

## **From importer to exporter: the changing role of Nigeria in promoting democratic values in Africa**

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*This paper takes a critical look at Nigeria's changing role in the promotion of democratic values in Africa since its return to democracy in 1999. The paper argues that the changing role of Nigeria from an importer to an exporter of democracy can be understood in terms of wider global political changes; Nigeria's African centre-piece policy; the perception of threats to its leadership position in Africa especially from South Africa; and the personality of Obasanjo given his international credentials and stature. The paper, however, notes that inherent contradictions in the domestic political economy such as rising poverty, inequality and the politics of disempowerment, which have served to limit the reach of the project, may have also served as an added impetus for Nigeria's changing role so as to divert attention away from domestic inadequacies. However, unless these contradictions are redressed the hope of exporting democracy abroad and that of consolidating Nigeria's democracy, will remain a mirage after all, whatever the level of pretensions to the contrary.*

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## **Introduction**

For the better part of their post-independence period, most African states groaned under the oppression and bad governance of one form of authoritarian regime or the other. One party and military rule reigned supreme and were characterised by the flagrant and wanton abuse of all known democratic values particularly the fundamental human rights of citizens, rule of law and equality. During this traumatising period that spanned the decades of the 1960s, 70s, 80s and in some cases early 90s, Africans had to contend with dehumanising conditions occasioned largely by the prevalence of visionless leadership, excruciating debt burden and rising poverty, thus resulting in a vicious cycle of armed-ethnic conflicts, civil wars, unprecedented refugee flows, among other crises and contradictions (see Albert 2005; Nugent 2004; Akinwumi 2004; Adekanye 1995; Ake 1985; Englebert, 2000; Onimode 2000; Udombana 2003; Mamdani 1996; Osaghae 1998). However, as the “third wave” of democratisation reached Africa, following the end of the Cold War, the pressures for democratic reforms, both from within and without, became irresistible. The protests, which took place in the capital cities of African countries, embodied an expression of discontent with economic hardship and political repression and demand for democratic reform (Lawson 1991; Agbu 1996; Osaghae 1999; Bratton and van de Walle 1997).

The responses to these pressures served to ensure that the decade of the 1990s represented, to all intents and purposes, the age of democratic rebirth in Africa. One after the other, African states began to embark on democratic transitions under different guises; some through constitutional conferences as was the case in Benin Republic and others through multi-party elections as in Ghana and Nigeria (see Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Osaghae 1999). As it happened, Nigeria stands out as one of the late “democratisers”, following the unwillingness of the military elites to vacate politics and governance. This was evidenced by the series of failed

transitions, coups and counter coups and the baseless annulment of the June 1993 presidential election, which were adjudged as the freest and fairest in the annals of electoral politics in Nigeria (see Agbaje, Diamond and Onwudiwe 2004; Onuoha and Fadakinte 2002; Ojo 2000; Diamond, Kirk-Green and Oyediran 1996; Oyediran and Agbaje 1999; Osaghae 1998). However, since Nigeria's return to the paths of democracy in 1999 it has sought to move fast beyond its abysmal past not only with regard to its democratic credentials at home but also abroad, particularly in Africa. This changed role in the promotion of democratic values in Africa is what the paper identifies as Nigeria's transition "from importer to exporter". In other words, a country that was itself a beneficiary of western democracy promotion through external and internal exertions is now becoming one that promotes democracy by exerting pressures and committing substantial resources to ensure that those African countries left behind in the democracy whirlwind become democratic.

This paper interrogates Nigeria's changed role by looking at variables such as the outright condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional change of government, support for democratic succession through the ballot box and peaceful resolution of disputes. These are core issues in studies on democracy, which focus, amongst others, on issues such as popular empowerment, participation and representation through periodic, competitive, free and fair electoral politics. The paper addresses the questions of why despite enormous domestic contradictions Nigeria ventured into the promotion of democracy in Africa; how has Nigeria promoted democratic ideals in Africa; and how sustainable can the efforts be deemed. In order to provide an answer to these related questions the paper will adopt the Democracy Coalition Project's (DCP) framework, whose key goal is that of assessing states' adherence to a central provision of the Warsaw Declaration, which over 100 governments endorsed at the Community of Democracies conference in Warsaw, Poland in June 2000.

