



The Nigerian State, Civil Society and National Question: Issues, Contradictions and Contestations

Dele Seteolu, PhD

Department of Political Science
Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos

Abstract: The Nigerian state emerged from the colonial state; the resultant post-colonial state lacks autonomy and is peripheral in nature. The state is enmeshed in contradictions that raise questions on its relevance, meaning and purpose. The limitations of the Nigerian state have been posed as the national question. There is, therefore, a relationship between the nature of the Nigerian state and the national question. There is lack of unanimity among scholars on the nature of the national question in Nigeria. The citizenship, indigeneship and settler questions are aspects of the national question that underline the contradictory character of the Nigerian state. The lopsided nature of the Nigerian state and the ensuing national question have elicited the involvement of civil society organizations. The civil society groups have engaged different aspects of the national question; and have posed alternative constructs to the dominant political, economic and administrative arrangements. The Buhari administration insists on the non-negotiable nature of the Nigerian federation thereby provoking renewed debates on the country's federal architecture. This article reviews the theoretical and empirical debates on the Nigerian state and theorizes on the civil society and the nature of civil society organizations in Nigeria. The specific nature of the national question in Nigeria is appraised amid the struggle between the state actors and civil society groups on the alternatives.

Keywords: State, Civil Society, National Question, Federation

Introduction

The Nigerian state had a colonial origin and plays peripheral role in the international capitalist system. The nature of this state, the character of its governing class, its politics and socio-economic relations are thus conditioned by these fundamentals. The Nigerian state reproduces dependent capitalism, correlating class forces and class struggle. The state is a contested terrain where fractions of the political class struggle to dominate the public domain, influence policy outcome and appropriate public resources.

The Nigerian state assumed a repressive form particularly with the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme, SAP. The anti-social nature of the economic reform measures meant that the state had to rough-shod the opposition to sustain its economic policy. The state violence is foisted through the pursuit of anti-working people and anti-peasant policies. The immiseration of the middle class and the pauperisation of the masses underscore the class nature of the SAP policy.

The nature of the Nigerian state and the patterns of social relations have implications for the nature, character, and

the form of civil society organizations that emerges. The main research objective is to problematize the relationship between the Nigerian state and the civil society organizations. This article historicizes the struggle for the public domain between the Nigerian state and the civil society groups, it explain how the civil society organizations contributed to the articulation of the national question, the varying perceptions on how to resolve the national question, and the responses of the Nigerian state. These issues provide the canvass to interrogate the role of the civil society groups in Nigeria in the conceptualization of the national question and the struggles waged about it.

The preceding analyses suggest the interface of the state and civil society organizations. In other words, the thorough interpretation and analysis of the civil society groups should be predicated on the nature of the state. The character of the state, therefore, will likely impinge on the evolution and pattern of the civil society. The next sub-heading will discuss the nature of the Nigerian state in relation to the different theoretical contexts that explains the nature of state crisis in Africa. The research concern in this paper is to ascertain the relevance of these theories to situating the crisis of the Nigerian state.

How Do We Characterize the Nigerian State? : Theoretical Notes

The Nigerian state has undergone severe crises, but scholars differ on their perception of its nature. This crisis has elicited critical appraisals through the coalition and the weak-capacity state theories. The coalition theory is sub-categorised into the Urban Coalition theory and the Comprador theory. These

strands of the Coalition theory perceive the state crisis as the outcome of the role of the state in appropriating national wealth for the benefit of fractions of the dominant class (*Beckman, 1988; Amin, 1991; Onimode, 1992*). The weak capacity state theory identifies the state as weak and vulnerable, lacking the capacity to mobilise popular commitment and predictable political norms, and inability to pursue clear cut policy agenda (*Sandbrook, 1985*).

The Neo-Patrimonial, Organisational, Monopolistic theories constitute the strands of the weak capacity state theory (*Hyden, 1983; Sandbrook, 1985; Mars, 1987; Deutkiewicz and Williams, 1987; Bayart, 1993*). This research relies on the Comprador and Neo-Patrimonial theories to explain the nature of the state crisis. The Comprador theory contrasts the roles of the states in Africa and the core capitalist state. The center has the capacity to replicate the dominance of capital and subordinate foreign capital to the logic of national accumulation; the peripheral state is unable to control local accumulation. This is linked to the low level of capitalism, weak civil society and the underdeveloped nature of the private domain. The peripheral state is restricted to adjusting the local economy to suit the requisites of capital accumulation in the center.

