manner. There were some allegations of corrupt practice involving tribunal members and politicians in a few states, in particular states where incumbents probably abused the electoral process to get re-elected (for example Bauchi, Yobe and Lagos). However, these allegations were not proved and no legal action was taken against the juries of any tribunal. In addition, throughout their sittings, politicians stormed the premises of tribunals with their massed supporters who had to be dispersed by the police. The tribunals revealed several irregularities, but overall most results were upheld because of a lack of concrete evidence of wrongdoing.

In sum it is noted that the TMG participated actively in Nigeria's post-electoral legal process, as a means of conflict resolution. This was done long after the international observers had left Nigeria. At the time of returning from fieldwork, none of the EPTs had overturned election results and a TMG report expressed satisfaction with the verdicts as a demonstration of the rule of law. A key example was the presidential election won by the incumbent President, Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party. The EPT upheld his election. The losing political party, the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) and its presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, appealed to the Supreme Court of Nigeria, where the result was upheld again.

Learning Lessons: Review of the Electoral Process

After the elections several groups were involved in a review of the electoral process. Two review exercises are explored: a workshop organised by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the INEC post-Election conference.

From 23 to 25 July 2003, the Nigeria office of the International IDEA organised a national conference at the Protea Hotel, Abuja to evaluate 'Elections 2003'. The workshop was attended by government functionaries, representatives of civic associations (including the Coordinator of the TMG), politicians and international donors. TMG officials and members actively participated both as resource persons and plenary members. While those present, such as the TMG, were claiming to represent those absent (youth), the workshop hardly achieved its aims as the issues discussed hinged mainly on how to improve state structures to make them more efficient and effective.

On the whole, as related to me by one participant, both the organisers

and participants of the workshop wanted to drive home the issue of dialogue and consultations in a democratic dispensation. This was constructed as a lesson for state officials and institutions who are often too oligarchic and intolerant of criticism. The workshop not only provided the opportunity for civil society activists to meet and interact with state officials, politicians and other 'gatekeepers', in a non-confrontational manner, but also provided a forum to discuss strategies to attract more donor funding, facilitate consensus, and consolidate and strengthen their networking relationships. This is necessary, as noted in Chapter 5, to provide a united front for engaging the state, and to overcome the problems it causes.

The second electoral review exercise was organised by INEC between 28 and 30 July on the theme The 2003 General Elections: the lessons and way forward. As a state-organised conference, it was more colourful and crowded than the Abuja workshop organised by civic associations. Because of the huge turnout of participants, the INEC conference was less thoroughgoing, not properly coordinated, and less engaging. Soon after the opening ceremonies, most top state functionaries, in particular the President, who delivered a speech as a special guest, other elected representatives and ministers escaped from the rowdy scene of the conference and travelled back to their seats of power. INEC officials were left alone to administer the conference for the next three days. Its outcome suggested to me that while pretending to invite everyone concerned for an all-encompassing dialogue and policy review, state officials and institutions actually limited the participation of civil society groups, activists and opposition politicians. I observed throughout the conference that, in spite of struggling hard to contribute to plenary sessions (such as those on review of the legal framework in which I actively participated funding elections, election monitoring and so on), TMG and civic associations were sidelined and their views were barely reflected in the final report. In addition the TMG felt unfairly treated by the organisers of the conference, who gave a 'high-table' treatment to the representatives of international NGOs such as the International Federation of Election Systems (IFES) and the United Nations Elections Assistance Programme (UNEAP). Drawing mainly from his organisation's immediate past experience, Festus Okoye, the Chair of TMG, presented a paper titled The future and relevance of domestic election observation: the Nigerian experience in which he made a strong case for discouraging international election observers' participation in future elections. This call was followed by concerted advocacy throughout the conference, but none

of his proposals were taken seriously. This was perhaps because state officials see the international observers as providers of key funding to state institutions, which cannot be relinquished. However, not all state officials favour international monitors. For instance, after the 2003 elections the President and members of the Executive Council were said to be displeased with the overly critical reports of some international observer groups, in particular, the European Election Monitors, the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Republican Institute and the Carter Centre. Indeed, the state officially rejected the above reports and instead endorsed the 'favourable' reports of the Commonwealth and the Africa Union (AU).

Given the above it was not surprising that in preparation for the 2007 general elections, INEC officials, known to work at the pleasure of the President who can hire and fire their key personnel, joined the campaign for indigenisation pioneered by the TMG and others. For instance, at an Elections Stakeholders Forum, the new Chair of INEC Professor Maurice Iwu made an announcement to the effect that foreign election monitors will be barred from the crucial 2007 presidential, legislative and gubernatorial elections in the country. Professor Iwu stated that 'Nigeria does not require any (overseas) election monitor … nobody is going to monitor our election … it is a policy of this commission that the issue of somebody monitoring our election does not arise' (Iwu, cited in CDD 2005: 1). However, Iwu's further assertion that 'that there will be guidelines for the conduct of observer groups' disappointed not only foreign observers but even some domestic ones, including the TMG. In a rejoinder, the CDD, a London-based NGO with a branch in Nigeria stated that

> Just because Nigerian civil society groups are currently engaged constructively with INEC on a number of issues, the INEC Chair should not conclude that the role of external actors has become redundant, nor should he conclude that domestic civil society will be content at such exclusion … The only satisfactory guidelines for observer and monitoring groups are that they be allowed access to all stages of the electoral process, in order to satisfy the demands of full transparency (CDD 2005).

While the CDD was critical of INEC's decision, the TMG continues to maintain its position on the need to give more participatory space for local election monitors.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the potentials of civic associations in the electoral process of Nigeria's fledgling democracy, a charged moment not only involving contest for power among politicians, but also an opportunity for civil society to engage the state. It also brings the voting public into the political limelight. The chapter raises key issues on the debate around the democratic potentials and limitations of civic associations. The chapter reveals that in the context of 'Election 2003' the state constituted a key bottleneck to the participation of civic associations in the electoral process. However, given that the state was now 'democratic',[17] it had limited power in controlling and/or undermining civil society organisations. Nevertheless, the state was reluctant, even rather conservative, in granting free space to civic associations to canvass for electoral stability. Indeed the democratic state 'rediscovered' its authoritarian character bequeathed by the military.

In the case of the TMG, the association had to negotiate energetically for inclusion by state officials and institutions. Having secured its freedom to participate, the TMG was nevertheless bedevilled by other forms of constraint. First, funding played a large role in creating a conflicting relationship between TMG and state institutions; it also created internal contradictions within the Group. With donor funding, TMG suddenly became akin to a 'bureaucratic organisation' disbursing funds to other organisations. In the process, it became difficult to distinguish between the financial opportunism of TMG and its 'beneficiaries' and their claims of serving the people: as exemplified by the limited success of some key activities of the electoral process (for example party campaigns and voter education exercises). Second, and associated with external influence, it was noted that international observer groups welded more influence, in terms of funding and providing international legitimacy. Third, it was noted that the TMG was bedevilled by its own internal constraints, in particular the 'unequal' relationship between affiliate organisations as well as the political ambitions of some activists in civic organisations, in particular those formerly associated with the TMG. As a result the Group became a subject of suspicion and achieved limited results in carrying out its activities.

Based on the foregoing, two conclusive statements are advanced. First though dominant political interests and state gatekeepers limit the agency of civic associations, such limits have to be seen in the context of materialism and power relations. We have noted that the TMG provided a promising ground for gaining access to financial resources. We have also

noted that some of TMG's associated member-organisations and activists opted for the pursuit of political power – incurring suspicion from state institutions and raising reasonable cynicism about their claim to neutrality and disinterestedness. At some points in time, much as TMG narratives and activities opposed the policy of state actors, they occasionally appeared to support the claims of some political groups. Secondly, while the TMG and its affiliates claimed and struggled modestly to represent the interest of the voting public, such claims are adversely affected by the realities of their political and material ambitions.

Given the foregoing, it is reasonable to claim that class interest plays an important role in civil society, and in its relationships with the state and the voting public. Evidently, the transformation of some TMG-affiliated civic associations into political parties provides a clear example of how some professionals (pro-democracy activists) offer themselves for recruitment into the petty-bourgeois political class.

6

Conclusion: A Critique of Neoliberal Democracy, the State and Civil Society

This volume examines, in the context of state authoritarianism and neoliberal democratic expansion in Nigeria, the contradictory relationships between key 'contested spaces': in particular, the state and civil society, as well as the internal and external parameters of change. The study is precipitated by the fact that whilst there is a substantial body of conceptual work on the state, civil society and democracy, there are few empirically-informed studies. A distinctive feature of this study, thus, is that it seeks to bridge the gap between the theory and practice of the nexus between the state, civil society and democracy by using ethnographic data collected in Nigeria.

This Chapter pools together the key arguments developed from previous chapters. It is divided into three parts. The first part identifies the key contributions this study makes to the literature by reconsidering key thematic arguments emerging from the book. The second part identifies and recommends key areas of further research, in particular themes that should have been pursued in this study but were not, because of the inevitable limitations of the research. The finally part offers a synthetic conclusion.

Synthesis of Arguments

This volume makes no claim to 'discover' a new theory or alternative discourse on the state, civil society and democratisation. Nevertheless, the work is pertinent in that it utilises first-hand empirical data in engaging key aspects of the debate. In particular, the volume identifies key gaps in the literature and rescues some theoretical viewpoints that have apparently

been consigned to oblivion by recent political and intellectual develop-
ment. In what follows, key themes emerging from the volume are
outlined.

