

## **CIVIL SOCIETY, DEMOCRACY AND REVOLUTION IN NIGERIA: EXPLORING THE PARADOXES, CONJECTURES AND POSSIBILITIES\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This essay seeks to respond to some research questions: Is revolution in developing countries solely a product of sit-tight leadership syndrome? Is a democratic government, even without the expected corresponding deliverables, serve as an antidote to revolution? Can the socio-political peculiarities of the Nigerian state permanently foreclose the possibility of a revolution? Are the civil society organizations capable of enforcing social change in the country without the support of a proportionate segment of the political class? If this support is even assured, will a possible revolution merely signify a change of regime or bring about good governance that guarantees better standard of living for the people or disintegration of the country as being speculated in some quarters? It is an open secret that many of the revolution-induced factors that precipitated the Arab uprisings in 2011 for instance, or elsewhere before then, are abundantly present in Nigeria while the country still parades articulate and vibrant civil society organizations. Without necessarily calling for a revolution, this essay is an attempt to explore some of the conjectures and paradoxes that characterize civil society's interventions in Nigeria's chequered history and examine the possibilities or otherwise of a revolution by adopting both historical and comparative approaches.*

### **Introduction**

The proliferation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in most African countries began in the late 80s and early 90s when combined pressure from the various sectors forced the authoritarian regimes to conform to the New World Order following collapse of the Soviet Union. The

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emergence of the CSOs as alternative voice to challenge single party dominance was necessitated by the fact that most Countries in Africa had outlawed multi party politics thereby making the CSOs the only alternative voice against such regimes. Decades of single party system that majority of the population had accustomed themselves with coupled with raw power ambition that had characterised the operations of opposition parties led to disillusionment by the public with political parties which further reinforced the perception that CSOs formed the best means of organizing. Indeed they have also had to step up to the task by undergoing a rapid and profound transition in the manner in which they can ably interact with other key actors such as government and state institutions on governance matters (Owuor, 2011:7-8).

Civil society provides networks of communication among citizens, and between citizens and the State. It has been affirmed that, as instruments of political consent, the institutions of civil society can either provide political legitimacy to governments, or withhold it. Nigeria, according to Action Aid International, (2007: 23) “has a long and strong tradition of civil society, which represents the diverse and pluralistic nature of Nigerian society. Nigeria’s history of struggle and resistance was primarily led by civil society groups... labour organizations, student associations, and the media provided a strong leadership and organized protests against unpopular policies” particularly during the military regimes that characterised the political development of the country. Paradoxically however, it is an open secret that many of the revolution-induced factors that precipitated the Arab uprisings in 2011 for instance, or elsewhere before then, are abundantly present in Nigeria just as the country still parades organised and vibrant civil society organizations. Without necessarily calling for a revolution, this work is an attempt to explore some of the conjectures and paradoxes that characterize civil society’s interventions in Nigeria’s chequered history and examine the possibilities or otherwise of a revolution by adopting both historical and comparative approaches.

### **Defining Major Concepts**

#### ***Civil Society***

From an historical perspective, the emergence of the idea of civil society resulted from a crisis in the social order of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The outcome of this crisis was the breakdown of existing traditional notions of order in society. Seligman (1992) cited in

Gray (2002:55) postulates that, “the general crises of the seventeenth century – the commercialisation of land, labour, and capital; the growth of market economies; the age of discoveries; and the English and later North American and continental revolutions – all brought into question the existing models of social order and of authority.” People questioned traditional assumptions of social order. They began to look at how society functioned and their place in it. The image of civil society as a model for conceiving the workings of society and of social order emerged from within this major and radical reorientation of European social thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Without this radical reorientation of thought, a more inclusive concept of citizenship and civil society would not have emerged. It took the breakdown of traditional European conceptions of society, before a reformulation of the idea of civil society could emerge.

According to the London School of Economics, civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development nongovernmental organizations, community groups, women’s organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups (LSE, 2004, in Wood, 2007: 2). Civil society which is also considered as the third sector or the nonprofit sector is used to describe all aspects of society, and that the boundary extends beyond the realm of public and private sector (Pharr, 2003, in Teegen et al., 2004).

The concept of civil society is now accepted in modern political science as an intermediary between the private sector and the state. Thus, civil society is distinguished from the state and economic society, which includes profit-making enterprises. Nor is it the same as family-life society. Civil society, as Larry Diamond (1995:9) defines it, is “the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by the

legal order or set of shared rules... it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions and ideas, exchange ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable. It is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state”.

With this in mind, civil society may encompass a wide range of organizations concerned with public matters. They include civic, issue-oriented, religious, and educational interest groups and associations. Some are known as nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs; some are informal and loosely structured. This is further explained by Carothers (2000:19-20): At the core of much of the current enthusiasm about civil society is a fascination with nongovernmental organizations, especially advocacy groups devoted to public interest causes--the environment, human rights, women's issues, election monitoring, anticorruption, and other "good things." Such groups have been multiplying exponentially in recent years, particularly in countries undertaking democratic transitions. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to equate civil society with NGOs. Properly understood, civil society is a broader concept, encompassing all the organizations and associations that exist outside of the state (including political parties) and the market. It includes the gamut of organizations that political scientists traditionally label interest groups---not just advocacy NGOs but also labor unions, professional associations (such as those of doctors and lawyers), chambers of commerce, ethnic associations, and others. It also incorporates the many other associations that exist for purposes other than advancing specific social or political agendas, such as religious organizations, student groups, cultural organizations (from choral societies to bird-watching clubs), sports clubs, and informal community groups.

Civil society is frequently stunted in societies that have long been dominated by autocratic governance structures. This was the case in most African countries with the inception of multiparty politics. Nonetheless, civil society organizations have typically been at the forefront of political reforms in Africa. It was civil society that championed the historic national conferences of the early 1990s in West Africa that facilitated the initial transitions from autocratic rule. And with the greater openness of the past two decades, Africa’s civil society organizations have grown in number, capacity, and sophistication. Today African civil society continues to campaign for anti-corruption initiatives, promote needed constitutional reforms,

advocate for poverty alleviation, and oppose the prolongation of presidential terms (ACSS, 2011:15-16).

Within the context of this essay therefore, civil society would include: labour movement; (The term “labour movement” is interchangeably used with “organised labour” and “trade unions” to refer to associations of wage labourers formed for the purposes of promoting and protecting workers’ interests and welfare against employers) professional associations, students’ unions, artisans and other special interest associations; the media, and various types of Non-Governmental Organisations such as community associations, religious and advocacy groups.

### ***Revolution***

Ballentine’s Law Dictionary (1969) defines revolution as "a sudden, radical and fundamental change in the government or political system, usually effected with violence or at least some acts of violence, sometimes after prolonged struggle between armed forces, and prompted ordinarily by internal conditions oppressive to the people; the overthrow of an established government, generally accompanied by far-reaching social changes." According to the Encyclopedia Americana (1829:455), revolution is a term used to designate a fundamental change in the government or the political constitution of a country, mainly brought about by internal causes and effected by violence and force of arms on the part of a considerable number of individuals.

