



## Chapter 3

# From Importer to Exporter: The Changing Role of Nigeria in Promoting Democratic Values in Africa

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### Introduction

For the better part of their post-independence existence, most African states groaned under the oppression and misgovernance of one form of authoritarian regime or another. One-partyism and military rule reigned supreme, characterised by the flagrant and wanton abuse of democratic values, particularly the fundamental human rights of citizens, the rule of law and equality. During this traumatising period that spanned the decades of the 1960s, '70s, '80s and in some cases the early '90s, Africans had to contend with dehumanising conditions occasioned largely by the prevalence of visionless leadership, an excruciating debt burden and rising poverty, resulting in a vicious cycle of armed ethnic conflicts, civil wars and unprecedented refugee flows, among other crises and contradictions (see Albert, 2005; Nugent, 2004; Akinwumi, 2004; Adekanye, 1995; Ake, 1985; Englebert, 2000; Onimode, 2000; Udombana, 2003; Mamdani, 1996; Osaghae, 1998). However, as the 'Third Wave' of democratisation reached Africa following the end of the Cold War, the pressures for democratic reforms, both from within and without, became irresistible. The protests embodied an expression of discontent with economic hardship and political repression and a demand for democratic reform (Lawson, 1991; Agbu, 1996; Osaghae, 1999).

The responses to these pressures served to ensure that the decade of the 1990s represents, to all intents and purposes, the age of democratic rebirth in Africa. One after the other, African states began to embark on democratic transitions under different guises: some through constitutional conferences, as was the case in Benin, and others through multiparty elections, as in Ghana and Nigeria (see Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997; Osaghae, 1999).



As it happened, Nigeria stands out as one of the late ‘democratisers’, following the unwillingness of the military elites to vacate politics and governance. This was evidenced by the series of failed transitions, coups and counter-coups and the baseless annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, one adjudged as the ‘freest and fairest’ in the annals of electoral politics in Nigeria (see Onuoha & Fadakinte, 2002; Ojo, 2000; Oyediran & Agbaje, 1999; Osaghae, 1998). However, since Nigeria’s return to the path of democracy in 1999, it has sought to move quickly beyond its abysmal past, not only with regard to its democratic credentials at home, but also abroad, particularly in Africa. This transition, or—better still—changing role in the promotion of democratic values in Africa, against the background of its appalling past records is what can be described as the country moving ‘from importer to exporter’ of democratic values. By this is meant a country that was itself a beneficiary of Western democracy promotion through external and internal exertions now becoming one that promotes democracy by exerting serious pressures and committing enormous resources to ensure that those African countries left behind in the democracy process become democratic.

This chapter basically seeks to interrogate Nigeria’s changing role in the promotion of democracy in Africa. Variables include the outright condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional change of government, support for democratic succession through the ballot box and peaceful resolution of disputes. These are core issues in democracy, which basically has to do with popular empowerment, participation and representation through periodic, competitive, free and fair electoral politics. The basic questions that the chapter addresses are: Why has Nigeria ventured into the promotion of democracy in Africa, despite enormous domestic contradictions? How has Nigeria promoted democratic ideals in Africa? And how sustainable can these efforts be?

As the chapter seeks to address these and related questions, we are confronted with the problem of measurement. However, the chapter will adopt the framework of the Democracy Coalition Project (DCP), the key goal of which is to assess states’ adherence to a central provision of the Warsaw Declaration, which over 100 governments endorsed at the Community of Democracies conference in Warsaw, Poland in June 2000. The Declaration commits signatories to ‘work together to promote and strengthen democracy’ at home and abroad (DCP, 2003a). In its methodology, a DCP (2003b) survey has concentrated on four subject areas: (1) a state’s response to the overthrow of a democratically elected government abroad; (2) a state’s response to the manipulation of electoral processes abroad; (3) the degree of state support for international democracy efforts, including through foreign assistance; and (4) the nature of a state’s policy towards entrenched dictatorships.