The Declaration commits signatories to “work together to promote and strengthen democracy” at home and abroad (DCP 2003a). In its methodology, the DCP survey has concentrated on four subject areas: (a) a state’s response to the overthrow of democratically elected government abroad; (b) a state’s response to the manipulation of electoral processes abroad; (c) the degree of state support for international democracy efforts, including through foreign assistance; and (d) the nature of a state’s policy towards entrenched dictatorships.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first substantive section of the paper briefly historicises Nigeria’s disappointing betrayal of the high hopes and expectations of independence in Nigeria as a country that would make steady progress in the direction of sustainable democracy and good governance. This is the time span that the paper refers to as the “dissent into the abyss”, which necessitated the effort of “others” to export democracy to Nigeria. The second section explores the bases of Nigeria’s attempts to promote democracy throughout Africa since 1999. This is followed by an examination of the changing role of Nigeria in promoting democratic values in Africa. The last substantive section of the paper identifies some inherent contradictions in the political economy of Nigeria, which tend to question the political wisdom behind the country’s democracy promotion project in Africa. The concluding part reflects on the possible impacts of such contradictions on the future of Nigeria’s promotion of democratic values in Africa.

The main argument of the paper is that the changing role of Nigeria from an importer to an exporter of democracy can be understood in terms of the wider global political changes; Nigeria’s African centre-piece policy; the perception of threats to its leadership position in Africa especially from South Africa; and the personality of Obasanjo given his international credentials and stature. Though largely successful, its reach has been

limited by inherent contradictions in the domestic political economy such as rising poverty, inequality and the politics of disempowerment. Unless these contradictions are redressed the hope of exporting democracy abroad and that of consolidating Nigeria's democracy, will remain a mirage after all, whatever the level of pretensions to the contrary.

### **Descent into the abyss**

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

Nigeria's ignominious transition from hope to despair began with the failure of the ruling elites of the immediate post-independence Nigeria, to fundamentally redress the crisis and contradictions bequeathed to the country by the departing colonialists. The opportunity presented by independence to redress the roots of these problems was, however, misused by the new elites who took over from the colonialists. They seized the opportunity to further their own interest by manipulating identity, particularly ethnicity and religion. The inevitable deepening of political contradictions and tensions paved the way for the collapse of the First Republic via a military coup in January 1966 (Dudley 1982 and 1973; Adekanye 1981).

The first military interregnum in Nigeria (1966-79), which heralded new hopes at its inception in 1966, did little to salvage the precarious balance of country's power structure. This necessitated a regime of coups and counter

coups, which were either successful, foiled or failed, all culminating in Nigeria having four military heads of state during a period of 13 years. This represents a very high rate of political instability. The failure of this period could further be gleaned from the fact that it coincided with the 30 months agonising Nigerian civil war between 1967 and 1970 that further accentuated the centrifugal forces of the country to a dizzying height (see, Osaghae, Onwudiwe and Suberu 2002). The consequent policy of Rehabilitation, Reconciliation and Reconstruction, also known as the 3Rs, of the immediate post-war years, as well as the process of national rebirth, integration and development that followed, would appear to have had limited positive impacts. Decades after the inauguration and experimentation with these policies and processes the vestiges of the civil war continue to hunt the country. The most eloquent manifestation of this is well captured by the unprecedented emergence of ethnic militias such as the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC); Egbesu Boys; Bakassi Boys; Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF), among others, competing with the state's monopoly over the coercive instrument of force. It also include separatist movements especially the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), all of which have been major threats to national peace and stability (Babawale 2002; Akinwumi 2005).