Katz argues that revolutions involve “downfall of an old regime through violent means and replacement by a new regime that attempts to establish a new political and socioeconomic order.” Contemporary scholarship on revolution is best defined as formulaic. According to the rigid terms of conventional revolution theory, a revolution has three signposts: violence, mass mobilization and swiftness. Unless we can discern one or more of these three features in its unfolding, an episode or series of events cannot properly be defined as a revolution under the dominant narrative of revolution theory. In their search for a Weberian ideal of revolution, revolution theorists have held firm to these three criteria, each of which is thought to reflect the

very nature of revolution. It is an all-or-nothing proposition that creates a bright line rule distinguishing revolutions from non-revolutions (Albert 2011:5).

Revolution, according to Yaakoub (2011:39) is a stage that is marked by a high level of violence, the exhausting of populations and grassroots efforts. It is an exceptional condition that achieves a specific purpose, which is fundamentally to overthrow and change the status quo with which the people are no longer satisfied. The objective of a revolution is to employ the state of popular discontent and hatred, and the poverty and oppression suffered by the people, to effect change and put an end to the sources of hardship – or, in other words, overthrow those whom the revolutionary leaders consider to be the source of this suffering. Revolution works with the emotions of the masses more than it does their minds. But, the masses cannot continue in a state of continuous revolution. Accordingly, revolution must pass through two stages: destruction and construction. Regan (2007) however, argues that violence may be associated with revolutionary politics in most historical cases but it is not a necessary condition for revolutionary change, particularly in modern industrial societies where participatory forms of government can accommodate -- and possibly facilitate -- sweeping changes without violence. This, in his words, was made evident by the revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

### **Typology, Nature and Conditions for Revolution**

Regardless of the time and location, it is not unnecessary to bring to the fore the very basic factors that precipitated revolutions in the past. It becomes expedient too for any country, either underdeveloped or developed, that share similar traits to learn from history. This section will therefore, briefly discuss this. While writing on the prospects for social revolutions in the industrialized democracies of the West, Regan (2007) affirms that: The Soviet Union has experienced a sweeping revolution despite the claim by Huntington that modern societies will not experience revolutions. If a country as large and seemingly as strong as the Soviet Union can succumb to revolutionary pressures, then why should we expect that other highly industrial countries are immune to such political mobilizations? Given a lack of theoretical reasoning to suggest such immunity, we probably should not. Nor might democracy be the saving grace, for

as Huntington argues, political democracy is not the vaccine to prevent revolutions, even though Goodwin and Skocpol posit that the ballot box has been the "coffin of revolutionary movements"

If the industrialized democracies/countries are not immune from revolution, then countries of the third world are much more vulnerable. The recent Arab Spring that affected some countries may have further authenticated this claim. In his work, Goldstone (2001:142-143) identifies different types of revolution. According to him, "revolutions are distinguished sometimes by outcomes, sometimes by actors. Revolutions that transform economic and social structures as well as political institutions, such as the French Revolution of 1789, are called great revolutions; those that change only state institutions are called political revolutions". Citing other scholars, he writes:

Revolutions that involve autonomous lower-class revolts are labeled social revolutions (Skocpol 1979), whereas sweeping reforms carried out by elites who directly control mass mobilization are sometimes called elite revolutions or revolutions from above (Trimberger 1978). Revolutions that fail to secure power after temporary victories or large-scale mobilization are often called failed or abortive revolutions; oppositional movements that either do not aim to take power (such as peasant or worker protests) or focus on a particular region or subpopulation are usually called rebellions (if violent) or protests (if predominantly peaceful).

Revolutions do not always feature the same set of key actors, nor do they all unfold in the same way. Popular mobilization may be primarily urban (as in Iran and Eastern Europe), feature extensive peasant revolts (Wolf 1969), or involve organized guerrilla war. If domestic elites are seeking to reform or replace the regime, they may encourage or tolerate large popular demonstrations in the capital and other cities, and then withdraw their support from the government, leading to a sudden collapse of the old regime's authority. In such cases, although the revolutionaries take power quickly, they then need to spread their revolution to the rest of the country, often through a reign of terror or civil war against new regional and national rivals or remnants of the old regime. Revolutions of this type, which we may call central revolutions, occurred in France, Russia, Iran, the Philippines, and Indonesia. A variant of elite/popular mobilization dynamics is that some revolutions combine these types in different stages. In the Mexican and Chinese Revolutions, the old regimes initially fell in a central-type collapse; the Huerta and Nationalist regimes that first consolidated power were themselves overthrown by a peripheral mobilization. Recent events suggest yet a third pattern of revolution, a general

collapse of the government, as occurred in the totalitarian states of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Goldstone 2001:143). In his own analysis, Richard Albert (2011) writes on democratic revolutions:

Democratic revolutions do not transpire by happenstance. They are the deliberate expression of a revolutionary intent. Whether they spring from below as popular movements or descend from above as elite processes, revolutions share at least this point in common: they are not accidental episodes. Often for political or other purposes, revolutionary leaders may sometimes wish to clothe their successful revolutionary efforts in some measure of spontaneity, as the result of a popular detonation that they wish others to perceive as having been impossible to restrain any longer. In so doing, revolutionary leaders hope to create a revolutionary myth. Mythmaking casts the revolution as a just cause whose time had come and whose spirit of justice had infused the people with a fierce yearning for change, one that they could neither dismiss nor sustain placidly within themselves until more inviting conditions for reform presented themselves. It was then or nevermore, a chance unlike any other to finally set themselves free.

Skocpol's (1979:13-31) conception of social revolution draws upon Marxist emphasis on social-structural change and class conflict. She analyzes the relations between peasants and landlords, and the organizational capacities of these groups, especially access to coercive resources. Her approach has three distinguishing characteristics: (i) structuralist - identifies the objective conditions necessary for the emergence of revolutionary situations; (ii) internationalist - traces how transnational economic relations and the international structure of competing states influence domestic developments; (iii) statist - the analysis of emergence of revolutionary situations centers on the relationship of the state, with its administrative and coercive powers, to military competitors abroad, and to dominant classes at home (ibid: 31).

Social revolutions, according to her, occur when (a) revolutionary political crisis emerges (due to the regime's inability to cope with international pressure either because of landed upper class opposition to reforms which would endanger its wealth and status, or because of backward agrarian economy), and (b) the sociopolitical structures of the regime are conducive to peasant revolts (so the breakdown of administrative and military organizations during the crisis leaves the dominant class vulnerable to a revolution from below). The nature of the new regime (the consolidation of a new state) depends upon (a) the specific way in which the old regime broke

down; (b) the timing and nature of peasant revolts; (c) socioeconomic legacies of the old regime; and (d) influences of international relations.