The chapter is divided into a number of sections. The first briefly historicises Nigeria's disappointing betrayal of the high hopes and expectations at its independence as a country that would make steady progress in the direction of sustainable democracy and good governance. This is what is referred to as the descent into the abyss (see below), necessitating the need for 'others' to export democracy to Nigeria. The next section explores the bases of Nigeria's adventure into democracy promotion since 1999. This is followed by an examination of the changing role of Nigeria in promoting democratic values in Africa. The last section identifies some inherent contradictions in the political economy of Nigeria that tend to question the political wisdom behind the country's democracy promotion project in Africa. The concluding section reflects on the possible impacts of such contradictions on the future (ie the sustainability) of Nigeria's promotion of democratic values in Africa.

## Descent into the abyss

Upon Nigeria's attainment of political independence on 1 October 1960, international attention shifted to it as a country that would possibly make steady progress along the paths of sustainable peace, democracy and development in Africa. Such hopes were not misplaced, given the abundance of human and natural resources endowing the country (Omotola, 2005a; Omotola & Omofa, 2005). Contrary to expectations, however, it did not take long before these hopes were dashed (Akinwumi, 2004; Osaghae, 1998).

Nigeria's ignominious transition from hope to despair began with the failure of the managers of the immediate post-independence Nigeria to fundamentally redress the crises and contradictions bequeathed to the country by the departing colonialists. The opportunity presented by independence to redress the roots of these problems was wasted by the new elite who took over. They saw independence as an opportunity to further their selfish and parochial interests through the manipulation of the forces of identity, particularly ethnicity and religion, within the country. The deepening of these contradictions largely resulted in the collapse of the First Republic through a military coup on 15 January 1966 (Dudley, 1973; 1982; Adekanye, 1981).

The first military government in Nigeria (1966–79), which heralded new hopes at its inception in 1966, did little to salvage the precarious balance of the power structure of the country. This resulted in a series of coups and counter-coups, some of which were successful, others of which failed or were foiled. In all, Nigeria had four military heads of state during this period (13 years), representing a very high rate of political instability. The failures of this period could further be gleaned from the fact that it coincided with 30 months of agonising civil war (1967–70),

which further damaged the country (see Osaghae, Onwudiwe & Suberu, 2002). The subsequent policy of rehabilitation, reconciliation and reconstruction (the 3R's) of the immediate post-war years, as much as the process of national rebirth, integration and development that followed, would appear to have had limited positive impacts. Decades after the inauguration of and experimentation with these policies and processes, it would appear that the vestiges of the civil war continued to haunt the country. The most explicit manifestation of this is captured in the emergence of ethnic militias such as the Odua Peoples Congress, the Egbesu Boys, the Bakassi Boys, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force and separatist movements, especially the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra, which challenged the state's internal sovereignty and monopoly over the coercive instruments of force (Babawale, 2002; Akinwumi, 2005).

The return of the country to democracy in 1979, disappointingly, did not help to address the deepening crisis of the Nigerian state. And as the state became privatised for the interest of the ruling clique and their clients against the collective good, the military once again struck, seizing power in December 1983 (Joseph, 1987; Falola & Ihonvbere, 1985). The second period of military rule (1983–99) only served to deepen the country's crisis of governance. The search for solutions, particularly through the introduction of structural adjustment programmes by the Babangida regime, added salt to an already festering wound. As it turned out, the country witnessed increasing economic problems in the form of rising inflation, unemployment, a high cost of living and declining living conditions.

Another dimension of the contradiction was the simultaneous transition in the political and economic spheres. It is on record that the Babangida regime organised and midwived the longest and most expensive transition to democracy in Nigeria (1986–93), at a total cost of over NGN<sup>1</sup> 40 billion (see Ojo, 2000; Diamond, Kirk-Green & Oyediran, 1996). Despite the fact that the electoral politics of the transition was widely acclaimed to be of a good standard, its results were annulled on frivolous grounds such as the claim that both presidential candidates, Bashorun Abiola, the presumed winner who contested the election as the Social Democratic Party candidate, and Alhaji Bashiru Tofa of the National Republican Convention deployed huge sums of money during the electoral processes (Omoruyi, 1993; 2004). Other reasons advanced for the annulment of the election included frivolous court injunctions granted to Arthur Nzeribe's Association for a Better Nigeria (ABN). A few days before the election, an Abuja high court granted the ABN's application to stop the election in the first instance. Another injunction was also granted at the instance of the ABN after the election, which ordered the electoral management body, the National Electoral Commission,

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1 NGN = Nigerian naira.



not to announce the election results. It was also alleged that the military as an institution did not support the candidature of Abiola. This last excuse sounds rather questionable, given the fact that the military midwived the election and could have prevented Abiola from contesting it if they really did not want him to take part.

The annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, in addition to the arrest and detention of its presumed winner, Abiola, only served to complicate Nigeria's battered image in the international system. To make matters worse, the Abacha regime that took over after the sacking of the Shonekan's Interim National Government demonstrated a minimal appreciation of the values of the so-called New World Order at the end of the Cold War. Of particular significance here were the questions of democracy, environmental protection and drug-trafficking, which were issues where the country's rating was close to zero. As Abacha continued unabated in his onslaught on pro-democracy and human rights groups and environmental activists such as Ken Saro-Wiwa, and Nigeria was labelled as a major transit point for the trade in narcotics, more global attention shifted to the country. As Abacha's regime resisted pressures from within and without to democratise and improve its human rights record, cultivating unprecedented ties with dictatorial regimes in South-East Asia in protest against Western 'intrusion' into the domestic affairs of the country, a number of sanctions were imposed on Nigeria (Oche, 1999; Eyinla, 1999; Eminue, 1999). To divert attention away from domestic inadequacies, the Abacha regime sustained existing peace-keeping efforts in Liberia and Sierra Leone and initiated new ones through the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

In the thick of this crisis, international organisations (the United Nations, the Commonwealth, etc) and some Western countries, especially Canada and the United States, pressured Nigeria to implement political reforms. Added to this was the radicalisation of the internal struggle for political and economic reforms, championed by civil society. Though a long-standing struggle, the annulment of the 12 June election added bite to the battle. Even in Africa, some countries, most notably South Africa under Nelson Mandela, were part of the struggle for the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria. Abacha's self-succession bid, coupled with his defiance of international calls and pleas, was also a contributory factor.

It is not possible to say definitively what would have happened if Abacha had not died in 1998 under circumstances that many believed was a stroke of good fortune for the country. However, the continuation of the increasingly irresistible pressure for democratic reform and the need to save the country from total collapse may have informed the decision of General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who became head of state following the mysterious death of Abacha, to oversee the shortest transition programme in Nigeria's history (10 months). It was the outcome of



the transition processes that heralded the eventual 'importation' of democracy to Nigeria in 1999. Ever since, Nigeria has established a good record of promoting democratic values in Africa. How has the country fared in this enterprise?

## **From importer to exporter of democratic values**

Since its successful transition to democracy in 1999, promoting democratic values has become a prominent feature of Nigerian foreign policy, especially in Africa. Since 1999 to date, Nigeria has committed a great deal of resources to combating anti-democratic forces, notably to reverse or prevent the forceful seizure of power and the management of conflict through unconstitutional mechanisms in Africa. While this trend may not be entirely new and its cost since 1999 a small fraction of what the preceding military regimes spent in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as a reflection of the country's continuing commitment to its African centrepiece policy, the current wave of Nigeria's democracy promotion is obviously unprecedented. This is more so as Nigeria is now a democracy where due process is expected to be followed before the appropriation of public funds, as the legislature enjoys substantial power over national finances.

Nigeria's attempts at promoting democratic values in Africa have been predicated upon certain mechanisms. Most notable of these are the strong rejection of the overthrow of democratically elected governments, financial and technical assistance to transitional states, leadership and support for all African initiatives aimed at promoting democratic values, and a commitment to peace and conflict management in Africa. These have been well demonstrated in many instances. To start with, Nigeria, in collaboration with other African countries (particularly South Africa), has been in the forefront of all efforts to ensure sustainable peace, democracy and development in Africa. For instance, Nigeria was one of the strong voices for the criminalisation of the forceful seizure of power in Africa (ie making unconstitutional changes of government a criminal offence) at the 35th summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) held in Algiers, Algeria in July 1999. The resolution states that any government that comes to power in any African country through a coup would be diplomatically isolated (Mbah, 1999). As the OAU turned into the African Union (AU), under which the implementation of this resolution was to commence in 2001, Nigeria participated actively in the processes leading to the successful transition. Nigeria has also been a leading light in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism frameworks, both geared towards the promotion of sustainable peace, development and good governance. Here, Nigeria is providing leadership for the implementation committee of NEPAD (see Saliu & Omotola, 2005).



