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**The Integral State and Construction of Hegemony: Gramsci and
Democratisation in Nigeria**

Abstract

The engagement between agents in the Nigerian state and civil society during the struggle for the end of military rule and establishment of democracy from the 1980s to the current elective civil rule fits into Gramscian war of position. Demands on military rulers to establish democratic civil rule elicited backlash from forces controlling the state. In the current post military era, entrenchment of democracy beyond institutional parameters also warrants relations of forces with either a pro-democratic or an anti-democratic agenda. In the struggle for democracy, clusters of interests operating in two broad directions of democratisation or de-democratisation seek to extend their values and control on the state. Gramsci explains this by showing the interstices and linkages between state and civil society in the process of articulating or contesting hegemony. Democratisation in itself is related to the hegemonic processes. Connecting the thesis of Antonio Gramsci to various strategies of pro-democracy groups and the corresponding effort to squelch them by contrary forces both in state and civil society, I argue that the struggle for establishment of civil rule and consolidation of democracy is a war of position.

Introduction

The trajectory of Nigeria's political development beginning from the colonial era shows struggles that consistently express aspiration for a democratic society. This was the basis of contesting colonial rule. But post-colonial form of the state also became a source of political and economic alienation of large mass of the citizens. The dominant political elite engage in two levels of exclusionary practice to maintain their position. Firstly, they use unfair rules to exclude other contending elites to power. Secondly, they sustain the structural conditions that subjugate the underclass in society. Consequently, there is struggle for the transformation of the society into a form that would guarantee democratic inclusion for all. For the elites it would be political inclusion, for the under-class, the anticipation is an end to economic alienation and creation of generalised scope for social citizenship. Gramsci finds the dialectics of this contention to be one of a tactical and strategic competition similar to positional warfare in military campaign.

Gramsci posits in the analysis of Italian and European history, that "war of position is related to the West where there is a 'proper relation between state and civil society' unlike the East (Russia) where war of manoeuvre is appropriate".(Gramsci, 1971, p. 207). He argued that war of position is the only possible form of political struggle in periods of stable equilibrium between fundamental classes when frontal attack is impossible. He saw this pattern of struggle as characteristic of the period of Italian *Risorgimento*.(Gramsci, 1971). Political struggle in Italy of that period was transitioning from physical engagements to engagements in ideas and other forms of political practice. In a similar vein, transition from authoritarian military rule in developing formations like Nigeria to elective civil rule and on-going

struggles to consolidate democracy which involve relations of social forces replicates the war of position template.

Similar to Nigeria, some African states in the early 1990's witnessed a wave of democracy movement which ended in mixed outcomes. It led to the end of unpopular and mostly one party regimes in Cape Verde, Niger, Malagasy, Zambia and Mali. However, other entrenched personalist rulers captured this democratic fervour by either over-riding the conferences with use of force as in Togo or tactically circumventing democratic movements by introducing superficial political changes as in Gabon. In Congo DR (former Zaire), Ghana, Burkina Faso, the incumbent leaders mobilized state resources to rig elections that followed national conference deliberations.(Ake, 2003). The democratic forces were simply out-manoeuvred by the dominant interests in the political war of position.

Similar uprisings in the North of Sahara and other parts of the Arab world since late 2010 are combinations of war of position and war of movement. In all, the core challenge of democratisation in Africa is that peripheral institutional changes stymie the intensity of mass demand for democracy. This is simply a tactical game by dominant political forces in positional warfare.

Gramscian thesis is found significant in the analysis of newly democratising formations because it focuses the dynamics that could explain why the institutions of multi party rule which usually results from democracy movements are not always linked with norms that serve democratic ends. In interrogating the Nigerian case, this paper addresses the theory of the integral state and war of position. It continues with discourses on state and civil society. Further it examines the partition of the political field by contending social forces during the struggle to end military rule. It also explores how the political field is bifurcated in the post military era. The conclusion synthesizes these engagements in the light of the dialectics of the integral state, hegemony and democratisation.

The Integral State and War of Position

The integral state is a broad concept which accounts for state beyond institutional parameters. In Gramscian terms:

the general notion of state includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society [in the sense that one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion]. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 263).

Gramsci's integral state establishes the organic connection between civil society and the government. He meant to show that these two sites are terrains populated by clusters of interests. Interest-bearing agents in state and civil society reinforce one another while undermining contrary ones in the same terrain. Such configuration of forces in the executive state is not usually pronounced apart from moments of major division between governing elements. The more visible struggles are usually those fought by actors of similar interest in state and civil society united against opposing forces in the same sites.