While drawing a comparison between the Stalinist states of Eastern Europe and the apartheid state in South Africa, Rees (1999) notes that: It might seem that there were few similarities between the Stalinist states of Eastern Europe and the apartheid state in South Africa. Yet there were strong likenesses in certain crucial areas--both societies were industrialised by a process of strong state direction and in relative isolation from the world economy. South African apartheid, like Stalinism, faced its terminal crisis because it was unable to transform this method of capital accumulation when new realities faced it in the 1970s and 1980s. And the South African ruling class, like its East European counterparts, tried to meet the opposition of a revolutionary mass movement with a strategy of partial reform and negotiation. Deep racial segregation marked the South African state all this century, but it became codified and further institutionalized in 1948 with the ascendancy of the Afrikaner National Party in the elections of that year. This system endured the major challenge which resulted in the 1960 Sharpeville massacre. But in the 1970s the Soweto uprising and the rise of the black consciousness movement, followed in the 1980s by the growth of independent black trade unions, marked successive phases in the crisis of apartheid.

With specific reference to the Arab Spring, Samad and Mohamadieh (2011:117) affirm that the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have precipitated processes of critical reflection on systems of political governance. Various stakeholders are part of this debate, including existent and new political parties, civil society organizations, labor unions and groups that emerged as a result of the revolutions themselves, representing a variety of youth voices and adopting various forms of organization. Writing on the interface between revolution and the civil society, they observe thus: For a long time, civil society organizations in the Arab region have faced many restrictions and violations with regards to their freedom of association and expression, and their independence. The civil society sector was being systematically destroyed by the regimes in power, seeking to restrict the emergence of any strong and effective opposition movements. The developments in the region have reinforced the role of civil society and social movements as key stakeholders in enriching and preserving the continuous struggle for democracy and freedom.

The revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia signal a new era for the role of civil society organizations and their standing in relation to political power and to public policy making in general. Yet, the old status quo still prevails in other Arab countries where civil society organizations are still facing restrictions and repression. (Samad and Mohamadieh, 2011:117)

In a survey carried out by Abu Dhabi Gallup Center (2011), it was revealed that unemployment and poverty alone did not lead to the overthrow of Egypt's government. It was the perceived difference between what *should be* and what *was* that created the driving force for the country's historic uprising. Experience of hardship alone does not move people to resist. To shift from misery to a mass movement, people must first discover "moral anger and a sense of social injustice." In her seminal work on Revolution, Arendt (1963:175) asserts that a group is able to light the spark for revolution if it possesses the power that comes into being only if and when men join themselves together for the purpose of action, and it will disappear when, for whatever reason, they disperse or desert one another.

Welch and Taintor (1972: 6) offer four preconditions that may lead to a mass unrest, rebellion, or Revolution: A widespread sense of disappointment with the conditions of life (relative deprivation); focusing the feelings of disappointment upon political institutions; vacillation, incompetence, and incoherence of political leadership through resistance to reform or through injudicious use of force; combination of economic and political feelings of deprivation with the acceptance of a myth or ideology of change. The essential point is this: a revolution marks a break from the past toward a new course chosen consciously. For Arendt, change alone does not make a revolution. That change must both signal, as a matter of perception and it must also chart, as a matter of reality, a new direction for the state and its people (Albert, 2011:9). The baseline here is that when a government, according to Calvert (1990: 65), fails to fulfill the essential requirements to its citizens, the doors are open for a mass upheaval and rebellion by the excluded part of the society.

### **The Nigerian Realities**

This section of the paper shall address some of the pertinent issues that border on governance or factors that are consistent with historical causes of revolution particularly within the context of

the Arab region, which are very much familiar with the Nigerian realities. These factors include but not limited to: precarious social environment, corruption, the leadership question, bad economy and political atmosphere full of tension. On the country's independence anniversary day a few years ago, a Nigerian newspaper, *Weekly Trust* (2006) observed that:

In key areas of development Nigeria seems to be worse off now than 46 years ago [at independence], so much so that the older generation of Nigerians are often filled with a sense of nostalgia about how good it used to be in this country. Amenities such as good roads, efficient healthcare facilities and adequate water supply are still part of campaign promises of politicians seeking elective offices for which both past and present leaders have woefully failed to deliver to the people.

Economists refer to the coexistence of vast natural resources wealth and extreme personal poverty in developing countries like Nigeria as the “paradox of plenty” or the “curse of oil.” Outside of the energy sector, Nigeria's economy is highly inefficient. Moreover, human capital is underdeveloped—Nigeria ranked 158 out of 177 countries in the United Nations Development Index in 2005—and non-energy-related infrastructure is inadequate (Library of Congress, 2008). Herskovits (2009) observes that “ten years of supposed democracy have yielded mounting poverty and deprivation of every kind in Nigeria. Young people, under-educated by a collapsed educational system, may ‘graduate’ but only into joblessness. Lives decline, frustration grows and angry young men are too easily persuaded to pick up readily accessible guns in protest when something sparks their rage.” As noted by the Statistician-General of Nigeria, Kale (2012), it remains a paradox that, despite the fact that the Nigerian economy is growing, the proportion of Nigerians living in poverty is increasing every year. Sometimes, Odunuga (2012) argues:

you cannot help but wonder how a country that is so blessed in human and material resources continues to breed a community of the poorest of the poor. Well, that is one of the mixed paradoxes that have led to the stunted growth of an economy that once had (and still has) the potential of being Africa's best. Today, Nigeria is a study in stupefaction.

This abysmal level of poverty is manifested in many areas. For instance, of the 60 million children that have stunted growth globally due to malnutrition, Nigeria accounts for 11 million as revealed by a new global report (The Nation, 2012:7). The report notes that with the recent withdrawal of fuel subsidy by the government, prices of foodstuff have increased and experts fear that this would further make it difficult for many of the poorest children in the country to access basic staple foods, thereby worsening the malnutrition crisis (ibid). As argued by

Erinosho (2012:52) widespread poverty is a catalyst for revolution and social disorder. Grinding poverty was one of the major causes of the French revolution. He submits that Nigeria is heading toward such a revolution if poverty is not addressed very quickly. The soaring rate of unemployment in Nigeria is a worrying phenomenon that requires greater attention than it is currently receiving. Unemployment in the country is fuelled largely by faulty economic policies and the lack of enabling environment for businesses to thrive. Many companies that should provide employment have either folded up or are laying off their staff because of government's unfavorable policies.

Nigeria's large and growing population of youth (roughly half of the population is under the age of 19) see only limited opportunities to achieve a better future for themselves, their families, or their country. The structural obstacles to such aspirations are many. Despite an officially declared commitment of 6 percent to 8 percent of Nigeria's budget, the education system is widely considered sub-standard at best. Across Nigeria at any given time, one finds students not going to school and university staff on strike for several months at a time, demanding reforms or simply to receive their paychecks. Nigeria has over 100 universities, many of them funded by federal and state governments. Unlike the U.S. and other industrialized countries, there are very few opportunities for higher education outside the university system—no community college system, no reputable online degree programs, or other postsecondary programs that contribute to individual advancement or to the country's human capital (Forest, 2012:36-37).

