

Where are the Peasants? A discourse on the role of Civil Society as Social Movement in the Post-Independence Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper aims to create awareness on the importance of peasants forming a synergy with civil society organizations in the struggle for political and economic liberation in Nigeria. The paper argues that in recent time peasants have remained docile and largely gone out of existence in the post independence struggle for democratic governance. They are no longer involved in the social protest rather they alienated themselves. The inherited wisdom of peasants' non-involvement in the contestation for power runs counter-productive to the construction of a culture of opposition geared towards positive change. The class-cultural theory of social movements helps in the interpretation of complex relationships between civil society on one hand and the peasants on the other hand. The method employed in this analysis is qualitative based on secondary data. The study is limited to post-independence democratization struggle and their non-involvement in the protest against unfavourable economic policies right from the military regimes and democratic era. The paper's aim is to raise the political consciousness among the peasants to engage actively in the struggle for political and economic liberation. The significance of this is that a synergy would be established between peasants in the rural areas and the organized civil society in the urban areas. It concludes that the peasants as social category and important political actors should be involved in subterranean protests with the civil society organizations. Thus, peasants should forge a link with other organized civil society groups in urban areas for the struggle for better political and economic conditions and system.

Keywords: peasant, civil society, transformation, democratic governance, institutionalization, alienation, struggle, democratization, mass movement and class-cultural theory.

INTRODUCTION

In Africa sociological and anthropological studies, the peasant question is beginning to attract scholarly attention. It is generating academic interest because some are of the view that peasants never existed or does not exist at all in Africa. This was the thought of most African scholars that Africa was a continent of tribesmen and peasant social movements are seen as recent origin. According to Mamdani(2002:185) peasants movements at times were stigmatized as tribal and considered illegitimate. It is this caricature description of peasant movements that more or less rendered the group too weak to organize themselves for collective action. Just like those inspired by communitarian notions asked the question whether the peasants are revolutionary or not? We contend that peasants will not develop revolutionary consciousness except they are re-aculturated by urban-based civil society groups by instigating them to revolutionary political action.

In contemporary discourse, civil society organizations (CSOs) have acquired widespread currency in comparative African political analysis. The rising influence of CSOs can be attributable to the declining role of the state as an agent of developments. CSOs have gained recognition in

public policy and most importantly in reshaping public policy. Civil society has contributed in various ways to the entrenchment of good governance and transforming the society socially, economically and politically. In view of this increasing role, visibility and influence, COSs require collective action from both rural and urban centres. It is through coalition of peasant organizations and other civil groups that policies and practices that are considered inimical and antithetical to the progress and well-being of the citizens can be addressed and eliminated. Therefore, a discourse on the role of civil society should focus on the central task of social movements to win the hearts, souls and minds of the populace.

The motivation for this discourse is predicated on the gradual and systematic loss of confidence in the power of collective action. This is as result of the feeling of personal and political idiosyncrasy of civil society leadership without carrying the peasants along. In a society where the people see mass action as a futile effort or the cultural orientation of the people makes it an anathema to challenge those that superintend over their affairs. This attitude of subservience imbibed by civil society and peasants pervades the Nigerian society to the extent that the citizens do not question the leaders.

It is in this context that social protest as one of the endemic features of emerging global culture can be encouraged. This is why there is hardly any passage of the day without the media reports of protest against perceived injustice of the state in advanced democracies. Of course, history is full of successful and unsuccessful peasant revolutions. Despite the exponential growth of civil society in Nigeria in recent time there is no collaboration among the various groups. There is near absence of such civil society group at the rural areas to galvanize ideas. Thus, there is the need for collaboration between the civil society organizations in the urban centres and the peasants in the hither land. This type of synergy will help in mobilizing the citizenry against unfair and unjust system.

