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ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MOBILISATION AND THE SAPPING OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: ON THE LEGACY OF THE TRANSITION PROGRAMME

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ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MOBILISATION AND THE SAPPING OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA; ON THE LEGACY OF THE TRANSITION PROGRAMME

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Over the past four decades, the Nigerian State has evolved from a federal polity characterised by politically strong regions to a highly centralised system in which the so called federating states have no real autonomous powers and are at the beck and call of a strong centre in which enormous powers are invested in the hands of one person and one institution, the president and the presidency. This political transformation was carried out mainly under military rule in a context in which excessive corruption and primordial issues of ethnic, religious and regional political domination have become central elements in the country's political culture. Successive governments have slowly but steadily lost their credibility and legitimacy as they are perceived as selfish, corrupt, incompetent and parochial leaders that have taken over power to line their pockets, and the pockets of their kith and kin with largesse from public coffers. With the steady decline of petroleum revenues since the late 1070's, successive leaderships, of the rapacious political entrepreneurs type have become more reckless in pirating State resources and in so doing, they have weakened State capacity and precipitated major economic hardship, especially under the regime of General Babangida. In the context of the general political and economic crisis that has gripped the country over the past decade, fears of ethno-religious and regional domination have been growing in the country and these fears are being translated into violent and bloody conflicts that ressembles a return to Hobbesean state of nature. As the number of conflicts and the death toll of ethno-religious strife increases, hate memories are accumulating, people are getting more frightened, more violent and more parochial in their thinking.

In his interesting analysis of the Yugoslavian imbroglio, Ignatieff posits that:

> What Hobbes would have said, having lived through religious civil war himself, is that when people are sufficiently afraid, they will do anything. There is one type of fear that is more devastating in its impact than any other, the systemic fear that arises when a state begins to collapse. Ethnic hatred is the result of the terror which arises when legitimate authority disintegrates (1993:16).

The legitimacy of the modern State is linked to its capacity to present itself as a provider of necessary public goods and more important, a neutral arbiter that guarantees the security of all sections of society. When the State is generally perceived as serving the particularistic interests of one group, it starts losing its legitimacy, and indeed, its authority. As State capacity declines, fear of "the other" rises and people resort to other levels of solidarity - religious, ethnic, regional etc, in search of security.

THE MILITARY, THE TRANSITION PROGRAMME AND THE REDUCTION OF NIGERIAN POLITICAL SPACE

The terms patrimonialism and prebendalism are being used increasingly in African political science (Medard, 1982; Joseph, 1987; Theobald, 1982). They refer to the way in which people with access to public offices in the continent use them for private accumulation. Popular opposition to this form of corruption has generally lead to repression by those who control State power and the exclusion of a lot of people from the public arena. The history of the repression and exclusion which the African people have been subjected to has been motivated mainly by the desire of ruling groups to protect avenues of corruption. The result has been a reduction of political space. Almost all the military regimes which took power after overthrowing the first generation of politicians on the continent declared that they took power in order to fight against corruption. It turned out that each military regime became more corrupt than the regime from which it took over power.

In Nigeria, soldiers have become the most important section of the power elite and they have made a significant impact on the political life of the country. The military power elite in the country has always claimed that they were playing a role similar to the one played by Cincinnatus (Oyovbaire, 1987:178). In Roman

mythology, Cincinnatus was the model par excellence of human selfless determination and civic consciousness. He had been invited by the representatives of the people in a period of national decay to carry out a fundamental civic responsibility - repair and reconstruct the decomposing institutions, structures, and norms of the society. Having brilliantly carried out his civic duty, he scorned the glory of power and the appeals for him to remain as ruler and left the scene.

The soldiers in power in Nigeria have always had similar pretentious. In January 1966, General Aguiyi Ironsi who had become Head of State after the coup d'Etat organised by the "Five Majors", declared that he was a temporary impartial arbiter accepting the responsibility of power only for the short time that was necessary to reorganise the world of civilian politics which would then take back the power that belongs to it. It was for that reason that he did not take a political title like President or Prime Minister and was satisfied with that of Head of State. The three other military regimes that succeeded his regime more or less remained faithful to this idea. A discernable political culture evolved in Nigeria that deligitimated military rule, except as a short "corrective" regimes intervening at moments of political crisis. A certain form of professional political ethical code developed for the Nigerian military. The organisation of occasional military coup d'Etats for the resolution of acute political crisis, the reorganisation of structures and institutions and the organisation of elections.

The first military ruler to consciously and deliberately break this tradition was the former Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida. He took the title of <president> and clearly embarked along a trajectory of personal, as opposed to collective military rule. For example, he dissolved and reconstituted the ruling military council at will and informed his military colleagues of his decisions rather than consult with then in the official decision making bodies. He however pretended to remain within the said political culture and even stated that "military regime is an aberration" and that he had no intention of staying in power beyond 1992, one of the years during which he promised to hand over power to civilians.(1)

The Nigerian military has transformed the country's body politic in a very significant manner. In the first place, the military have entrenched the culture of public corruption established earlier by civilian regimes. It is a major change, in the past, corruption was corruption - unethical or illegal advantages procured through official positions. Under the Babangida and the current Abacha Administrations, what used to be known as corruption has become the art of government itself. There is a

(1) West Africa, 20 avril 1987, p. 1897.

complete prebendalisation of state power and virtually all acts by public officials involving public expenditure or public goods of any kind leads to the appropriation of state finances or property by officials.

The routine operations of government are being subjected to prebendal rules. It is widely known for example that officials of state governments and parastatals have to pay, as they put it, <up front> a percentage of their statutory allocations to the Presidency, Ministry of Finance and Central Bank officials before their allocations are released. They in turn, simply take, their own share, <up front>, from so called government coffers. Contractors who used to bribe officials for government contracts have been completely sidelined. The President, military governors, ministers etc simply allocate contracts to their own front companies, and they don't even have to pretend they are doing the job because nobody can dare pose questions. The country's major resource, petroleum, is now allocated to individuals who then sell their allocations to petroleum companies. Custom officers have been reported to have refused to release equipment imported by government because they had not been paid their percentage <up front>. Virtually all the major drug barons arrested by the Agency set up to fight against the narcotics business have been released, or rather, allowed to escape, by their captors and most of the captured drugs have "disappeared" from government security depots as the anti drug squad have become the major pushers. There is even a major struggle between different military and security agencies for the control of the lucrative "drug prevention" business. The military have succeeded in transforming corruption from a deviant activity by public officials into the "raison d'etre" of the Nigerian state.

