Civil Society, Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria: 1999-2012

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Abstract: This paper interrogates civil society, democracy and good governance in Nigeria, between 1999 – 2012. It argues that the incohesiveness of the dominant class in Nigeria, accounts for the weak nature of the Nigerian state which creates chaos in the society, the chaos that inhibits the institutionalization of hegemonic order, which is why the dominant class, whose interests is represented by the state does not understand democracy and cannot bring about good governance. Also, the civil society is philosophically, ideologically, structurally and financially weak and is vulnerable to co-optation by the state (politics). Finally, the paper concludes that civil society, democracy and good governance in Nigeria, between 1999 and 2012 still elude the country. Thus, while democracy, during the period, is but a sham, good governance is still far in coming. And for the civil society organisations, the last thirteen years have not witnessed many achievements because of some formidable array of systemic and contextual factors that mitigate them.

Keywords: Civil Society, Democracy, Good Governance, Nigerian State.

1. Introduction

One of the challenges facing Nigeria today is democratic consolidation. After years of prolonged military rule, Nigeria came under civil rule (again) in 1999. Nigeria’s return to civil rule was not until some horrifying experience of oppression and naked violence on the Nigerian people by the military that
claimed to be in office and in power. Opposition to military rule was quite fierce as expected, because of the dangerous plunge the society had taken into corruption, poverty, ethnic conflict, economic mismanagement, pillage and brigandage in leadership and authority.

In those days of military rule, the protagonist in opposition was civil society, whose basic objective was the search for a more humane, responsive and responsible social order. In other words, civil society became a means through which citizens expressed their intense indignation to the misrule of the military. By those expressions of indignation, the contributions of civil society to the democratization process in Nigeria became quite significant. For instance, during the general elections in 1999, civil society played no mean role both in the debates and discussions that preceded the elections and in the conduct of the elections as well (Nkwachukwu, 2005; Maikudi, 2005).

However, it is necessary to periodize the activities of the civil society in Nigeria, in order to properly situate the activities for a meaningful analysis.

The activities of the civil society can therefore be logically periodized as follows

- Immediate post-independence period (1960 – 1965)
- Civilian democracy, Second Republic (1979-1983)
- Civilian democracy (1999-2012)

The post-independence period was rather too short for meaningful activities of the civil society before political crises set in. In order words, soon after independence, the country began to experience serious political debacles, starting with the treasonable trial of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the Action Group crisis of 1962, the crisis that followed the creation of Midwest region in 1963 the Tiv crisis in 1964 and the Western Region crisis in 1964/65. All that led to the 1966 military coup, which culminated in the civil war that ended in 1970.

Second, the period of military rule was the most remarkable period for the civil society. The period witnessed the emergence of quite a number of civil society organisations and during that period they were the main opposition to military (miss) rule and were in staunch defence of the citizens’ rights. Indeed, the civil society was at the forefront of the struggle against military dictatorship, with the support of public opinions and some foreign interests.

However, most of the analyses on the activities of the civil society by scholars are often done without separating civil society’s opposition to military rule which was the concern of all and what should be the role of civil society in a democracy i.e. standing between the state (government) and society (people). Thus, during military rule, the civil society had only one objective, i.e. to make the military quit politics which was the wish of every Nigerian. Therefore, there was little or no need to embark on
mobilization before Nigerians recognised that. Also, there was tacit support by foreign interests, which provided the impetus for opposition to military rule.

But under democratic rule, civil society is to ensure the following from the state, effectiveness, accountability, efficiency, prompt response to citizens’ needs, human rights, rule of law and constitutionalism.

Third, the four-year period of the Second Republic (1979-1983) was a short military/civilian interregnum which was too short a period for civil society to make any meaningful impact.

Fourth, the activities of civil society organisations during democracy i.e. the Fourth Republic, from 1999 now deserve some attention. As the military is no more in power with their obnoxious laws, civil society organisations should be more visible and play their expected roles.

This paper therefore, focuses on Civil Society, Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria between 1999 and 2012. The paper begins by looking at the idea of civil society both in the liberal and radical perspectives, its emergence and relevance to society. Then civil society and democracy is analysed with emphasis on the challenge of civil society in a liberal democracy. Next, the paper examines civil society and good governance in Nigeria, against the background of incohesive dominant class and crisis of hegemony. In conclusion, the paper attempts to look at the crisis of the Nigerian state, as a problem with democratization and good governance and the challenges faced by the civil society.