Nigeria has transcended these commitments in principle to the realm of practical demonstration. The first litmus test that confronted the country under the nascent democracy was the Ivorian case. In December 1999, General Robert Guei led a coup that overthrew President Henri Konan Bédié of Côte d'Ivoire for alleged misgovernance. Responding to this development, Sule Lamido, the then Nigerian minister of external affairs, noted that the coup was not acceptable. He warned Guei very strongly that 'ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] would not tolerate any military regime in the sub-region, no matter the circumstances that might have brought it to power'. He also demanded that 'the Guei junta must return the country to democracy within the framework of the ECOWAS intervention plan' within at most six months (Agekameh, 2000). In his own response to the junta's appeal for international sympathy, President Obasanjo of Nigeria warned that 'military coups remain an aberration irrespective of their *raisons d'être*', and urged the Ivorian military to initiate a rapid transition back to democracy (Obasanjo, 1999; DCP, 2003b). The restoration processes, largely mediated by ECOWAS under Nigerian leadership, eventually yielded some positive result when in October 2000 a presidential election was held in Côte d'Ivoire. Although the election was characterised by crisis and contradictions, especially the exclusion of a major contender, former Prime Minister Alassane Quattara, and fighting between partisans of Guei and Gbagbo, the Supreme Court ultimately declared Gbagbo the winner (UNDPI, 2003).

The return of democracy to Côte d'Ivoire had been considered a viable means of reconciliation. But, as it turned out, efforts geared towards reconciling the different parties in the aftermath of the 2000 election failed to ease the tension. By mid-September 2002 hostility had broken out again between the loyalists of Guei and President Gbagbo, resulting in the assassination of Guei and members of his family, massive loss of lives and the displacement of about 750 000 Ivoirians (UNDPI, 2003: 6). Again, Nigeria was on hand to checkmate the trend and contribute to the restoration of peace and democracy. Dubem Onyia, Nigeria's minister of state for foreign affairs, led leaders of three African countries (Nigeria, Ghana and Togo) to Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002 to condemn the uprising. In a joint communiqué issued at the end of the one-day visit, the team expressed their support of and solidarity with Gbagbo. Onyia, however, warned Gbagbo to be cautious in handling the crisis, because 'being too rigid might frustrate the rebellious soldiers into adopting guerilla tactics which will not augur well for the country' (Ajomale, 2002: 52). Nigeria has also promoted talks among Ivorian factions through ECOWAS, leading to the deployment of ECOMOG, which by June 2003 had 1 300 peace-keeping troops in Côte d'Ivoire (UNDPI, 2003).

Nigeria's role in restoring democracy in São Tomé and Príncipe was also significant. On 16 July 2003 a group of army officers, led by Major Fernando Pereira, the



then commanding officer in charge of the Army Training College, had announced the overthrow of the government of President Fradique de Menezes, who was away in Nigeria attending a conference. In a swift response to this development, the then chairman of the AU, Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, after consultation with President Obasanjo of Nigeria, condemned the illegal overthrow of the government, saying that 'this event constitutes a set-back to the efforts of the African Union aimed at restoration of peace, stability and economic recovery on the whole continent' (Porto, 2003). Obasanjo also called on the coup leaders to return power to the democratically elected government and convinced Pereira to accept a meeting with a Nigerian envoy. Following the amicable resolution of the impasse, demonstrated by the signing of a memorandum of understanding by all the parties involved on 23 July 2003, Nigeria also had a representative on the subsequent International Monitoring Commission created by the memorandum. Savouring the relatively swift resolution of the crisis vis-à-vis Nigeria's role in the process, Obasanjo remarked that 'you may now, no doubt, agree that the return of President Menezes to power, and the restoration of democracy in the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, was a remarkable achievement for Nigeria's foreign policy' (Porto, 2003: 3).