There are no accurate statistics on the number of graduates being produced by the universities and other tertiary institutions yearly. However, with an estimated 300,000 being admitted, about the same number enter the labour market searching for blue collar jobs that do not come easy. The norm now is for graduates to apply for jobs they are over-qualified for. That is why the response of 13,000 graduates, some of them with Master's and Ph.D degrees to the advertisement of Aliko Dangote Transport Company for truck drivers, has generated a lot of reactions (The Nation, 2012). To have 32.5 million, in a population of 150 million people, out of work is frightening. It means that one out of every five Nigerians is jobless, and that Nigerians accounts for about one out of every seven unemployed persons in the world (The Punch, 2011).

*National Daily* (2012), in its editorial, observes that unemployment in this context is the percentage of labour force that is without job. This does not include the army of the underemployed; those who are engaged in jobs that do not give them job satisfaction and commensurate wages but glued to such jobs nevertheless.

This ugly development arising from the leadership ineptitude and lack of vision does not prevent political office holders from appropriating the larger percentage of the annual budget to their own welfare related matters. For instance, since Nigeria's democratic experiment in 1999, over 70 percent of the budget is channeled towards the payment of salaries and allowances of political office holders, their aides and other special appointees. A significant proportion of financial resources that could have been invested in physical development and infrastructure cum its maintenance is set aside for the welfare of political appointees who in all intents and purposes, have not done much to improve the lives of the people they are supposed to serve (The Punch, 2009 cited in Omole, 2009: 2-3). The salaries and allowances are frequently reviewed upward so as to make life more comfortable for these politicians and discourage them from dipping their hands in public treasury.

Nigeria generates over \$60 billion a year in oil and gas revenue, but despite its large economy, its population is among Africa's poorest. As many as 70% of Nigerians live beneath the poverty line, and the average life expectancy is less than 48 years. Nigeria also has the world's second-largest HIV/AIDS population (after South Africa). Access to clean water remains a major challenge—almost half the population has no access to improved sources of water and less than one-fifth of households are served by piped water. Sanitation is also a problem, with 30% of people lacking access to adequate sanitation. Diarrhea remains the second-leading cause of death among Nigerian children, and the country ranks second only to India in the number of diarrhea-related child deaths globally. The country ranks 156th out of 187 countries on the U.N. Development Program's (UNDP's) 2011 Human Development Index. Due to decades of economic mismanagement, political instability, and widespread corruption, Nigeria's education and social services systems have suffered from lack of funding, industry has idled, and Africa's largest oil producer suffers periodically from severe fuel and electricity shortages (Ploch, 2012:9). According to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), a Nigerian law

enforcement agency created in 2003 to combat corruption and fraud, more than \$380 billion has been expropriated by the country's political and military leaders since oil sales began in the 1970s (Christian Science Monitor, 2007 cited in Ploch, 2012:12). Agekameh (2011:21) captures the Nigerian realities as he surmises rather pathetically that:

The political horizon is foggy and holds no assurance of a better tomorrow. The economic indices are frightening as the naira continues to be on a steady slide in spite of measures put in place to firm it up. Besides, most of the industries have crumbled. The educational sector is in shambles. On the social front, there is hardly anything to cheer. Public infrastructures and utilities are all lying in either waste or outright ruin. The roads have become a place where citizens get one-way ticket to the great beyond even without asking for it. The hospitals are still glorified consulting clinics... As if all these burdens are not enough, the whole country has been put under the crushing weight of terrorism unleashed mercilessly by the *Boko Haram* sect.

The constituent parts of Nigerian society each feel aggrieved, in one way or another. People from the Delta States feel they have been denied fair benefit from their region's natural resources; traditional leaders, especially in the South, see their position and authority gradually eroding; young people are searching for signs of hope; business people are critical of infrastructure that doesn't work, over-regulation and rent-seeking by various government agencies; and civil servants see their incomes eroded by inflation. The average Nigerian today struggles hard to make ends meet, sees himself/herself as being poorer than he/she was a decade ago, and finds it hard to be hopeful that things will get better soon (World Bank, 2002:1). More of these realities are captured by Sekoni (2011:14) when he notes that "over seventy per cent of Nigerians earn less than one dollar a day. Efforts to make the lowest-paid worker earn one hundred dollars a month at current exchange rate of one dollar to one hundred and seventy naira is hanging on the threats of representatives of the underpaid to go on strike. More Nigerian pregnant women die at childbirth than their counterparts in other parts of the world's least developed continent. More infants born to Nigerian parents die before they reach the age of five than in any other country in the region. More Nigerian children suffer from protein deficiency than in most of the countries in the region". The Nigerian state, argues Oke (2011:16), is characterized by a confluence of factors. On the one hand, economic interests, political forces, capitalists' entities and other bureaucratic institutions determine the political, economic, social and other laws or policies suitable or adoptable for the Nigerian state per time. On the other hand, the interplay of

transnational forces and institutional decadence aggregate in overrunning the efficacy of state apparatuses or mechanisms put in place to ensure sustainable use or equitable distribution of benefits from natural resources. The Nigerian realities, therefore, readily depict what many people refer to as a failed state. According to Gbonigi (The Nation, 2011:64):

Whether you settle for the former (a failing state) or the latter (a failed state), the crux of the matter is that the ravaging socio-economic, political, environmental, moral, religious cankerworms plaguing Nigeria today have been identified as the fundamental attributes of a failed state...what other label or name should a country that has invariably failed in its responsibility to be sensitive to the plight and predicament of its citizenry deserve?

The absolute disenchant state, which perpetually entangles Nigerian citizens, has given rise to exploration of other means of survival. Violence of different dimensions is daily cropping up as a response to the conservative stand of an unresponsive government. Their manifestation in ethnic, religious and communal colouration is evident in the fragile polity. Like many of the failed or failing states, elections in Nigeria do not provide a just and veritable platform for its teeming masses to change an abysmally bad system of governance. Elections have not always been free and fair. This makes the concept of popular participation an illusion, moreso when the nation has *a very rich minority that takes advantage of its failed system*. We may not have a condition of “state collapse” where a state has no effective control of its territory and borders, as Crisis States Research Centre partly defines it or a polity with a complete vacuum of authority as a failed state was somewhere else referred to, but all other astonishing indices are our avoidable companions today in Nigeria (Omilusi, 2007).