2. The Idea of Civil Society

The term, civil society, from the ancient through the modern times has several uses and has always stood for different ideas with various interpretations (Seligman, 1992: Herbeson, 1994: Kasfir, 1998: Hall, 1995). In the classical period, the concept meant a regime that was committed to secure the rule of law on behalf of the common good, and the common good meant the provision of basic rights, public safety, education, system of communication and roads. (DeLue, 2002). Thus, civil society was synonymous with good society or a political association governing social conflict through the imposition of rules that restrained citizens from harming one another (Edwards, 2004). Again, civil society stands somewhere between a state with the power of legitimate coercion and a host of autonomous social groups and associations that are bound to manifest their obligation to their members (Johari, 2006: Seligman, 1992).

Civil society, in its specific meaning, excludes those groups that belong to the market place and the state and those groups that are interested in acquiring political power, which is why political parties are not usually, included among civil society organizations (Rooy, 2008). In other words, civil society acts as a buffer against the power of the central government and in that role encourages an atmosphere
that allows various groups to follow their own courses without the fear of central government intrusions (DeLue, 2002)

However, civil society is not the same as society. While society stands for the entire social practices and interactions, both public (government) and private (governed), which mark a collectivity, civil society is the public sphere of society, the mediation level, between the private and the public or between individual experiences and public articulation (Chandhoke, 1995).

From the above, civil society can be interpreted to mean two broad ideas. First, it can be interpreted to mean a kind of social order that involves the widest possible political participation and ensuring political accountability of the rulers to the ruled. Under this situation, a regime of civil society is undoubtedly committed to secure the rule of law on behalf of the common good making civil society to be a social value. Thus, as a social value, it is a kind of well-behaved society that we want to live in and, the goal for our political and social efforts creating an ideal society that is trustful, tolerant, and cooperative, including all conditions that are held to be universal and to be universally good. In other words, civil society here means, a historical moment, either a real or idealized description of society that exists when a set of prerequisites was in place (Rooy 2008).

The other broad idea describes civil society as a space that exists between the national government and the individual, the space that consists of a variety of different groups and associations, each of which is dedicated to upholding certain values and to achieve particular ends. In its simplest form therefore, civil society is seen as the “third sector,” distinct from government and business, (CSI, 2003) i.e. those intermediary institutions like professional groups, religious groups, labour unions, citizen advocacy organizations that give voice to various sectors of society and enrich public participation in democracy. In this sense, civil society refers to different forms of associations, often called voluntary groups such as families, religion organizations, trade unions, self-help groups, charitable organizations, private clubs, and so on (DeLue, 2002).

It is against this background that civil society is seen as:

That set of diverse non-governmental institutions, which is strong enough to counterbalance the state, and, whilst not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and being an arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent the state from dominating and atomizing the rest of society (Hall, 1995).

Thus, civil society can mean both a social value and a set of social institutions. It can mean a political society with active citizens shaping its institutions and policies. It can also mean a bridge between society and polity.
In this paper, we shall focus on civil society as those organizations which exist outside the formal structures of government power. Thus civil society in this sense acts as a buffer against large corporate powers just as it acts as a buffer against the power of the central government. It is against this background that civil society is described as the “third sector”. (CSI, 2003)

The idea of civil society either as a social value or the third sector comprising free organizations has always been linked with methods of government. This is why civil society is related to democracy and liberalism. For example, Montesquieu clearly believed, from a theoretical perspective, that civil society should function as a counterbalance to governments in order to inhibit their tyrannical tendencies (Harbeson, 1994). In other words, civil society exists for the curtailment and containment of the powers of the state and its struggle is for a limited state shapers (Johari 2006). Indeed, the idea of civil society had featured in classical philosophy as it continues to appear in modern political essays. Thus, it has become a concept that has engaged both the liberal and radical scholars.

3. The Liberal Idea of Civil Society

The breakdown of feudalism led to the growth of the capitalist society and the emergence of liberalism. Thus, the aspirations of the middle class in the capitalist society reflected in liberalism, and ever since, liberalism and capitalism have been linked (Fine, 1978: Onimode, 1981: Luxemburg, 1965.) In other words, liberalism reinforces the capitalist ideology by attacking absolutism and feudal privileges. However, from the classical through the modern, liberalism espouses individualism, freedom, equality, consent and tolerance because the liberal goal is to construct a society within which individuals can flourish and develop (Heywood, 2002). Consequently, liberalism promotes civil liberties of the individual, including freedom of thought and expression, freedom of association and movement and personal freedom.

In the liberal view of society, the main objective is to promote respect for the diversity of values and ways of life in society (DeLue, 2006). Again, in the liberal conception of political organization, civil society becomes crucial because freedom, tolerance and equity with the right of expression and opinion can only be sustained as the pillars of democracy if the citizens are prepared to challenge totalitarianism and authoritarianism, the obvious negation of democracy, through the civil society activities.