The quest for the role of peasants in the socio-political and economic transformation of Nigeria has become inevitable. The peasants and peasant organizations can play vital role in the establishment of democracy because of their grassroots nature in the past. They will provide the platforms for political and economic advocacy. Historically, peasants have been in the fore front against domination by the state, landlords or merchant capital, through a variety of organizational forms, associative activities and relationships(Onyebuchi and Ayichi, 2002.) Unfortunately, peasants in Nigeria are in a state of oblivion in the struggle for political, economic and social mobilization. It is therefore argued that peasants have largely remained invisible as a social category in the emerging history of new social movement in Nigeria. Peasants in Nigeria are presumed to be victims of new global movement arising from technological innovations but remained less integrated into the mainstream of capitalist economy than peasants elsewhere. This is primarily due to so-called autonomy they enjoy with respect to outside institutions such as the market and the state. Arguably, peasants in the colonial Africa enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy which had enabled them to embark on demonstration during food shortages, excessive labour demands or unfavourable market conditions leading to withdrawal of commodity production and the market (Issacman,1990:15).

It is against this background that we ask one fundamental question about the peasants in Nigeria. Do the peasants still exist? It is observed that during the struggle for democratisation in the 1990s, the peasants' voices were not heard let alone seen. The paper examines the theoretical issues on social movement; offers varied explanations of peasants and civil society; the role of the peasantry, civil society and state is analysed; it addresses the peasants' question; and it concludes.

Peasants and Civil Society: Explained

It is difficult to define peasants in sociological, economic and cultural terms because of the great differences existing in the rural areas of developing countries(Zamponi, 2011). At times the word "peasants" and "farmers" are used interchangeably. The reason is that peasant simply means 'people of the land'. The term therefore can apply to "...any person engaged in agriculture, cattle-raising, pastoralism, handicrafts-related to agriculture or a related occupation in rural area. This includes the indigenous people working on the land"(Edelman, 2013). They are vulnerable to intolerable economic conditions and more often than not treated as second-class citizens with limited access to social services such as health care, education, housing, road, etc.

Peasant societies have long been a major focus of anthropological study. These were societies of small-scale agriculturalists that generally preceded the emergence of industrialization around the world, and today are still being modified by globalization of capitalist economy. An anthropologist Eric Wolf in his book 'Peasants' published in 1966, sees the peasants as those "large segments of mankind which stand midway between the primitive tribe and the industrial society" (Wolf 1966:vii). He defines peasants also as "rural cultivators whose rulers uses the surpluses both to under write its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to group, in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in return (Wolf, 1966: 3-4).

In a descriptive term, peasants refer to rural peoples of pre-industrial Europe or those of contemporary developing countries. African scholars refer to 'peasants' as those agriculturalists who control the land they work either as tenants or small holders, organized largely in households that meet most of their subsistence needs, and are ruled by other classes, who extract a surplus either directly or through control of state power (Isaacman, 1990:2). In other words, peasantry are merely those engaged in petty commodity production where small land holdings and cultivation is done essentially by household or family labour(Momoh, 1996:159). Indeed, all categories of rural associations both ethnic groups are broadly regarded as peasants because they are cultivators who are very close to the land which provides the means for their living (Adeniran, 1974:365). We can see peasants as the rural poor, rural residents, serfs, agricultural labourers, and the "common" or "simple" people. According to anthropologist, George Dalton, "peasants were legal, political, social, and economic inferiors in medieval Europe..."(cited in Edelman, 2013:10). Peasants are not just rural farmers or artisans but small and medium size workers or cultivators or commercial farmers in the urban cities in developed countries.

They are at times derogatorily described as hews of woods and drawers of water in rural areas. In short, they are referred to as people from the countryside, whether or not they are agriculturalists(Edelman, 2013).

The term peasants can also be used as analytical category or as ambiguous social category. In view of these ambiguities in defining it, we therefore extrapolate the defining features of the peasant labour process such as its composition and organization of peasant labour force; how necessary and surplus labour are separated in both time and space, how the peasants are able to set in motion the instruments of production independently of the landlord, state or ruling class; how peasant labour is supervised by outside agents and work obligations secured through political-legal institutions; and how peasants assume the risks of production (Isaacman 1990:2).

Paradoxically, peasants exist not only as part of a larger social order, but as instruments for fulfilling the agenda of the ruling class, especially in state politics, and international commerce, which impinges on their daily activities in terms of their labour. The labour process offers a strategic entry into the fundamental question of how power was acquired and exercised in the countryside and what the potential of the peasants to dissent (Isaacman 1990:3). We then turn our attention to civil society to differentiate it from peasant group.