In Togo, where the military took power following the death of President Eyadema in February 2005, Nigeria was the first to describe the incident as a military coup d'état. Obasanjo predicated this qualification upon the fact that under the Togolese constitution, Fambare Quattara, the parliamentary speaker, should have taken over the presidency at the death of Eyadema, while the country was to prepare for new presidential elections in 90 days (Soyinka, 2005: 54). For this and related reasons, Obasanjo, speaking through Femi Fani-Kayode, his special assistant on public affairs, said that: 'whatever it takes to ensure there is peace, democracy and stability in the West African sub-region, we will do' (Soyinka, 2005). Pursuant to this, the visit of Faure Gnassingbe, Eyadema's son, who took over power after the death of his father, to Abuja shortly after the coup was not accorded the usual protocol for visiting heads of state. For example, the visit was devoid of the traditional 21-gun salute, the ceremonial guard of honour or the special reception usually held for heads of state (Soyinka, 2005: 54). Gnassingbe's visit was essentially to officially 'apologise' to Nigeria and explain why he and his country's military had to take over government, giving as reasons especially 'the fear of the outbreak of violence' following Eyadema's death and the need to 'ensure that the state was not rudderless'. Obasanjo remained unpersuaded, and warned that the AU and ECOWAS were determined that constitutional rule should be restored to Togo within 60 days. The country has since conducted elections, though in a manner that lends credence to the thesis that elections in



Africa are nothing but the fading shadows of democracy characterised by lack of genuine choice.

Nigeria has equally been seriously involved in conflict management and peace-building in Africa. The most notable cases here are those of its intervention in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan (Darfur) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In these cases, the Liberian experience stands out, but actually pre-dates the new democratic government. Nigeria not only almost single-handedly bore the costs of the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia, it was also the champion of the reconciliatory processes that led to the return of 'peace' to the war-torn country. The democratic Nigerian government under Obasanjo facilitated and bore the 'costs' of Charles Taylor's exit from Liberia, a development pivotal to the success of the transition to democracy in that country (see Egbewole, 2005). Nigeria also contributed financially and technically to the 2005 Liberian election that ushered in the nascent democracy headed by President Helen Johnson-Sirleaf, as much as it is currently lending support to the reconstruction and reform processes in the country. Nigerian troops have also been part of the AU and UN peace-keeping forces in Darfur.

Beyond open and strong condemnation of unconstitutional change of government in Africa, Nigeria has also been fervent in its support of countries holding competitive elections. In this regard, Nigerian civil society has been vital, deploying teams of observer missions to monitor the electoral process and ensure compliance with acceptable standards. The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a civil society organisation with the mandate of promoting democratic nurturing and deepening in Africa, has been particularly active in this regard. It was part of the observer groups monitoring the 2005 Liberian and Togolese elections.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Nigeria has been at the forefront of promoting democratic values in Africa. As an importer of democracy that had to be compelled by a series of domestic and external pressures to democratise in the 1980s and 1990s, Nigeria has suddenly grown to become an exporter of democracy since its return to democracy in 1999.

## Why promote democratic values?

Against the background of Nigeria's unenviable democratic record in the past, coupled with the reluctance of the military elite to democratise, one cannot but wonder what could have propelled the changing role of Nigeria in promoting democratic values. Quite a number of reasons can explain this welcome development. Firstly, Nigeria's 'new' commitment to the promotion of democratic values is a response to the global winds of change. Beginning from the late 1980s



through the 1990s, there had been a global acceleration toward democracy under the so-called 'Third Wave' (Huntington, 1991; Diamond, 1995; Carothers, 2000). Added to this was the end of the Cold War, which lowered barriers to international political co-operation, following the emergence of a New World Order governed by the 'triumphant' Western values. For Nigeria to demonstrate its sensitivity towards the global trend, especially given its poor start, it has to devise means of sending signals to the world that it has internalised the virtues and values of the New World Order. Such a step is not only pivotal to redressing its battered image acquired under successive military regimes, but also central to the pursuit of its economic diplomacy. Among others, Nigeria's economic diplomacy under the nascent democracy seeks to achieve a regime of rising foreign direct investment; debt relief; recouping Nigeria's money stashed away in foreign accounts by the former dictator, Abacha; and the general improvement of the Nigerian economy (see Saliu & Omotola, 2005; Omotola & Omofa, 2005; Omotola, 2005b). The actualisation of these and other foreign policy goals requires being globalisation compliant. This is perhaps what Nigeria has partly done with its commitment to the promotion of democratic values.