The return of the country to democracy in 1979 could not help to address the deepening crisis of the Nigerian state. As the state was captured by the ruling elite and their clients, the military once again, struck and seized power in December 1983 (Joseph 1987; Damolekun 1983; Falola and Ihonvbere 1985). Between 1983 and 1999, the second coming of the military only served to deepen the country's crisis of governance. The search for solutions, particularly through the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) by the Babangida regime, added salt to an already festering injury. As it turned out, the country witnessed increasing

economic downturns in the form of rising inflation, unemployment, high cost of living and declining living conditions.

Another dimension of the contradiction was the simultaneous transition in the political and economic spheres. It has been reported that the Babangida regime organised the longest and most expensive transition to democracy in Nigeria, whose total cost was estimated at over 40 billion naira (see Ojo 2000; Diamond, Kirk-Green and Oyediran 1996). During the transition the electoral processes were deemed to be of acceptable standards, however the results were annulled on speculative grounds such as the claim that both presidential candidates, Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola, the presumed winner who contested under the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Alhaji Bashiru Tofa of the National Republican Convention (NRC) deployed huge sum of money into the electoral processes (Omoruyi 1993 and 2004). Other reasons advanced for the annulment of the election included a frivolous court injunction that, a few days to the election, granted Arthur Nzeribe's Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) the power to stop the election; and another injunction granted after the election ordered the electoral management body, the National Electoral Commission (NEC), not to announce the election results. It was also alleged that the military's institutions did not support the candidature of Chief M.K.O Abiola. This last allegation is rather questionable given the fact that the military initiated the election and could have prevented Abiola from contesting the results if they did not want him in power.

The annulment of the 1993 Presidential election, in addition to the arrest and detention of its presumed winner, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, only served to complicate Nigeria's already tarnished image in the international system. To make matters worse, the Abacha regime that took over after the sacking of the Shonekan's Interim National Government (ING) demonstrated a low appreciation of the liberal values of New World Order that emerged with the

end of the Cold War. Of particular significance, in this context, were the questions of democracy, environmental protection and drug trafficking, which were issues where the country's international rating scored close to zero. As General Abacha continued unabated in his onslaught against pro-democracy and human rights groups, environmental activists such as Ken Saro-Wiwa; and while Nigeria was labelled as a major transit for trade in narcotics, the attention of the international community shifted to the country. As Abacha resisted pressures from within and without to democratise and improve its human rights records, cultivating unprecedented ties with dictatorial regimes in South East Asia as a protest against western "intrusion" into the domestic affairs of the country, a number of sanctions were imposed on Nigeria (see Oche 1999; Eyinla 2000; Eminue 2000). Furthermore, as a buffer to divert attention away from domestic inadequacies, the Abacha regime sustained existing peacekeeping efforts in Liberia and Sierra Leone and initiated new ones through the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

In the thick of this crisis, international organisations, particularly the UN and the Commonwealth, as well as some western countries especially Canada and the USA, mounted a lot of pressures on Nigeria to implement political reforms. Added to this was the radicalisation of the internal struggle for political and economic reforms, championed by civil society. Though long-standing, the annulment of the June 1993 election, however, added bite to the battle. Even in Africa, some countries, most notably South Africa under Mandela, were parts of the struggle for the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria. The self-succession bid of Abacha, coupled with his defiance to international calls were also contributing factors to pressure the country towards endorsing far-reaching democratic reforms.

One may not be able to say, definitively, what would have happened if Abacha had not died in 1998 under circumstances many believed was a



stroke of good fortune for the country. However, the sustenance of increasing pressure for democratic reform and the need to save the country from total collapse, may have informed the decision of General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who became the head of state following the mysterious death of Abacha, to engineer the shortest transition programme in Nigeria's history – a mere 10 months. It was the outcome of the transition processes that heralded the eventual “importation” of democracy to Nigeria in 1999. Ever since, Nigeria has established a good record of promoting democratic values in Africa. How has the country fared in this enterprise?