Civil Society is conceived here to mean a group organized for social life in a voluntary manner that is self-supporting and autonomous from the state and bound by a legal order and shared rules (Diamond 1994:5). Civil society encompasses a vast array of organizations formal and informal. These include groups that are (1) economic (productive and commercial associations and networks); cultural (religious, ethnic, communal and other institutions and associations that defend collective rights, values, faiths, beliefs and symbols). Information and education (devoted to the production and dissemination – whether for profit or not- of public knowledge, ideas, news, and information); interest-based (designed to advance or defend the common functional or material interests of their members, whether workers, veterans, pensioners, professionals or the like); developmental (organizations that combine individual resources to improve the infrastructure, institutions, and quality of life of the community); issue-oriented (movements for environmental protection, women’s rights, land reform, or consumer protection); and civic (seeking in non-partisan fashion to improve the political system and make it more democratic through human rights monitoring, voters’ education and mobilization, poll-watching, anti-corruption efforts, and so on (Diamond,1994:6).

Sachikonye(1995) defines civil society as “ an aggregate of institutions whose members are engaged primarily in a complex of non-state activities-economic and cultural production, voluntary associations, and household life-and who in this way preserve and transform their identity by exercising all sorts of pressures or controls upon state institutions”(Makumbe,1998: 305). As our working definition, we can say that includes trade unions; professional associations; church and para-church organizations; resident, student, business and other special interest associations; the media; and various types of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Antonio Gramsci lecture provides a reverse version of Karl Marx’s conception of civil society. In contrast to Marx, Gramsci sees civil society as part of the superstructure in addition to the state, but with a different function. To him, “the state served as the arena of force and coercion for capitalist domination, and civil society served as the field through which vales and meanings were established, debated, and contested” (Paffenholz, 2010:5). Gramsci provides an understanding of African civil society as the ensemble of “institutions, ideologies, practices, and agents... that comprise the dominant culture of values” (cited in Young 1994:220). Intimately joined to civil society is his notion of hegemony, whereby the ruling bourgeois class achieves the acquiescence of the classes it dominates by its capacity to diffuse an ideology legitimating the social order through the organizational and ideological structures of civil society (Young 1994:220). The political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes and societal consensus is formed within civil society (Paffenholz, 2010).

Civil society is distinguished from other human organizations from the following features. First, it is concerned with public rather than private ends. Second, it relates to the state in so many ways but does not aim to win formal power or office in the state. Rather, it seeks from the state concessions, benefits, policy changes, relief, redress, or accountability. Third, it encompasses pluralism and diversity to the extent that an organization – such as religious fundamentalist, ethnic chauvinist, revolutionary or millenarian movement – seek to monopolize a functional or political space in society, claiming that it represents the only legitimate path, it contradicts the pluralistic and market –oriented nature of civil society. Fourth, it is partialness, signifying that no group in civil society seeks to represent the whole of a person’s or a community’s interest (Diamond, 1994:6-7).

Civil society performs many crucial functions for democratic development and consolidation: limiting the power of the state more generally, and challenging its abuses of authority; monitoring

human rights and strengthening the rule of law; monitoring elections and enhancing the overall quality and credibility of the democratic process; educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities, and building a culture of tolerance and civic engagement; incorporating marginal groups into the political process and enhancing the latter's responsiveness to societal interests and needs; providing alternative means, outside the state, for communities to raise their level of material development; opening and pluralising the flows of information; and building a constituency for economic as well political reforms(Diamond, 1997: 24).

Peasantry and the State

The rhetorical question "where are the peasants" is premised on the fact that more than 70 per cent of Nigerians live in the rural areas are engaged in farming as small producers. This has been a conservative estimate in the 1980s of rural population and it is still the dominant view up till that rural dwellers constitute the chunk of the total population in Nigeria. For more than a century there have been the debates about the 'peasant question'. The two dominant groups engaged in this debate are the 'disappearance thesis' and 'permanence thesis'. The 'disappearance thesis' defends that the inevitable expansion of capitalism will lead to the extermination of the peasantry. The 'permanence thesis' on the other hand argues that peasant mode of production in peasant societies have a distinct development logic that supports the survival of the peasantry within capitalism ((Araghi, 1995, cited in Vanhante, 2010). We can draw from the first thesis that the expansion of capitalism have led to the disappearance of the peasantry. In other words, the conclusive changes in the organization of capitalism – its global reach and revolutionary technological innovations, its centralization in Giant Corporation and financial institutions – have resulted in the virtual exclusion of vast numbers of the world's poor from effective economic and political participation (Diamond, 1994:14).