To Sandbrook (1985), the state crisis in Africa is linked to the absence of a hegemonic capitalist class with the capacity to enforce discipline and the coherence of the state. The consequences are personal rule and the privatisation of governance process based on primordial ties. The state becomes the outlet to actualise individual and communal

aspirations and the distribution of patronage. Ake (1994) contends that the state in Africa has limited autonomy. This characterization is tied to the limited development of productive forces, and the restricted penetration of the economy and society.

The state in Africa is a coercive force that lacks the capacity to transform power into authority, and domination into hegemony. The state capacity to dispense patronage leads to unmediated contradictions and intense struggles among the fractions of dominant class. The consequences are tenuous relationship between the ruling class and the entrepreneurial class, the over concentration and fusion of power in the central authority, the notoriety of political contestation, the replication of the form and content of the colonial state in personal rule and dictatorship (Ake, *ibid.*).

Eteng (1998: 129-134) posits that the political struggles in Nigeria have assumed a Hobbesian character, and the legitimacy of power and political processes becomes problematic. The contradictions and conflicts inherent in this socio-economic formation and the social relations of production and exchange are also difficult to resolve. The state and its managers became involved in the prevailing peripheral capitalist production, exchange relations, and the accompanying class contradictions and conflicts. The Nigerian state lacks the capacity for consensus – building and the conciliation of violently conflicting relations among the social classes.

The Neo-Patrimonial theory provides insight into the nature of Nigerian state. This state has been contested by the fractions of the dominant class that seeks

access to the governance structures to create private economic domains or patronize the state managers for self-serving ends. The bastardization of this state leads to the personalization of political power, the institutionalization of corruption and patronage policies, when the ruling class distributes largesse to its clientele and cronies. The implications are personal rule, economic mis-governance, institutional collapse, economic underdevelopment and pervasive poverty, and the pauperization of the vulnerable social groups (Adejumobi, 1995; Momoh, 1995; Olukoshi, 2000). The characterization of the Nigerian state constitutes the backdrop to interrogate the civil society organizations in Nigeria.

The Character of Civil Society in Nigeria

There are virile debates on the nature, pattern and direction of the civil society (Diamond, 1994; Gyimah-Boadi, 1996; Fine, 1997; Jega, 1997; Olukoshi, 1997; Kulipossa, 1998, Stelytler and G. Hollands et al, 1998; Momoh, 1998; Momoh, 2003). Meanwhile, the literature on civil society organizations in Nigeria responds to the questions of what constitutes the civil society organization, how economic reforms and military rulership enhanced or restricted the civil society organizations. The literature discusses the struggle to broaden the political space occasioned by the authoritarian and alienating nature of the military governments (Ekeh, 1992; Ajayi, 1993; Ihonvbere and Vaughan, 1995; Momoh, 1995; Olukoshi, 1997; Gboyega, 1997; Jega, 1997).

There is a link between the civil society and bourgeois class. The Marxian literature argues that the social structures

of the civil society are not independent entities of the bourgeois society. The civil society is viewed in the radical literature as a stage in the evolution of social bonds, when social relationships that include the productive process, are instruments of the bourgeois class. The civil society is thus the outcome, not the condition, of capitalism and bourgeois development. The civil society is the aggregate of the material conditions of life and its anatomy should be understood in the context of political economy (See Gouldner, 1980).

Stelytler and Hollands (*ibid*) rely on the corporatist and voluntary – pluralist model to explain the probable nature of the state and civil society relations. The corporatist model is predicated on the inclusion of civil society groups into the decision-making process, the capacity of groups to impose sanctions in order to exert pressure on the state and its managers. The voluntarily – pluralist model assumes that the civil society organizations relate to the state in a less regulated form, exhibit greater distance to the state institutions, and aggregate opinion on varying issues with a view to engaging the state on its term. The research tasks in this paper are to determine the involvement of civil society organizations in decision –making, its capacity to engage the Nigerian state and the extent of its aggregating role. These issues are discussed in the latter part of the work.