Ambivalences and Contradictions of Neoliberalism: Towards an Alternative Discourse

Given the ambivalences and contradictions of neoliberalism, this volume
draws attention to, indeed endorses, the alternative radical discourse
drawing from the views of Antonio Gramsci. The study problematised,
particularly in chapters 1 and 2, a key assumption of neoliberal discourse
and policy practice, pioneered by Western development institutions and
donors in response to Africa/Nigeria's 'developmental impasse' – namely
that Africa was lacking in the essential components for a spontaneous
transition to liberal democracy and development. This assumption is
rooted in the phenomenon of state authoritarianism, repression and 'crises
of governance' which bedevilled most countries of post-colonial Africa,
particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. In this context, the actualisation of
liberal democracy, one underpinned by a minimalist state and dense and
vibrant civil society, was seen to be lacking. The imposition of structural
adjustment and 'political conditionality', pioneered by Western donors as
preconditions for debt relief and cancellation for many African countries
in the late 1980s and 1990s, was aimed at exporting the essential com-
ponents of Western capitalist development – civil society, liberal
democracy, market economy (Hobsbawm 2005).

Whilst these prescriptive assumptions are generally regarded as benign,
particularly in terms of their potential in resolving the dire structural
problems of cash-starved countries of Africa and the global South, this
study argues that the theoretical and ideological postulations underlying
them are largely problematic. The study has identified several contra-
dictions associated with neoliberal discourse, in particular its foisted
versions of economic development and 'democratic intervention' in the
global South. First, both mainstream liberalism and neoliberalism are
insensitive, indeed oblivious, to domestic structures and institutions.
Second, in practice neoliberalism has generated controversies between the
principles of state sovereignty (particularly, 'non-interventionism'), and the
realities of multilateral developmental intervention. It is also noted that
since the late 1980s, structural crises have provided Western donors with
the chance to recast developing countries in their own mould, and in a
manner that contravenes the basic principles of democracy as well as
international law. Third, there are frictions between external agendas

promoted by international donors and the domestic context of struggles for democracy staged by popular forces against state authoritarianism and austerity measures. Fourth, there is a contradiction between benign 'democratic claims' inherent in the neoliberal agenda and the repressive approach that drives them. It is argued that the rhetoric of 'political goodwill' which underpins neoliberal development required high-handedness and threats in the event of non-compliance. Finally, this study argues that donor paradigm shifts have implications for the role of discourse in national and international politics.

In view of the foregoing and given the evidence presented in this study, it is argued that the radical perspective offers a useful alternative discourse, not least in the current period when it has apparently been consigned to oblivion by recent political and intellectual development. Of particular importance is Antonio Gramsci's striking arguments on the state and civil society, explored in Chapter 1 and in subsequent chapters. Gramsci's view of the relationship between the two spheres in terms of 'power' and 'hegemony' is particularly pertinent to the empirical context of Nigeria. 'The state and civil society', Gramsci argues, 'correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised throughout the state' (Gramsci 1978: 12). Gramsci's definition of the state as a '"coercive power" which legally enforces discipline on those who do not consent, either actively or passively' and rewards those who are submissive (Gramsci 1978: 12) aptly describes the Nigerian state, whether under military or democratic dispensation. The state in Nigeria has largely remained hegemonic in its relationship with civil society. To be sure, the state plays an instrumental (class) role as an organ dominated by the petty-bourgeois political class, who often exploit its means of coercion in pursing its vested interests – in this case, conflict or alliances with elements in civil society.

On the other hand, Gramsci's description of civil society as an 'ensemble of private groups' with conflicting potentials for reproducing and/or challenging 'coercive power' aptly captures the *pro-state* and *anti-state* (or pro-democracy and anti-democratic) associations explored in chapters 4 and 5. It also captures the contradictory relationships within these associations, and their relationships with the state. Again, in contrast with the state, 'civil society' appears as an arena populated by specific social classes: particularly urban professionals and wage labourers.

Given the foregoing, the struggles for democratic expansion and socio-economic justice are contingent on, indeed constrained by, class

struggles and contradiction between the political class (controlling the state) and subordinated, but potentially autonomous and emancipatory classes in civil society.

Internal and External Contexts of Democratic Expansion: Synergies and Contradictions

In Chapter 2 it was noted that whilst Nigeria has largely been a 'prey' to Western influence, external factors alone illuminate only a fraction of Nigeria's complex history and political economy. To be sure, Nigeria is at the receiving end of socio-economic and political policies cultured and imposed by Western capitalist states and institutions. Bade Onimode, writing in the wider context of Africa, argues that two sets of external actors have always dominated the continent: the Old and New Masters. To him, Old Masters were the colonialists, who departed in 1960 after years of direct conquest and exploitation, while New Masters are the International Finance Institutions (IFIs) that have emerged since the 1980s as architects of development in the global South, as well as transnational corporations which emerged earlier as vectors of international capitalist interests and values: 'the interval between the formal departure of the Old Masters in 1960 (in Africa) and the emergence of the New Masters has been dominated by the multinational corporations (MNCs)' (Onimode 1988: 280). Nevertheless, this study notes that whilst 'externalities' have largely shaped Nigeria's domestic political and socio-economic conditions, local structures played reinforcing, but also contradictory, functions. This debate was addressed in chapters 2 and 3, where the 'internalities' of Nigerian history and political economy are critically explored, particularly in the contexts of structural adjustment and democratic struggles. In essence, this book has verified the dangers associated with the tendency to consider external influence as a sole factor in Nigerian political and social history. At issue is the need to pay equal attention to external and internal factors – a key rationale of the hybrid (internal-cum-external) perspective identified and endorsed in this study (see Chapter 2) and confirmed by other scholars of African politics (for example Abrahamsen 2000; 1997).

The domestic dynamics of Nigerian democratisation reinforce this point. As noted in Chapter 4, military-guided, externally inspired 'structural adjustment' and 'political liberalisation' bred different forms of protest from disaffected actors in civil society. On the one hand, the 'pains' of adjustment led to street protests. On the other hand, the military's failure to democratise, in spite of its brutal role in imposing

IMF-cultured structural adjustment on the masses and civil society, generated massive pro-democracy protests spearheaded by civil society organisations. Anger at widespread economic hardships galvanised and unified diverse groups to confront the military, using the language of democratisation. Nigeria's democratisation is essentially contradictory, exposing the vulnerability of the Nigerian state to foreign economic influence (SAP) and the susceptibility of its weak domestic classes to the military-dominated state and the local petty-bourgeoisie. These vulnerabilities bred conflict between actors in the state, civil society and the public – the latter emerges both as an audience and a recruitment ground for pro-democracy groups and/or government policies.

The State, Civil Society and Class

The language of 'class', as a research tool, has become less fashionable, even extinct, in academic and policy debates on the state, civil society and democracy. This was the more so in the 'Great Moving Right Show' (Geras, 1986: xvii cited in Bujra et al. 2004: 563) that characterised the era of neoliberalism, in which the realities of class conflict were overridden by the overwhelming ideological and intellectual tides of neoliberalism: 'class divisions and exploitations are no longer fundamental problems, replaced instead by a reformist discourse happy to subordinate itself to the rule of neoliberalism and to re-assert the universality of liberal values' (Geras op cit.). However, a discourse of class confrontation has been surprisingly pervasive in Nigerian commentary. Indeed, writing on the African developmental crisis of the 1990s, Onimode argues that without an emphatic resort to class analysis, African social sciences, currently overwhelmed by neoliberal discourses, carry the risk of being 'an apologetic ideology', rather than an academic enterprise (Onimode 1988: 27): '[neoliberalism] was dictated not by the scientific requirement of fidelity to reality, but the bourgeois need to petrify and justify a system which was [is] anything but harmonious, equilibrated and gradualistic' (Onimode 1988: 27–8) This study attempts to rescue class analysis as a framework for exploring the relationship between social actors in the state and civil society in Nigeria (see also Ake 1982: Adewumi and Adeshina 1999; Adesina 2000; Adetula 1992).

Class analysis is anchored on revealing 'the relatedness of different elements in society' in a manner that concretely exposes the dynamics of the social world (Ake 1982: 4). In particular, it allows for a systematic study of the interaction of different elements of social life: economic structure, social structure, political structure, and belief systems and the

social actors and interests that inhabit them. There is risk in ignoring 'class' both as a political grouping and as a framework of analysis, not least in the context of a neoliberal world which not only spawned 'a full-scale intellectual retreat' (Bujra et al. 2004) of scholars committed to the method, but also *imposed* particular conceptions of the state, civil society and democracy (see also Wood 1990).[1]

Social class is underpinned by the dynamic interrelations of economic change; in Nigeria's case the marginalisation or destruction of a subsistence and partially feudal economy and the emergence of a dependent and partially capitalist economic system. In the context of this study, class analysis offers a grounded theory capable of locating and exploring relationships of alliance and conflict between socio-economic and political groupings who, aware of their stakes in the political economy and in the state or civil society, strive to protect their interests. In this scenario, democratic struggle or socio-economic protest is largely a contest against hegemony and those reinforcing the status quo (state actors) (see also Beckman 1997; 1998).

This study notes that in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, civil society associations, in particular pro-democracy groups, are dominated *largely* by particular classes which are sometimes at odds with one another: particularly urban professionals and waged labourers. This is an indication of the class character of civil society which cannot be ignored in any analysis. Evidently, a specific cohort of classes (the local and foreign bourgeoisie) dominates the state and its policies: military, professional politicians, businessmen. This too, is an indication of the class character of the state (see Abutudu 1995; Beckman and Sjogren 1998). However, the study also reveals the dangers of over-simplifying the social composition and class character of the state and civil society. It is noted that occasionally some urban professionals become part of the state (or petty-bourgeoisie) when they are recruited into or compete for political office; in the same vein, associations formed to promote the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie could be part of civil society and/or the state. Nevertheless, the study argues, with caution, that Nigeria's pro-democracy movement is populated predominantly by the middle class and wage labourers and the state by the local petty-bourgeoisie.