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

Since its successful transition to democracy in 1999, promoting democratic values has become a prominent feature of Nigerian foreign policy especially in Africa. From 1999 to date, Nigeria has committed a lot of resources to combating anti-democratic forces notably forceful seizure of power and conflict management through unconstitutional mechanisms throughout the continent. While this trend may not be entirely new and has cost a small fraction of what the preceding military regimes spent in Liberia and Sierra Leone, it is a reflection of the country's continuing commitment to its age-long African centre-piece policy and the current wave of Nigeria's democracy promotion is obviously unprecedented. This is more so as Nigeria is now a democracy where the due process is expected to be followed before the appropriation of public funds. The legislature enjoys substantial power of the purse and must ratify the budget before any expenditure can be made.

Nigeria's attempt at promoting democratic values in Africa has been predicated upon particular mechanisms. The most notable include a strong rejection of anti-conventional overthrow of democratically elected governments, financial and technical assistance to transitional states, leadership and support for all African initiatives aimed at promoting

democratic values; and a commitment to peace and conflict management in Africa. These commitments have been fulfilled in many instances. To start with, Nigeria, in collaboration with other African countries particularly South Africa, has been in the forefront of all efforts to ensure sustainable peace, democracy and development in Africa. For instance, Nigeria was one of the strong supporters for the criminalisation of forceful seizure of power<sup>1</sup> in Africa at the 35<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) held in Algiers in July 1999. The resolution stipulated that any government that comes to power in any African country through a coup would be diplomatically isolated (Mbah 1999; Tell 26 July 1999). As the OAU transitioned to the African Union (AU) under whom the implementation of this resolution was to commence in 2001, Nigeria continued to actively support the proposed legislation. Nigeria has also been a leading light in the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) frameworks, both geared towards the promotion of sustainable peace, development and good governance. Here, Nigeria has been playing a prominent role, providing leadership for the implementation committee of NEPAD (see, Saliu and Omotola 2005).

Nigeria has transcended these commitments in principle to the realm of practical demonstration. The first litmus test that confronted the country under the nascent democracy was the Ivorian case. In this context, it can be recalled that in December 1999, General Robert Guei led a coup that overthrew President Henri Konan Bédié of Cote d'Ivoire for alleged mal-governance. In response to this development, Sule Lamido, the Nigeria's Minister of External Affairs, noted that the coup was not acceptable. He warned General Guei that "ECOWAS would not tolerate any military regime in the sub-region, no matter the circumstances that might have brought it to power" (Lamido 2000). He also demanded that "the Guei junta must return

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<sup>1</sup> Here criminalisation entails that making unconstitutional change of government could be regarded as a criminal offence.

the country to democracy within the framework of the ECOWAS intervention plan” within six months (Lamido 2000; Tell 24 January 2000; Agekameh 2000). In his own response to the junta’s appeal for international sympathy, President Obasanjo warned that “military coups remain an aberration irrespective of their *raison d’être*” and urged the military to initiate a rapid transition back to democracy (Obasanjo 1999; DCP 2003b). The restoration processes, largely mediated by ECOWAS under Nigerian leadership, eventually yielded some positive result when in October 2000 a presidential election was held. Although the election was characterised by numerous contradictions especially the exclusion of a major contender, the former Prime Minister Alassane Quattara, and the infighting between partisans of General Guei and Mr. Gbagbo, the Supreme Court ultimately declared Mr. Gbagbo as the winner (Africa Recovery July 2003).

The return of democracy to Cote d’Ivoire had been considered a viable means of reconciliation. However, as it turned out, efforts geared towards reconciling the different parties in the aftermath of the 2000 election failed to arrest the tension. By mid-September 2002, hostility broke out again between the loyalists of General Guei and President Gbagbo resulting in the assassination of General Guei and members of his family, massive loss of lives and the displacement of about 750,000 Ivoirians (Africa Recovery July 2003). Once again, Nigeria took the lead and contributed to the restoration of peace and democracy. Dubem Onyia, Nigeria’s Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, led the leaders of three African countries (Nigeria, Ghana and Togo) in September 2002 to Cote d’Ivoire to condemn the uprising. In a joint communiqué issued at the end of the one-day visit, the team expressed their support and solidarity to Gbagbo. Onyia, however, warned Gbagbo to take caution in handling the crisis because “being too rigid might frustrate the rebellious soldiers into adopting guerilla tactics which will not augur well for the country” (Ajomale 2002: 52; Tell 2002: 52). Nigeria also promoted talks among Ivorian factions through the ECOWAS, leading to the

deployment of ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which by June 2003 had 1,300 peacekeepers in Cote d'Ivoire (Africa Recovery July 2003).