The specific emphasis on Africa is understandable. For one thing, Africa has always been the centrepiece of Nigerian foreign policy. According to this principle, Nigeria would ordinarily accord Africa and its affairs the highest priority in its external relations, for obvious reasons. These include the fact that Nigeria is located in Africa; the fact that it is endowed with enormous resources, both human and natural, including the largest black population on earth; and the psychology of Nigerian leaders, who repeatedly conclude that Nigeria has 'a historic mission and manifest destiny' on the continent of Africa (see Saliu, 2005). Nigeria, as a result of its 'manifest destiny thesis', has always endeavoured to play a leadership role in Africa, even when under military regimes, and over the years, efforts have been made to retain this largely self-imposed leadership position. These considerations may have contributed to Nigeria's renewed commitment to African affairs through the promotion of democratic values in the continent.

Closely related to the foregoing is the emergence of perceived viable threats to Nigeria's leadership position in Africa. The end of white minority rule (apartheid) changed South Africa into another natural regional heavyweight on the continent. Since being welcomed back to global affairs following the ending of apartheid, South Africa has emerged as an effective global actor in the international system. It happened to be one of the active players that exported democracy to Nigeria when it stood vehemently against military autocracy in Nigeria under Abacha and acted as a leading voice clamouring for sanctions against Nigeria in the Commonwealth. This development was facilitated and boosted by the personality and visionary leadership of the first president of a democratic post-apartheid South



Africa, Nelson Mandela. The long years of institutionalisation of governance institutions and structures such as the judiciary and bureaucracy was also a factor (see Lodge, 1998; Omotola, 2004a), while the economy of South Africa has also been stable. All this contributed to the rising profile of South Africa, not only in Africa, but also in the world. It was therefore not surprising to see South Africa beat Nigeria in the contest for the hosting rights of the 2010 FIFA world cup. Apart from South Africa, several other countries such as Ghana and Senegal have had nationalistic leaders in recent years who have demonstrated strong commitment to African affairs. With these developments, Nigerian leaders may have felt threatened in their aspirations to continue to provide leadership for Africa—the country having been popularly known as the ‘giant’ of Africa. The struggle to reclaim/retain its leadership position in Africa could therefore be seen as another major motivation for Nigeria’s changing role in the promotion of democratic values in Africa (see Akinterinwa, 2005; Saliu, 2005).

It is also important to acknowledge the significance of the personality of Nigeria’s ex-president, Olusegun Obasanjo. Having acted like a true statesman by being one of the first and respected African military heads of state to voluntarily hand over power to a democratically elected government in 1979, Obasanjo acquired tremendous international credibility, clout and respectability. With this, Obasanjo came into the job of democratically elected president with impressive, if not intimidating credentials (Fawole, 2000: 26). As a way of proving his worth, therefore, Obasanjo could not have demonstrated this better elsewhere than in Africa. This concern largely explains the president’s marked contributions to African affairs, particularly in his open and strong condemnation of unconstitutional changes of governments, his support for the restoration of democracy, and his promotion of peace and development, among other things, in Africa.

## Domestic contradictions

Does Nigeria really possess the credentials to act as an exporter of democratic values in Africa? This question becomes important given the fact that the Nigerian political economy, especially its political and economic reform agenda, is an embodiment of crisis and contradictions. With respect to political reforms, the democratisation processes have so far been carried out in a manner detrimental to the fundamental ideals of democracy. This is what Aremu and Omotola (2007: 57–58) refer to as ‘violence against democracy in Nigeria’, which they define as the ‘reversal or retrogression of democratic gains, occasioned largely by the negligence, perversion and inefficiency of those structures, institutions and actors saddled with the promotion and protection of democracy’ in the country.