Accordingly, state and civil society make up the integral state and terrain of political action (political field). It is in this field that struggles which frame the form of society is fought with deployment of strategies by each group to achieve advantage. Each shade of interests frame their ideas about the best plan for society in a manner to attract maximum mass appeal so that domination under the kind of social plan they project would take place with minimum

recourse to force. In that case, the most common form in which political practice is designed is that which purports to create political democracy. This is why even dictatorial regimes lay claim to democracy or plans to institute the same. The rationale for this is that when domination is framed with popular acceptance, hegemony is attained. In effect, articulations and practices associated with democratisation is basically a hegemonic process.

In the context of democratisation, social forces operate in two dialectical directions. To achieve outcomes that represent their interests, they engage in strategic games for ascendancy. This process, likened to a war of position is the tactical and strategic political manoeuvres in the integral state between contrary forces all aimed at construction, consolidation or displacement hegemony. (See Gramsci, 1971). This formulation is Gramsci's extension of dialectical heritage drawn from Hegel and Marx to the analysis of political struggle for hegemony.

Hegel's dialectical progression used the principle of transcendence of stages of development and retention of some elements of preceding stages in higher forms of development. (Hegel, 1977). This dialectical logic also reflects in Marx's theory of mode of production in which later modes retain elements of preceding ones. In Gramsci's usage, War of Movement and Underground warfare are associated with direct combat strategies that precede war of position which is largely not a direct combat strategy but may at certain instances manifest elements of it. (Gramsci, 1971). The terrain for military manoeuvre is the battle field but the site of campaign for political war of position according to Gramsci is the integral state. The struggles for the end of authoritarian military rule and establishment of elective civilian democracy in Nigeria were fought in the terrains of state and civil society. The centrality of these sites to the process of democratisation invites a review of major discourses regarding their interaction.

Discourses on State and Civil society

Three broad strands of discourses may be isolated on state-civil society dialectics regarding democracy project. One is a brand of interpretation linked with Hegel. The second is the Tocquevillean school while the third is the Gramscian school.

The Hegelian notion which sees the state as the universality tends to suggest that the state is the core determining sphere in the society. (Hegel, 2001). His sense of dialectical evolution of the state is that at the end, it assumes a concrete form in a constitutional government. Human needs throw up necessities that the state has to deal with via regulation. The state cedes this regulation to the terrain of civil society. This terrain based on Hegel's notion owes its existence to the state and has to exist in an organic relationship with it. It is a site of particular interests that must submit to that of the universality as a requirement of ethical harmony between itself and the sphere of state.

Hegelian ethical system tends to project the state as an over-arching ethical regulator of the civil society. Thus, Hegel seemed to ignore the salience of human agency in framing these structures and their forms. It is human agency and dynamics of democratisation that generates support or oppositional engagements with the state through forces in the sphere

of civil society. Therefore eruptions from groups that culminate in popular democracy movements undermine this thesis because the state form is determined by the process.

The over-bearing image of the Hegelian state is the basis of critiques from Hobhouse (1993), Popper (1962), Bongmba (2006) who accuse Hegel of constituting an epistemology of authoritarian systems. On the contrary, Lukacs (1975) denies that Hegel was a precursor of authoritarian politics. However, Hegel's theory is built on idealistic ethics where political practice is regulated by a God-like state which would create ethical norms for democratic freedom. Thus he obscured what Lukacs finds as the authentic meaning of Hegelian state theory. This is expressed more recently by Durst (2005) when he illustrated structural parallels between Hegel's concept of the Ethical and Gramsci's theme of hegemony. He posits that Hegel hoped for a "fundamental sense of order' rooted in the 'habit of the ethical' that promises to organise unhesitating consent of the collective".(Durst, 2005, p. 1). However, political formations that accumulated powers in an all-powerful determining state perhaps, based on wrong interpretation of Hegel, led to the rise of fascist and authoritarian states in Europe. The Nigerian state in the long years of military rule spanning twenty nine years fits into the authoritarian model. This form of the state is a product of configuration of forces in the integral state.

The second variant of interpretation on state and civil society is the set of articulations that find civil society as a countervailing force which prevents the state from becoming undemocratic. This view was popularized by Tocqueville who thinks that associations provide the basis of maintenance of democracy. For him, individuals in association "are no longer isolated individuals, but a power conspicuous from a distance...when it speaks men listen".(De Tocqueville, 2003, p. 125). Hence he sees civil society as a place where popular feelings are articulated, including democratic aspirations.

Similarly, Kant's moral philosophy believes in public use of reason in enlightened discourses which leads to democratic emergence of the better argument.(See DeLue & Dale, 2009). But Kant obscures the possibility that such platforms could equally undermine democracy. Kantian thesis finds a challenge in Foucault's critique of discourse formations because discourses are not value free. (1997). This debunks Kantian norms of discourse and categorical imperative and its more recent incarnation in Habermas' (1987) communicative rationality. Based on Foucauldian critique, defining a certain form of norm for civil society tends to privilege the actors that formulated it. The nature of civil society is rightly settled by Delue and Dale (2009) with the note that civil society must include diversity of voices, perhaps some confrontational or even subversive.