Nigeria's role in restoring democracy in Sao Tome and Principe (STP) was also significant. On July 16 2003, a group of army officers, led by Major Fernando Pereira, then Commanding Officer in charge of the Army Training College, STP announced the overthrow of the government of President Fradique de Menezes, who was away in Nigeria attending a conference. In a swift response to the coup, the Chairman of the African Union, Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, after consultations with President Obasanjo of Nigeria, condemned the illegal overthrow of the government stating that "this event constitutes a set-back to the efforts of the African Union aimed at restoration of peace, stability and economic recovery on the whole continent" (Porto 2003). President Obasanjo also called on the coup leaders to return power to the democratically elected government and convinced Major Pereira to accept meeting with a Nigerian envoy. Following the amicable resolution of the impasse, epitomised by the signing of a memorandum of understanding among all the parties involved, Nigeria also appointed a representative for the International Monitoring Commission created by the memorandum. Pleased with the relatively swift resolution of the crisis vis-à-vis Nigeria's role in the process, President Obasanjo remarked that "you may now, no doubt, agree that the return of President Menezes to power, and the restoration of democracy in the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, was a remarkable achievement for Nigeria's foreign policy" (Porto 2003: 3).

In Togo where the military captured power following the death of President Eyadema in February 2005, Nigeria was the first to depict the incident as a military coup d'etat. President Obasanjo predicated this qualification upon the fact that under the Togolese constitution, Fambare Quattara, a parliamentary speaker, should have taken over the presidency at the death

of President Eyadema, while he was to prepare new presidential election within 90 days (Soyinka 2005: 54). For this and related reasons, President Obasanjo, speaking through Femi Fani-Kayode, his Special Assistant on Public Affairs, said that “whatever it takes to ensure there is peace, democracy and stability in the West African sub-region, we will do” (Tell 28 February 2005). The visit of Faure Gnassingbe, son of Eyadema who took over power after the death of his father, to Abuja shortly after the coup was not accorded the usual treatments for visiting heads of state. For example, the visit was devoid of the traditional 21-gun salute, the ceremonial guard of honour or special reception usually accorded heads of states (see Tell 28 February 2005: 54). While Gnassingbe’s visit was essentially to officially apologise to Nigeria and explain why he and his country’s military had to take over government especially because of “the fear for the outbreak of violence” (Tell 28 February 2005: 54) and the need to “ensure that the state was not rudderless” (Tell 28 February 2005: 54) President Obasanjo remained unpersuaded. Obasanjo warned that the AU and ECOWAS were determined that constitutional rule should be restored to Togo within 60 days. The country has since conducted elections, though in a manner that lends credence to the thesis that elections in Africa are nothing but the fading shadows of democracy characterized by lack of choice.

Equally, Nigeria has been seriously involved in conflict management and peacebuilding in Africa. The most notable cases here are Nigeria’s interventions in Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Sudan (Darfur) and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In these cases, the Liberian experience stands out, but actually predates Nigeria’s democratic government. Nigeria not only contributed to the bulk of the costs of ECOMOG intervention in Liberia, it also championed the reconciliatory processes that led to the return of “peace” in the war-torn country. The democratic government under President Obasanjo facilitated and borne the “costs” of Charles Taylor’s exit from Liberia – a development which was considered pivotal to the success

of the transition to democracy in Liberia (Egbewole 2005: 275-85). Nigeria also contributed financially and technically to the 2005 Liberian election that ushered in the nascent democracy headed by President Helen Johnson-Sirleaf, while currently it is lending support to the reconstruction and reform processes.