Secondly, the military have succeeded in destroying Nigerian federalism, sacrificing it on the alter of over-centralisation. The country's geopolitical realities have been completely modified. The tripartite structure which had become quadripartite with the creation of the Mid West in 1963, has changed drastically as a result of the multiplication of States whose number currently stands at 30. The multiplication of States has produced a Jacobean effect, as has been explained by Kashim Ibrahim, the last Governor of Northern Nigeria:

> This increasing miniaturization of states consequent on creation of puny states has also led to a loss of some of the freedoms inherent in a federal system of government. The system stresses unity and diversity and a powerful federal or central government legally so constituted, with a constellation of financially subservient and dependent states. Such a system lends itself to dictatorship because there is little

or no room for the states to manoeuvre. (Osuntokun, 1987:128).

Nigeria thus finds itself now with a federation that is for all practical purposes a unitary system with some devolution of power to the States. This tendency was reinforced after the decision by former President Babangida on October 1, 1988, to scrap Ministries of Local Governments and establish a Directorate in the Presidency to direct local governments. Under the current Abacha Administration, the Presidency is insisting on vetting not only state executive councils but also locoal government caretaker committees.

The heritage of centralisation established by the military is so strong that as far back as 1986, the Nigerian political class had accepted the idea of a strong President who will be relieved of control by democratic institutions (Ibrahim, 1986). The British parliamentary tradition has been completely replaced, not by the American style presidential system that so many acclaimed, but by the worst form of Jacobean dictatorship. Nigeria has certainly not developed its own military Cincinnatus, it has created the conditions for the rise of absolute dictators whose totalitarian ambitions are very difficult to contain. It is this extreme centralisation of power and corruption that created the conditions for the exacerbation of ethno-religious conflicts and checkmated the democratic transition in Nigeria.

It will be recalled that in 1985, another military coup d'Etat once again came with the promise of handing over power to an elected civilian administration in the country. The transition programme was conducted under the aegis of General Ibrahim Babangida who, like a voluntarist architect, drew a plan for a complete transformation of the Nigerian body politic. His programme covered a long transition period during which, a group of political scientists drew up a programme of "political crafting" that was supposed to create a new democratic political culture.(2) General Babangida was indeed like an experienced trapeze artist determined to use his political skills to complete the patrimonialisation of Nigeria's political culture to ensure that only rapacious political entrepreneurs that have looted the nation's wealth and have no commitment to the people's welfare, have the slightest chance of ever coming to power. The method he used involved an elaborate process of political engineering in

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(2) The three major Professors of Political Science that "crafted" Babangida's diabolical democratic transition that never was, have recently published a book of self justification - T. Olagunju, A Jinadu and S. Oyovbaire Transition to Democracy in Nigeria: 1985-1993, Safari Books, Ibadan, 1993.

which the popular forces were successively excluded from the transition programme through arbitrary and ever-changing rules and corruption was entrenched as the only instrument for the acquisition of political power.

The first element of the process was the systematic destabilisation of the country's political class beginning with the ban of "old" politicians in September 1987. The totality of those who had held political office in all proceeding civilian and military regimes were prohibited from participating in the political transition process. A new breed of "grassroot politicians" were to be created and they were to operate, not in a multi-party framework but in two new political parties registered by the State.

To determine the two political parties to be registered, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the government imposed very expensive and virtually impossible preconditions that only the upper section of the bourgeoisie or old politicians with established networks could have afforded or met. In three months, the parties were to establish well equipped offices with at least three paid staff in all the 435 local government areas in the country. In addition, they were to supply 25 membership lists of their parties comprising the names, photographs and personal details of at least 200 members from each local government in the country (making at least 87,000 individual membership files per party) to the NEC. For good measure, prospective parties were to submit their applications with a registration fee of 50,000 naira. In spite of these draconian measures, 13 parties were able to submit their files before the deadline.([3]) In a broadcast to the nation on 6th October 1989, the Head of State in a perfect Catch 22 scenario used the argument that the "impossible" preconditions had not been perfectly adhered to as a justification to refuse to register any of the parties. The political parties, he said, had:

> Failed to comply with key conditions in the guidelines such as documentation on members, declaration of assets and liabilities of individual members of the national executive committees [...] most of them (parties) had operated underground prior to the lifting of the ban on politics on 3rd May 1989 [...] (and) had deep roots in the party politics of the First and Second Republics. There

(3) It was political farce at its worst. Nigeria run out of photographic materials and Polaroid films in the stampede to produce photographs of their members and emergency imports had to be made and people were paid to have their photographs taken etc. The parties had to hire lorries to carry hundreds of thousands of the hurriedly prepared membership files to NEC.

> were very strong indications of the wealthy individuals in the executive committees of the associations that confirm fears that they were being hijacked by money bags.

As if any mass party in the world could give exact and detailed information on all its members at any point in time or as if politics could suddenly be cut of from historical connections to past leaders, networks and issues or that people with money could or should be barred from the politics of liberal democracy.

Be that as it may, the government decided to dissolve all the thirteen parties and create two new ones, allegedly for the "ordinary people" at the grassroots - the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention, with the former leaning "a little to the left of centre" and the latter leaning "a little to the right of the centre". In addition, the government drew up the manifestoes of the two parties, and decided to fund and staff them, before calling on individuals (as opposed to organised groups) to sign up. As Anthony Enahoro said,

> My judgement of the two bodies is that they are military government parastatals being paraded as political parties for the benefit of the outside world [...] Nigeria is probably the only country where people scamper from one king (or traditional ruler) to another begging for or in any case acquiring chieftaincy titles, and yet call themselves "Republicans", and the one notable country where people without a social conscience and people whose sole qualification for high public office is that they have successfully robbed the public treasury, have the temerity to put themselves forward for public acceptance as social democrats. (1992:5-6)

It is clear from the transition programme that the military government has decided to define and apply each "democratic" step on behalf of the people.