Civil society therefore stands for an alternative way of bringing together, the social and the political, the public and the private, outside of the state, which may stand for constitutional power that is more effective than some other social agents of political change, (Drake 2010). Also, Feirlback (1998) argued that the idea of civil society is firmly rooted in liberal political thought. Thus, western countries and their institutions, like the IMF and World Bank believe that civil society is a means of encouraging liberal values like due process and the accountability of the state to the public.
That is why liberalism posits that totalitarianism is one of the opposites of civil society (Arendt, 1951). And both Rousseau and Kant argue that people are peace lovers and therefore civil society becomes effective in guarding against the domination of a single interest and checking the tyranny of the majority (Alagappa, 2004). Rooy (2008), believed that civil society exists as an agent of change to cure a range of social and economic ills left by failure in government or the market place, autocracy, poverty, oppression and, some malaise. Consequently, civil society promises a solution to the enduring problem of development and democracy, which can be achieved through the separation of the state and society, as a central feature of any democratic political order. And this is because, a civil society permits limited role of the state coupled with states accountability to the society (Johari, 2006.).

However, to the liberals, civil society is between the state and society while the radicals see the civil society as residing at the base where productive activities take place and the state belongs to the superstructure.

4. The Radical Idea of Civil Society

Marxism believes that civil society is at the base where productive activities take place and the political society is the superstructure (Marx, 1970). Although, to Marxism, there is a link between capitalism and civil society, the latter represents the interests of the bourgeoisie much as the state represents the interests of the dominant capitalist class. Consequently, Marxism has a negative view of civil society which it views as part of the bourgeois society with emphasis only on economic life which everyone pursues but in the process becomes alienated (Das, 2009).

Thus, contrary to the position of the liberals, the radicals believe that civil society is with the idea of universal equality without regard for actually existing inequalities, as though public debate can be equal even if there is disparity in the level of material resources available to different individuals and groups (Drake 2010).

Marxism may not be far from reality because if the objective of liberal civil society is to restrain the government from excessive use of coercive power on the citizens, but the problem of domination remains and the market still exists where the bourgeoisie alienate the people and appropriate surplus, then the claim by liberal civil society will be futile. In effect, the civil society becomes irrelevant if all the bourgeois laws that oppress the people are permitted and the market is allowed to determine the quality of life of the people.

Thus, to the Marxists, civil society operates in a discredited bourgeois system which sanctions exploitation of workers in the midst of inequality (Johari, 2006). To Marxism, whoever is dissatisfied with society should seek to change it (Bottomore, 1961, 1976: Blackburn, 1978: Giddens, 1982, 1972). Thus, all Marxists would favour an immediate and fundamental change in the society and not creating
associations with the aim of checking the powers of government and allowing individuals to pursue their passions by permitting the structures of the society, which they claim to recent, to continue to dehumanize the people.

Gramsci, (1978.), believed that civil society belongs to the political superstructure where it plays the crucial role of contributing to the cultural and ideological capital for the survival of the hegemony of capitalism (Ehrenberg, 1999).

Bratton (1994) therefore, argued that because civil society manufactures political content, it is the source of the legitimating of state power and also serves the hegemonic function of justifying state domination.

However, Gramsci said that the role of the civil society assists in both political and economic control of the people by the state (dominant class) in the sense that, the subordinate classes are kept in their cooperation and collaboration with the state (Gramsci, 1978). Thus, civil societies participate in political game where participation only legitimize the existing regime (Have 1988). This sense is demonstrated by civil society not challenging the hegemony of capitalism but allowing the same brutal capitalist state to have so much influence in every sphere of society.

However ( Gramsci 1978) saw some critical role which civil society could perform and he said that civil society could be the site for challenging the existing values and inculcating new ones in counter hegemonic struggle against capitalism (Edwards, 2004).

5. Civil Society and Democracy

Democracy, as a problematic, is very obvious in comparative politics and so it is contentious. Bernard Crick, (1982) said democracy was perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs. And both the liberals and Marxists have different meanings of the concept of democracy (Baradat, 1984: Barry, 1981: Penneock, 1979: Macpherson, 1986). However, there is a common ground in all the ideas of democracy and that is that democracy, in general, implies the rule of the people (Johari, 2006).

In the liberal idea, democracy is characterized by individual rights and freedoms which are constitutionally guaranteed and the activities of the various parties including the opposition parties as well as of the mass public organizations are allowed. Again, representative organs are determined in general elections with the population enjoying suffrage; where democracy primarily is to provide the conditions for the free development of human capacities and to do this equally for all members of the society (C.B Macpherson, 1986).

However, the radicals see liberal democracy as ignoring the economic needs of the people to the point where any effort at real democracy is destroyed. This is because the radicals see a democratic
system as one where, in addition to conventional liberal political rights, there exists a considerable measure of collective action to create social and economic equality and free people from economic bondage to an ownership class (Baradat, 1984).