To begin with, the main political actors, by their actions and utterances, have demonstrated that they are not democrats. Democrats have democratic mind-sets, which are pivotal to the promotion of a democratic political culture and good citizenship (see Jega, 2003; Aremu & Omotola, 2007). Political parties, for example, have no clear political ideology, lack internal party democracy and have been hijacked by the ‘godfathers’, all of which have seriously undermined their important roles in the democratisation and nation-building projects. Civil society organisations are also hamstrung by the all-powerful state, segmented and urban biased, with a low degree of social embeddedness. There is also a low level of political participation and competition, as well as electoral corruption and violence that amount to a state culture, all with negative implications for the consolidation of the fledging democracy (see Saliu, 2005; 2006; Omotola, 2004b; 2006).

Of these political dimensions of Nigeria’s internal contradictions, the issue of electoral maladministration through electoral fraud and violence stands out as the most devastating, and deserves elaboration. While elections in Nigeria, as in most other parts of Africa, have been problematic, appearing merely as the ‘fading shadows of democracy’ (Adejumobi, 2000), the 2007 general elections will go down in history as possibly the most flawed in the country’s history. From the beginning, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had, through its poor preparation and interference in purely internal party affairs, demonstrated that it might not be capable of acting as an independent, impartial and efficient electoral umpire. A typical example was the insistence of Professor Maurice Iwu, INEC’s chairman, on disqualifying some aspirants of the most notable opposition parties, particularly Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the Action Congress. All entreaties to make INEC understand that it did not have the power to disqualify candidates fell on deaf ears, and it went ahead and disqualified Atiku on an alleged corruption indictment by an administrative panel set up by President Obasanjo to investigate corruption charges against Atiku. It took a landmark judgment by the Supreme Court five days before the presidential election to annul INEC’s disqualification of Atiku. By implication, therefore, the playing field was not level for all contestants.

The actual conduct of the election was equally flawed. Through bad administration, which manifested in the form of late arrival of voting materials; non-delivery of materials; under-age voting; ballot paper and ballot box stuffing; falsifications of results; and intimidation of opposition candidates, agents and parties by party thugs and security agents, with the active connivance and involvement of INEC officers, the 2007 elections were certainly not a reflection of the wishes of Nigerians. Societal disapproval was clear from post-election violence such as violent protests, looting, killings and arson that accompanied the announcement of the



results. The reports of domestic and international election observers, including Democratic Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, European Union and Commonwealth monitoring teams; the ECOWAS monitoring group; and the TMG, all came to the conclusion that the elections were massively rigged in favour of the ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (Adejumobi, 2007; Suberu, 2007; Adebayo & Omotola, 2007). More importantly, the outcome of election petitions at the election petition tribunal has lent credence to the reports of the election monitoring groups. At the last count, state (gubernatorial) elections have been annulled in Kogi, Kebbi and Rivers states and are to be re-run due mainly to confirmed irregularities in favour of the ruling party. In other centres, it is still largely expected that more results would be overturned on the basis of the available evidence of falsification and related irregularities. This has put the democratisation process on the line, the survival of which will largely depend on how post-election issues such as protests are managed, as well as how the winners and losers manage their successes and failures, respectively. The preference for due process by the opposition in pursuing their grievances over the elections remains a good response. The president's call for a government of national unity and the inauguration of the electoral reform panel also gives hopes for democratic continuity.

On the economic front, the reform agenda through the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, the monetisation of fringe benefits of public servants<sup>2</sup> and poverty eradication programmes through the National Poverty Eradication Programme and National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy have yet to yield the desired results. Although the government is said to have raised money from the privatisation process and saved on costs through the monetisation policy, Nigerians keep asking questions about the use to which such proceeds have been put. This is against the background of the fact that today close to 70 per cent of Nigerians live below the poverty line, with many living in absolute poverty. Estimates have shown that Nigeria would need about 7–8 per cent annual growth rate in its gross domestic product (GDP) if it wants to halve the number of people in poverty by 2015. The government has been boasting that the GDP currently grows at 7 per cent per annum. However, there is a large question mark as to the authenticity of this claim, because the much-orchestrated growth has not been accompanied by any significant improvement in the living conditions of the average Nigerian. This may not be unconnected with the lopsided system of distribution in favour of the rich, leading to wider inequality in society (Okonjo-

2 Before the reform, the practice was for the government to provide and maintain cars and houses, for example, for its workers. With the monetisation policy, government tries to sell off those properties, and public officers are only entitled to monetary compensation for such utilities.