Apart from imposing manifestoes and constitutions on the two parties, excessive powers were given to government-appointed Administrative Secretaries to organise their take-off and to EXCLUDE undue radicals, socialists, anti-Structural Adjustment Programme agitators as well as ideological and religious extremists from them. In addition, Decree 48 of 1991 gave the National Electoral Commission (NEC), established by the Military Government, wide ranging powers to disqualify any political aspirant whose action was "likely to disrupt the process of grassroots democracy" and the law was amended with Decree 6 of 1992 which widened these powers by absolving NEC of the duty of explaining or giving reasons for disqualification. This law

enabled NEC to disqualify thirty-two aspirants who had already won their party's nominations for the Senatorial and House of Assembly elections in July 1992. The threat of the NEC axe was used to scare away many presidential candidates that were not close friends of the military hierarchy.

The most dramatic aspect of the transition was however the commercialisation of the nomination and electoral process through the use, or rather abuse of the open ballot or queueing system in which the secret ballot was disallowed and voters queued up in public behind the party symbol of their "choice". The direct effect of the system was that candidates pay people to vote for them and party aides could directly observe and ensure that people who have been "bought" joined the queue of the aspirant who has paid for their vote. Not surprisingly, the State Governors that were elected in 1991 were considered the most corrupt and notorious elements in the nouveaux riches and included a well known cocaine dealer and somebody who had been found guilty by a Judicial Tribunal of bankrupting a State owned National Supply Company he was managing by stealing its resources. They were political entrepreneurs who had decided to invest in the political game to make more money. It has been estimated for example that no serious presidential candidate spent less than fifty million naira ($2.5 million) for his campaigns in 1992.([4])

The first set of leading Presidential candidates for the two parties were disqualified by NEC for using money rather than ideals in their campaigns. At that time, the handover date to an elected Administration had been postponed from October 1990 to October 1992 and then to August 1993 while Babangida and his political science gurus "crafted" the newbreed politician. In a last ditch attempt to get the General to hand over power, the two parties nominated close personal fronds and business associates of Babangida as their presidential candidates - Abiola for the SDP and Tofa for the NRC and after a lot of procrastination by government and determined protest against another postponement by the people, presidential elections were finally held on 12th June 1993. The candidate of the SDP won neatly in an election that was generally considered free and fair. The elections were above all a referendum in which Nigerians voted OUT Babangida, but he would not take NO for an answer. He cancelled the elections and tried to initiate yet another round of "political crafting" but there was so much mass protests against the cancellation that he had to leave power in haste and handover to an incompetent and powerless civilian without any mandate, creating the basis for yet another

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([4]) For some detailed examples of the types and scale of the expenses incurred, see "The Money Game", African Concord, 21 September 1992.

coup d'Etat in November 1993 by his crafty second in command, General Abacha. Abacha is now calling for a Constitutional Conference in June 1994 to plan a "proper" democratic transition - ten years of transition planning by military overlords.

This process of political engineering has therefore further eroded some of the elements of Nigeria's democratic traditions. In particular, the regional autonomy that is guaranteed by federalism, the independence of the judiciary, and the network of well entrenched local politicians capable of resisting unfair policies have all received a thorough beating. Patrimonialism and the struggle for access to the State have imposed a logic of political banditry in which thuggery, bribery and political assassination are becoming the core of the nation's political culture.

AUTHRITARIANISM, PLURALISM AND THE RELIGIOUS ARENA

Religious movements constitute one of the most important types of social movements in the contemporary era. They often provide an arena to which popular classes that have been pushed out of other political and social spaces could retreat in to. Nonetheless, social scientists have been slow and sometimes reluctant to take them seriously, until the movements themselves impose their logic on society, and subsequently on the community of scholars:

> Religious activism intrudes upon the post-enlightenment secular world of sociological theorising as rudely, and with as little comprehension, as secularism once intruded upon a world united by belief. One of the paradoxes of the modern sciences that have made much of our world more accessible to human intellect is that it has made this part less so (Fields, 1982:335)

Functionalist sociology has found it difficult to fully comprehend religious movements because of its attempts to reduce them either to their expressive and symbolic or their instrumental and/or purposeful acts (Fields, 1982:326). Similarly, Marxist sociology has tended to follow its founders in reducing religious fervour to material conditions:

> Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. It is the opium of the masses" (Marx, 1964:142)
>
> .....

> The class struggles of the day were carried on under religious shibboleths (Engels, 1964:98)

It is difficult to disagree with Robert Wutbnow's (1991) assertion that a review of recent social science literature and theory reveals a clear failure to understand the complex relationship between religion and politics. The result is that the complex, multi-facet relationship between religious ideology, social relations and economic life is often oversimplified and consequently misunderstood.

Christian Coulon (1991) has argued convincingly that the dynamics of religious movements in contemporary Nigeria is very complex and cannot be reduced to a simple "revivalist movement" or a mechanical response to political and economic crisis. It is thus necessary to study more seriously, the current conjuncture of the multiplication of religious movements in the country and the intensification of their fervour not only in the context of serious economic and social crisis but also the conditions created by the so called programme of transition to democratic rule, and the attempt by common people to produce autonomous spheres of meaning and action. In so doing, it may be possible to elucidate the interface between growing and wide ranging struggles for democratisation, and the multiplication of religious movements and the intensification of their activities.

The African people have shown a high capacity to re-appropriate and transform foreign ideologies and religions so that they fit into their reality and their needs. It has been argued by Mbembe (1988) for example that Christianity, far from being the weapon of the colonial aggressor in Africa, had been domesticated, re-appropriated and turned into the secret weapon of the African common man, (common person, in politically correct terminology). He argues that political domination did not lead to spiritual domination, it simply ignited the necessity for innovation. Christianity, the religion of the conqueror, was accepted as a strong new element to re-enforce indigenous "Paganism" in the African tradition of using all forces to combat objective problems of survival.