The study notes that the class character of actors in state and civil society owes its origin to Nigeria's colonial and neo-colonial history, in particular the development of a 'rentier' oil economy through which a petty-bourgeois political class controls the state. The colonial state system played an important role in moulding structures of state and society

through 'selective breeding' (see Chapter 3). Deliberate developmental policies, particularly in education, commerce and urbanisation aimed to create an educated, wealthy and powerful successor class. Through this process the colonial (later post-colonial) state created deep social inequalities and, by extension, precipitated the rise of new forms of associational life amongst specific classes and in specific geographic locations. In the process, it is revealed that colonialism nurtured, on the one hand, petty-bourgeois political, administrative and 'traditional' classes aligned to the colonial system and, on the other, Western-educated professionals and labouring classes which provided recruits for local civil society struggles and, eventually, partisan politics and the anti-colonial movement. Herein also lie the partisan roots of the Nigerian state and civil society.

It is acknowledged that in the post-colonial era the Nigerian state became an instrument in the hands of a local petty-bourgeoisie dependent on foreign capital (see also Forrest 1986). In this era, some civil society organisations became captive to a strong state ruled by the post-colonial political class. Conversely, anti-statist opposition, particularly from labour, continued. With the advent of military rule in the 1960s and the 'oil boom', civil society became an arena for many causes, from challenging resource redistribution to fighting against waste and corruption. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, civil society organisations rediscovered themselves as a force for engaging the military-dominated state, particularly in response to the introduction of structural adjustment and its failure to deliver democracy. Here, the 'pivotal', but contradictory, significance of urban professionals is worth noting: they played an active leadership role in civic associations and other civil society groups. What is most striking, however, is the contradiction of their class positioning. On the one hand, they emerged initially as a class fragment of wage labour, working in highly skilled and well paid jobs in the state sector. They constitute a reservoir from which the state draws its skilled personnel (administrators, accountants, lawyers) – even culminating in competition for political office. They provided prime recruits for running pro-state civil society organisations. However, as wage labourers they also forged formidable alliances with their kind to protect their privileged position against their employers, the state – often also becoming significant players in labour struggles and emerging as labour leaders.

With the introduction of SAP in the 1980s, the class position of urban professionals was fundamentally endangered. Their socio-economic fortunes were severely weakened. As austerity, privatisation of public

corporations and massive retrenchment led to the disappearance or devaluation of their jobs, they descended from privilege to survival and resorted to various alternative means of survival. First is 'moonlighting' in more than one job. Second is by going into private ventures (private medicine, legal practice, which turned them into high-achieving entrepreneurs). Third, they scout for alternative sources of income in the donor-funded non-governmental sector which was encouraged by neoliberalism as an alternative to state provisioning. Indeed, at one point this class was at the verge of being 'converted into the proletariat' and experiencing their hardships at first hand in the aftermaths of SAP. But in the longer run they were smart enough to convert their creative skills into more lucrative channels, especially through access to donor funding. In these circumstances they present themselves as politically neutral, but if the opportunity emerges to metamorphose into politicians and enjoy state privilege, they often grab it.

In Chapter 4, the class character of actors in civil society and the state was used as a basis for exploring their relationship in the context of socio-economic and political change. The chapter confirms that because the state and its policies are controlled by a dominant fraction of the petty-bourgeoisie, in their own interest, social actors in civil society were forced to oppose state policies that made life difficult for them. Resistance moreover came from diverse sections of society. In particular, the chapter notes that in constructing a common front for democratic struggles, the labour movement and civic associations have demonstrated the possibility of an expedient class alliance, with all its associated risks and benefits. The chapter also reveals that in engaging the state, civil society organisations demonstrate conflicting relationships, as well as complementarities, within themselves, in terms of their organisational styles, sources of funding, internal democratic practice, and methods of engaging the state.

The State and Construction of Civil Society:
Hegemony versus Autonomy

This study refutes common assumptions, particularly amongst liberal scholars, of civil society as a potentially autonomous arena (for example Diamond 1997; Alexander 2001). This assumption ignores the role of the state in imposing its hegemony and containing potential autonomy in civil society (Chandhoke 1998). In Chapter 3 it is noted that, in the context of military rule, the state plays an important role in undermining anti-state civil society associations, whilst also providing incentives for the emergence of pro-state associations. The 'hidden agenda' of the state is

driven by the interest of ruling governing elites and executed using the overt and covert structures of the state. In particular, the chapter identified three kinds of civil society associations: *pro-state civil society organisations* which emerge, often in mysterious circumstances and with the direct support and involvement of ruling military actors, to canvass in favour of state policies and the interest of ruling actors; *anti-state organisations* which emerge in protest against the state and its polices; and *neutral associations* or those 'sitting on the fence', which experience little or no intervention from the state.

The three types of civil society associations mentioned above are deeply rooted in times of national crisis, when the formation of collective associations becomes an inevitable, albeit risky, means of engaging the state; it also provide opportunity for some people to be co-opted on the side of the ruling regimes. If anti-state civil society associations are seen as the epitome of anti-statism and democratic struggle, there is a commensurate need to note the role of pro-state associations in promoting hegemony. In essence, civil society is not merely anti-hegemonic or pro-democratic, it can be quite pro-hegemonic, anti-democratic and undemocratic (see also Fatton 1999).

The Composition and Democratic Potentials of 'Civil Society'

This study reveals the dangers of qualifying or glorifying particular fractions of civil society as inherently democratic and democratising (see for example Putnam 1995). This study began by highlighting a biased conceptualisation of the nature, content and agency of civil society and its democratic potentials – this bias is noted to be particularly associated with liberal discourse. The discourse often treats pro-democracy associations as essentially benign, democratic and representative. This study revealed that it is misleading to privilege some associations, to the exclusion of others, as drivers of democracy. While they constitute an important, but recent, segment of the overall scene, the glorification of donor-driven civic associations, as the epitome of autonomy, anti-statism and democratic struggles, obscures the potentials of others, particularly the labour movement. The study argues that the Nigerian labour movement pioneered socio-economic and political struggles from the 1980s. They were joined in the 1990s by civic associations, when donors began to support the latter associations in response to the failure of the military state to deliver democracy.

The above finding was reinforced, in Chapter 4, through an empirical review of pro-democracy associations. The chapter notes that the key

factor in the privileging of civic associations (also explored in Chapter 5), is neoliberal donor funding. However, although promoting pro-democracy struggles, donor funding has also paradoxically bred conflict and suspicion amongst pro-democracy groups, undermined the autonomy of associations and tied up their creative energies in fund raising. Another issue explored in this study is the internal democratic credentials of the Nigerian pro-democracy movement – both civic associations and labour. It is revealed that overall Nigeria's pro-democracy groups are marred by internal democratic deficits. Nevertheless, the absence of internal democracy has not proved to be a significant obstacle to wider democratic struggles in civil society.

The 'Audiences' of Civil Society Activity

This study has shown that certain contradictory 'audiences' drive the activity of pro-democracy associations. At least three are worthy of mention here. The first and most important 'audience' is donor agencies. Donor visions and conditionalities heavily influence, indeed constrain, the agency of associations, especially civic organisations. At issue is not only donor insistence on accountability and 'best practice', but their doggedness in controlling the programmes and activities of associations, often in the name of 'oversight' and external collaboration. This is captured by a common adage in Nigeria which depicts the differential power between a 'giver' (donor) and 'taker' (associations): 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'. To get the necessary funds to carry out activities, civic associations have to please and convince donors. Amongst the factors which put donors on the influential high ground include: the dramatic rise in the number of civic associations, each competing for donor funding; the scarcity of donor funding and interest in post-military Nigeria; and the nascent competition between state institutions and mushrooming civic associations. Thus it is reasonably argued that, as a patron and an 'audience', donors still constitute key drivers of the agenda of civic associations in Nigeria.

A second 'audience' of pro-democracy associations is the general public (in particular, the voting public). This study reveals that the 'public' constitute a key constituency for civil society and the state. On the one hand, the state claims to be the authoritative custodian of the public interest and on the other hand civil society organisations claim to represent the public interests. However, the study reveals that as a constituency and 'audience' of civil society, the public is often pushed to the backwater and comes to the limelight only in certain circumstances –

for example during elections or mass protests. This contradicts the ambitious claims that are made by civil society organisations.

A third 'audience' of civil society activity, particularly amongst civic associations and networks, is an emergent 'informal guild' or 'peer group' of activists who are driven by professional ties and a common vision of sustaining their collective ties, relevance and political influence in a competitive, donor-driven world of NGOs. To a large extent, the activities of most civic associations are driven more by personal and professional ties than the ideal of engaging the state for public good. Thus, it is a typical spectacle in most NGO-organised workshops, conferences and public debates to find that a close circle of friends, colleagues, collaborators and partners form the core, if not the entirety, of participants. This peer group speaks in a language that captures the civic imagination of its immediate constituency, rather than the so-called public interest. Paradoxically, whilst these events are meant to involve other 'stakeholders', particularly the public and even state officials, they equally constitute an arena for formation of and consolidation of privileged class interest.

Multiparty Elections:
Achievements and Failure of Civic Associations
A key contribution of this study is that it offers a case analysis of the activity of a key civic association – the Transition Monitoring Group – using first-hand ethnographic data collected during Nigeria's 2003 general election (Chapter 6). The analysis is predicated on the perception of elections as a cornerstone of liberal democracy. However, it is argued in this study that, contrary to the model held up of developed Western democracies, in Nigeria the practice of liberal democracy and, in particular, multiparty elections is riven with problems, ranging from political corruption and governmental instability to electoral fraud. It is argued therefore that civic associations are likely to be limited in their impact on the electoral process. This severely dents the taken-for-granted democratic reputation earned by civic associations, particularly amongst liberal scholars and institutions, as key drivers for the achievement and consolidation of democracy. In the case of the TMG, the chapter finds that because multiparty elections, as a component of liberal democracy, were abused by political actors, the TMG was severely constrained in its activities during the election. The TMG was noted to be absent in grassroots politics, and its voter education messages, though well-meaning, barely reached the voter. The key constraints encountered by the TMG

and its affiliates were classified into structural, organisational and societal – they included, among other things, the suspicious, even hostile, attitude of state officials and 'gatekeeper' institutions; competition with international agencies; conflict and limitations arising from donor funding and inability to monitor grassroots politics.