Today, liberal democracy enjoys near-universal appeal and is regarded as the ideal system of government. Thus, liberal democracy is a form of government by means of which citizens, through open and free institutional arrangements, are empowered to choose and remove leaders in a competitive struggle for the people's vote (Shalendra, 2007). And, a truly representative democratic government must be based on the principles of popular sovereignty; competitive political participation and representation; an independent judiciary; free, fair and regular elections, universal suffrage; freedom of expression and conscience; the universal right to form political association and participate in the political community inclusive citizenship and adherence to the constitution and the rule of law (Robert Dahl, 1971; Arendt Lijphart, 1984).

According to (AmartyaSen, 2001) democracies enrich individual lives through the granting of political and civil rights, and do a better job in improving the welfare of the poor, compared to alternative political systems. Therefore, democracies, unlike authoritarian regimes, offer a better long term protection of property rights as well as individual and collective freedoms. In any democracy therefore, important decisions or questions of law and policy depend, directly or indirectly upon public opinion, formally expressed by citizens, the majority of whom have equal political rights. Democracy is therefore, meaningful to the extent that people participate in the political process, i.e. selecting their leaders and representatives, voicing opinions on policy and ensuring that leaders follow procedure in the process of governance. Perhaps, this is why Pericles said that democracy implies “a system in which people are powerful” (Cited in Johari, 2006), while Aristotle held that democracy means the rule of the many.

Consequently, civil society is relevant in a democracy to safeguard citizens’ rights, because liberal democracy grants each citizen the right to express his passion for his interest, and pursue the interest with passion. But by the nature of the capitalist society, the state, which arose from the irreconcilable differences between the social classes, always acts in defence of the social order. Thus, laws in a capitalist society must necessarily reflect the values of the capitalist class and in that case, citizens are at the mercy of the dominant capitalist class with the government and its coercive powers on the side of the capitalists. Also, the liberal democratic state is not for the furtherance of the interests of all. And in spite of its own pretensions, the state functions, not in the interest of all, but in the interest of the dominant capitalist class of which its welfare and not that of all is it’s raise d’être.

Thus, Haynes (1996: 106 - 107) argued that the primary function of civil society is that of maintaining a "check on the power of the state" or serving as "citizens" curb on the power of the state. On the issue of roles of civil society Maclean et al, (2001) argues that non state actors (Civil Society)
serve as a vital instrument for containing the power of democratic government, checking their potential abuses and violations of the law and subjecting them to public scrutiny under an authoritarian regime and therefore, support to civil society can be one of the most effective methods for the establishment of democracy

Maraming (2006) believed that civil society is a pillar of any democracy, the conscience of government, and the overseer of governmental actions. In that sense, it precedes the judiciary as the vanguard of citizens’ freedom and the protector of their liberties, which makes the civil society a necessity in a democracy.

Thus, in order to guarantee the above and prevent the government from being a maximum ruler, that public sphere, the third sector that stands between the state (government) and society (people) needs to be active and agile.

If democracy means popular participation in the political process, a political system that grants citizens the right to freely choose their leaders and replace their government peacefully, then democracy cannot survive, if a public sphere or political society (civil society) is not recognized (Nnoli, 1994).

Indeed, we need the civil society organizations if we are desirous of domesticating democracy and are ready for democratic consolidation. This is a way by which active popular participation will be achieved and it is also a way by which the revitalization of social institutions that are needed to nurture democracy will be promoted.

6. Civil Society and Good Governance

We have linked civil society to democracy and to the larger society from both the liberal and radical perspectives, arguing that for the government to perform its basic functions and ensure that there is good governance the civil society must check on the government. But what is good governance and how do we measure it?

Narrowly defined, governance means the process of the exercise of political power in managing the affairs of state. In a broader sense, good governance refers to the various processes about how leadership is engaged in policy making, in determining how power is exercised to embody transparency, accountability and rational and prudent resource management.

Good governance has recently been accorded a central place in the discourse on development. It is being argued that without an appropriate governance structure, developing countries will not be able to either sustain economic growth or a momentum towards rapid poverty reduction (The World Development Report, 2004). This has been the conclusions of a number of research studies trying to figure out why, despite resource allocation and good policies, broad improvements in human welfare,
have not led to improvements in social services, freedom from hunger, illness, illiteracy. (Aisha – Ghaus Pasha, 2005).

The World Bank as the chief engineer of the good governance agenda, defines it as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development. The key components of good governance, according to the Bank include effectiveness and efficiency in public sector management, accountability and good responsiveness of public officials to the citizens, rule of law and public access to information and transparency. (World Bank, 1992b, 3; 1994, VIII).

The above definitions make governance a process, i.e. the exercise of power, a process of exercising authority and appropriating resources. Again, the UNDP defines governance as the “complex mechanism process, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences” (The World Development Report, 2004). Once again, the above definition makes governance a process in the distribution and appropriation of resources as well as in the management of the affairs of the citizens.