The importance of religious movements in African society is linked to their capacity for providing "democratic space" for surbordinated actors - the colonised against the colonisers, the poor against the rich, African rulers against their citizens or rather, their subjects.(5) Numerous groups that have been marginalised by the colonial or postcolonial State, such as women activists, poorly educated or uneducated youth and members of

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5) For the notion of "democratic space", see our paper and research project; "The Expansion of Nigerian Democratic Space" CODESRIA National Working Group, 1991.

casted groups have been able to participate actively in social life through the religious arena.(6) It is an arena in which access is difficult to block. This factor is important since official religions, both Christian and Islamic have been increasingly unable to secure the adherence of the "masses" and have lost a considerable number of their members to protesting sects representing more popular versions of the religion.

One of the crucial sectors in which the State, Official Religion and secular ideologies have been unable to provide adequate response, at least in practice, is that of poverty and relationship to property. It has been argued by Rasmessen that both Islam and Christianity have the same doctrinal approach to property:

> Since all property belongs to God, it must be administered to the benefit of the community as a whole... Therefore one should not accumulate wealth for one's own benefit by exploiting others, but rather burden oneself in order to bring relief for others. Instead of accumulating, one should share. Both the Qur'an and Bible contain a radical critique of wealth. (Rasmussen, 1990:94)

Few, and increasingly fewer religious leaders, and the rich and powerful people they support, live up to the solidarity requirements of their faiths. In other words, just like communism, official religion is confronted with the problem of resolving human needs in conformity with its creed and forced to pay the price of its perceived failure. At this time when a lot of interest is being expressed in the "religious" forms and dimensions of communist ideology, some interest should also be focused on how world religions have failed, or are failing in their ideological mission.

The informal sector has been asserting itself as a major and open sector of creative production and survival in Africa. A lot of people are being marginalised from the official and mainstream economy, and pushed to the informal sector. Religion could be conceived as the ideology of this informal sector. It is characterised by open access and multiple possibilities to a wide spectrum of actors that enter the arena and each actor that gets involved re-interprets it in the context of his or her own target community, often ignoring the dictates of official religion. The presence of numerous actors in the context of open access cannot but breed a crisis-generating mechanism

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6) See for example Ruth Marshall's interesting approach in using the "Bordeaux School's" - "Le politique par le bas" in the analysis of power, social transformation and pentecostalism in Western Nigeria.

Pluralism and religious conflict have become a major theme in Nigeria's political development. The two universal religions, Islam and Christianity are both internally divided and they relate in a complex and variable geometry with other elements of plural society such as traditional African religions, ethnicity, regionalism and statism. The fact that the two main religions have sacred texts that are accepted by virtually all sects and groups has not prevented the growth of serious conflicts caused by different theological interpretations. Nonetheless, factional and sectarian differences and struggles linked to ideological, political and leadership variables seem to play a more important role than theological differences. There is also the relatively new tendency of large scale "ecumenical struggles" by Christians and Muslims acting as organised blocs (Ibrahim, 1989).

What is significant is that the two universal religions are based on ideological orientations that aim at uniting the whole of humanity, but paradoxically, their evolution as social movements seems to impose a splinter logic on them. In an incisive analysis of Islam and pluralism in 18th and 19th century Northern Nigeria, Mahmoud Tukur argues that the Shariah, the Muslim holy text, is sufficiently broad to support divergent views; "whatever political views one holds today, one can, if one knows where to look for, find support in the Shariah." Tukur adds however that the necessity to differ and the necessity to quarrel lies not so much in the sacred texts themselves but in the concrete socio-political situation of the epoch and of the Nation (1990:19). The works of Umar, Doi, Bako, Coulon, Kane etc reveal different aspects of contemporary Islamic sectarianism.

In Christianity, the work of Bishop Akerele (1986) has made a major contribution to the arduous task of analysing denominational sectarianism and separatism in the Nigerian Church. Omoyajowo's (1984) study of schisms and factionalism in the history of the Cherubin and Seraphim movement is a classic of the genre. Other studies by Peel, Ojo, Hackett, Kalu, etc have focused on more specific aspects of Christian pluralism. At the more general level, the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions and the Nigerian Association for Religious Tolerance have edited a number of relevant studies.

The development of both Islam and Christianity in Nigeria has depended on their capacities to convert believers in traditional religions. In the 1931 census, 50% of the population were registered as "pagans" with the percentage declining to 34% in 1952 and 18.2% in 1963; leaving Islam with 47% and Christianity with 34% of the population. Almost nobody is registered today as a pagan and as the 1991 census did not pose the question of religious affiliation, it is not known which of the two religions gained a majority of the rest of the "pagans". The study by Gilliland (1986) shows that traditional religions have faded away

as official identities but they still dominate the lives of a substantial number of Nigerians who are syncretists in practice. Conversion campaigns in "pagan communities" have been one of the major activities of Christian and Islamic evangelisation campaigns.

One of the major objects of Colonial Rule was the conversion of "pagans" to Christianity. After independence, the Sardauna of Sokoto initiated a major Islamic conversion campaign among "pagan" groups of Northern Nigeria from 1963. Since the mid 1970s, evangelical sections of the two religious groups have focused their attention on the "last remnants" of the pagans. Conversion is a major crisis-generating factor in contemporary Nigeria. Conversion, a Godly and positive achievement for the receiving group is apostasy, an evil act for the losing one. Worse, converts are praudly and loudly shown around in the media, in mass congregations etc; almost as if they were war booty, an act that breeds more triomphalism on one side and bitterness on the other. In addition, conversion campaigns and methods such as attempts to debunk the validity of the sacred texts of the other group or mass meetings in the "territory" of the other side have ignited a lot of the current religious uprisings in the country. The 1987 crisis in Kafanchan was the first in a tragic series of "territorial" conflicts that would mark a turn for the worse in inter-community relations in the country.