### **The Paradoxes, Conjectures and Possibilities**

If civil society is viewed as the panacea for freedom; protection and advocacy of the civil rights and liberties; resistance against state repression; the mobilizing arena for the protection and projection of substantive interests; the compelling impetus for state moderation; and the epitome of popular struggles and civil power (Ikelegbe, 2001), then it becomes expedient to examine how relevant it can be, or has been, within the context of our discussion. Nigeria has long enjoyed a vibrant civil society and a rough-and-tumble media that is famous across Africa. It has a flourishing English language press, much of it in private hands. There are at least 20 dailies, 12 Sunday papers, and four weekly business reports. State-run radio and television reach virtually

all parts of the country, with broadcast media starting to open up to private enterprises as well. Radio remains the key source of information for many Nigerians. Trade unions, professional associations, business associations, traditional institutions, and religious institutions have also played critical roles in building democracy and sustaining the democratic yearning since Nigerian independence. These older groups have been joined since the late 1980s by the NGO movement, a host of small, professional, fleet footed organizations targeting a variety of social concerns, service provisions, or advocacy needs across the federation (USAID, 2006:23).

Contemporary civil society activism in Nigeria, Akanle (2009:224) submits, is traceable to the 1980s during the repressive reigns of the military governments of Babangida and Abacha. The civil society organisations at the time were basically reactionary and responsive to government ineptitude as they failed to deliver basic necessities of life to the people while they completely wiped the Nigerian slate clean of the concept and notion of fundamental human rights in an effort to ensure the unchallenged perpetration of corrupt practices and perpetuation of selves in government. Kew (2004:1) summarises this development thus:

Military repression and economic stagnation combined to whittle away the Nigerian state, forcing most Nigerians to seek civil society alternatives for political organization, expression, and protection...While many Nigerian politicians relinquished to blind political expediency and followed the military's transition paths to nowhere, civil society became the only sphere where democratic political activity and leadership in national democracy promotion could be found

Democratic government notwithstanding, civil society organisations still contend with some of these issues just like the military era. Many people do not see a paradigm shift from the past. Perhaps, in response to the inevitability of a “drastic change” in the polity, many prominent Nigerians have been advocating (what the authorities usually regard as instigation from disgruntled elements) an end to the unjust system that pervades the Nigerian society. One of such people is Prof. Nwabueze (2010) who calls for a revolutionary change in the polity: “I want a wholesome transformation.... I want a bloody revolution. We need a revolutionary change, a bloody one and those who survive will pick up the pieces. Corruption has eaten deep and everybody is involved, only a bloody revolution will remedy the situation. That was how France was saved. If you read about the French revolution, that was what saved France and Europe is what it is today because of the French revolution. I cannot see the country being saved other than

through a bloody revolution”. After the 1999 elections, Onanuga (2012) observes, there has been a growing clamour for revolution in Nigeria. For some, the talks of revolution was borne out of the recklessness of the ruling class and on the way they squandered the nation’s resources and the belief that there was a need for change, some as a mere academic exercise and for others, a bloody revolution is inevitable if we must have real transformation in Nigeria. Some were even of the view that the Arab spring be transferred to Nigeria. Quoting Olorode at a public lecture, Onanuga writes:

wherever conditions for revolutionary change exist, responses are usually determined by class interests and subjective imperatives of living conditions and collective and individual class consciousness...victims of the ruling class policies of privatisation, deregulation etc. are now taking very practical private and collective political revolutionary steps, strikes, protests against increased school fees, toll gates, fuel price and religious and ethnic militancy largely by dispossessed strata of the society.

It should be noted here that there are instances where participation or the willingness on the part of the exploited segment of the society to involve in a revolution may be constrained by some variables. In Nigeria, hope of a “better tomorrow” is continually hinged on religious injunctions with the belief that through a divine intervention, they can be liberated from the shackles of oppression. This notion, ironically, is further reinforced by the unusual access to wealth accumulation that public office provides for its occupant. The oppressed are therefore, restrained from antagonizing the current public office holders with the hope that it might be their turn in the nearest future. Those who appear vociferous and capable of instigating others for a revolt can be bought over, blackmailed or eliminated. Critics of government policies are easily labeled as antagonists, detractors or disgruntled elements. This variant of stigmatization has kept many otherwise social critics out of public domain. These strategies were frequently employed during the military era. Same may not be totally ruled out now as many people are getting more reticent about their unpleasant living standard occasioned by unfavorable government policies. Politics of patronage and clientelism, therefore, sets in. Kavka captures such a scenario thus:

Imagine a country in which a small elite rules over and exploits the vast majority of the citizens. All the members of the exploited group know that if they acted together, they could easily overthrow the present regime and set up a new and just government that would better serve their interests... But now consider the question of participation in a revolution from the point of view of an individual member of the exploited group. It would appear that, for him, the substantial costs of participation – the risk of being

punished by the regime for participating or of dying in the fighting- will greatly exceed the expected benefits. For, in the first place, it is highly unlikely that his participation would significantly increase the chances of the revolution succeeding. And, in the second place, the benefits of better government that would follow a revolution are essentially public goods, i.e the average individual would receive them even without being active participant in the revolution. Hence, if he maximizes expected utility, our potential revolutionary will not join in the revolt. Nor, for like reasons, will his fellows; and as a result, there would not be a revolution ( Kavka, 1982:455).

The indifference of the middle class (or absence of it in Nigeria, as some have argued) is regarded as one of the root causes of our failing government and the inability to challenge the status quo. Omojuwa (2012) contends that: The world over, you'd hardly find any country that ever survived the domination of a few over many without the rise of a people who are neither at the top of the pyramid nor essentially at its bottom, those who find themselves between both ends of the socio-economic divide. You cannot get to any *Promised Land* worth the travel without getting to cross bridges as we cannot bank on the miracles of going through water. The bridge of progress and development in any modern nation is the middle class. If a nation stays stagnated or retards in development, check the bridge. Read tales of the Industrial Revolution, the American Revolution and other mass movements including the several movements across Europe and even more recently with the likes of Rudi Dutschke in Germany and the Arab Spring and you'd find the middle class at the end of it if not at its beginning. This is because this class has the number and the resources to make change happen. Unlike the poor, they have resources to spare for advocacy. The poor live from hand to mouth and are the worst hit in case of any campaign that halts production one way or the other. That Nigeria needs saving is a foregone conclusion and that there has to be a mass movement that seeks and demands genuine transformational change is a long delayed reality. But Natufe (2001) opines that “the middle class in Nigeria has been rendered obsolete and moribund. This dislocation of the middle class and the growing impoverishment of the vast majority of Nigerians has intensified the exploitative grip on power by the wealthy few”.