In fairness, however, the study also revealed that the TMG can claim considerable achievements before, during and after the elections. With donor funds, the TMG and its affiliated organisations participated actively in the election, a domain hitherto dominated by the state, and deployed a third of local observers. They also succeeded, at least to some extent, in voter education, as well as in calling on the state to conduct another round of voter registration.

Further Research
This study is by no means exhaustive. Given its scope and limitations, the study cannot claim to have covered every question pertaining to the theme of this research. The study has neglected the following key issues which are, therefore, recommended for further research.

The Perverse Manifestations of Civil Society and the Implications for Democracy
There is a debate on 'uncivil' or violent civil society and its implications for democracy.[2] This debate is only mentioned in passing, without empirically engaging it. The prevailing opinion is that violent 'sectarian' associations are dangerous for a democratic culture and therefore beyond debate. But in societies where 'uncivil' society is inevitable and active in local politics and associational life, there is a pressing need to explore such groups in terms of their character, motives, styles of organisation and internal democratic practices. There is a potential ground for conducting ethnographic research on this subject matter in Nigeria. During fieldwork for this research, I have noticed that whilst claiming to be democratic, many associations actually promote a violent agenda. Key examples include the Oduduwa People's Congress and the Arewa People's Congress, currently at the forefront of ethnically motivated civil society organising. In addition, extensive violence and massacres in the Niger Delta and northern Nigeria that took place in the course of my fieldwork pointed up the need to explore the role of civil society organisations (*vis-à-vis* the state) in employing violence as a means of political expression. A number of studies have documented the crises in the Niger Delta (for example Ikelegbe 2001b; Omeje 2006, 2004; Zalik 2004). However, more

needs to be done particularly to further engage the debate on 'uncivil' society.

Civil Society and Hegemony

Further in-depth research is needed to understand 'hegemonic civil society' – the organisations that emerge to promote the agenda of the state and its governing classes. In this study, this is addressed using mainly documentary data. My focus has largely been on anti-state pro-democracy groups. There is a need for extended ethnographic research on pro-state organisations to examine their profile, social character, internal democratic practices, and linkages with state agendas. The following are key examples (1) associations founded by petty-bourgeois elements – for example the Nigerian Employers' Consultative Forum and the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (2) pro-state associations formed by the proletariat and/or initiated by the state amongst them. There also a need to compare and contrast different kinds of hegemonic associations.

Gender and Civil Society

Gender is central to social and political life, not least in the construction of the state, civil society and democracy. During fieldwork I have come across many gender-sensitive and gender-based associations. Some of these associations were discussed in this study. However, further in-depth research is recommended to examine the gendered construction of civil society, the state and democratic struggles in Nigeria. Key provocative questions include the following: to what extent have democratic struggles in Nigeria been driven by gendered hierarchies and exclusion? How does 'affirmative discourse' generate activism in civil society? How are women represented in mainstream national politics and associational life? These questions, and many more, need to be addressed in future research.

Rural–Urban nexus in Civil Society and Democracy

This study is based on a study of urban-based associations – it only looked at a part, rather than the whole of the jigsaw of 'civil society' in Nigeria. A significant proportion of the Nigerian population is rural-based, depending on subsistence/peasant agriculture. These communities do participate in a different form of civil society organising, albeit driven by survival – for example self-help associations, community vigilantes. There are attempts by urban-based associations to connect to, and exploit the support of, rural communities. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore the density, vibrancy and democratic potentials

of rural-based civil society organisations and their linkages with urban-based associations.

Concluding Remarks

This book draws our attention to the following key issues. First, it argues for a measured synergy between the *internal dynamics* of the state, civil society and democratic expansion in Nigeria and *external influences*. This is important because in the current neoliberal era, there is a mounting disregard of local dynamics and structures. The study reveals that whilst external discourses and agenda have driven recent moves towards economic liberalisation and liberal democracy, this reality is complemented, but also contradicted, by Nigeria's complex domestic politics.

Second, this volume emphasises that the relationship between the state and civil society lends itself to the dynamics of 'class' – a missing gear in the toolkit of recent scholars of African/Nigerian politics. Obviously, the emergence of the Nigerian state through colonialism and capitalist penetration meant that the state emerged as an organ, in the hands of colonialists, and later the domestic petty-bourgeoisie, for class control. It also meant that the state played a key role in reproducing social inequality and generating, in the process, anti-state associational activity from labourers and urban professionals. This work shows that in engaging the state for democratic expansion, elements of civil society, particularly the labour movement and civic associations, demonstrated different organisational styles, funding sources, and internal democratic practices. They also display potential class conflicts, whilst also forging difficult alliances in confronting a common enemy – the state.

Thirdly, the book draws our attention to the debate on the democratic potential of 'civil society'. The study refutes the tendency to give democratic credit only to civic associations, to the exclusion of other forms of organisations – particularly the labour movement. Finally the study draws our attention to how multiparty elections provide a spot-on opportunity for observing the agency of civil society. The evidence in this study, based on a case study of one civic association, the Transition Monitoring Group, suggests that a host of structural, organisational and societal constraints stand in the way of democratic activity. However, in fairness, it is revealed that the TMG enjoyed a modest success in terms of participating in an imperfect and unstable electoral system.

Finally, it is reasonable to claim that, in spite of its limitations, civil society ought to be seen in positive terms as an arena of struggles out of

which have emerged a fledgling democratic culture in Nigeria, and which will provide significant blueprint and roadmap for democratic consolidation. But there is a long way to go in achieving a stable democracy in Nigeria and Africa at large.

Appendix: Methodology

Conducting social research on politicised issues such as 'civil society', 'state officials' 'the public', 'democratic expansion' and 'neoliberalism' is no mean challenge in a developing society like Nigeria, where the process and outcome of research is constrained by and has implications for power relations. Academic freedom is one of the most contentious, even denied, political goods in neoliberalising Nigeria (see Mustapha 1996; Amuwo 1999). Jega notes that 'the principles and practice of academic freedom were some of the major early casualties of the [neoliberal] crisis' (Jega 1997d: 1). In the wider context of Africa, where similar challenges have been well documented (see Mkandawire 2005; Diouf and Mamdani 1994).

This Section examines how data were generated for this research. It also highlights the choices and limitations I confronted and strategies adopted in justifying and maximising the kind of data used. As ethnographic research that tried to unveil relationships, tensions and contradictions between different 'spaces' in democratic expansion, the research process itself deals with my negotiations and dialogue within these spaces.

Methodological Framework of the Research

In deciding which method to use, there was a need to consider how effectively that particular method provides the tool for generating data and testing, in a practical context, the problems identified in the conceptual literature. Indeed, some argue that the point at which one decides which method to use in collecting data follows largely from literature review and hypothesis-building: 'once the concepts and hypotheses (or research questions) have been carefully formulated and a good sample drawn, the next link in the research chain is the data collection instrument' (Bailey 1978: 93–4).

This research adopts qualitative ethnography and, within that framework, 'reflexivity' is used as a means of firsthand data collection and analysis. Reflexivity and ethnography are mutually reinforcing; indeed the former has been defined as 'a new kind of ethnography … where the author's voice and those of her respondents are situated more completely

for the reader [to see clearly]' (Hertz 1997: vii). Qualitative ethnography aims at cooperative and participatory encounters between the researcher and subject in the research process.

The Research Terrain and Data

Two broad contextual factors influenced my negotiations (both in field encounters and in data analysis): (1) operating within the terms of an unstable, often repressive, political system and (2) negotiating oneself in a plural socio-cultural setting. In my case, a focus on state–society relations and democratic transformation led me to uncomfortable encounters with officials when I asked questions that were interpreted as challenging state actions and power. I was aware of past instances when governments branded researchers as 'security threats', especially during military rule when state agents and institutions oppressed researchers and scholars with impunity. However, as a Nigerian myself, the consequences of risking state repression may not be the same as those faced by a foreigner. In the past, whilst suspected foreign researchers have been asked to leave or even been deported,[1] citizen researchers were often detained by the police, interrogated and sometimes prosecuted. In my case, one example was my encounter with the police in May 2003 in the aftermath of the Nigerian general election. Suspecting my identity, particularly in view of a University of Bradford-endorsed introduction letter I showed, a police patrol team, deployed to ensure law and order in Abuja confiscated my laptop and asked me to report to the station the following day. When I reported as required, my laptop was safely returned to me after the police took a statement. I was released perhaps because my statement showed no hint of suspicious activity, but such police action can sometimes be more arbitrary or less rational.

Closely related to the above was the challenge of negotiating academic research in an environment increasingly dominated by state-sponsored 'official' research and commissioned non-governmental research work, the latter itself under constant scrutiny but, nonetheless, more privileged than professional academic research. NGO and government research share commonality in terms of satisfying a pre-fixed institutional agenda[2] (Morse 1998; see also Bulmer & Warwick 2000). Where academic researchers come under suspicion and undergo security checks, state-sponsored researchers are often protected from official encumbrances – not surprisingly, given the 'official' and power-bearing nature of their work. Government research is likely to be infused with official rhetoric: project evaluations, field surveys and feasibility studies are often manipulated to

obtain desired results and justify policies and programmes (Mitchel 2000). On the other hand, academic research claims to be more independent and rigorous in orientation. Another distinction between academic and policy research is that while the former may feed into policy, the latter hardly succeeds in getting the attention of policy makers. In the context of ethnographic research, growing emphasis has been on the need for reflexivity and accountability, or 'the democratisation of research' in order to make it more responsive to the conditions of the people, and not necessarily to the needs of policy makers (see Silverman 1995).