THE HIDDEN AGENDA AND ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MOBILISATION

Nigeria has witnessed a surge in the phenomenon of Christian and Islamic religious fundamentalism or revivalism since the mid 1970's (Ibrahim, 1989 and 1991). Islamic fundamentalism involves a frontal attack against remnants of traditional African religious practices still prevalent among Muslim communities, and secondly, it involves a struggle against mystical practices and the beliefs of Sufi brotherhoods, mainly the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya. Christian fundamentalism, organised under the rubric of the "Born Again" movement, involves a struggle against what it considers to be the corrupt Nigerian Church whose spirituality has been destroyed by "pagan practices", materialism and hierarchical structures. There has also been a steadily rising conflict between Muslim and Christian actors acting as organised blocs. Muslim actors have created a linkage between the Nigerian secular State and Christianity and thus reject the State as it is, while demanding the establishment of an Islamic State based on the Shari'a.

Since 1978 therefore, the Shari'a has become a major bone of contention in Nigerian politics. The debates during the 1978

Constituent Assembly revolved a lot around the issue of the Shari'a (Laitin, 1982). One of the major issues arising from that period was that many Yoruba members of the Constituent Assembly did not join their Northern colleagues in the Shari'a political quarrel:

> Yorubas were not recruited by agents of either side to further polarise Nigeria on the religious dimension. Furthermore, they took compromise positions gratuitously, taking no political advantage of their insouciance on the issue." (Laitin, 1986:10)

This has since changed, and in 1988, Yoruba leaders have played a key role in the battles over provisions for a Shariah Court of Appeal in the Constituent Assembly - see Aniagolu (1993:93-147).

Being one of the major arenas for the reproduction of popular ideological discourses and struggles, the religious scene has witnesses a runaway inflation in the production of clergy and a growing battle for the control of "theological space". In order to survive, the growing number of Pastors, Mallams, Sheiks, Reverends, Imams and Prophets try to demonstrate that their competitors are heterodoxical in their religious beliefs and practices. The "fundamentalists" try to separate themselves from the others and "puritans" combat the cultural reality of the existence of multiple sources of divinity. The turbulence of the religious scene therefore fuels the associated agitation in the political arena especially in the context of growing fears over political domination and religious freedom.

Muslim activists express concern and fears over what they consider to be the dominance of Christian culture in Nigeria established by the colonial experience. The major concerns are about the nature of the State, especially its secular tradition and its juridical common law framework. The contention is that as Muslims, the separation of the sacred and the mundane is unacceptable and the legal framework that governs their lives should be the Shari'a. Other issues raised include, the tradition of having Saturday and Sunday as workfree days while the Islamic holy day, Friday, is a normal working day, the use of - the Gregorian Christian calender for official business, unIslamic uniforms for girls in schools, Christian melody in the National Anthem, the Christian cross as the symbol for health institutions etc.

Christian activists are concerned mainly with what they regard as the threat of the Islamisation of the country and the imposition of the Shari'a on non Muslims. They argue that the Shari'a has been used to oppress Christians in Muslim dominant parts of Northern Nigeria. Linked to this concern is the tradition of Muslim political hegemony in the country and in the army. They are worried that most regimes in the country's post independence

history have been dominated and led by Northern Muslim politicians or military officers. Other concerns are the use of State resources to subsidise Islamic activities, in particular, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and the government take-over of missionary schools, most of which belonged to Christian denominations.

The idiom of a HIDDEN AGENDA has played a major role in creating the conditions in which religious pluralism made an explosive pact with ethnicity since General Babangida's transition programme to the Third Republic started. Christian circles had been concerned with the dominance of Muslim officers in ruling bodies ever since the Buhari coup d'Etat of January 1994:

> The Buhari regime's highest policy-making and legislative organ, the Supreme Military Council (SMC), was heavily criticised for being dominated not only by Northerners but also by Muslim military officers. The same lopsidedness was reflected in the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), the SMC's equivalent under the Babangida Administration. (Agbaje, 1990:303)

Even the change of nomenclature by Babangida from SMC to AFRC was interpreted to be part of an Islamic agenda with the argument that Islam does not allow for a supreme council as only Allah is supreme.

Secondly, the Babangida regime in particular was, and was seen as a crafty regime whose promises and official programmes were a facade and a ruse that hid its real intentions of monopolising political power and perpetuating it in its hands. The numerous broken promises to hand over power to an elected government fuelled this belief. It was however the style of government that was the most alarming issue. As a Civil Liberties Organisation study argued, the country had a dictator:

> The powers he (Babangida) concentrated in his office were uniquely total and unchecked, amounting to all intents and purposes, to powers ordinarily exercised by a one man dictator (1993:16)

The first issue on which Nigerians realised that for the first time in their country's history, they were dealing with a dictator was a religious one. It was about the country joining the Islamic Conference Organisation (OIC), an organisation established in 1969 to unify the Muslim Umma all over the world and mould them into a political and economic force. Observer delegations from Nigeria had been attending OIC meetings since its formation. In January 1986, secret negotiations were carried out that led to the country officially but surreptitiously

joining the OIC. The newspapers found out and reported the story but the then deputy to General Babangida, Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe declared that "the stories about Nigeria's membership were a figment of journalistic imagination" (Ahanotu, 1992:29). It turned out that an official delegation under Rilwan Lukman, the petroleum minister was sent to join the organisation without discussing it with the ARPC or the Council of Ministers and neither Babangida's deputy nor the foreign minister, Bolaji Akinyemi were in the know. Both of them were later dropped from the Government:

> The pattern of selection and dismissals of President Babangida's Cabinet Ministers caused alarm to Christians. The dismissals of Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe from his position as Chief of General Staff, Professor Tam David West from his Petroleum Cabinet post and Lt General Domkat Bali from his position as Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff and Defence Minister. (Ahanotu, 1992:31)

Nigerians realised with alarm that constituted government bodies had been made irrelevant for the first time in the history of military rule and that the dictator seemed to believe he could do as he pleased. That was how fears about a hidden agenda by President Babangida started to take root. Christians were concerned that he might take drastic decisions on religious matters that might affect them negatively while all democrats were worried about the growing authoritarian tendencies of the regime. In the same year, 1986, a magazine editor Dele Giwa, who was said to be trying to publish an embarrassing story on President Babangida was killed by a parcel bomb by elements apparently linked to military intelligence. It was the first case of assassination in the 130 years of Nigerian journalism.