Categorizing the country into two tribes of *those in government and those Nigerians outside government*, Nkire (2012:22) argues that “Nigeria is evidently made up of the haves and the have-nots; the ruling class and voting class; the policed government officials and the ordinary unprotected people; the well-fed leader and the hungry unemployed citizen”. The manipulating

tendency of the ruling class and the anticipated “better tomorrow” of the have-nots may have placed the latter perpetually at the mercy of the former. This is partly responsible for the prevailing docility in the camp of the masses particularly on issues of corruption in governance. Nkire explains further: one tribe divides the other to rule it. The other hardly complains because given the opportunity to rule, it is not likely to do things different of better. So this tribe suffers and smiles while it waits patiently for its turn to be in a position to oppress citizens of his or her former tribe. While drawing some lessons from the Arab revolutions, Abbas (2011:36) notes that:

In virtually all the Arab countries... there is no problem of electricity, water, roads, rail system, food and housing. The only two areas in which the people of those countries have problem with their governments are in those of employment and freedom to be part of governance...In Nigeria, which of the above named infrastructures is available despite the enormous material resources with which the country is naturally endowed? Rather than utilizing those resources to boost the general standard of living and thereby uplift the status of the country, the priority of our government is to squeeze the citizenry dry through the removal of non-existing subsidy on oil

Variants of critical drivers of People and Street Power, PSP abound in Nigeria, making her a likely candidate for a peoples’ revolution and, possibly, a violent one. Societal ills, crime, insecurity, deprivation, poverty, injustice, human rights violations, and lack of basics amenities, including education, healthcare, and housing are all prevalent in Nigeria. Youth unemployment, another critical driver, is as prevalent as sectarianism. Similarly, the rising spate of youth cult associations both inside and outside the educational institutions, are all indications that not all is well and thus ripeness for a PSP (Eso, 2011). While the variables that could ignite resistance and social change stare Nigerians in the face on daily basis, it is contended that the type of revolution expected in the country may not be a variant of the conventional revolution that comes with blood and violence. Aiwuyor (2011) belongs to the category: “signs of revolution are in the air in Nigeria... but if history remains a good teacher, there is no certainty that any bloody revolution would solve Nigeria’s problems. All the retrogressive military coups that have taken place in Nigeria as well as the country’s three year civil war (1967-1970) were executed in the name of bringing about revolutionary change. Yet, none could solve the country’s problems. Nigeria should and would have a revolution; it ought not to be violent”.

The present democratic experiment in Nigeria is seen as a viable political system to solve its myriad of problems without any violent revolution unlike in the Arab region where long-standing dictatorship and the people's desire for liberation precipitated same. Aregbesola, one of the state governors in Nigeria, quoted in Onanuga (2012), submits that: "the forcible removal of long standing dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and other places cannot be compared to crises attendant to security challenges emanating from the incompetence of security agencies and disagreement over policy choice between the government and the people .... democracy anywhere is an unfinished business. There is no problem emanating from democracy that democracy cannot fix. What we need therefore is more democracy. While the former is avoidable and can be fixed, the latter is a common occurrence even in established democracies".

My argument, however, is that if a democratic government does not bring about positive fundamental changes in the living standard of the supposed beneficiaries, that is, the people, and the nation continues to witness socio-economic and political maladies as enumerated in the previous section, far worse than what were obtainable in the Arab region, can such a system of government provide immunity against revolution?. Diamond (2008) argues that emerging democracies must demonstrate that they can solve their governance problems and meet their citizens' expectations for freedom, justice, a better life, and a fairer society. If democracies do not more effectively contain crime and corruption, generate economic growth, relieve economic inequality, and secure freedom and the rule of law, people will eventually lose faith and turn to authoritarian alternatives. Struggling democracies must be consolidated so that all levels of society become enduringly committed to democracy as the best form of government and to their country's constitutional norms and constraints.

Also, if a coup "rarely alters a country's fundamental social and economic policies, and its foreign policy" or ... "rarely results in a significant redistribution of power among competing sections of the country" (Encyclopedia Britannica) then equating *coups* and counter coups with revolution-as canvassed by some commentators- might be misleading. It is observable that in many instances, a change of regime through coups, particularly in some African countries, is usually facilitated by a dissatisfied segment of the ruling class. As a matter of fact, such a military coup amounts to a mere change of baton of power from one faction of the ruling class to

another with little or no consideration for the critical mass of the people whose hopes and aspirations have been shattered by the ousted regime. As noted by Miller (2011:46) while these coups and others around the continent ousted largely corrupt and autocratic regimes, this type of extralegal takeover has never succeeded in engendering durable democratic institutions throughout Africa's history.

The term revolution obviously does not cover every attack upon the established order or every seizure of power. Military coups are not revolutions; nor are not anti-colonial struggles. In a world in which political turnovers are common, the term covers only a small number of cases; conscious attempts to establish a new moral and material world and to impose, or evoke, radically new patterns of day-to-day conduct (Walzer, 1998:128). In other words, military coups are not: social revolutions, transfer of power to opposing force(s) during civil conflicts, popular uprisings, voluntary transfers of powers of authority, and the unseating of regimes by foreign invading forces. A military coup, Mackay (2010:8) argues, differs from a revolution, in which a significantly larger proportion of society seeks to implement changes in government. For this reason, successful military coups and resultant military rule places a broad spectrum of state apparatus and decision-making powers in the hands of a few, a situation which has historically limited the political mobility of the majority.

Waxing philosophical in his remarks on the state of the nation after 57 years of independence, Fani-Kayode (2012:13/67) compares Nigeria to a badly wounded, gangrenous and diseased leg which can only be cured through restructuring or which needs to be cut off in order to save the rest of the body. The consequence of doing neither is death for the whole body. It follows that the only way real change can come is if the country is broken up into two or more independent nations or, if we insist on remaining as one, through the auspices of a people's revolution which will sweep away the old order, convene a Sovereign National Conference, restructure the country drastically and devolve power from the centre. If one is looking for fundamental change in Nigeria, these are the only two courses of action that can produce it. He, however, expresses some reservations about the ability and readiness of the Nigerian people to embark on any of these options:

Unfortunately, the Nigerian people do not seem to have the resilience or strength to effect either of the two options for true change anytime soon. They seem to have been traumatized, demoralized and subjugated in the last 50 years that they have lost their will to resist inequity, tyranny and injustice, to insist on determining their own fate and to fight for their own future (ibid).

I am not in any way insinuating that any inadequacies inherent in a democratic system of government or the shortcomings of the politicians can be rectified by a revolution. Rather, the costs- in all ramifications- of going through a revolutionary struggle might be higher than strengthening democratic institutions that can bring about public good. The challenges of post-revolution societies, in respect of structure of governance, rules of engagement and power sharing among the political gladiators, as witnessed in the cases of North African revolutions or elsewhere, do not present such drastic change of regime as the best alternative let alone where there already exists a form of democratic government. However, this argument does not foreclose the fact that civil society can always apply all existing institutional mechanisms provided in a democratic regime, and where possible embarking on civil disobedience if these democratic institutions fail to perform their mandated functions.

In fact, in reference to the post-Arab Spring, Yaakoub (2011:41) argues that democracy is not just a matter of institutions, but it is also a culture. In the Arab world, he posits, democratic institutions were established before democratic thinking – unlike the Western experience where modern thinking paved the way for the renaissance and the enlightenment which led to the establishment of democratic systems. Indeed, after the “revolutions,” the majority of revolutionary Arab regimes worked to immediately disband existing political parties and obstructed any course leading to democracy, transforming their revolutionary leaders into new sovereigns with new ideologies. Meanwhile, the people were transformed into new subjects at the mercy of these new sovereigns, and revolution and democracy became two hostile poles, instead of one paving the path before the other.