In my research, the academic nature of my study became difficult to prove. For instance, as a member, official or affiliate of several civil society organisations (see 'Genesis of the Research'; Chapter 1), this affected my academic claim. Similarly, my doctoral programme and field trip were sponsored by the government of Borno State (though they did not set any conditions). During fieldwork, while I insisted that my research was academic, it nevertheless carried the potential risk of coming under suspicion as a work commissioned by, and in the interests of, one of my funding bodies, civil society organisations to which I was affiliated, and/or even an international non-governmental organisation such as UNICEF or DfID. Worse still, as a student of a foreign-based university (Bradford), I did not rule out the possibility that I might fall under suspicion as a person of questionable character or even a foreign intelligence agent. The latter in particular is a treasonable offence punishable by life imprisonment or death! At the onset of my fieldwork, I received an 'early warning signal' from a public servant. While collecting data at the Corporate Affairs Commission (a public institution responsible for coordinating non-governmental organisations), an officer warned me to be 'straightforward and honest' – a caveat I consciously observed with relative success.

In terms of the implications of my 'politics' on data – in particular, my governmental funding source, membership of civil society organisations and commitment to democracy – it should be noted that this research is by no means 'objective'; subjectivity had proved inevitable. This is the key reason why I adopted the qualitative method, which celebrates subjectivity as useful to social analysis. My personal values and experiences played a huge role in the data collected and the knowledge claims made. As I interpret the narratives of others, I cannot claim to be wholly objective. Here I am in the company of Gyimah-Boadi, a practitioner-researcher: 'I write not only as a scholar and researcher on African democratisation and civil society development but also as a practitioner, and when I write … I do not pretend to be able to be objective' (Gyimah-Boadi 2004c: 99). Yet,

while objectivity is a crude possibility, what I did attempt was a rigorous approach to my data.

Another broad factor that affected my field encounters and data analysis was how to negotiate my 'self' in a highly pluralised, culturally volatile society. Nigeria offers a social setting where all forms of social and gender relations are formidably rooted in culture, religion and traditions of the people. It is perhaps one of the most complex and volatile social and political settings in the world. With its population of over 120 million, divided into about 400 ethnic (sub)groups, ethnographers wanting to study Nigeria need hard work to succeed. In this research, two key factors were taken into consideration in negotiating my social identity with those of the subjects as a means of collecting and maximising data. The first consideration was how to choose samples from the general population. The second was setting the strategy, given my unique social status, on how to go about doing the research. In selecting the populations to be sampled, I divided Nigeria into three sections: the North, the Southwest and the Federal Capital (Abuja). In each area, selected sites and target population/groups were drawn using opportunity sampling (for details see below).

In terms of negotiating social relations, especially during field research (and this is explained in detail here to justify the kind of choices made in later sections), it is important to explain, in broad terms, how I did it and its implications for data. Ethnographers depend largely on mutual interaction between them and the research subjects by observing the mores of society and adopting appropriate manners of social relations. Yet, because of the social-relational nature of their work, they may stand the risk of being construed as an intruder, arrogant, or even 'bad-mannered', which may adversely affect the research process. At issue here are 'the ethics of intrusion [especially] in sensitive areas and devising means of securing reliable information' (Bujra and Baylies 2000: 51). In my own case, the most important factor I noticed was that some forms of unequal social and power relations were crucially involved.

My identity includes being a Muslim man of northern Nigerian origin, working in a local university, studying in an overseas university, and a relative of renowned local politicians. Each of these identity constructs carried potential costs and benefits of negotiating access. Similarly, other identifying factors such as my ethnicity (Kanuri), language skills (Kanuri, Hausa, English, including Pidgin – the latter three are widely spoken in some parts of the country) and local knowledge (as a Nigerian) played no less important a role.

Sites and Locations of the Research

There were three main sites of research: the federal capital, Abuja, seven northern locations and two in the south (see Table below for details and rationale). In view of the limited number of sites chosen, the research cannot claim to speak for the whole of Nigeria. For instance, my samples were skewed in favour of urban areas given that my research focused on what were largely urban groups and institutions.

Table 5.1: Sites of the Research

Site/Location	*Why chosen*	*Data obtained*
FCT *Location* Abuja	✓ Centre of national power ✓ Centre of governmental and non-governmental activity ✓ Deep social inequality	✓ Archival ✓ Observation ✓ Interviews
South *Locations* Ibadan Lagos	✓ Former centre of regional power ✓ Headquarters of state governments ✓ Industrial/commercial centres ✓ Highest concentration of associational life in the country ✓ Deep social inequality	✓ Archival (Ibadan, Lagos) ✓ Observation (Lagos) ✓ Interviews (Lagos)
North *Locations* Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Maiduguri, Jos, Lafia, Damaturu	✓ Former centre of regional power (Kaduna) ✓ Headquarters of state government ✓ Industrial/commercial centres ✓ High concentration of associational life in the region (Kano, Kaduna) ✓ Deep social inequality	✓ Archival (Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Maiduguri, Jos, Damaturu) ✓ Observation (Kaduna, Maiduguri ✓ Interviews (Maiduguri, Kaduna, Kano, Lafia)

Research Tools and Data Sets

Archival Research

In this research, I carried out 25 archival searches from governmental and non-governmental 'sites'.[3] The emphasis was mainly on documented historical and 'grey data'. From governmental sources, data obtained included the Nigerian Constitution (1999), legal documents such as decrees and gazettes, press releases, reports of public enquiries. It is

worthy of note that in the context of governmental sites, access to information was limited by official red tape and corruption. During fieldwork, the Freedom of Information Bill (2003) was passed into law to facilitate easy access to official records. However, as the Bill did not take effect immediately, the usual obstacles remained. For non-governmental sources, where access was more open, data obtained included the constitutions of groups (not all), correspondence, minutes of meetings, reports of activities, press releases, newspaper stories, adverts, and features.

Participant Observation

In this research, participant observation was carried out at a number of events: for example organisational meetings, workshops, protests and strikes. A particular example of participant observation during the Workers' Strike of July 2003 (see Chapter 4) gave me the opportunity to watch events first-hand. A specific form of participant observation was also carried out during the Nigerian general elections (March/ April 2003). The significance of observing the election was to observe first-hand, and in the context of a fledgling democracy, the contested relationship between the state and civil society. My observation tried to unveil the dynamics of the election (pre-; intra-; and post-election) in terms of how a particular civic association – the Transition Monitoring Group – engaged the state, claiming to represent the interests of the public, on such issues as election reform, election monitoring and the maintenance of law and order during election.

Qualitative Interviewing

Interviewing is a common tool for qualitative research not least because it facilitates conversation and dialogue between the researcher and research subjects (see Sarantakos 1998: 246). Rosanna Hertz argues that 'as situated actors, we [researchers] bring to each interview our own histories … we may draw on the richness of our own experience, particularly if what we are studying also have experience' (Hertz 1997 xiii). Interviewing is perhaps one of the most tasking social science and ethnographic research methods; it requires creative negotiation skills and demands both regular eye contact and a real or assumed show of enthusiasm for an interviewee's narratives. Each interview poses a different set of challenges: each as unique as the interviewee.

In this research, I carried out 49 semi-structured and 39 unstructured interviews (n=88 see Figure 8.6). Each planned interview was preceded by

telephone, email or physical contact (for example in a public meeting) of a potential respondent. However, some opportunities for interview arose spontaneously. For instance, while participating in a Voter Education Workshop in Maiduguri from 29 March to 1 April 2003, two co-participants agreed to be interviewed during the meal break.

Notes and References

Introduction

1   Beckman advanced three sets of arguments, each relevant in its own right, but endorsed the third, holistic, one: (1) the Nigerian state as an organ of domestic bourgeoisie (i.e. the local ruling classes); (2) the Nigerian state as an organ of international capital (i.e. foreign capitalist states, classes and institutions); (3) the Nigerian state as an organ of capital in general. In endorsing the third argument, Beckman notes: 'while the Nigerian state serves as an organ both for the penetration of international capital and for the emancipation of the domestic bourgeoisie, it cannot be reduced to either. Nor is it possible to comprehend the significance of either of the two aspects without examining such class functions of the Nigerian state for which the distinction between foreign and domestic is not relevant. The primary role of the Nigerian state is to establish, maintain, protect and expand the conditions of capitalist accumulation in general without which neither foreign nor Nigerian capital can prosper' (Beckman 1982: 45).

2   Adam Przeworski defines liberal democracy as 'a procedural system involving open political competition, with multi-party, civil and political rights guaranteed by law, and accountability operating through an *electoral relationship* between citizens and their representatives' (Przeworski 1991: ix). The core substance of liberal democracy is competitive electoral politics involving, on the one hand, regular, open and competitive elections whose outcome is 'uncertain [and] indeterminate ex ante' (Przeworski, op cit) and, on the other, a periodic machinery for making popular choices with the widest possible provisions for popular participation.

3   Wikipedia, available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_class (accessed 10 April 2006).

Chapter 1

1   Pearce (1997) identified the analytical value of the concept of civil society in exploring the meaning and practice of democratisation in her study of Latin America. Similar works reinforce these observations. See Abootalebi (1998) for views on Middle East and the North South Institute (1996) for a general Southern view.

2   Other liberal theorists also proudly confess to the quintessential influence of de Tocqueville: Michael Edwards notes that 'civil society [is] … part of society that is distinct from states and markets, the most common understanding in use today, and the direct descendant of de Tocqueville's idea about nineteenth-century America' (Edwards 2004: 20).

3   This is a useful point for Nigeria and other developing societies: even 'ascriptive' associations become 'achieving' in new contexts. However, given

the heterogeneous and volatile nature of cultural pluralism in most developing societies, evolving ascriptive 'primordial' associational forms to achieving social entities has proved somewhat difficult.