There is no consensus among scholars on how to define the civil society organization (McLean, 1996; Kulipossa, *Ibid*; Stelytler and Hollands, *Ibid*; Momoh, 2003). There are, however, certain attributes of the civil society

groups. These include the voluntarily constituted social relations within institutions and organizations that are not reducible to the administrative grasp of the state. It is a buffer against the negative impacts of market economy, a self-consciously organized institution with the primary aim to articulate demand on, and influence government policies. It is an identifiable aspect of the society that is autonomous of, but still relate and prospect to influence the state.

It is probable to differentiate the civil society groups. These are the economic, cultural, informational and educational, interest groups, development organizations, issue-oriented movements, and the civic groups that canvasses for political pluralism and the political inclusion of the exploited classes in the governance process (*Kulipossa, Ibid*). The literature identifies the sub-categories of the civil associational groups in Nigeria (*Jega, Ibid; Ekeh, Ibid; Momoh, ibid*). These strands are broadly summarized into the human rights, political, statist, and the deviant. The discourse on the national question in Nigeria is located in this context.

The concept of the uncivil society emerged to characterize the self-organizations that exist on the fringes of the state. These groups contest the legitimacy of the state and demonstrate the propensity to pursue armed struggle (*Heinrich Boll Foundation, 2004*). The paper emphasizes the roles of the human rights, statist, and political based civil society groups in the struggle to conceptualize and canvass for the resolution of the national question in Nigeria. It discusses the state perception of the civil society organizations, and its

tactics to curb the seemingly anti-state posturing.

National Question: The Conceptual Issues

The national question is confused with the ethnic question. It is hinged on equality, equity, oppression, justice as against its perception as ethnic question. The national question is a political question, ideological in nature and class based. The ethnic content of the national question is explainable in the context of other social variables. The debate on the national question has been thoroughly discussed in literature and will not need a re-hearse in this work (Lenin, 1975; Lowy, 1976; Mustapha, 1985; Wamba-dia-wamba, 1991; Parekh, 1994; Soyinka, 1996; Fashina, 1998; Momoh, 2005:1-5).

Lenin sees the national question as the quest for freedom and a political question. He submits thus:

The right of nations to self-determination means only the right to independence in a political sense, the right to free political secession from the oppression nation. Concretely, this political, democratic demand implies complete freedom to carry on agitation in favour of secession, and freedom to settle the question of secession by means of a referendum of the nation that desires to secede (Lenin, 1975:5 cited in Momoh, ibid:6).

Nzongola-Ntalaja offers three typologies of the national question in Africa thus;

- 1). the ethnic nation that corresponded to pre-colonial functions destroyed by colonialism,
- 2). the colonially – created territorial nation and

3). The Pan-African nation (Nzongola – Ntalaja cited in Momoh, ibid: 8).

The criteria on ethnic nation and colonially created territory had shaped the nature of national question in Africa, but the third criterion has been rhetorical. Momoh (ibid: 8) argues that the crisis of national question in Africa was engendered by the crisis of nation building that led to the interrogation of the colonially established territorial nation. This led to the contradictions of fragility, artificiality and differences among co-ethnics. Wamba-dia-Wamba (cited in Momoh, ibid: 8) sees the national question as a political question that leads to the struggle for popular democracy and the struggle against imperialism. He posits thus:

The national question refers to how the global of the social existence, characterizing the internal multiplicity and the relationship of the society to its environments, is historically arrived at. How is 'the orderly exercise of nationwide, public authority' organized? Who is or is not a member of that society? Who is an outsider? How has the social relationship been changing? Does every member enjoy the same rights/obligations as those of every other member? How are the rights recognized and motivated? How are the competing claims (for self-determination, for example) by diverse groups mediated and made consistent globally? Are there people of groups that are, or feel, collectively oppressed or left out? How are the inequalities of uneven development handled; are there groups looked upon and

paternalistically administered?
(cited in Momoh, *ibid*: 9).

He argues that colonial rule served to unite the colonized people in their struggle against the colonizers. He also affirms that it split hitherto homogeneous ethnic groups in a way that impinges on the process of national building in Africa. This split, he notes, was politicized by the governing elite that instrumentalized ethnicity.