In all practical purpose, peasants' social movements are to articulate interests satisfactorily through political channels or take action on behalf of the people. We, therefore explore the causal relationship between the peasants and civil society organizations; establish the reason why the peasants as a group of agricultural producers whose socio-political orientation and cultural environment have been psychologically apathetic to politics in recent Nigeria political history; the strategies that will make the peasants to be disentangled from the traditional passivity to be more active in the process of transformation of the post-independence Nigerian society; to underscore the factors that have militated against the peasants from being involved in the

struggle for political, social and economic emancipation in the post independence Nigeria.

The peasantry in the 1970s and 1980s has responded with sporadic revolts. Just as witnessed in peasant unrest at Iseyin-Okeho in 1916 and at Egba in 1918 during colonial days. The peasants carried out protests that were unprecedented. In the post-colonial Nigeria, peasants' unrest has intensified. For example, the revolt at Agbekoya (1968-69), and at Bakolori (1980) in which the grievances of the peasantry found vent in "...massive, organised and partly armed struggles..." (Momoh, 1996:161). The peasant revolt in the Western region known as "Agbekoya parapo" was allied amalgam of peasants groups with ambition of desecrating their salient, conservative postures by protesting their distressing situation (Adeniran 1974: 365). The group revolted because of the imposition of higher taxes and the use of force in the collection of taxes, demand for substantial increase in the prices of the crops (Cocoa) on which the peasants relied for existence and sustenance. This was successfully carried out with a combination of group of articulate and relatively enlightened peasants, and some middle-class professional and urban elites (largely from Ibadan districts) who were alienated, marginalized in the decision-making process. It was this situation that made the groups that share similar interests to coalesce. They resisted in a demonstration on November 26, 1968 and marched to popular Mapo Hall in Ibadan, resulting in death of several people(Momoh, 1996). Consequently, the peaceful protest turned violent resulting in the death of several people, but did not deter the peasants. By September 1969, the revolt had become even more violent with the daylight attacks on the Agodi Federal prison at Ibadan and the release of over four hundred prisoners, mostly those who were detained earlier for refusing to pay the imposed taxes. The government saw the resilience of the peasants and ultimately negotiated peace. The flat-rate tax was reduced to two pounds and all motor parks and market fees together with other local rates suspended. Sanitation inspectors and town planning officials were withdrawn from all rural areas (Momoh, 1996: 161). In the Northern part of Nigeria, the Socialist Working People's Party (SWPP) calls for mass struggles to protect peasant land interests against the rise and growth of the Kulak class. Fighting the Kulaks is part of the party's programme for a united front of left and democratic forces. The demands for minimum wage for agricultural workers as demanded for all other workers (Beckman, 1988:30). The Socialist Party of Workers, Youths and Farmers (SPWYF) demanded for peasant land control and ownership and management of their own cooperatives, credits institutions, and supply stations for machine services and inputs. Demands for free

medical services, education and social security (Beckman 1988: 31).

Another popular peasant revolt was in 1980 in Bakolori village. This was sparked off by the construction of dam on Sokoto River. The construction of this dam led to perpetual flood in that village. The peasants' interests were not considered by the government, as regards resettlement and payment of compensation for damaged crops, access to land and food security (Momoh, 1996: 162). The peasants were united by a common determination to resist the state. The peasants protested by blocking road demanding of compensation for destroyed crops and trees. As the militancy of the peasants increased, the state later agreed to compensate them for their lost crops in the irrigation area.