Good governance has some dimensions, according to (Diamond, 2005). It must entail the capacity of the state to function well in the service of the public good, and must be committed to the public good. Indeed, good governance must be transparent in the activities of government and this includes transparency on how government makes decisions, conduct business and spends public funds. Good governance also requires that rulers must abide by the rule of law and be accountable to the people. Indeed, good governance must entail the mechanism for peaceful conflict resolution, for it is a bad government that results to violence in resolving conflict. In peaceful resolution of conflict, such parameters like justice, fairness and equity must be demonstrated. Other elements of good governance include: the cultivation of citizens capacities, public Opinion and judgment, freely flowing information, individual rights and protections, institutional checks and balances, multiple venues for making collective decisions and organizing collective actions.

According to Warren, (1999), the notion of good governance can be disaggregated into three complementary domains to which the various associative venues of civil society might contribute. These include:

• Developing, forming, enhancing and supporting capacities of individuals for self- governance,
• Constituting the social infrastructure of public spheres that provide information, develop agendas, test ideas, represent distinctions and provide voice ,
• Supporting and enhancing institutions of democratic governance by providing political representation, enabling pressure and resistance, organizing collective actions, and serving as alternative venues for governance.
In summary, good governance has been described as participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It also ensures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (UNESCAP, 2008)

Thus, it is clear that governance is a process of decision-making and the process of implementing decisions. Therefore, the outcome of the process, in terms of the quality of life of the people and in the way the rulers amicably partner with the people, is what defines good or bad governance. And while good governance promotes better welfare for the people, resulting in growth, development and prosperity, bad governance accounts for the roots of most of the ills within the society.

Since governance is a process of decision-making, it means that some actors are involved. And in any society, government is the principal actor while other actors include institutions, influential land lords (capitalists), peasants, religious leaders, political parties etc. From the above, all the actors that are involved in the process of governance can be grouped into three, the government, the people and the civil society. And of critical importance is the civil society which can enhance good governance by means of advocacy role and by addressing unidentified, unaddressed problems and bringing to public attention. The advocacy role performed by these groups will help to bring the issues to the public spotlight. In addition, civil society can provide information that is vital for the development of policies that are appropriate to the community which the policy is to serve and also serving as watchdogs. In addition, civil society can apply pressure on the government to ensure the appropriate policies are enacted and implemented.

Although, it can be argued that good governance is an ideal, but in order to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards the ideal and this is why, in a liberal capitalist society, the activities of civil society become essential.

7. Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria

The idea that a link exists between democracy and good governance is not new. But what is the link?

First, democracy is most meaningful with regular free and fair elections which enable the people to choose their representatives and by so doing the people can hold their rulers accountable and replace a non performing government. In addition, electoral democracy creates the opportunity for the people to monitor and also express their policy preference. Thus, (Diamond, 2005) argued that there are five basic dimensions of liberal democracy viz free and fair election (political competition) extensive public
freedoms of speech, press, information association, assembly and movement; broad participation; the responsiveness of elected officials to the needs and concerns of society; and a high degree of political equality and citizens. And again, to (Diamond, 2005) good governance consists of several dimensions, some of which are, the capacity of the state of function the commitment of elected officials to the public good; transparency, accountability; the rule of laws and well established mechanism for conflict resolution. Thus democracy impacts positively on good governance as a result of the empowerment enjoyed by citizens through the instrumentalities of (dimensions) democracy to make good governance achievable.

Consequently, democratic tenants such as regular free and fair elections will make citizens to replace a non performing government that is responsible for bad governance; freedom will create the willingness in citizens to express themselves and force the government to explain issues and then be more accountable.

Democratic tenants therefore engender good governance and good governance will ensure proper management of the interaction of the three mechanisms, the market, the state and civil society that will promote growth and development (Elsenhans, 2001).

Thus, to what extent has Nigeria been able to practice democracy and enjoy good governance with the necessary social pre-requisites for democratic governance, in the past thirteen years?

Except for the conduct of the four general elections, (1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011) which results were highly disputed and contested by opposition parties and protested by the electorates, on each occasion; and having a national assembly that was composed of “elected” representatives, there is very little to show for democracy in Nigeria. It has been argued that the vertical electoral dimension of democracy is not enough (Diamond, 2005), democratic tenets must be demonstrated in order for a country to qualify for good democratic performance.

One of the essential elements of liberal democracy is the right of the citizens to freely elect their leaders, hold their leaders accountable and replace the government in case of poor performance. In this case, Nigeria has been performing so badly, that citizens have now lost confidence in elections as a result of extensive rigging, violence and fraud that plagued all the general elections since 1999. For example, out of 28 states where the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) ‘won’ the governorship elections in April 2007, eleven of the results were nullified by the Election Petition Tribunals. Out of the eleven nullified elections, three governorship candidates from the opposition parties were declared the winners and sworn in as governors by the Appeal Court, while there were re-runs of elections in six states.