Fears about religious, regional and ethnic domination did not start with the Babangida regime. In fact, hateful memories have been building up in many communities over the years. Northern Muslims were for example seriously grieved by the assassinations of January 1966, especially that of the Northern Premier, the Sardauna of Sokoto. In the words of the late Muslim cleric, Gumi:

> It was immediately apparent that the Igbo Christian officers were the leaders and all the killings followed a set pattern. Only the Muslims and those who were considered as their friends were assassinated. (1992:1177)

The Sardauna, it would be recalled had embarked on a massive Islamisation campaign in the early 1960's and was said to have had the ambition of "dipping the Qur'an in to the sea":

> With the death of the Sardauna the Christians felt that God had somehow used the tribalistic factors of the army to rid them of a fearful element. The Sardauna was feared because he was using the classic model of an Islamic state to align Christians with his party against their will. (Gilliland, 1986:183)

The July 1966 revenge massacre of mainly Igbo Christians in Northern Nigeria closed the cycle that led to the three year civil war. In the 1970's, the assassination of the Head of State, General Murtala Mohammed by mainly Christian officers from the Middle Belt and the purges and execution of officers from that area kept up the tempo of the accumulation of hate memories. A tendency that was accelerated under Babangida following the two attempted coup d'Etats against him and the numerous execution of army officers he carried out. The real legacy of the Babangida regime was to create the impression in the minds of Nigerians that the time has come when the worst fears in their hate memory could be realised by the all powerful Presidency.

We have argued that the transition process was geared towards excluding an increasingly larger number of political actors from the political process and the result was that the religious arena became one of the few in which a great number of actors could participate and protest against their exclusion and their fears. The combination of political exclusion, the hardship imposed by the financial crisis of the rentier State and ethnic and religious pluralism combined to provoke a series of ethno-religious crises. As is often the case in popular struggles however, the enemies that are sought for were not the political leaders who have the responsibilities of steering the country's political affairs, but the neighbour next door that seems to be different.

RELIGION AND COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

Since the 1980s, a number of bloody conflicts with a specific ethno-religious character have afflicted Northern Nigeria - 1980 in Kasuwan Magani, 1984 in Zangon Kataf and Gure-Kahugu, 1987 in Kafanchan and Lere, 1989 in Ilorin and Jere, 1991 in Tafawa Balewa, 1992 in Zango Kataf etc. The main protagonists are Hausa/Fulani Muslims and Christian Ethnic Minorities from the "pagan" areas the former used for their slave raiding activities in the past. It should be noted that the "pagan" groups that had been converted to Islam had mostly been ethnically converted to

the Hausa/Fulani group.(7) The "pagan question" seems to play an important role in creating a climate of suspicion and intolerance. In the 1950s, many representatives of the ethnic minorities complained before the Willinks Commission that the Hausa/Fulani were contemptious of them and called them "arna", meaning pagan or infidel.(8) These groups were worried about the implications of Independence because during the colonial period:

> "The British embarked on a policy of imposing "alien" Moslem district heads on communities that had never been conquered and incorporated into the Sokoto Caliphate." (Mahadi and Mangvat, 1986:38)

There is thus a latent feeling of unfair domination among the groups that believe "alien Muslim rulers" have been imposed upon them. In the pre-independence period, these groups formed the Northern Nigeria Non Muslim League which later metamorphosised into a party - United Middle Belt Congress; an instrument conceived to counter the Northern People's Congress, the party of the Hausa/Fulani majority. Over the past few decades, the élites from these minority groups have been exposed to western education, have risen to the top of the army hierarchy and public service and have made money and are becoming more and more belligerent and as intolerant as those they are struggling against. The result has been a multiplication of confrontations in a context in which the religious idiom has been politicised to such an extent that the stake has become the survival of the Nigerian State.

A) KAFANCHAN

The first, in the current series of ethno-religious crises started tn Kafanchan in March 1987. A quarrel erupted between Christian and Muslim students during a Christian evangelical campaign at the Kafanchan College of Education.(9) The crisis was ignited by allegations that a convert from Islam to Christianity, Abubakar Bako, had misinterpreted the Holy Qur'an while

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7) See for example the conversion of Maguzawa to Hausa (Last, 1979) or that of Gungawa to Hausa analysed by Salamone (1976).

8) The Willinks Commission was established by the British Authorities to look at the fears of ethnic minorities before independence. The complaint about the name calling "arna" recurs in the reports of the numerous commissions of inquiry that have investigated the various ethno-religious crises.

9) See our article, (Ibrahim, 1989) for a detailed political analysis of this crisis.

preaching. This led to a fight between Christian and Muslim students on the Campus. The fight spread to Kafanchan town which is populated by Christian ethnic minorities of southern Kaduna, the indigenous local majority and Muslim Hausa/Fulani settlers. The Christian majority descended on the Muslim minority, twelve of whom were killed. The conflagration spread from Kafanchan to six other towns in Kaduna State - Katsina, Funtua, Zaria, Kankia, Daura and Kaduna in which the Muslim communities made reprisal raids on Christian settlers, 19 of whom were killed. There was also destruction of Churches, Mosques, beer parlours etc.

According to the late Muslim cleric, Gumi:

> The Kafanchan crisis was the first mass action against Muslims in the country since the military coup of 1966... Among others, Christian regional forces in the Southern part of the country have joined house with minority Christian groups in the North to campaign against all Muslim interests especially in the Northern States. (1992:191)

With the Kafanchan crisis, fear started spreading especially among minority communities in Northern Nigeria and the spiral of conflicts was set in motion.

B) TAFAWA BALEWA

In April 1991 in Tafawa Balewa, a quarrel in the market between a Christian Zar(10) butcher and some Hausa/Fulani people led to the massacre of Muslims in the town. The corpses were taken from Tafawa Balewa to Bauchi town and the sight provoked revenge massacre of the Zar people and other Christian settlers in the town. The army was called in to make the peace but it seemed most of the soldiers were Christians and they turned their guns on Muslims leading to a series of massacres in which thousands of people were alleged to have been killed.