Eso (2011) offers an explanation on why advocates of revolution in Nigeria may not be taken seriously: Historically though, and quite ironically, some of those Nigerians who have advocated *People and Street Power* are not necessarily advocating changes for the sake of good governance

and ameliorating developmental challenges, as much as they are interested in upstaging those in power or securing political power and its trappings for themselves. It is thus understandable, why rather than coalesce to a formidable political opposition, capable of challenging the *status quo*, some resort to high political rhetoric and warnings of the nation being in danger of imploding or imminent revolutions, in order to gain recognition and even political appointments. These obvious contradictions, nonetheless, mask or divert attention from prevailing challenges and concerns, as well incremental groundswell of resentment and restiveness.

As observed by Alamu (2012:3) virtually all the institutions inherited from our colonial masters are so thoroughly debased and deformed that they have become a sick joke. The degeneracy of these vital institutions is so complete and mutually reinforcing that there hardly exists a possibility of redemption. He notes further: “In many countries, it has taken revolutions, violent upheavals, momentous uprisings, social concussions and convulsions to consummate. The tree of liberty is watered by the blood of heroic freedom fighters. It is only in Nigeria that people believe that you can have omelette without breaking eggs”. That Nigeria has been going round and round in circles in an unending motion without movement such that the more things appear to change, the more they remained the same has been so stupefying that not a few among more discerning Nigerians have all but given up on the country. Whereas all that is needed is a leadership that is ready and able to arrest the current drift in the country, Nigeria seems to have resigned to divine solutions to the country’s numerous problems as the numbers of churches, mosques and spiritual homes continue to rise exponentially (Oyebode, 2012). The upsurge of charismatic movements and their emphasis on spiritual inanities with little or no preference to intellectual or polemical development has reduced a larger part of Nigerian populace to fatalistic beings. Nigerians now accept whatever befalls them as an act of God, and that it will only take providential intervention to turn the table. This quiescence has a very large extent made Nigerians unthinking political beings. Resultantly, the human mind is poisoned to the effect that every action should be reacted to by resigning to fate (Ogbonna, Ogundiwin and Uzuegbu-Wilson, 2012:73). Abidde (2012) wonders that: “For the last 50 years, at least, Nigerian leaders have been making pilgrimages to Western and Asian countries, yet, have not found it necessary to copy the good and mighty things they see and enjoy abroad. The ruling elite send their

children to attend universities and other institutions of higher learning abroad; yet, refuse to provide such amenities in Nigeria. When the president and governors get sick, they fly to Germany. When ministers and commissioners think they are falling ill, they take the first flight out to the USA. Why the people have not rebelled against their oppressors is what continues to amaze me”

To many socio-political observers of the Nigerian State, the face-off between the government and the labour Unions in January 2012 over the removal of ‘fuel subsidy’, culminating in a week-long protests and industrial action, could be used as a barometer to gauge the capacity and capability of the civil society to effect a change in the polity. Nigerians, in a rare display of public anger and disapproval, organised protests to vent their disgust and discontent with former President Jonathan’s Greek Gift on New Year Day. The Nigerian Labour movement and civil society organizations united to make open statement, asking government to revert to the old 65 naira per litre or face civil action. Government, the President and his economic team also organised several public relations and talk shows to convince Nigerians, but they failed abysmally. When the Labour/Civil society street action commenced, the protest took a life of its own, it became very popular and significantly successful to the extent that local and global communities became interested in the civil society’s rare determination to reject an obnoxious public policy. Nigerians steadfastly displayed their opposition until the leadership of the Labour committed a blunder by suspending the campaign at the weekend to enable protesters “refill and re-strategise” (Opadokun, 2012:12). But Oyebode (2012) argues that in a situation of deepening crisis of the Nigerian political economy, perhaps the role of the masses of the people is that of conscientisation and clarification of issues as well as intensification of the organizational capacity of the oppressed in order not to repeat the truncation and ultimate failure of mass action during the fuel subsidy debacle of January 2012. An unorganized mass poses little threat to a callous, incorrigible and selfish leadership. It has been said repeatedly that the masses have to take their destiny in their hands but the meaning and consequences of this are yet to be well articulated. Assessing the January street protest viz-a-viz the Labour leadership in his column, Omatseye (2012) writes:

My mind crawled to the last strike and how many saw revolution. I did not. Nigerians, in their naivety, thought the labour leaders would swim the country into the crimson tide of change. They were disappointed. The labour leaders are not revolutionaries, they learned later. They are an adjunct of the political class, ready to bargain away the sovereignty of the people's trust. They could not fight. The labour leaders did not suffer the deprivation of the poor. They are leaders but they do not lead except for their parochial gains. They are reformists of self-interest. It was clear from the rhetoric of the National Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) top hierarchy that they were there for bargain, not change. They restricted their grouse to oil subsidy, and in no way did they extend the power of their agitation to the larger agonies of failed infrastructure, hunger, corruption, lack of visionary policies, the structure of state and decay in education, the funeral air of hospitals, the occlusion of the future.

Reacting to the 'oil subsidy' protests in many parts of the country, former President Goodluck Jonathan had dismissed that of Lagos as class-induced that did not reflect the true feelings of the people. He said: The demonstration in Lagos, people were given bottled water that people in my village don't have access to; people were given expensive food that the ordinary people in Lagos cannot eat. So, even going to eat free alone attracts people. They go and hire the best musician to come and play and the best comedian to come and entertain; is that demonstration? Are you telling me that that is a demonstration from ordinary masses in Nigeria who want to communicate something to government? I am hardly intimidated by anybody who wants to push any issue he has. I believe that that protest in Lagos was manipulated by a class in Lagos and was not from the ordinary people." Though coming from the president of the most populous Black Country in the world, the statement might appear pedestrian in content, but it is also an indictment on the government that failed in its responsibility to make life worth living for the citizens. For Adegboyega (2012:17) the question is: "How can a president who understands the issues still have the guts to say this kind of thing at a time his government should be tendering unreserved apologies to Nigerians for untold hardship that had been caused by the conmen (and women) involved in the subsidy racket"?

The June 12, 1993 political crisis, arising from the election annulment by the then military regime had earlier brought the civil society on a collision path with the government. Usman (2009:135) affirms that “the aftermath of the annulment of the election results was an unprecedented social uprising and civil disobedience which brought about the country to the brink of civil war”. According to Kukah (2000:253-254), the annulment was a wake-up call for every segment of the Nigerian population. The most active segment of the population after the announcement of the annulment was the human rights community. Adewumi (2007:112) aptly summarises the civil society intervention during the period thus: “...an attempt by a broad coalition of Nigerians to organize a national conference in 1990 brought the human rights groups frontally into the political fray, culminating in their robust involvement in the struggle to terminate predatory military rule by spearheading the campaign for the de-annulment of the results of the June 12 presidential election believed to have been won by the late Chief M.K.O Abiola. Even when professional politicians were not forthcoming and were playing pranks, the civil society groups did not relent in the struggle until the military was forced out of governance and civil rule restored in 1999”.