4 Like de Tocqueville, other liberal philosophers such as Thomas Paine, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and others, see civil society as a legitimate arena that emerged to defend individual and group liberties against the excesses the state (see Keane 1993). Mamdani notes that this is a unilinear 'one-sided anti-state romanticisation of civil society [that] considers the process of democratisation as synonymous with the coming to life of civil society. In turn, civil society is conceptualised as existing against the state' (1995b: 603). To Mamdani, the idea that civil society exists against the state not only glorifies civil society and demonises the state, but more importantly, obscures the potential hierarchies, differentiation and power that exist within them.

5 Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick (1848 [1948]) *Manifesto of the Communist Party* available: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm, accessed 20 June 2007.

6 See Howell and Pearce (2001) for global debates on this impasse. For Nigerian discussion, see Amuwo (1995: 8) and Ihonvbere (1995: 196).

7 I have based my typology on the Nigerian literature, as a representative sample of discourses amongst African scholars. However, it is difficult to generalise this typology as Nigerian scholars, like their counterparts elsewhere, are riven with (dis)agreement. Construct A is drawn partly from Ibrahim (1997a), Asiwaju (2000), Kukah (1999), Enemuo and Momoh (1999) and Momoh (1995, 1995a), while Construct B is based on Beckman (1997, 1998), Beckman, Akwetey and Lindström (2000), Ekeh (1992), Ikelegbe (2001a), Imade (2001), Jega (1997a, 1997b, 1998), Mama (1997), and Pereira (2000).

8 This viewpoint needs to be qualified in terms of the Nigerian literature reviewed. For instance, whilst some present the liberatory potentials of civil society in terms of liberal anti-statism (for example Asiwaju, 2000), others view it more radically in terms of the emancipatory struggles staged by some civil society groups – particularly the Labour movement. The latter conforms to the Gramscian notion (for example Beckman, Akwetey and Lindström, 2000).

9 In fairness, there are liberal theorists who propose better options such as the use of civil society self-consciously and reflexively. For instance, Robert Cox, a liberal theorist, opines that 'we must recognise that the European tradition of political thought will be seen as that part of a particular civilization co-existing with others. It can no longer make an uncontested claim to universality, even though the concepts involved in western discourse have penetrated into all parts of the world through the era of western dominance' (Cox 1999: 5).

Chapter 2

1 This is the period following the Nigerian civil war (1967–70) when oil production and profits peaked, as a result of domestic and external market factors. Proceeds from petroleum export rose from 10 per cent of total export earnings in 1962 to 82.7 per cent in 1972 and soon thereafter peaked at 90–93 per cent. Excessive oil wealth led to the emergence of a national

consumption culture (characterised by massive importation of rice and other basic commodities), particularly amongst the dominant privileged classes, and ambitious development or 'prestige projects', leading the former Nigerian Head of state, General Gowon, to declare that 'Nigeria's problem is not money but how to spend it'. The petty-bourgeoisie and foreign capital benefited from the grant of import licences, corrupt contracts and importation: 'by strengthening the lucrative but unproductive relations with foreign capital, the commercial-bureaucratic elites simply mortgaged the future and converted the country into a dumping ground for all sorts of foreign imports' (Ihonvbere and Vaughan 1995: 74).

2   State agricultural development policies – such as the accelerated agricultural development programme, 'Operation Feed the Nation', and 'Back to Farm' – all failed to promote peasant agriculture as they were undermined by countervailing policies such as the Land Use Decree (policy) which allowed wealthy elites and foreign capital to 'grab' land for large-scale commercial farming.

3   A key example, which constitutes the focus of this study, is the conflict between dominant ruling classes who control the state (state officials) and the professional and working classes in civil society – the former claiming a moral authority over the state and society, and the latter contesting such a claim on grounds of the declining legitimacy of the elite-dominated state and its policies.

4   Omeje (2004) describes this strategy as 'oilification', which he defines as a state policy aimed at confusing – or 'oilifying' – the different forms of struggle as a means of illegitimising them and necessitating violent state intervention to 'restore order'.

5   For a further analysis of the contradictions of Nigeria's oil economy see the volume *Oil and Class* edited by Petter Nore and Terisa Turner (1980). In particular, Chapter 10 (by Turner) lays bare the *saboteur* role of the 'comprador bourgeoisie'. See also Forrest 1995.

6   There was an 'aborted' Third Republic (1986–93), during which the military was unable to democratise until 1999.

7   Nigeria's national question is contested on the issues of re-negotiating the country's federalism. Key recurrent issues include: the charting of a fair system of resource distribution for states/regions; minority rights; gender equality; the role of the state in religion (contested secularism), national policing, and the constitutional role of the military in national politics etc (see Suberu 1997).

8   Some of the critics of military rule include retired officers (for example Adesina 1999; Jembewon 1998).

9   Three key factors constrained the Shagari administration from accepting the IMF recommendations in their entirety: (1) opposition from labour and students to any relationship with the IMF (2) the risk of provoking voter anger in the impending 1983 general elections which, at the time of loan negotiations, was less than a year away (3) Genuine popular expectations of an end to the economic crisis in the foreseeable future – many preferred temporary home-grown austerity measures to accepting the IMF recommendations (see Olukoshi 1990 for details; see also Adejumobi 1995; Momoh 1995). This is an excellent example, perhaps the earliest one, of civil society organising itself to effectively resist and influence the state.

10 Notable amongst them include the National Association of Nigeria Students (NANS), the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Jama'atu Nasrul Islam (JNI – Association for the Propagation of Islam), ethnic associations, women's groups, traders' associations.

11 For instance, Prince Bola Ajibola, a young lawyer who spearheaded the Nigeria Bar Association in protesting against General Buhari's abuse of due process in 1984, was appointed the Federal Minister of Justice. Jerry Gana, a university professor, was appointed the Director of Mass mobilisation. Others include Professors Tunji Olaguju, Sam Oyovbaire, Adele Junadu, Tam David West, Olukoye Ransome Kuti, Oyeleye Oyediran, appointed to different posts during the course of the regime. There is a debate on the role of these scholars in the introduction of structural adjustment and 'subversion of democracy' (see Ibrahim 1997e; Oyediran 1997).

12 The Bureau received 27,324 contributions made up of 14,961 memoranda, 1,793 recorded audio and audio input, 3,933 newspapers cuttings, 2,214 debates and conferences, 3,729 summaries of oral debates and interviews and 703 contributions made at public hearings (*West Africa*, 21–27 June 1993).

13 Decree Number 25: Participation in Politics and Elections (Prohibition).

14 The election was believed to be won by SDP's candidate Chief Mashood Abiola, a Yoruba businessman from southwestern Nigeria and a close associate of General Babangida. Many speculate that the election was annulled by General Babangida on grounds of ethnicity and regional geopolitics. Nigeria has never had a civilian president from the southern part of the country. The loser of the election, NRC candidate Alhaji Bashir Tofa, was from Kano in Northern Nigeria.

15 The new groups include, among others, National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL), Association of Trial Lawyers of Nigeria (ATLN), Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), the People's Committee for Liberty (PCL), Association for Democracy (AD), the Universal Defenders of Democracy (UDD), the Media Rights Agenda (MRA), the Movement for National Reformation (MNR), the Ethnic Minority Rights Organisation of Nigeria (EMRN), the Movement for the Survival of the Ogonis (MOSOP), the Association for Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria (ADGGN), and the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP). Most of these associations were either inspired by or benefited from donor funding.

16 For instance, Women in Nigeria (WIN) held a meeting at Bauchi on 7 August 1993 following which it resolved that 'unless General Babangida relinquished power to the winner of June 12 elections unfailingly on August 27, permanent damage will be done to the political and territorial integrity of the nation'. WIN therefore resolved to participate actively in all demonstrations to make sure that the military does not remain in power (*Guardian* [Nigeria] 20/6/1993: A4).

17 These discourses were promoted by the Yoruba-dominated print media such as the *Tempo, Vanguard* and *Concord.* Amongst civic groups, the discourse was matched with action. For instance, when the National Electoral Commission

(NEC) was restrained by a High Court from releasing the results, the CD went ahead and published the result (using data from party agents).

18 Apart from the USA and UK, other G8 countries took similar harsh steps. For instance, Canada had earlier imposed sanctions on any further military and police training for Nigeria. It also banned a visit to Canada by key Nigerian military and civilian officials for a course scheduled for September 1993 (*Guardian* (Lagos)*, 21/8/1993).

19 It is argued that 'the World Bank and IMF, as key creditors and lenders, are under the firm control of the United States and other developed and industrialised member [countries] who are clearly the majority shareholders in these institutions' (Akindele 1999: 278).

Chapter 3

1 Although a party to the democratising process in Nigeria, this is a serious source of some intellectual standing. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance is a Stockholm-based international NGO established in 1995 by 14 countries (later 19), including four from Africa: Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa. Amongst its associate members include the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights (IIHR), the International Press Institute (IPI), Transparency International and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Its key objectives are to promote and advance sustainable democracy world-wide; to strengthen and support national capacity to develop the full range of democratic instruments; to increase knowledge and enhance learning about democratic electoral process; and to provide a meeting-place for exchange between all those involved in electoral processes in the context of democratic institution-building. International IDEA claims that it is 'global in ownership and scope, independent of national interest, and flexible and quick in its responses, the only international organisation with this mandate' (International IDEA, 2001: back page). Since the late 1990s, International IDEA has been engaged in Nigeria's democratic process and was invited in 2000 by the Nigerian Federal Government to conduct a public dialogue aimed at sustaining Nigeria's fledgling democracy.

2 The last point (4) is particularly noted in Peter Ekeh's seminal work, *Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa* (1975: 91–112).

3 Density is defined as 'the degree to which something is filled or occupied' (*Collins English Dictionary,* 2005: 147). In this study, the word is used to connote the number of associations and their interrelations.

4 Examples of empire-states include the Oyo and Benin Empires in the south, and Kanem-Borno and Hausa Empires in the north. These states had evolved elaborate systems of hereditary leadership, socio-economic and legal systems, largely based on a feudal mode of production. On the other hand, an example of a stateless society is the Igbo where male elders from clans/families constitute the building blocks of social order (see Crowder 1978 for details).