The peasants' revolts in the Western and Northern regions were important landmarks in the history of popular struggles in Nigeria. Paradoxically, the political potential of these revolts was not harnessed in support of the political struggles of the Nigerian people for social liberation. The radicalism demonstrated by the Agbekoya parapo group, the Bakolorin peasants, the Socialist Party of Workers, Youths and Farmers are no longer seen today. The local government authorities' officials go to rural areas and impose all kinds of levies on the market women, farmers, artisans, etc without raising any eye browl. In urban areas in different parts of the country the local government officials collect all kinds of levies from motorists, transporters, commercial drivers at motor parks and bus stops and high ways without any form of resistance.

In the Occupy Nigeria protest after the government announced removal of fuel subsidy and increase in the price of the fuel, the peasants were not involved in the struggle, especially the peasants in the rural areas. For popular struggle for total liberation and emancipation of the masses there has to be organic linkage between the peasants and the toiling people on one hand and the urban social movements on the other hand. This type of linkage was conspicuously absent in the struggle for democratization and economic liberation.

The Nigerian peasantry are living in externality to civil society borrowing Claude Ake's expression (Cited in Momoh, 1996). In recent time, the attitudes of the peasants in participating or non-participation in the struggles are largely influenced by elites' primordial values that have made them insensitive to their situation. The primordial values of ethnicity and religion are influential in the understanding of politics (Momoh, 1996). This explains why the peasants have remained unperturbed to their plight. One cannot agree less with Abubakar Momoh who believes that the peasantry has political consciousness

but only shaped or redefined by the dominant values of the Nigerian state. The Nigerian peasants are no longer the backbone and the main force of the struggle for change. The ignorance of the peasantry is exploited by the urban-based politicians. They have shown evidence of resistance in the past which is a lesson that will remain useful in social movement discourse today.

Theoretical Explication

There are contending theories of peasants and civil society as social movements. Social movement presumably consists of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, self-defined social movements, strikes and riots, the mob and the crowd- all have elements of social movement praxis and may be considered together with their engagement with political parties, international agencies and other societal agents in critical analysis of the role of popular social forces in African societies (Miles, 2010). The theoretical underpinning of this paper is class-cultural theory which offers a better understanding that the position one occupies within the production process determines the role the person is likely to play in any social struggle. It is argued that cultural forms can produce and reproduce through practices a combination of both conformity and resistance to the structural demand of class interest (Rose, 1997). Social movement can be seen as a group of people who organize in order to promote or prevent change from taking place.

Class cultures reflect evolving strategies for living within class structures. For a clear understanding of class cultures, it requires an analysis of both the structures within which classes function and particular strategies adopted by class members (Rose, 1997). Class culture is an all-inclusive strategy that helps individuals or groups to respond to their work environment or to the dilemma such individual finds himself in a stratified society of middle-class life. The new social movement falls within this range of related middle-class strategies. Thus, class cultures are therefore products of structured positions within the hierarchy of class and independent subcultures that provide unique resources for adapting to distinct circumstances (Rose 1997:474).

The psychological disposition of individuals in a work environment reflects the work experience and the cultural and material organization of production. Rose (1997) argues that there is a structural relationship between the middle class and other classes. This explains why there is the need for the peasants and other organized civil society groups to come together for socio-political transformation as a class that share the same culture. The peasants are distinct group which may not be categorized in the class of middle class like the organized civil society

groups but they are both oppressed groups. Class-cultural theory provides a more inclusive understanding of the new social movements by acknowledging that interests, values, and consciousness play important roles in motivating behaviour. The relationship between class culture and New Social Movements can be established at this point.

New social movements reflect middle class origins even though they do not explicitly articulate their goals in class terms. The actors, issues, values, and “mode of action” identified by New Social Movement theorists can be seen as direct expression of middle-class culture. Class-cultural theory resolves the ambiguities and contradictions found in the New Social Movement. Although, New Social Movement theorists argue that the production process has imposed new levels of control beyond the sphere of production into consumption, services and social relations. Alberto Melucci (1980) explains:

The new social movements are struggling, therefore, not only for the re-appropriation of the material structure of production, but also for collective control over socio-economic development, i.e. for the re-appropriation of time, of space, and of relationships in the individual’s daily existence (cited in Rose,1997: 467).