This was one of the cases when the civil society had to confront the military establishment. However, the ultimate goal of having M.K.O Abiola installed as the democratically elected President could not be materialized under the subsequent Abacha regime as the struggle began to suffer from ethnic politics and other selfish interests among civil society actors (and politicians alike) before the deaths of Abacha and Abiola under controversial circumstances. The civil society has not been able to cure itself from this cankerworm. In the present political dispensation, the civil society organisations in Nigeria do not present a united formidable force in their approach to issues of governance as many contending interests always come into play. Different primordial factors tend to neutralize their strength. That the civil society, particularly the media, “played a major role” in the fight against a third term for Obasanjo, could be attributed to the visible support of an aggrieved faction of the political class whose interests were at stake. It was a rare alliance among the politicians-ferociously championed by Atiku Abubakar, the civil society-having media as arrowhead and the masses (carried along in the process) meant to suppress the tenure elongation of Obasanjo administration. The campaign for and against the

proposed third term was said to have been funded and sustained by the politicians on both divides. And this may have addressed one of the questions raised in the introductory section of this essay.

Rather than building bonds across society along issues of shared interest, civil society groups are frequently organized along intergroup differences, reinforcing societal divisions. Similarly, too often, these civil society groups are highly personality driven — at times serving the political interests of an individual rather than a broader social concern. Not coincidentally, these organizations are often governed with the same limitations on participation, expression, free and fair leadership elections, and accountability as a governing regime, making them poor training grounds for democratic models of governance (ACSS,2011:26). Also, divisions among the Nigerian civil society along the ethnic and regional lines have not helped its democracy advocacy; this has led to disunity and disagreement among the Nigerian NGO practitioners in term of decision taking and unity of purpose.

Unlike other developing democracies, members of Nigeria’s large professional associations—law, medicine, unions, accountants, academics, women—have not provided leadership for opposition political parties. As a result, they have not yet been able to mount an effective oppositional movement. Civil society groups are numerous and active but they are fragmented, local, and not yet integrated into strong, cohesive national organizations. Hence, without effective political parties, their opposition and reform programs are often frustrated by the entrenched oligarchy. In short, there is a disconnect between an elite that struggles to maintain their relative hegemony and the bulk of the population who find themselves disenfranchised by the informal patterns of patrimonial power that characterize public decision making in Nigeria (USAID, 2006:16).

The expanding focus of foreign donors on democratic governance in Nigeria has also impacted negatively on Civil Society Organisations’ capacity to positively influence democratic process in the country. Most Nigerian pro-democracy Non-Governmental Organisations are donor dependent and the focus of foreign donors on democracy in Nigeria have expanded from

supporting pro democracy organisations to include the support for democratic institutions like the legislature, judiciary and other democratic institutions. This fiscal factor has also reduced the activities and impacts of some pro-democracy CSOs in contemporary Nigeria. (Ikubaje, 2011). More often than not, the Nigerian civil society has proved to be a wobbly assemblage for mundane biddings and usually employed by political interest, shuttling between wage rancor and opposition party at the same time. Most times the need for bidding for long term and holistic development is forgone to wage agitations. The civil society groups are mostly pro-active in the biddings to satisfy group interest devoid of the effort at social mobilization (Chijioke, 2012:6).

Instead of sustaining the tempo of activism gathered during the military era in the 1980s and 1990s, in some ways, civil society organisations have comparatively gone passive under the current system. This may have resulted from fatigue, ideological conspiracy, complacency and short-sightedness as they appear tired, having believed to have won the ‘real’ battle and seeing democracy as naturally workable to protect the civil society (Akanle, 2009:233). In spite of this submission, the Nigerian civil society is still seen as capable of meaningfully engaging the government, particularly on policies that affect the generality of the people, if well organised. Adenugba (2009:201) avers that “it would be erroneous to conclude that the civil society has been dormant in Nigeria”. Yet a vibrant civil society alone does not amount to healthy political development (Kew, 2004:1).

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it becomes obvious that *revolutions are seen as evidence that humans can indeed change their environments: they are political regeneration provided by the people who demand that their government serve them, rather than the reverse*. However, if revolution is seen as an unusual phenomenon in a democracy, it is also doubtful if democracy can be a product of a revolutionary change. As noted by Marshall and Gurr (2005:20) while democracy is strongly associated with peace and the capacity for peace-building, what is not clear is democracy’s role in establishing peace and prosperity. It is not clear how much democracy

actually fosters peace and facilitates peace-building and how much democracy is the culmination of economic performance, societal development, and peace-building efforts. One thing seems clear from the evidence, democracy rarely, if ever, results from radical or revolutionary transformations of governing structures. In case of Nigeria, Oyebode (2012) avers that: The quick answer to the country's current stagnation would be a massive dose of shock therapy or what, in popular parlance, is referred to as a revolution. However, students of revolution know that not only is a revolution not a tea-party, it occurs in a conjuncture of the coincidence of both the objective and subjective conditions. In other words, the Law of Transformation of Quantity into Quality cannot operate except where and when the pre-requisites of a revolution are present. This is why romanticizing about an African summer as a response to the Arab spring is largely a pipe-dream as Nigeria is nowhere yet near a revolutionary situation.

For many years now, discussion on revolution has occupied the public space in Nigeria. It has dominated local pub interactions by those who cannot even spell the term. Every attempt at proffering solution to governance crisis in the country, particularly among the masses, has always met a consensus on revolution. But the truth of the matter is that where revolutions have taken place-either long time ago or recently- prior formal or informal notice was not recorded to have been given. They could be seen as spontaneous reactions to age-long oppression by autocratic regimes, ignited by a particular event. For Nigerians, revolution is all about analysis-both mundane and academic!

It has been my argument in this essay that the socio-political and economic problems confronting the country provide a fertile ground for revolution. It is, however, observed that, given the religious nature of the Nigerian citizens- seeking divine intervention on practically all issues - which ordinarily should be subsumed under government responsibilities to its citizens- coupled with the menace of corruption that permeates every stratum of the society (where, paradoxically, in spite of their religiousity, everyone still tends to fraudulently amass wealth if given the opportunity to occupy public office or know someone in the corridors of power), an organized social change might be a mirage in Nigeria. The current democratic experiment in the country,

despite its shortcomings, may also provide an antidote to revolution as long as it guarantees a periodic means of altering the power configuration among different segments of the ruling class. It should be noted here that if revolutions are made by revolutionaries, and violence is required to bring about the desired changes, the civil society in the country may not properly fit into this logic. This submission stems from the thesis of this essay- which is basically anchored on the assumption that the usually adopted advocacy tool by the civil society serves as a stopgap for revolution in Nigeria, and perhaps, in other democracies.

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