5 An example is the Sokoto Caliphate, an Islamic empire conquered by the British army in 1904. The class structure of the empire was feudal, structured into *Sarakuna* (the aristocrats and land owners) and *Talakawa* (the commoners) whilst civil society was clearly built around the *Ummah* (or

communities) – albeit for the sake of voluntary self-help and the defence of society, rather than anti-statism.

6   This has been classified as 'Petty-bourgeoisie' (see also Chapter 5).

7   Primitive accumulation refers to the way in which those who owned land and labour are respectively 'dispossessed' of their land and left with no means of survival other than resort to wage labour. Bujra defines primitive capitalist accumulation as 'the looting and plunder which preceded colonialism and the forcible separation from land or other means of livelihood of those who become wage labourers for capital' (Bujra 2004: 637, fn 1).

8   This varied from one part of the country to another. In the north, where there were well organised empire-state systems, with institutions such as judiciary and finance, colonialism merely superimposed 'indirect rule', with the colonial state as overseer. In the south, particularly stateless Igbo societies, however, the colonial system adopted 'direct rule' which involved the establishment of colonising institutions including bureaucracy and new centrist traditional institutions headed by a patriarch, the *Obi*.

9   A justification was provided by Lord Frederick Lugard, the Governor-General of Nigeria, whilst defending the colonial policy of model education for the sons of Hausa/Fulani rulers from the Emirates of northern Nigeria. He claimed that given their 'noble background', these pupils were predisposed to imbibing the colonial doctrines of honour, loyalty and responsibility which would make them honest, efficient and reliable allies of the British colonial project (in Ake 1982).

10   The European sections, commonly known as 'Government Reservation Areas' or 'European Quarters', were distinguished by luxurious buildings and exotic social amenities, while the African sections consisted of congested shanty settlements and ghettoes with no efficient social facilities.

11   The three major regional parties – the Northern People's Congress (NPC; north), the Action Group (AG; southwest) and National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC; southeast) began as urban, non-political and sectarian groups. The point is that the boundaries between the 'civil' and 'political' became blurred, contrary to the prevailing liberal argument (for example Diamond 1997).

12   By this I mean the extent to which groups are active, lively, energetic and animated; in particular, how they relate within themselves and with each other in engaging the state.

13   For instance, when General Gowon announced, in October 1974, his intention to remain in power 'indefinitely', the regime did not encounter significant opposition from civil society or organised labour. Diamond argues that it would have taken only internal division within the ruling military regime to depose General Gowon and restore democracy (Diamond 1988).

14   For instance, the Report from which Figure was adapted did not include key sectarian (development-inclined) associations like Women in Nigeria (WIN), founded in the early 1980s to struggle for the inclusion of women into mainstream national politics and development (see also Chapter 4: fn 16). Others include ethnic and 'hometown' development associations (for example Igbo Development Association, Bauchi Development Association, Ibadan Development Association, Arewa Development Association etc).

Barkan and his colleagues, writing in the context of Western Nigeria, have argued that these associations are key drivers of local development and key participants in national politics (Barkan et al. 1991: 457–80).

15   Many 'self-help' associations, social clubs and some 'cultural' societies in Nigeria belong to this category. They claim to show no interest in either supporting and or opposing political regimes and, as a result, have been spared from 'autocratic' state intervention. Examples of these associations include Alheri Social Club, Bayajidda Cultural Association, Bajinta Club and Tawakaltu Social Club (see Mamman 1999 for details).

16   Nigeria experienced a violent civil war between 1967 and 1970. The war was rooted in a bloody coup which ousted the northern-dominated Balewa government on 15 January 1966. Apparently the coup was initiated by young military officers from southeastern Nigeria led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna. The highest-ranking military officer who foiled the coup and formed a government – General Johnson Ironsi – was also an Igbo. Consequently, a counter-coup was staged by northern officers in July 1966, following which Major Yakubu Gowon took over power. This led to a stalemate between Igbo and northern military officers holding political power. Lt Col Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, the then governor of Eastern region, refused to recognise the new military government and declared the secession of the region as the independent state of Biafra. The Gowon government responded violently and war became inevitable (see Diamond 1988 for a detailed critical discussion).

17   Ever since, establishing this type of organisation has become a tradition by the wives of Nigerian Heads of State. For instance, the wife of General Abacha, Babangida's successor, established the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) which merely replaced the Better Life Programme. Recently, the wife of Nigeria's incumbent President, Mrs Stella Obasanjo, established the Childcare Trust. While they are officially non-governmental, these organisations function with state resources that are often abused in pursuing wasteful programmes.

18   The following provides a sample: Vision '98; Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha '98 (YEAA) led by a young graduate, Daniel Kanu; National Council of Youth Associations of Nigeria (NACYAN); Sani Abacha Initiative for National Transformation (SAINT); National Mobilisation and Persuasion Committee led by Dr Godwin Adzuana Daboh; National Movement for Peace and Stability (NMPS); Movement for National Stability (MONAS) led by Tony Anyawu; National Mass Movement of Nigeria (NMMN) led by Alhaji Bukar Mandara; Traditional Rulers Forum (TRF); Professional United for Peace and Stability (PUPS); National Association of Patriotic Professionals (NAPP); Media Democratic Forum (MDF); Northern Elders Forum (NEF); Union of Democratic Elected Representatives (UDERN); Movement for National Consensus (MONAC); the 4th Force; and General Sani Abacha Movement for Peaceful Tranisiton (GESAM) (see Obadare 2005).

19   This statement was made at a time when the 1989 Constitution had started functioning in keeping with the military's transition to civil rule programme. Even then, as the statement showed, the Constitution was not supreme, as a military decree could overpower it.

20   Sources: Amuwo (1995), CRP (1994), Momoh (1997, 1995) Mustapha (1996) and Olowokure (1999).

21 Replaced by the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) Decree of 1996, and the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC) Decree (No. 17) of 1998. To a greater or lesser extent, these decrees provide similar power to the commissions.

22 In this study sectarianism is viewed as an objective reality and a possible force for good or bad. Without doubt some of these associations have promoted divisive causes. Others have promoted good causes, for instance, many Nigerian women's organisations (for example Women in Nigeria [WIN], Women Aid Collective [WACOL], Women Right Advancement and Protection Alternative [WRAPA]), whilst obviously 'sectarian', have played an important role in promoting better condition for society. WIN in particular was part and parcel of Nigeria's democratic struggle in the 1990s.

23 In a study of Ibadan and Abeokuta, the Centre for African Settlement Studies and Development, CASSAD, identified 735 and 546 non-governmental organisations respectively (CASSAD 1991). However this figure is based on a count of NGOs, without any specific criterion, whereas my list is only of pro-democracy organisations.

24 My finding is confirmed by Bonny Ibhawoh, who observes the implications of this trend in the context of human rights NGOs: 'most groups are based in towns, often in the capital city of the state in which they operate … the result is that human rights NGOs have made much less impact in addressing human rights issues that affect rural populations than they have been in addressing urban issues' (Ibhawoh 2001: 52).

25 See Chapters 3 and 4 for more details.

26 In similar first-hand research, Aiyede (2004a) notes that Nigerian civil society comprises both labour movement and civic associations and that these groups share common experience in terms of the problems of internal democracy, wider democratic struggle and state responses. However, he notes that they also differ in terms of organisation-building, funding and democratic manifestations.

27 Examples include, Chapter 3 (religion), Chapter 4 (ethnicity), Chapter 5 (the state), Chapter 9 (civil society), Chapter 14 (the international community). My focus is on Chapter 9, but other chapters are tangentially relevant.

28 One example is the 'Strategic Planning Workshop' for Nigerian pro-democracy groups, organised by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) held in London in November 1997. The Workshop brought together both resident and exiled civil society activists. It was convened because several of the invited groups were involved in leadership crises, factionalism and petty rivalries which affected their democratic struggles. The workshop identified 'credible strategies for building a coalition' for the expansion of democratic space in Nigeria; the creation of a broad framework that tolerates differing views and ensures a minimum agenda (for example 'no to military rule' agenda); and the promotion of internal democracy and accountability within civil society groups etc (CDD 1997: 5–6).

29 Examples include the Report of the Political Bureau set up in 1986 to carry out a national debate on Nigeria's future (FRN 1987); the Vision 2010 Report, the product of a high-profile exercise initiated in 1995/6 by the Abacha regime to devise Nigeria's political and economic strategies; and, recently, the Report of the Presidential Committee on a Review of the 1999

Constitution (FRN 2001a; 2001b). Enormous energy and resources have been invested in the production of these reports.

Chapter 4

1   See for example Crompton and Gubbay (1980) especially chapters 5 and 6: 'Economy and class structure in the West' and 'State and economy in the West'.

2   Relations of production are defined as 'the relations which people enter into in the course of production … the most famous and most important example of social relations of production is the relation between the ruling classes and subordinate class' (Ake 1982: 12).

3   While it is apparent that Marx saw the bourgeoisie and proletariat as the two contending players in a capitalist economy, it is arguable if his 'dual class model' is a rigid construct: indeed, he also identified a multiplicity of classes. For instance, in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx identified the following social groupings in France: landed aristocracy, financiers, the industrial bourgeoisie, the middle class, the petty-bourgeoisie, the industrial proletariat, the lumpenproletariat and the peasantry (Marx 1962). Some have re-classified Marx's typology into three key classes: bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie and proletariat (for example Wright in Edgell 1993: 19).

4   However, both have also explored pre-capitalist and other societies. Marx's treatise: *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations* (1964) is a key example (see Ake1982: 42).