Beyond open and strong condemnation of unconstitutional change of government in Africa, Nigeria has also been openly supported the holding of free and fair elections at home. In this regard, Nigerian civil society has been vital, it deployed teams of observer missions to monitor the electoral process and ensured compliance with acceptable standards. The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a Civil Society Organisation (CSO) with the mandate of promoting democratic nurturing and deepening in Africa, has been particularly helpful in this regard and was part of the monitoring of the 2005 Liberian and Togolese elections.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Nigeria has been at the forefront of promoting democratic values in Africa. As an importer of democracy who had to be compelled by a series of domestic and external pressures to democratise in the 80s and 90s, Nigeria has suddenly grown to become an exporter of democracy since her return to democracy in 1999.

### **Why promote democratic values?**

Against a background of coups coupled with the reluctance of the military elite to democratise, one cannot but really wonder about what could have propelled the changing role of Nigeria in promoting democratic values. Quite a number of reasons can explain this development. First, Nigeria's "new" commitment to the promotion of democratic values may be a response to the global political changes particularly on the political and economic fronts. From the late 1980s through the 90s, the global political economy witnessed an acceleration toward democracy under the so-called "third wave"

(Huntington 1991; Diamond 1995; Carothers 2000). Added to this was the end of the Cold War, which lowered barriers to international political cooperation following the emergence of a New World Order. In order to demonstrate its sensitivity towards these global political changes Nigeria had to signal the world that it had internalised the political and economic values of the New World Order. Such a step was necessary to redress the battered image acquired under successive military regimes, but was also central to the pursuit of its economic diplomacy. Among others, Nigeria's economic diplomacy under the nascent democracy has been seeking to receive Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); lowering its debts; recuperate Nigeria's money stashed away in foreign accounts by the former dictator, General Sani Abacha; and has sought to improve the state its economy (see Saliu and Omotola 2005; Omotola and Omofa 2005; Omotola 2005b). The actualisation of these and other foreign policy goals, requires been globalisation compliant. This is perhaps what Nigeria has partly done with its commitment to the promotion of democratic values.

The specific emphasis on Africa is understandable. For one thing, Africa has always been the centrepiece of Nigerian foreign policy. By this principle, Nigeria would ordinarily accord Africa and its affairs utmost priority in its external relations for several reasons. First, Nigeria is located in Africa; it is endowed with enormous resources, both human and natural, including the largest black population on earth; second, the psychology of Nigerian leaders made some scholars argue that Nigeria has "a historic mission and manifest destiny" on the continent of Africa (Saliu 2005a). Furthermore, as a result of the "manifest destiny thesis", Nigeria has always endeavoured to play leadership role in Africa, even when under military regimes. Over the years, efforts have also been made to keep faith with this largely self-imposed leadership position at seasoned and unseasoned periods. These considerations may have contributed to Nigeria's renewed commitment to African affairs through the promotion of democratic values in Africa.

Closely related to the foregoing is the emergence of perceived threats to Nigeria's leadership position in Africa. The end of white minority rule (apartheid) in South Africa had thrown up another regional heavy-weight on the continent. Since its return to global reckoning following the end of apartheid, South Africa has emerged as an effective global actor in the international system. South Africa happened to be one of the active players that exported democracy to Nigeria when it stood vehemently against military autocracy in Nigeria particularly under Abacha, and acted as a leading voice clamouring for sanctions against Nigeria in the Commonwealth of Nations. This development was facilitated and boosted by the personality and visionary leadership of the first President of a democratic post-apartheid South Africa, Nelson Mandela. The long years of institutionalisation of democratic institutions and structures such as the judiciary and bureaucracy also contributed to the good performance of South African political economy (see Lodge 1998; Omotola 2004b). It was therefore not surprising to see South Africa beat Nigeria in the contest for the hosting rights of the 2010 FIFA world cup.

Apart from South Africa, in recent years, several other countries such as Ghana and Senegal have had nationalistic leaders who have demonstrated strong commitment to African affairs. With these developments, Nigerian leaders may have felt threatened in their aspiration to continue to provide leadership for Africa, having been popularly known as the "giant" of Africa. The struggle to reclaim and retain its leadership position in Africa could therefore be seen as another major motivation for Nigeria's changing role in the promotion of democratic values in Africa (see Akinterinwa 2005; Saliu 2005a).