At present, there is no one area of social life in which civilian government has made a strong and remarkable impression of change on Nigerians. From accountability to human rights, to popular participation in governance, from rule of law to welfare of citizens, the last thirteen years of civil rule is
but governance as usual. So, in terms of nurturing democracy, it is doubtful if what we have in Nigeria today is what we should nurture. Indeed, it can be argued that rather than talk of democratic consolidation, we should be talking of democratization of attitudes, processes, and institutions. And this is precisely because Nigeria is yet to evolve a democracy that should be consolidated, which will be characterised by individual rights and freedoms, popular participation, rule of law, free and fair elections with political equality among citizens.

And for good governance, the picture spells only gloom because the essence of democracy is to have good governance but where democratic principles are being truncated, as the case now in Nigeria, then good governance becomes farfetched.

Since 1999, Nigeria has been witnessing unprecedented degree of corruption among state officials. Out of six senate leaders from 1999, three have been impeached on account of corruption. Two speakers of the house of assembly have also lost their positions for fraudulent practices and 12 among the 36 governors, between 1999 and 2012, have appeared before the Economic and Financial Crime commission (EFCC) for embezzlement. Between 2003 and 2007, three serving governors were removed from office on account of stealing public funds.

In terms of the welfare of the citizens, the performance of Nigeria is below expectations. Today inflation is running at two digits with consequential effects on the quality of life of the citizens. The naira exchange rate in 1999 was $1 to N85, while in May 2007, it was $1 to N120 and by 2012, it had further depreciated to $1 to N160. The country still records very high unemployment rate. Today, infrastructural decay has reduced economic capacity to less than 30%, as the economy is now generator driven because public electricity has virtually grounded. Recently, the Minister of State for power declared that at least 120 million Nigerians; out of an estimated population of 160 million do not have access to electricity (The Guardian, June, 2013)

If commitment to public good by efficient delivery of service to the people for the enhancement of the citizens’ welfare is what defines good governance, then the last thirteen years has witnessed nothing but bad governance which breeds social ills in society. And indeed there has been an upsurge of armed robbery, ethnic violence, and regional militancy, kidnapping, increased rate of corruption, inefficient and corrupt Police Force and decaying infrastructures.

The above description of democracy and good governance in Nigeria from 1999 to 2012 is certainly not cheering, but how do we account for this situation?

8. The Nigerian State, Democracy and Good Governance

As it appears in Nigeria, democracy is more or less a sham while good governance is still long in coming. In all this, we cannot understand the problem without understanding the nature and character
of the Nigerian state. And this is because we cannot understand democracy or good governance without delving into the issue of who exercises power of the state in the first place. Thus, the poor performance of Nigeria with regard to democracy and good governance makes the nature of the state a critical factor. Therefore we shall put in perspective the nature of the dominant class, whose interest the state represents.


We shall start our description of the Nigerian state with its condition immediately after independence. Thus, at independence, we had a social formation which originated from colonialism and which was very unstable because the dominant class was in factions. Again, the central power of post-independent social formation did not enjoy a general consensus in terms of legitimacy. Consequently, we had a weak state authority that could not subordinate all the peripheral ethnic formations. And the reason for this was because the Nigerian social formation had not sufficiently developed well defined class structures. In other words, at independence there was no clear-cut alignment of all the class forces, which meant that state formation process was rudimentary (Fadakinte, 2002).

One of the consequences of the above was the inability of the fragmented dominant class to institute hegemonic process, which will be the way the dominant class will maintain a dominant culture through the use of social institutions to formalize power. The dominant class became in-cohesive because of unequal distribution of resources and the struggle for economic power which tear them into factions. So, we now have this bellicosity, arising from the struggle by the factions of the dominant class, manifesting the serious crisis of the Nigerian state. Consequently, the Nigerian society is fraught with crises, which makes the state to assume a violent character, while leaders follow no procedure and they become lawless (Fadakinte, 2013). The citizens then suffer repression and arbitrariness because of the immensity of the state as there is no rule of law. Therefore, the disorganized dominant class cannot acquire and exercise legitimate power or leadership, because they are bereft of meaningful and relevant ideas, necessary to grow and consolidate a democratic order, which will be devoid of uncertainty, poverty and corruption. Thus, the Nigerian state cannot function as the institution to engineer and implement development objectives and therefore cannot even perform a basic function of providing security needs of the citizens.

In Nigeria, therefore, democracy is not beyond elections because the dominant class equates elections to democracy and therefore cannot distinguish civil rule from democratic rule. In addition, because the state is weak, it cannot implement democracy as a class project. Consequently, democracy
does not have any meaning to the dominant class, and they cannot democratize the polity and also cannot ensure good governance, good governance that ought to be the ultimate of democracy, based on openness, transparency, accountability, tolerance, freedom and equality, through popular, free and fair elections.