There is no consensus on the perception of national question in Nigeria. The varying perceptions are underscored by the exchange between the Bala Mohammed Memorial Committee and the Ife Collectives on the national and nationality question in Nigeria, the ethno-charismatic and cultural perception argued at the 1993 conference organized by the Nigerian Economic Society, and the left interventions in the conceptualization of the national question in Nigeria (Momoh, *Ibid*:13). To Mustapha (1986: 82 cited in Momoh, *ibid*: 14), the national question reflects 'the struggle for internal democracy within a nation state and the struggle against imperialism'. He identifies two dimensions of the national question;

- a). It deals with the nature of the relationship between Nigeria and global imperialism and,
- b). The relationship among various Nigerian nationalities. He also identifies the contradictions within the federation with a view to conceptualizing the national question in this sense:

The national question in Nigeria manifests itself in a series of eight contradictions: Nigeria versus imperialism; the contradiction between the majority nationalities

i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba; the North South divide between the three major nationalities on the one hand, and the smaller nationalities on the other; inter-state rivalry between the ... states of the federation; inter-ethnic rivalries in a mixed state for instance between the Nupes and Hausas in Niger state; inter-sectional rivalries within one ethnic group of nationality, as between Kano and Sokoto, or the Egba and Ijebu; and finally, inter-clan rivalries within a province or district, as is common in the South eastern part of the country (Mustapha, 1986: 82 cited in Momoh, *ibid*: 14).

Madunagu (1997: 12 cited in Momoh, *ibid*:14) perceives the national question thus: 'By the national question we mean the problems that arise from the composition of a nation; that is, problems arising from the nature of the relationship between the ethnic groups in a nation state' (emphasis added). Ade Ajayi coheres on the ethnic character of the national question in this sense:

The national question is ... the perennial debate as to how to order the relations among the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have the same rights and privileges, access to power and equitable share of the national resources (Ajayi, 1992 cited in Momoh, *ibid*: 15).

Fashina (1998: 93 cited in Momoh, *ibid*: 15) critiques the ethno-nationalism conception of the national question in Nigeria:

I am not denying that there is a national question. I am not denying that there is an ethnic problem ... the national question is not, at the root of ethnicity problem and that it

has no ethnic solution...The national question is a 'concentrated' socio-economic political question. The ethnic formulation of the national question masks exploitative processes which go on within all ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The national question in Nigeria is also tied to these issues:

- a). That the national question cannot be separated from the manner of the creation of Nigeria by British colonial capitalism;
- b). That the present upsurge in calls for a re-examination of the national question are organically linked to the crisis of structural adjustment in Nigeria, which has benefited the unproductive, but politically powerful 'few', and alienated and dispossessed the majority, fuelling increased struggles between and within social groups/classes for a larger share of shrinking oil rents;
- c). That the resolution of the national question must necessarily commence outside the structures of dependent (rentier) capitalism and monopolistic practice; and
- d). That the democratization of all facets of political and economic life is central to the resolution of the national question (Obi, 2005:107).

The discourses on the national question in Nigeria are varied thus reflecting the perception on the rentier nature of the state, the constraint of dependent capitalism, and the import of democratization for the national question. There are somewhat unanimities, however, on the implications of colonial origin of the state for the national question, the politicization of ethnicity, the interlacing nature of class, ethnicity

and religion, the questions of justice, equality, oppression and domination.

The Contestations for the Public Domain: The National Question and Civil Society in Nigeria

The national question provides the context of power relations, the access to, and influence on political structures and institutions, the identity crisis, the social relations in the production process and the ensuing social class relations. It also engenders varying perceptions of how these issues should be dealt within the context of the historical specificity of a state. There are two broad perceptions of the contradictions and imbalances in the Nigerian state. These are ethnic and class-based. The differentiations are rooted in the perception of the state, the central nature of the nationality question, the implications of the ownership structure and the ideological context of the governance process.

The ethnic position is hinged on two anti-thetical schools. The Marxist-Socialist leaning sees ethnicity as a super-structural concept without an independent analytic value. Its explanatory strength is linked to the dialectical interface with more potent class based variables like power, wealth and ideology. The ethno-relativist approach identifies ethnicity as a viable mobilizing platform, but rejects the argument that the ethnic question is the consequence of the elite manipulation of the social class relations in Africa. The ethno-relativist theory argues on the inter-related nature of ethnicity and class, class and political association, ethnicity and political association. While the class analyst concedes on the multitudinal nature of power relations, he insists on the

character of ethnicity as mediated through class relations (Eteng, *ibid*: 136-140).