5   See Chapter 3, note 7.

6   Bujra further notes that such conceptualisation of class difference derives from a Marxist perspective, which is not discerned from quantitative indicators but defines classes by their stake in 'the means of production and alignment in political struggle' (Bujra 2004: 15). Conversely, she notes, 'indexical accounts often collapse the difference between petty commodity producers and wage labourers into terms like "the urban poor", or conflate peasants with capitalist farmers, or fail to distinguish between professional wage workers and "businessmen", collapsing both into a category of "the middle class"' (Bujra 2004: 4). Marx's conceptual schema seems to be relevant to this study, not least because of its reference to class in terms of production process and political struggle. However, this has not resolved the problems of how to apply the schema in the context of Nigeria.

7   Evidently, there is a contradiction between Nigeria's dependent oil economy, which is heavily entrenched in the global capitalist system, and its relative advancement in industrialisation, at least by African standards.

8   Onimode terms this a 'manufactured elite' because it did not grow 'naturally through capitalist ownership and accumulation in social production'; it is in fact 'tied to the [dependent] nature of the postcolonial state it inherited and, therefore, condemned from birth as corrupt and enfeebled class agents and allies of the imperialist bourgeoisie' (Onimode 1988: 101).

9   The key measures of internal democracy identified in this chapter are as follows: regular meetings; regular free and fair elections; dealing with the 'incumbency factor' (for example founders not perpetuating power or unduly influential); constitutionalism and due process; free flow of information; social inclusivity in leadership; conflict resolution and consensus building, in

terms of continuous unity rather than division; accountability; and financial autonomy.

10   NLC 'History of the NLC' Available: http://www.nlcng.org/PROFILE/ historyofcongress.htm, accessed 15 August 2005.

11   NLC 'Policy on NLC and Unionism', available: http://www.nlcng.org/ PROFILE/policyonunionism.htm, accessed 30 January 2006.

12   Examples include the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Nigeria Security Printing and Minting Company. Workers in these organisations are prohibited from forming active industrial unions, ostensibly because if they embarked on a strike, the Nigerian economy will come to a standstill.

13   The Departments are: Education and International Affairs; Organisation, Industrial Relations and Gender; Research and Statistics; Administration and Establishment; and Finance.

14   However, the NLC has initiated measures to improve women's participation in the union. An example is the setting up in 2003 of a Women's Commission in the Congress and its state councils and affiliates. Moreover, in the past two decades the activities of the women's wing have expanded dramatically, especially in the areas of education, internal agitation for reforms and advocacy. But these measures are aimed at improving 'participation' rather than reversing the disproportionate leadership ratio.

15   See NLC 'Labour Policy on Politics' available: http://www.nlcng.org/ PROFILE/ policyonpolitics.htm, accessed 20 January 2006.

16   The extent to which military-imposed NLC leadership was considered as anathema, was expressed by another observer: 'The congress leadership was a bunch of military lackeys who had no affinity with principles, integrity and democracy … Congress [leadership] was a sell out, one that could not be trusted and should not be supported' (cited in Kukah 1999: 156).

17   Indeed, the stalemate between the government and NLC continued. A further wave of workers' strikes commenced in June and then October/ November 2004 when the Federal Government increased again the price of petrol from N44 to N55, diesel from N45 to N63, and kerosene from N40 to N65.

18   I have not identified these associations by their real names, in line with ethics and obligations of anonymity and confidentiality. This approach provided sufficient scope for critical analysis without provoking emotions or risking long-term friendships which I have developed with the members and officials of some of these associations. However, in the analyses I have named some renowned associations where the information is in the public domain, not too sensitive and/or not risky to reveal.

19   This interview was held at a time when the respondent was undergoing postgraduate studies at the University of Bradford. As a student-colleague, it enable me break the usual barrier asking sensitive questions and getting candid answers to them (see Appendix for further details on issues of accessing respondents and negotiating research).

20   In using this comparative concept, I take my cue from Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi (1997), writing in the wider context of Africa. The point being made here is, civil society in Africa comprises a plethora of associations - peaceful and violent as well as pro-state and anti-state – each worthy of consideration as being part and parcel of 'civil society', no matter the approach to politics or orientation of the association concerned.

21 'So-called' because it does not represent the interest of all Yoruba but certain higher class elements with this ethnic category. At issue, also, is the economic potential of this region relative to the north. 'Democracy' is actually contested here.

Chapter 5

1   See Introduction, note 2.
2   In this chapter, 'civil society' is narrowed to civic associations in terms of their participation in a fledgling electoral democracy. The aim is to evaluate their role beyond anti-military struggle (examined in previous chapters) to election under a representative government, as a means of democratic consolidation.
3   Consider, for instance, the controversy following the US Presidential election in Florida in 2001 (see: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1372065.stm) and alleged scandals in UK local elections in Birmingham in 2005 (see: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4410743.stm). These instances suggest that even in developed democracies, election irregularities cannot be ruled out and constitute a public issue.
4   See note 3.
5   Other organisations of similar size include the Citizens' Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR) and the Civil Society Pro-Democracy Network (see http://www.cdd.org.uk/cfcr/).
6   By this I mean the political dynamics within individual associations affiliated to the TMG. An example is how some civic associations were seen as overwhelmed by the promotion of particular regional political interests (see Chapter 5).
7   They include associations from all over the country, for example, Adolescent and Health Information Project (AHIP) based in Kano; Baobab – for Women Rights, a Nigerian branch of a pan-African women empowerment network based in Lagos; Girls Power Initiative based in Calabar; Society for the Welfare of Women Prisoners (SWEP) based in Uwani, Enugu State; Women Development Project Centre based in Onitsha, Anambra State; Women Action Research (WARO) based in Enugu; Women Environment Programme (WEP) based in Kaduna; Women's Centre for Peace and Development based in Lagos; Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON) based in Lagos; Foundation for Social Justice and Equity based in Jos; Centre for Women and Adolescent Empowerment (CWAE) based in Yola.
8   For instance, the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC) emerged from previous electoral institutions was formed in August 1998 (by Military Decree No 17) in accordance with Section 153(f) of the 1999 Constitution. The key functions of INEC are (1) to organise and administer elections and bye-elections; (2) the register and regulate political parties; (3) the implementation of electoral laws and policies relating to peaceful elections; and (4) carry out any responsibilities that are delegated by the National Assembly. INEC is dependent on financial grants from the office of the president. In addition, because INEC follows Nigeria's federal structure, key appointments are often politicised along sectional and ethnic lines. In short, INEC and its predecessor organisations have largely been weak, dependent and politicised.

9   Excerpt from the field report of a former Chairman of TMG, Mr Clement Nwankwo, published in the *Journal of Democracy* (Cited in Nwankwo 1999: 161).

10 In transforming into political parties, some of these associations retained their civil society acronym and logo (for example Democratic Alternative; National Conscience (Party) (NCP).

11 The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs is an American international non-governmental organisation involved in democratic governance across the world. In addition to funding local civil society organisations, the NDI participated, in collaboration with the Carter Centre (another American NGO) as international observers during the Nigerian 2003 general elections.

12 The 14 member committee comprised the following: TMG – 5; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – 3; UK Department for International Development (DfID) – 1; the European Union (EU) – 1; United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – 1; International Human Rights Law Group – 1; Nigeria Organisation for Solidarity and Development (NOSAD) – 1; and the Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN) – 1 (TMG 2003). While the composition of committee may seem to indicate the participation of the TMG and its affiliates, some respondents informed me that in reality, representatives from funding agencies, deployed on the principle of donor 'oversight', had greater clout over their decision-making and activities.

13 The Electoral Act (2002) stipulates that all parties are to receive an equal sum of money as grant from the state. Each new party was given one million Naira (the equivalent of £5000) to help them get up and running. After receiving their subventions from the government, some parties simply turned away from the electoral process. For others, the sum was too small to enable them to get established. However, stronger parties depended on private and corporate (arguably corrupt) funding to sponsor their activities.

14 In Nigeria, traditional rulers enjoy immense respect and influence as the bearers of people's traditional values and culture. Because they play an important role in influencing public opinion, governments often use them in mobilising support for state policies – which are, more often than not, meant to serve the interest of ruling elites.

15 The term 'multiple registration' refers to the registration of a person more than once. 'Proxy registration' refers to registration of one person by another. 'Ghost registration' refers to the registration of an imaginary person so that that a person whose characteristics fit what is contained in the card could use that card. All these kinds of registration are illegal.

16 For a list of local observer groups, see an earlier section titled 'Civil Society and the Electoral Process: a Glimpse of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG)'.

17 This reality in 'Election 2003' contrast sharply with those depicted in previous chapters, in particular Chapter 4 and 5 when the state was mainly under military rule. Indeed, the election was conducted, as a regular democratic exercise, at the end of a four-year spell of democratic rule (1999–2003).

Chapter 6

1 For instance, Bujra and her colleagues note that in the pastiche of neoliberal triumphalism, 'exploitation and class conflict are replaced by a particular conception "civil society", a loose and arbitrary collection of more or less autonomous identities, interests and associations no longer embedded in the mode of production. Thus disconnected from class struggles, the idea of "civil society" can come to express anything and nothing' (Bujra et al. 2004: 563).

2 Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, writing on sectarian associations, describe them as 'Bad civil society' (Chambers and Kopstein 2001: 837–65), arguing that they are counterproductive and cannot be expected to play any useful role in a democracy.

Appendix

1 Consider, for instance, the mysterious arrest and deportation of Dr Patrick Wilmott, an Afro-Caribbean university lecturer based at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, by government agents in 1986. He was deported on the grounds that he was a threat to national peace and security. In his research and publications Wilmott, a Marxist, was critical of the government.

2 However, there are instances where academic and government research may overlap. In general, government-commissioned academic research may, and often does, seek to satisfy the institutional expectations of sponsors with huge ethical implications.

3 It is problematic to qualify and quantify archival search. Given that several searches were done in a particular 'site', at different times and for short or prolonged periods, in this study, each 'site' is given one point, no matter the frequency of visits, quantity/quality of data obtained or time spent there.

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