9. Civil Society and Good Governance in Nigeria

How can the civil society be related to good governance in Nigeria, or how does the civil society relate to the state in Nigeria?

But first, how can we describe the civil society in Nigeria? Or put differently, what type of civil society do we find in Nigeria? We need to note that the nature and character of the civil society is determined by the nature and character of the state therefore, the Nigerian state being an emerging one also reflects the emerging nature of a democratic civil society in Nigeria. Then, it will not be impertinent to refer to the civil society in Nigeria as emergent.

Consequently, the civil society in Nigeria cannot be described as being part of the state (bourgeois) again the state (radical) support or in partnership with the state (liberal) (Chambers and Kopstein, 2008).

Indeed, that is why the mode of actions of the civil society in Nigeria is devoid of critical engagement, either in participation i.e. a willingness to take the risk of retaliation on repugnant state polices/actions. Or in voicing dissent and criticism or even taking a strong opposing side on public policies that do not favour the ordinary citizens (Egbe, 2004).

Thus, the civil society in Nigeria is very weak, very reactive, lacking in organisation and tactics and therefore does not possess that overbearing influence on government. They possess very weak capacity for mobilisation and cannot sustain long period of protest. In Nigeria, today, majority of the citizens doubt the representative capacity of the civil society, making them wonder on whether or not the civil society can represent the society, against the state. And this is because on very critical issues the civil society will be found wanting. For example, the problem of corruption which has reached and crisis level is enough a problem the civil society ought to have taken up with the state.

However, relating civil society activities to good governance in Nigeria leaves a conclusion that reflects the nature of the civil society itself i.e. an emergent (inertia) sector in an emerging state. This is reflected in the declined manner the sector attacked the military.

And this is quite unfortunate, because it is like the civil society assumes that democracy means just civil rule. Indeed, the civil society should realize that civil rule is not the same as democratic rule because democracy is beyond elections. The critical role of civil society is to limit the state i.e. the promotion and defence of the constitution, rule of law, enhancement of the integrity and efficacy of the
democratic institutions (Rooy, 2008). In a capitalist society, the market obviously dominates with its most cherished values being materialism and utilitarianism while other values that are critical to human development, such as spiritual, moral and intellectual are relegated. Civil society must always endeavour to promote the relegated values.

Thus, in terms of ideology and philosophy most segment of the civil society in Nigeria is lacking in this primary identity. The relevant goals cannot be achieved if activities of the civil society are not guided by ideology and philosophy.

In Nigeria, many civil society groups are deficient in effectiveness and therefore are not able to play the role of key agents because of the challenges they face. For example, the trade unions and student union organizations which are expected to be active and agile and even militant are highly vulnerable to cooptation by the state (politics). For example, Mr. Adams Oshiomhole the former President of the Nigerian Labour Congress is today a State Governor. His deputy in office, Mr. Joseph Akinlaja is a member of the House of Representatives. Mr. Peter Akpatason, former President of NUPENG, is in the House of Assembly.

The current Minister of Information, Mr. Labaran Makun was a student union leader at the University of Jos, Mr. Frank Nweke, a former Minister of Information was also a student union leader at the University of Ibadan, while the current Minister of Interior, Mr. Aba Moro was a leading comrade as the General Secretary of the Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees. Dr. Reuben Abati, who was the chairman of the editorial board of the Guardian Newspapers and the anchor person for the *Pattito Gang*, a popular television program of public opinion, is now a Special Adviser on Media to President Good luck Jonathan. Mr. Segun Adeniyi, a fearless columnist in the This Day Newspapers served as Special Adviser on Media to late President Umaru Yar’ adua.

Dr. Patrick Utomi, who established a civil society organization, *Value for Leadership*, contested the presidential elections in 2003 and 2007 but lost on both occasions. Suppose Dr. Utomihad won any of the elections, what would become of *Value for Leadership*, to be antagonizing the President (founder)?

However, the following questions become pertinent. What are the above individuals doing in politics, when they were known to be protagonist actors in the third sector? Today, these individuals are either in politics or are part of state structures, oppressing those Nigerians they once claimed they were defending. Thus, does it mean that they used the third sector space as a platform to get into politics or be co-opted into the state? Or does it mean that while facing the state during military regimes, as civil society actors, they did not understand what they were doing in terms of the underlying ideology and philosophy of their activities?

Thus, lack of well-articulated ideology and philosophy is today a critical deficit with the civil society in Nigeria. In addition, the sector is organizationally too weak and financially poor and is
therefore not able to embark on meaningful mobilization. Indeed, the sector lacks the leadership, structure and method to do so.