Thoughts on democratisation in Africa and particularly Nigeria reproduce the thesis that civil society is all democratising. This interpretation fails to account for groups in the civil society that support undemocratic state forms.

The third set of interpretations of state and civil society in the context of democratisation draws from Gramsci's theory of the state. He identifies two superstructural levels. One of the levels he said "... can be called 'civil society' that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called the 'private' and that of the 'political society' or 'the state'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which dominant group

exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the state and 'juridical' government". (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). This conceptualisation encapsulates the state both as government and the forces outside the terrain of direct exercise of power which have relevance in determining the form and character of political rule.

Essentially ruling interests collaborate in the executive state and civil society to maintain political rule while contrary interests try to extend their values and interests to the apparatus of government. Each of the competing groups seeks to generalize their interests as the objective public interest. In this connection, civil society may be seen in relation to Gramsci's thesis as:

a sphere of class struggles and of popular democratic struggles. Thus it is a sphere in which a dominant social group organises consent and hegemony. It is also the sphere where the subordinate social groups may organise opposition and construct alternative hegemony – a counter hegemony. (Simon, 1991, p. 27).

The agency that bears the role of this sphere is the intellectual who either seeks to objectify the existing social practices or construct alternative ones. The kind of context that civil society provides makes it "a market place of ideas, where intellectuals enter as 'salesmen' of contending cultures". (Bates, 1975, p. 353). Hence, interests organised in civil society may actually support democratic or undemocratic ends in contesting or reinforcing the executive state.

The above concept captures Nigeria and other formations in which democratic forces contend with contrary forces located in both the executive state and civil society. Accordingly, Mamdani (1990) argues that:

forces within civil society penetrate the state differentially, just as the state power reinforces certain social interests and undermines others. Not only is the struggle between social forces found within society and telescoped inside the state, it shapes the very character of state power. (cited in Sjorgren, 1998, p. 9).

This formulation reflects Gramscian thesis and offers a lead to the dialectical divide in the integral state between actors for democratisation and those for de-democratisation in Nigeria's democracy project.

Interests and partition of the political field in the Struggle to End Military Rule

The struggle to end military rule partitioned the political field between votaries of the status quo and those committed to democratic transformation of the state. This could be gleaned in the encounter between social forces in three important contexts of relations in the political field during the military rule namely: the press, the organised labour, human rights and democracy activist groups.

Positional warfare in the context of the press took place in the form of publications that exposed violations of civilized standards of conduct by the military regime. This is one of the methods of increasing international opprobrium for an authoritarian regime. (Stepan, 2001). Military regimes responded by constraining the ability of the press to inform the public. In 1993 under General Babangida, Decrees 33, 35, 43 and 48 were enacted to enfeeble the independent press through harsh control measures. (Olukotun, 2002). Under the regime of

General Abacha, the press retained its democratic activism. This led to the enactment of Decrees 6, 7 and 8 of 1994 which limited freedom of the press.(Walker, 1999).

The inability to silence the press with use of decrees drew further approaches such as official harassment of the media, arbitrary detention of journalists and harassment of their families, misuse of criminal charges and unfair trials against journalists, assassination attempts, banning of publications, arson attacks on newspaper offices, disruption of printing and distribution, illegal distribution by the Nigerian authorities of “doctored” versions of some editions of magazines published by the independent press. These versions invented lies that were supportive of the regime. There was also official interference in editorial decision making, “disappearance” of journalists and use of state media to counteract the oppositional media. (Global Campaign for Free Expression, 1997). Indeed the use of the state media for advancement of undemocratic ends reveals the possibility of adapting the press as a context of civil society action for the advancement of undemocratic ends. In the face of these obstacles, journalists withdrew into hideouts and continued to publish critical journals in defiance of the state. (Olukotun, 2002).

Another important context of the war of position was that of organised labour. A decisive action from the labour in demand for end of military rule emanated from two oil sector unions. The unions, National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) coordinated strikes that brought the economy to a halt in demand for restoration of democracy. (Tar, 2009). When the strike was successfully broken, the government enacted Decree No. 10 of 1994 which dissolved the executives of NUPENG and PENGASSAN. It also enacted Decree 9 dissolving the executives of the Nigerian Labour Congress and at the same time assumed the power to appoint a sole administrator to run the affairs of the union. (Aiyede, 2010).