The ethnic perspective on the national question in Nigeria suggests specific prescriptions to deal with the country's structural imbalances and contradictions. These are ethnic autonomy and self-determination, resource control, environmental control and preservation. The prescriptions are intended to protect the identities of the ethnic nationalities, reflect the competing interests of the region, state, ethnicity, community and religion, and moderate their negative consequences; deal with economic stagnation and political instability, and attenuate the hegemony of ethnic and religious factors in the state (Eteng, *ibid*: 142-145).

The class perspective investigates the peripheral and dependent nature of the Nigerian economy, the pervasiveness of the feudal – capitalist social formation, the low capacity for class action among the working people, peasants and the lumpen proletariat, the unrestrained power politics among the fractions of the political class, the politicization of ethnicity and religion. The class analyst recommend the reversal of the dependent capitalist economic system, the de-politicization of ethnicity and religion, enhanced productive process, widespread appropriation of the national resource as against individualism, opportunism and clientele politics. We can reconcile the ethnic and class perspectives. The contradictions within self-determining ethnic states are likely mediated with the restructuring of social classes. The class adjustment has the potential to foster the vertical balancing of class forces with a view to reducing the dominance of a social class (Eteng, *ibid*: 153-154).

The lopsided nature of the Nigerian federal system accentuated the national question (Egwu, 2003; Ihonvbere, 2003; Momoh, 2003). The federalism debate in Nigeria is predicated on the politics of state creation and local government, the control and appropriation of national resources among the federating units, the access to and control of political power at the center, the unresolved indigene ship and settler question, and the distribution of socio-economic infrastructure. The conflicting relations among the federating units that led to the Nigerian civil war became deepened through the cancellation of the June 12 Presidential Elections results presumably won by Chief M. K. O. Abiola, the Social Democratic Party, SDP, Presidential candidate. The crisis occasioned by the annulled June 12 elections reinvigorated the debate on the national question, deepened civil society engagement of the state especially on the viability of a *Sovereign National Conference*, and the termination of military dictatorship.

The Asiodu group began the advocacy for a national debate on the future of the Nigerian state. There were indications, however, that this group was sponsored by the Babangida government against backdrop of the public skepticism on the endless political transition program. The seeming manipulation politics of the state spurred the Nigerian progressives led by the radical lawyer, Mr. Alao Aka Bashorun, to organize a national conference on the platform of the National Consultative Forum, NCF, in September, 1989. The state responded through the 'politics of cajole' when a national conference was organized in Abuja in 1990, to assuage the agitations

and disgust occasioned by the subversion of the alternative non-state conference proposed by the NCF.

The Nigerian Labour Congress, NLC, and the National Association of Nigerian Students, NANS, had variously organized conferences on the alternatives to the Structural Adjustment Program, (SAP). The economic reform measures had been pursued at huge social cost to compel public outrage and indignation. The SAP policy inflicted socio-psychological pains on the Nigerian People, and required a repressive state to contain the resultant agitations, protests, strikes, and rallies. The alternative dialogues on the economy were aborted by this state, which insisted on neo-liberal reform and market policy. The civil society had perceived the economic crisis within the context of the broader national question. The professional groups particularly the Nigerian Bar Association, N.B.A. and the Nigeria Medical Association, N.M.A, in the Babangida government became vociferous in the struggles against military dictatorship and political corruption, the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the Nigerian populace and collapsing social infrastructure. This radical posturing led to the banning and un-banning of critical and militant organizations with a view to intimidating the civil society to conform to economic and political agenda defined by the state.

The Movement for National Reformation, MNR, constituted a component of the earlier civil society groups that canvassed for the resolution of the national question, and articulated specific agenda. The MNR relied on the defunct regional arrangement to canvass for the division of

the country into eight federations with semi-autonomy. It suggested a union government at the center, the regions as federating units, residual powers vested in the nationalities, and the right of a nationality to determine where to belong among the federation units (*Momoh, 2003*).

The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, MOSOP, led by the Novelist and Environment Rights Activist, Ken Saro Wiwa, sought for the resolution of the national question within the context of ethnic autonomy, resource and environmental control. It proposed a confederacy of ethnic-based states as prescriptive frameworks to resolving the national question (Eteng, *ibid*: 152). The MOSOP perception of the national question reflects, to some extent, the views of the Niger Delta. This geo-political region has been canvassing for resource control. The Niger Delta position on resource control largely contributed to the stalemate and subsequent collapse of the National Political Reform Conference organized by the Obasanjo government.