Older movements, most importantly the labour and peasants movements mobilize as socio-economic groups pursuing selective interest. While new movements promote goals that cut across class lines such as gender, race and locality. New Social Movement theorists provide various explanations for the disproportionate middle-class participation in the new movement politics (Rose,1997:468). New Social Movement that emerged in Nigeria to dismantle authoritarianism rule in 1999 was based on some structural changes in the political system. The conditions that can gave rise to peasants’ movement in the colonial days manifested again in the post-independence struggle for the enthronement of democracy and equitable economic system.

Peasants may form community-based movements to agitate for a better economic condition while the civil society groups pursue more general interests of the society. However, all social groups are motivated by both interests and values, despite their cultural differences or forms within the class (Rose, 1997). The reason for an alternative explanation of social movement theory is because they are by definition dynamic and volatile (Hiller,1975:344). There is the need to know what bring people together and the basis for participation in social protest. The Occupy Nigeria and Save Nigeria Groups illustrate this view

point as the group emerged as a result of debilitating economic conditions and the economic reform policy of the government. In this struggle the peasants were conspicuously absent.

Assessing the Role of Civil Society as a Social Movement

Over the years, Nigeria had witnessed the emergence and growth of peasant organizations as social movements. In the colonial Nigeria, the growth of peasant organizations has been attributed partly to the failure of colonial state to provide the citizenry the better condition of life or much expected improvement in living standards and general well-being of people. In this context, peasants attempt to survive through associative endeavours. Arguably, unfavourable social conditions promote or enforce solidarity and indigenous social organizations.

Historians have established the connection between primary resistance waged by the African people in the days of colonialism and the national liberation struggle in the process of consolidation of a tradition of resistance. For instance, the resistance of Chimurengo or the Shona/Ndebele war against colonial settlers 1896-97; and the Zimbabwean war of liberation between 1972 and 1980 (Nzogola-Ntalaja 1987, Cited in Makandwire, 2002). The primary resistance in form of armed struggles waged by African people against the colonial conquest was useful to modern mass nationalist movement in achieving a high level of mobilization and emotional involvement in the independence struggle.

As Fanon writes:

The propaganda of nationalist parties always finds an echo in the heart of the peasantry. The memory of the anti-colonial period is very much alive in the villages, where women still croon in their children’s ears songs to which the warriors marched when they went to fight the conquerors (Fanon, 1963:114).

The tragedy of the African peasants was that from the colonial time they were seen as savaged and childhood. Paganism was a defining characteristic of the savaged people. Young (1994) lamented that Africa suffered from arrested development and perpetual childhood. This is the mythology that pervaded in the whole of colonial state. He argues that African subject thus firmly constructed in the official consciousness of the colonial ruler as a savage child, systematic exclusion as the basis of state craft. The colonial state had the capacity to impose its cultural definitions on the formative processes of an indigenous civil society (Young,1994: 222).

The popular movements in the colonial Nigeria began as far back in the early colonial period. The Mahdi revolt of 1905; Iseyin uprising of 1916; Egba revolt of 1918; Ekumeku movement uprising of 1925; Dancing Women movement rampage of 1925; Calabar market toll uprising of 1925; Warri riots of 1927 and Aba Women's riots of 1929 (Nnoli, 2011, cited in Igbuzor, n.d). There is another category of struggle for democracy led by the petty bourgeoisie. Political organizations: Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) established in 1922 under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay (foremost Nigeria nationalist); Zikist Movement and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) (1950) under the leadership of Nnamdi Azikiwe and other political parties.

The existence of states— of varying dimensions, degrees of centralization, ideological underpinnings, and economic bases—implies their interactive relationship with societies. As Young (1994:222) argues that the empowerment of civil societies in pre-colonial Africa was because the pre-colonial states' relationships with populations were not based on exclusionary hegemony that characterized the colonial state. The colonial state had the capacity to impose its cultural definitions on the formative processes of an indigenous civil society (Young 1994). Unfortunately, in the shadow of colonial state new lines of social divisions define civil society form and context. The two primary lines of division were primordial ethnic cleavages and class. It is against this background that we try to address the question of where do we find peasants in the post-independence struggle in Nigeria.