Iweala, Soludo & Muhtar, 2003). Yet the privatisation process, having coincided with democratisation, has been predicated on a system of political patronage and opportunism, making it difficult for the emergence of a vibrant private sector that is autonomous of vested interests. It has also been done in a way that excludes the majority of Nigerians, particularly the workers. This anarchic form of globalisation therefore serves to ignite more crises and contradictions in Nigeria's political economy (Omotola, 2005b).

The cumulative effects of the foregoing on the democracy project in Nigeria are obvious. Firstly, the economic foundation that is so germane to democratic rebirth, nurturing and consolidation is suspect in Nigeria. The pervasiveness of poverty has become a worrisome dimension in the democratisation process. Rather than the economic and political realms reinforcing each other, the reverse seems to be the case. This development lies at the very heart of the unprecedented degree of ethno-religious and communal clashes all over the country since 1999 at the expense of appreciable 'democracy dividends' generally for the people (Jega, 2003; Adebawu, 2004; Akinwumi, 2004; Saliu, 2006). Consequently, a regime of violence against democracy in Nigeria has been sustained, raising questions as to whether the country really has the moral justification for promoting democracy abroad. The likely answer is that Nigeria, apart from other reasons discussed earlier, may have embarked on promoting democratic values in Africa as a way of diverting attention from its own domestic inadequacies.

## **Conclusion: The future of democracy promotion in Nigeria**

The preceding analysis reveals Nigeria's changing role from being an importer of democracy to that of an exporter of democratic values in Africa. It has also reflected on the country's strategies, accomplishments and justifications in this regard. The evidence suggests that Nigeria has fared relatively well in promoting democracy in Africa, given the number of cases and issues in which it has intervened to condemn unconstitutional change of government, contribute to the restoration of democracy, support electoral processes and institutions of African states, and/or give appreciable support to regional and subregional frameworks for the promotion of sustainable peace, democracy and development.

In spite of these efforts, however, some gaps are still noticeable. Across the length and breadth of Africa, the democratisation process appears still to be in limbo, radiating a contradictory combination of the characteristics of democracy, authoritarianism and inherited practices of neopatrimonialism (Jega, 2003). For most African states, including Nigeria, elections are not free and fair, and are usually characterised by violence of some kind (see Jinadu, 1997). The human rights records of African states, in terms of respect for the rule of law, the fundamental



human rights of citizens and the equality of individuals, remain appalling (see Udombana, 2003).

The challenge is that Nigeria needs to undertake a critical self-examination as to why its efforts have not yielded the desired level of dividends. It may be that the democracy project in Africa under the Third Wave, and like the previous efforts, is not sufficiently in touch with African realities. This is particularly the case when the project is examined against the background of the economic conditions for democracy and the pervasive nature of the poverty ravaging the continent. As Claude Ake (1996) has argued, any democracy that cannot bring food to the table of the common people stands the risk of collapse. The African condition today in terms of poverty is extremely alarming. Unless something fundamental is done to tame the expanding monster of poverty in Africa, no amount of democracy promotion can make the people imbibe and exhibit a democratic ethos. There is also the need for Nigeria to engage the roots of the contradictions in its domestic political economy if its attempts at exporting democratic values are ever to be taken seriously by the outside world.

The challenge of evolving a framework for evaluating the strategy and impacts of Nigeria's efforts is also important. Nigeria should realise that aiding democracy abroad is an expensive enterprise, as much as it is a long-term project. This realisation is important for the sustenance of these efforts, especially in the face of rising disappointment and negative responses not only from Nigerians, but also from the beneficiaries of the country's efforts. In the short run, however, efforts must be made to strengthen Nigeria's democratic experiment through a deliberate process that promotes the institutionalisation of democratic forces such as political parties, civil society, the public bureaucracy, the judiciary and the police, and the development of a democratic political culture and citizenry receptive to democratic ideals and values. It is only when Nigeria's own democracy is consolidated on a very sound footing that its projection of democracy to other African countries can be more meaningful. The country must therefore strive hard to thoroughly engage its own domestic contradictions.

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