It is also important to acknowledge the significance of the personality of Nigeria's ex-President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Having acted like a true



statesman by being one of the first and respected African head of state to voluntarily hand over power to a democratically elected government in 1979, Obasanjo acquired tremendous international credibility, clout and respectability. With this, President Obasanjo came into the job with impressive, if not intimidating credentials (Fawole 2000: 26). As a way of proving his worth, therefore, President Obasanjo couldn't have demonstrated this better elsewhere than in Africa. This concern largely explains the President's marked contributions to African affairs particularly in his open and strong condemnation of unconstitutional change of governments, restoration of democracy, promotion of peace and development in Africa.

### **Domestic contradictions**

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

To begin with, the main political actors, by their actions and utterances, have demonstrated that they are not democrats. Democrats are democratic actors with a democratic mindset that is pivotal to the promotion of democratic political culture and citizenship (see Jega 2003; Aremu and Omotola 2007). Political parties, for example, have no clear political ideology, lack internal party democracy and have been hijacked by local

“godfathers”, thus debasing them of their important roles in the democratisation and nation building projects. The civil society organizations are also hamstrung by the all-powerful state, they are segmented, urban-based and with low degree of social embeddedness. There is also a low level of political participation and competition as well as the elevation of electoral corruption and violence to a status of state culture; all with negative implications for the consolidation of the fledging democracy (see Saliu 2004; 2005b; Omotola 2004c, 2004d and 2006).

On the economic front, the reform agenda through the privatisation of State Owned Enterprises (SOE); monetarisation of fringe benefits for public servants; poverty eradication programmes through the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) have yet to yield the desired result. Although the government is said to have raised a substantial amount of capital from the privatisation process and saved cost through monetary policies, Nigerians keep asking questions about the use to which such proceeds have been put. This is against the background of the fact that today close to 70 per cent of Nigerians live below the poverty line, with some in absolute poverty (Okonjo-Iweala et al. 2003). Estimates have shown that Nigeria would need about 7-8 per cent annual growth rate in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to halve the number of people in poverty by 2015. The government has been boasting that the GDP currently grows at 7 per cent per annum. However, there is a big question mark as to the authenticity of this claim because the much-orchestrated growth has not been translated into any significant improvement in the living condition of an average Nigerian. This may not be unconnected with the lopsided system of distribution in favour of the rich, leading to wider inequality in the society (Okonjo-Iweala, Soludo and Muhtar 2003). Yet, the privatisation process, having coincided with democratization, has been predicated upon a system of political patronage and opportunism, making it difficult for the emergence

of a very vibrant private sector that can be autonomous of vested interests. It has also been done in a way that excludes the majority of Nigerians particularly the workers. These anarchic neo-liberal processes can be argued to have ignited serious crisis and contradictions in Nigeria's political economy (Omotola 2005b and 2005c).

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

### **Conclusion: the future of democracy promotion**

The preceding analysis has discussed Nigeria's changing role as an importer of democracy to that of exporter of democratic values in Africa. It has also reflected on its strategies, accomplishments and justifications. The evidence presented suggests that Nigeria has fared relatively well in promoting democracy in Africa, given the number of cases and issues in which the country has interfered either to condemn unconstitutional change of government; contribute to the restoration of democracy; support electoral

processes and institutions of African states; or give appreciable support to regional and sub-regional frameworks for the promotion of sustainable peace, democracy and development.

In spite of these efforts, however, some gaps are still noticeable. Across the length and breadth of Africa, the democratisation process appears to still be in a 'limbo', thus radiating a contradictory combination of characteristics such as authoritarianism and inherited practices of neo-patrimonialism (Jega 2003). For most African states, including Nigeria, elections are not free and fair, and are usually characterised by violent conducts (see Jinadu 1997). Furthermore, the human rights records of African States, including Nigeria, in terms of respect for the rule of law, fundamental human rights of citizens and equality of individuals, remain disappointing (see Udombana 2003).

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

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

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