Post- independence Nigeria especially in the late 1980s and 1990s during military dictatorship saw the activities of organized civil society groups gaining prominence. There are various types of civil society organizations: the anti-military dictatorship, which consists of groups fostering the protection of human rights such as the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDC), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Committee for Human Rights (CDIR), Constitutional Rights Project (CRP). There are professional associations such as Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Association of Democratic Lawyers of Nigeria (ADLN), Nigeria Bar Associations (NBA), Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Trade Union Congress (TUC) etc.

There was an era of radicalization of professional associations and coupled with the emergence of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the days of military authoritarianism in Nigeria. Economic hardships provoked the engagement of these groups with the military regimes in non-violent confrontation. In the event of intensified struggle by

the civil society family, the use of repression by the state in response to public protests increased the number of civil society organizations under the banner of professional and non-professional associations and NGOs dedicated to the cause of civil liberty, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and good governance and accountability.

The height of civil society activism was seen after the annulment of June 12 presidential elections in 1993 by Babangida's regime. This witnessed proliferation of civil society organizations mobilized against the military dictatorship. The activities of these groups forced the military leadership of General Babangida to step aside in August 26, 1993. With the coming into power by General Sanni Abacha in November 1993, some faceless civil society organizations like National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) came into existence, which incorporated different pro-democracy organizations, with operational bases in Europe and the United States of America. Ethnic militias like the Oduduwa's People Congress (OPC) as an ethnic-based civil society group emerged in the South-west of Nigeria comprising the Yoruba ethnic group. The emergence of this is linked with the annulment of June 12 presidential election claimed to have been won by late M.K.O Abiola, who was a Yoruba man. There are other ethnic based groups in the South-East, in the South-South and in the Northern part of Nigeria.

However, there is every tendency to interpret all these non-state actors as civil society. No doubt, some of the groups hold radical ideology that is similar to civil society group. The environmentalist group in the oil-rich Niger-Delta region led by late Ken Saro-wiwa shared the same vision that is compatible with the civil society group. Arguably, it is difficult to categorise some of the independent organizations as belonging to civil society organization because of their conduct and mode of operation. For instance, the OPC, the militia groups like the 'EgbesuBoys', in the Niger Delta, the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Mass Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the South East, and Arewa Boys in the North conducted their activities in such that they threatened national security. The aggressive behaviour of the civil society undermines the state's internal security and tends to threaten the fabric of the state.

The impact of civil society on the democratization is assessed with reference to 2007 and 2011 General Elections. Some civil society organizations came under the aegis of Transition Monitoring Group (TMG). The group educates, sensitizes and mobilizes voters to participate in the electoral process. The

TMG is a coalition of human rights, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations. This group came into existence following the military transition under Abdusalam Abubakar. Civil society groups came together under one umbrella known as Domestic Election Observation Groups which include the TMG, Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Labour Monitoring Team (LMT), Women Environmental Programme (WEP), Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDC), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE), Citizens Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR) and the Electoral Reform Network (ERN).

CONCLUSION

The paper has explored various substantive theoretical arguments in an attempt to address the problematic. The critical question, 'where are the peasants', may have been answered from the discourse on the role of the civil society in the transformation of Nigeria in the post-independence era. The paper has carefully delineated the role of civil society generally but argues that because of complete alienation of the society from the state the peasants who invariably represent the bulk of the society is not seen or heard. Thus, there is need for a paradigm shift from state-centred approach to society-centred approach to the strategy of civil society mobilization. Emphasize on peasant-based movement will lead to reverting to primary-groupings such as kinship, tribal, religious and traditional political structures. In other words, the attention should be shifted to the peasants as political actors to be involved in subterranean protests in conjunction with the civil society organizations.

The general observation is that it is difficult to pin down where the peasants are to be located in the scheme of things in the contemporary struggle for good governance in Nigeria as in other African states. This is because of the African peasants have the problem of competing in today's global market. The agrarian question is no central to global economy. The peasants are more disarticulate, disoriented and de-proletarianised. It is acknowledged that the peasants are far from disappearing if the face of the problems that confront them. This is why they must remain a veritable force for anti-systemic change in the crest of new wave of class struggle for good governance and social justice in Nigeria.

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