The third context of war of position was the actions of human rights and democracy activist groups. These include, Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), Campaign for Democracy (CD), National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and some religious groups. Many of the associations became very assertive upon the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election adjudged to be free and fair. Remarkably, NADECO established an unofficial broadcast media called Radio Kudirat with an unknown location. The media served as the critical voice of the opposition. Olukotun (2010) rightly justifies this defiant broadcasting by noting that when institutions of popular culture are circumscribed by control against legitimate dissent, the duty of subaltern group is to throw up subversive motifs to restructure the discourse map.

In parallel existence with the oppositional groups were rent-seeking associations that supported the military regimes. Such groups are exemplified by the activities of Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) during General Babagida’s regime and Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA) during the regime of General Abacha. ABN sought to undermine the transition to civil rule programme by ostensibly using litigation to stop the presidential election of June 12, 1993. It was said to be linked to the presidency through funding. YEAA mobilized support for General Abacha to transform from military leader to civilian leader. Groups of this nature provided framework for counter action against others that opposed undemocratic rule. But at the high point of the contention, the ruling interest made a

strategic adjustment by conducting elections and establishing basic institutions of elective civil rule.

Civil Rule, Bifurcation of Political Field and the Trajectory of Democracy

Two issues will suffice to illustrate how the political field is bifurcated between pro and de-democratisation forces in the post military era namely, a failed plan for an illegitimate tenure elongation by President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2007 and presidential succession crisis in 2010 when President Yar Adua who later died in office was sick.

The constitutional tenure for the presidency as contained in sections 135 and 137 of the Nigerian constitution is four years after which the incumbent president can only contest for one more tenure. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, when President Obasanjo was completing the second of his two four-year terms in 2007, he sought to manipulate constitutional changes to make presidential tenure a single term of six years. Under the changed constitution, the incumbent president would be qualified to run again. Some civil society groups like the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) supported the president's tenure elongation plot. The leadership of the union went further to decorate President Obasanjo with the award of "Defender of Democracy", following which the president publicly donated the sum of five million naira to the association (Akintola, 2010, p. 114). However, there was a counter mobilization in the national parliament. When the amendment bill was presented at the Senate it was overwhelmingly rejected. (Mohammed, 2006). The end to the political intrigue was a product of joint action by some legislators, the press and other civil society groups.

The collapse of the third term plot led to the emergence of the now late Umar Musa Yar Adua as the winner of the following presidential election in 2007. Another high point of the divide in the political field arose during Yar Adua's tenure when he became sick and was flown to Saudi Arabia for treatment. His journey which came as an emergency commenced a process of political manoeuvres by the politicians especially the ministers and legislators. Section 145 of the Nigerian constitution requires the president to transmit a written notice to the parliament when going on vacation and until a written declaration to the contrary is received, the Vice President shall be the Acting president. Mr Yar Adua did not transmit such declaration and had failed to do so in his previous medical trips. Consequently, there was a vacuum in the office of president until February 9, 2010 when the parliament applied the 'doctrine of necessity' to pass a resolution making the Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, the Acting President.

Prior to the application of the doctrine of necessity, the parliament was divided between those who insisted on waiting for the return of the sick president and others who felt the spirit of the constitution should be applied to make Jonathan the Acting President. The ultimate implementation of the constitution to make Jonathan the Acting President was also driven by actions of the Save Nigeria Group (SNG) which was a coalition of civil society groups that agitated for the application of the constitution to dispense with this vacuum in the presidency. The prevalence of democratic coalition in selected instances however does not translate to generalised democratisation of the polity or effective dominance by democratic forces. However, they represent moments of piecemeal progress towards democratisation.

Conclusion

Gramsci's theories of the integral state and hegemony provide framework in which this paper interrogated democratisation in Nigeria. Following his thoughts this paper sees that the political field, which comprises executive state and civil society, are bifurcated along the lines of interests which social forces articulate and seek to embed. It debunks the thesis which sees state as the sole determinant of change. It also rejects the view that civil society is that space par excellence for democratic ethos. Dialectical engagement of forces in the political field is found to express Gramsci's war of position in which contrary forces constantly seek to displace each other to maintain or attain dominance. This is the logic that plays out in democratic struggles both at the point of seeking to set up institutional forms of democracy and efforts to embed and sustain the norms that imbue political rule with mass legitimation.

The paper illustrated the war of position with the moments of contestations of the press, labour unions and other pro-democracy activist groups in engagement with authoritarian military government. Further, the post military era was shown to be another context of on-going struggle between contending forces for either democratic or undemocratic outcomes. In all, state and civil society are found to be spaces of engagement where agents bearing differing political values act out their interests so that outcomes in each moment reflects the stronger force in the integral state. Democratic forces in Nigeria have yet to attain preponderance in this contention. Thus Gramsci developed a useful tool-kit for understanding the fate of democracy in restored civil rules.

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