Let us look at two serious problems to which the civil society ought to have reacted by embarking on public protests to demonstrate its opposition and enlighten the citizens.

First, opposition to the massive rigging that characterized the three general elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007, ought to be expressed beyond newspaper condemnation. Election rigging and violence are serious criminal offences as they rob citizens of their fundamental human right and subvert their decisions on who should rule them.

Also, election rigging has been the catalyst for violence, chaos and military rule in the past. The civil society ought to have held public demonstrations, to show its objection to the social malady and also enlighten the citizens.

Second, the degree of corruption from 1999 has been alarming, as discussed earlier. The civil society organizations should be bold enough to publicly condemn this ugly development. Indeed, the civil society should go further to enlighten the citizens by putting together what politicians have looted from the treasury since 1999. Again, the whopping sum Nigeria has realised from the sales of crude oil since 1999 should be made public by the civil society. This is a way citizens will appreciate its indignation towards corruption.

In Nigeria, the media and religious groups are supposed to be part of the critical segment of civil society. However, the media is either government owned which is used for official propaganda or they are privately owned and used for political motives or as business ventures to generate profit. Even Christian and Muslim religious leaders, who are expected to be in the third sector, were used for tax propaganda (advertisements) by the Lagos state government between, 2009/2010.

The civil society, in Nigeria, must learn to engage the state with potent discussions, public debates, media pressure and combine these with peaceful protests. And this is because, it has been argued that protest can serve as a dialogical medium between the state and civil society when conventional democratic institutions are discredited or do not function properly (Chambers and Kopstein, 2008). The civil society in Nigeria should stop waiting till government increases the price of petroleum products before coming together to condemn the inequities of government.

For example, how can the civil society be quiet at the news that assembly members have approved life pension for themselves, even if a member serves for only one term of four years. From election rigging, assassination of opposition, lack of electricity, dilapidating public structures like roads and school buildings, to mention a few, the civil society ought to come out, mobilise the citizens, not only to condemn the deterioration but also demand for improvement. Also, the near-collapse of the education system leads to a situation in which more Nigerian citizens are schooling abroad than any other country.
in Africa. All this should be enough of failures of state, inefficiency and poor performance to make the civil society mobilize the citizens and demand for improvements in social service delivery.

The civil society should wake up; articulate its philosophy on a well-defined ideology. They have been active in the past when they were fierce in their opposition to military rule. But that was during military rule when the petty bourgeoisie colluded with the military and foisted fascism on Nigeria (Olukoshi, 1996). Now, the scenario has changed and the visible civil society organisations during military rule are heard only when the government increases the price of petroleum products.

10. Conclusion

What we set out to do in this paper is to x-ray civil society, democracy and good governance in Nigeria from 1999 to 2012 and also to see how the activities of civil society, as the third sector, have been contributing to the actualisation and realisation of democracy and good governance. We have attempted to do so by first providing a basis for the three concepts by putting them in a theoretical context.

However, we have seen how the nature of the Nigerian state, occasioned by crisis, that arose from the inability of a dominant class to be cohesive, united with a common interest and implement a class ideology as class interest. The result of this chaos is what inhibits the institutionalization of hegemonic order that will create the guiding values for society. Hence, there is no state to implement a class project and therefore democracy does not have any meaning to the ruling class and so, they cannot democratize and cannot ensure good governance.

And for civil society, formidable arrays of systemic and contextual factors are responsible for the seemingly inactive civil society since the return to civil rule (Gyimah-Boadi, 2008). For example, apart from their lack of well-articulated philosophy and ideology, there is no strong private economic sector in Nigeria which makes majority of the middle class to be government employees and therefore are constrained to challenge their employers (the government). Even the small and unproductive private sector is still largely dependent on government patronage. In Nigeria today, government is the largest employer of labour and the largest spender of money. Consequently, most of the civil society actors are preoccupied with economic survival and survival in terms of protecting their jobs and are therefore too timid to engage in anti-state activities. Also, the fact that Nigeria is not in the civil society (civil society as a social value) makes it difficult for autonomous organizations to emerge and defend the people. In addition, the crises that plague the Nigerian state make it to be irrational, violent, and arbitrary and appear larger than its size. For this reason, civil society organizations sometimes become weary to confront the state.
Perhaps hope is not totally lost and because the country is under civil rule which hopefully will not be interrupted by the Military, the third sector may become more agile if civil society actors can develop the consciousness to partner with the higher institutions, both locally and abroad, where they will benefit from their intellectual and academic activities such as conferences, seminars and workshops, on the role of civil society in development and democratization.

Also, the globalization hurricane will impact on Nigeria, because with the country under civil rule and the desire of foreign countries and bodies to collaborate with Nigeria, civil society organisations will begin to receive financial, intellectual and educational supports and by consequent become more active.

References