The Civil Liberties Organization, CLO, and the Campaign for Democracy, CD, featured strongly in the struggles against the military dictatorship, the brutal assault on the collective choice of the Nigerian people through the annulment of the June 12 Presidential elections, the infringement on fundamental rights of the Nigerian People, and the pauperization of the working people, peasants and artisans, through anti-people economic policies. The CD showed deviance to the clampdown on protestations, insisted on democratic rule based on popular governance. The Campaign for Democracy, CD, led by the radical social

critic, Late Dr. Beko Ransome Kuti led the civil society to protest the annulment of the June 12 Presidential Elections. It collaborated with similar mass based organizations including the Nigerian Labour congress, NLC, to organize mass political actions against the military ruler ship.

The CD led political actions such as the sit-at home strikes, protests and rallies raised the level of public outrage against the corrupt military governments, imbued the civil society with the culture of deviance against unpopular and repressive state policies, and offered the platform to agitate for alternative economic and political program. The CD envisaged that these alternative plans would moderate the high poverty level in the economy, foster political and economic pluralism, and promote a developmental process predicated on the populace. The CD, which began as a mass social movement became vulnerable, overtime, to internal schisms and conflicting perceptions of the tactics to adopt. These differences were not peculiar to the CD, but also undermined similar organizations such as the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, CDHR, the Democratic Alternative, DA, and their capacity for political struggle.

The Obasanjo civilian government organized the National Political Reform Conference, NPRC, to discuss some aspects of the national question. It drew intense criticism on account of the nomination of delegates as opposed to election. The opposition parties and the civil society doubted the capacity of the conference to act independently when its membership was determined by the PDP governments in the states and the

Presidency. The critics insisted that the nomination process suggested its pre-determined nature. The nomination process detracted from the legitimacy of the conference and its perception as vulnerable to the manipulation politics of the center. Conversely, the election of delegates had the potential to elicit popular interest in the conference, attract the confidence of the political class and civil society.

The NPRC had a restricted agenda in the sense that specific issues such as ethnicity and religion were excluded in the debate. This restriction created the perception of a manipulated and perverted process. The social activists who were nominated to the conference chose to boycott on account of the seeming flaws. The opposition had argued that a conference on the national question should discuss the various contentious issues without inhibitions. It argued for, unrestrained debate of the national question, as a requisite to resolving the contradictions in Nigeria. The NPRC convened despite its limitations, but became deadlocked on the resource control question. The Northern delegates and the South-South delegation differed on the prescribed allocation to the oil producing areas in the Niger Delta. Their differences led to the abrupt end of the conference, and drew attention to the intensity of the contradictions within the federation. These contradictions persist amid the greater agitation to renegotiate the Nigerian federation.

The Pro-National Conference Organizations, PRONACO, was constituted by the Nigerian radicals and Progressives, who insisted on a peoples' conference. This demand represented a shift from the agitation for a sovereign

conference. The agitation for a Sovereign National Conference had drawn intense debate on its viability when there are legal sovereigns such as the Presidency and the National Assembly. The proponents of the SNC insisted, however, that the Nigerian people constituted the popular sovereign whose aspirations and preferences should be binding on the political class. The PRONACO parley drew attention with the seeming failure of the NPRC.

This alternative conference raised pertinent issues. Firstly, it challenged the seeming dominance of the Nigerian state to defining the national question and the correlating national agenda. The conference insisted on discussing all the issues that inhibits the Nigerian federation. Secondly, it raised question on the legitimacy of the state as against the popular sovereignty of the Nigerian people. It insisted on the subordination of political class to the Nigerian populace as the basis of democratic governance. The notion of popular sovereignty in the Nigerian context is faulted, however, as a result of the manipulation of electoral process that imposes 'choiceless democracy'. The pervasiveness of electoral frauds and the role of power blocs in deciding who gets what, also impinge on the reality of popular sovereignty.

Thirdly, it raised question on the enforceability of the conference decisions and re-recommendations. This question was posed within the context of the control of state apparatuses by a fraction of the political class hostile to this alternative conference. The conveners of the peoples' conference had insisted that their decisions would be submitted to the Nigerian people through a referendum.

The conference sought to shift its findings and prescriptions to the public domain, while expecting that the populace would exert pressure on the governing class to appreciate and respond to their expectations of the likely changes in the nature of politics, the economy, the distribution of resources, the access to and control of political power.