C) THE JUKUNS AND THEIR THREE WAR FRONTS

Over the past three years, the Jukun people of Taraba State have been involved in three ethnic and/or religious confrontations

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10) The Zar, called Sayawa by the Hausa, are an ethnic minority in Bauchi State but the majority in Tafawa Balewa. Some of them converted into Islam and were absorbed by the Hausa/Fulani community but a majority seemed to have converted to Christianity.

with their neighbours. The first front which was opened in 1990 is a classic quarrel over land between the Jukuns and the Tivs. The Tivs are a land pressed farming group, that have been spreading into Jukun territory over the past one or so centuries. There has been skirmishes between the two groups for a long time and a major confrontation started in 1990 when the Tivs sided with other local minorities to turn the Jukuns into a minority in Wukari, an area they considered theirs. Since then, there has been a virtual civil war in the area, with both sides using soldiers and ex servicemen from their areas, well armed with stolen army weapons. The second front is the classic confrontation between the Jukuns as a Christian ethnic minority confronting Hausa/Fulani Muslims in 1991. There was a recurrence of this in March 1992 when a quarrel between Christian and Muslim Students in Government Secondary School, Jalingo, in which a student was killed led to a major confrontation in the town between Jukun and Mumuye Christians and Hausa/Fulani Muslims. The third front is between three groups that are all indigenous to the area. It involved an alliance between the Jukuns and the Chambas against the Kuteb, at least 50 of whom were killed in May 1992. The occasion was the Kuteb Kuchieheb festival which their local rivals - the Chambas and the Jukuns saw as a sign of Kuteb ascendency and a challenge to local Jukun hegemony. The Jukuns were particularly incensed that the Kuteb controlled the Takum chieftaincy and Local Government Authority.

D) ZANGO KATAF

In Zango Kataf, as in Kafanchan, there is a Muslim minority Hausa/Fulani community living in a Zango, (a Hausa enclave), since the 17th century, amongst a Christian Kataf (Atyab) population. The Hausa community in the Zango controlled the market in this old market town and the Kataf community, which considered itself the "real indigenes", were becoming increasingly angry about the control of the market and the control of territorial administration by the Emir of Zaria. In January 1992, the Kataf controlled Local Government Council decreed that the market would be moved out of Zango on the 6th of February. On the same day, the Zango community was attacked by the Kataf and many were killed. A Commission of Enquiry was established but before its findings were released, the Kataf community again attacked the Muslim community on 15th May and hundreds of people were killed. As was the case with the Tafawa Balewa episode, corpses of slain Muslims were taken to Kaduna town and the sight inflamed the Muslim community into revenge killing. In Kaduna town and also in Zaria, both communities engaged in an orgy of revenge killings in parts of the town where they were a majority and thousands of people were killed.

A number of common features could be observed from these conflicts. All of them involve problems of perceived political domination by a group considered as external or illegitimate - they are all over the control over land and political power, see Bonat (1993). There is a steady rise in the death toll, from a few persons, to dozens, hundreds and now even thousands. The rise in the death toll is partly due to the participation of serving military personnel and/or ex-servicemen. Cultural and religious differences have been evoked to explain these bloody clashes. The Cudjoe Commission that was examining the Zangon Kataf clashes has been told for example that:

> "The largely Christian Kataf told the Cudjoe panel that the Hausa refer to them as "arna", which means non-Muslims, but is deeply resented by the Kataf. For their part, the Hausa told the panel they deeply resented sale and consumption of both pork and burukutu, a native beer." (Citizen, 15/6/1992)

These differences do not explain anything because the communities have been living together for centuries and the current level of hatred and violence had never been attained previously. What is clear is that the relative autnomy of the religious arena and its dynamism maintained by a large horde of "religious entrepreenurs" makes for easy production and spread of violent conflicts.

CONCLUDING REMARKS
FEDERALISM AND THE MARCH TONARDS THE THIRD REPUBLIC

There is a major problem over the control and use, or rather, misuse of power in Nigeria. The erosion of Nigeria's federalist traditions is at the centre of the problem. The Constitutional provision of federal character which was created to reduce ethno-religious and regional tensions has had mixed results. In principle, federal character is supposed to act as a veritable machine for creating a national political class. The 1979 Constitution integrated some dispositions concerning this "federal character" into Nigeria's public law. The provisions require that there should be national spread in the distribution of political and senior administrative posts. The measures which are similar to the Soviet doctrine of "principle of equilibrium", aim at establishing an equilibrium of numerical correlation between the federated States in Nigeria and the political and administrative elite. The Soviet doctrine failed to work because there was neither equilibrium nor the means to protest against

the lack of equilibrium between dominant Russia and the other Republics in the Federation thus leading to the break-up of the Soviet State. Nigeria seems to be following the same trajectory.

There is a political problem regarding the definition of indegeneity which affects citizenship rights in the country. In practice, indegenes are defined on the basis of the place of origin of fathers and although there is a procedure for the naturalisation of aliens, there is none for the indigenisation of citizens in places other than the places of origin of their fathers. There are policies that discriminate against non indigenes in all local governments and in all states in the country on issues such as educational opportunities for their children, access to health care, land, jobs etc in which non indigenes, including those whose mothers are from the area are considered outsiders. The effect is that generational longevity in a settlement cannot guarantee full assimilation so settlers are forced to return to their homelands to buy land, educate their children etc.

A second problem is generated directly by the principle of federal character itself. It has been used as a justification for the application of affirmative action policies that are aimed at balancing recruitment into the higher echelons of the public service. Historically, the Nigerian public service has been dominated by Southerners who have had more access to western education. With federal character, relatively easy access to the upper hierarchies of the civil service and public corporations has been opened to Northerners, and this has generated complaints about discrimination from many Southerners. There are very strong feelings about a northern based oligarchy that has monopolised political power in the country:

> There is a need to diffuse regional resentment of the continuing use of the "federal character" principle to promote affirmative action in education and the bureaucracy. Nigeria's affirmative action policies are designed mainly to benefit not a weak minority, but the politically dominant, if educationally disadvantaged north. (R. T. Suberu, 1993:52)

In the long term, the federal character measures might have positive effects on the evolution of the political, administrative and even economic elite in Nigeria. Since the 1979 Constitution, it has been difficult to systematically exclude geographical, religious, ethnic or any other group from power. In the last twenty years, federal political and administrative posts have been distributed among all the States in the country. In each State, all the Local Governments receive their quota of posts and in each of the Local Governments existing in the country, each district has its percentage. It would appear that,

today, the established doctrine of the State is that of "fair geographical distribution of the spoils", if I may call it that. In the 1960s, Isaac Boro and Joseph Tarka launched wars on the Nigerian State because the C-O-R and Middle Belt regions were almost totally excluded from all the benefits which could come from the State. Today, these regions benefit not only from patronage, administrative posts, contracts, etc., but also from schools, industries, electricity, etc. to almost, but not quite the same degree as the other regions in the country.

The principle of "fair geographical distribution of spoils" has itself been turned into a generator of instability. Since 1979, almost all the political and administrative elites in Nigeria have been converted to the practice of applying distributive arithmetic to the "federal character" principle and as soon as a group - ethnic, religious, clan, local government, ward etc, feels that it is slightly under-represented, it reacts. During the Second Republic, the possibilities for negotiation which existed in the political system were able to contain the agitations but since the coup d'Etat of January 1984, more and more violent and dramatic solutions (military putsches and civilian uprisings) have been used. It would even appear that another civil war is not to be ruled out. Indeed, on April 22, 1990, a group of army officers announced a coup d'Etat on the Federal radio which proclaimed "a revolution" for the oppressed people of the Middle Belt and Southern Nigeria and the excision of five northern States (Sokoto, Borno, Katsina, Kano, and Bauchi) from Nigeria. They also called on the Christians to rise against oppression by the Muslims (Newswatch, 7/5/1990). It was a real declaration of civil war and, luckily, the people saw it to be just that and so the majority did not answer the call to rise. The coup plotters were overpowered with difficulty and the event showed clearly the extent to which national unity remains very fragile.

The argument of this paper is that it is not the difference between ethnic, cultural, religious groups that are important. There are now a lot of bloody and brutal conflicts between small groups that are culturally and ethnically similar such as the Ogonis and Andonis in Rivers State and the Jukuns and the Kutebs in Taraba State. Ignatieff's interesting study of nationalism, blood and belonging in contemporary Europe draws upon Freudian analysis to offer an insight into the nature of the problem:

> Freud once argued that the smaller the real difference between two peoples the larger it was bound to loom in their imagination. He called this effect the narcissism of minor difference. Its corollary must be that enemies need each other to remind themselves of who they really are. A Croat, thus is someone who is not a Serb. A Serb is someone who is not a Croat... All Croats become

> Ustashe assassins; all Serbs become Chetnik beasts. (1993:14-15)

Once fear combines with hate memory in a context in which political authority is seen as illegitimate and partial, senseless massacres are easily justified as the fault of the other. In Nigeria, the erosion of multiple poles of political power by military dictators has raised the spectre of the fear of domination and the absence of the State as a neutral arbiter. Conflict resolution mechanisms break down and political actors take maximalist positions and acquire disdain for compromise.

The new element introduced by the Babangida regime was the rise of a one man dictatorship and the fear of what he could do with so much power. During the First Republic, Ahmadu Bello, the leader of the ruling party was not interested in federal power and chose to stay in his region. In contemporary Nigeria, it is now clear that the only post worth fighting for, and for which people have to fight for is the presidency. The tragedy of the babangida regime was that at the beginning, it had a lot of goodwill because of its pledge to respect human rights and to promote ethnic and religious balance in appointments. It fulfilled neither. Worse still, it evolved a transition programme with two State sponsored political parties in which government influence and money were the most important variables. When President Babangida was forced to allow election to take place in June 1993, three years later than promised, he ended up confirming the worst fears of people by annulling the results of the elections and giving the impression that he was not willing to allow someone from a different part of the country to take over the mantle of leadership.

The June 12th 1993 presidential elections were cancelled mid way through the announcement of the results just at the moment when it had become clear that M. K. O. Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim had won a landslide victory. Even if the truth of the matter was that Babangida was a dictator who wanted to rule for ever, why shouldn't the Yorubas think it was a Hausa/Fulani plot to keep them out of power. The fact that both parties had Muslim candidates was itself a big political problem as Christian activists felt that they were being sidelined as usual. In addition, Abiola chose a Muslim running mate. Nonetheless, such was the desire to see Babangida out of the political scene that people downplayed the religious divide and voted massively for Abiola who appeared to be less of a Babangida stooge than his rival Bashir Tofa. The elections themselves were considered relatively free and fair and a good opportunity to start rebuilding confidence in the Nigerian Nation. The cancellation however led to strong ethnic and regional fears that the Northern ruling class were not going to allow a Southerner to rule, even if he wins a democratic election.

The brouhaha over the annulled elections was such that President Babangida was forced out of office by street protests and his own military machine. He however set up a puppet regime under a civilian nonentity, Ernest Shonekan before leaving office in August 1993. The Shonekan Government could not generate respect or authority and in November 1993, Babangida's longest serving Northern Muslim ally, General Sani Abacha carried out another coup d'Etat and took over power. After ten years of deceitful democratic transition, the new military regime has once again put everything on the drawing board. A Constitutional Conference is to take place from June to December 1994 and a new transition programme may be announced in January 1995. Military dictators are really pushing Nigerians to the precipice.

Saving the Nigerian Nation will require not only a return to civilian rule but also a deconcentration of the powers of the central government through a genuine federal mechanism. More power centres have to be created in the country. It is also necessary to give up the idea of "garrison" political parties "crafted" by some gurus and allow all groups, so willing, to form their own parties. As the struggles of Nigerians for a Third Republic continues, the expansion of democratic space is the most effective method of overcoming the FEAR of the dictator which the masses often transform into the FEAR of the "other neighbour".

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