The PRONACO conference was confronted with the challenges of finance, the inclusion of divergent socio-political and economic groups on a national basis, the prospect of attracting critical political actors and organizations especially in the core North and the South East, and the threat of fifth columnists who sought to undermine the conference. The differences among major PRONACO actors and the internal schisms to influence its outcome detracted from its public perception as an alternative. The final document also spurred least debate and indifference of the governing class.

The national question in Nigeria is still not resolved, and poses threat to democratic renewal, social cohesion and economic viability. The unresolved national issues include redefining the co-existing terms of the federating units, re-interrogating the state as the focal point of development, and evolving alternative economic agenda that reduces the dependence on Western capitalism. The census controversies, the growing power and influence of the center, the increasing restlessness in the Niger Delta, the recurring indigene ship and settler question, the contentious nature of revenue allocation, the ceaseless demand for state and local government creation reflects the fragile nature of the Nigerian federation. The class contradictions in Nigeria also became deepened with the

implementation of neo-liberal economic reforms, the virtual disappearance of middle class, the pauperization of working people and peasantry, and the deepening of dependent capitalism. These economic conditions had sustained the debate on the imperative of alternative economic agenda.

The resurgence of ethnic militia such as the Odua Peoples' Congress, OPC, the Ijaw National Congress, and the Arewa Peoples' Congress points at the inability of the Nigerian state to manage the national question amid increasing challenge to its legitimacy. The militia groups raise ethnic questions that are posed as national question. The national question though include ethnic issues is wider and more encompassing. These groups are perceived as uncivil in the sense that the organizations bear arms, confront the state, attract allegiance and shows defiance to state symbols. The state had responded through the arrest and detention of militia leaders. The militarization of the Niger Delta by the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta, MEND, and the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, NDVF, are protestations on the denigration of the Niger Delta. The kidnap of foreign oil workers, piracy and other forms of violence had threatened the country's crude oil production base. The Niger Delta crisis had also altered the security situation in the Gulf of Guinea. The resource question has been a major and vexatious issue that confronts the Nigerian state.

Concluding Remarks

The nature of the Nigerian state determines the form and character of its civil society. This state resorts to different tactics to subvert the emergence of a

vibrant civil society. This work investigates the struggle of the civil society organizations to redeem the public domain, alter the context of politics, foster issue based politics, and draw attention to the contradictions in the Nigerian state. The civil society groups in Nigeria are constrained by the heavy influence of donor agencies on its agenda and the shift from mass movement to non-government organizations. Consequently, the language and context of civil society discourse became colored by neo-liberalist ideas. For instance, the emphasis on good governance is a subtle attempt to problematize politics in developing societies as the absence of liberal democracy. This emphasis also suggests the crisis of democracy as opposed to the crisis of state as the basis to interrogate the Nigerian crisis.

This work differs on the nature of this crisis; it insists on the crisis of the state. It argues for democratic governance as opposed to good governance to engage the national question. This paper avers that the concept of good governance is elite based when the governing elite particularly in developing states appropriate the state apparatuses to serve self serving interests and immiserate the civil society. Democratic governance is all-embracing, totalistic, and ramifying. In this sense, the public domain is democratized, accessible, and amenable to popular influences. It allows for economic governance that offers social provisioning and the advantage of social capital as the driving force of governance (Olukoshi, 1991a, 1991b; Ihonvbere, 1993; Olukoshi, 2002). It promotes political and economic liberalism as against the economic orthodoxy and political illiberalism foisted through 'good governance'.

The national conference convened by the Jonathan administration was initially disputed by the civil society groups. It was viewed as gimmick to earn support for the Jonathan administration. More importantly, the conference was convened without a legal framework. It was thus perceived as a decoy to merely engage the restless political class. The conference outcome, however, stunned the civil society organizations. The conference reached far reaching decisions that will likely alter the context of political and economic relations in Nigeria. The successive government of President Buhari has been indifferent to the report

of the conference. The resurgence of the Niger Delta crisis, the crisis relating to Fulani herds men, the financially unstable nature of the states, the recurrence of ethnic and religious based crises, et cetera have aided a renewed debate in the future of Nigeria and the growing demand to re discuss the Nigerian federal arrangement. The pronouncement of Buhari administration that the unity of the country is not negotiable will likely renew debate on the national question and spur the proliferation of new groups to canvass for alternative federal architecture in the country

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