CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Four years ago we had no illusion that we will put right in a few years the destruction of two decades. We had no magic wand with which to achieve instant transformation.

– President Olusegun Obasanjo (UNIRIN 2003).

A dissertation is a dangerous thing. It must be theoretically innovative, yet a theoretical focus may lose sight of those tangible things that matter most, the people at the center of all social science. It must draw conclusions, yet the illusion of closure may objectify the lives of those people whose lives are never closed. It must wrestle with problems of substance, but it is those very problems that lend themselves least to dispassionate analysis.

This concluding chapter cannot save my dissertation from these dangers, nor can it save the world from whatever new dangers this dissertation may introduce, but it can follow the advice of Donald Horowitz and put some blood back into an otherwise “bloodless theory” (1985, 140). It may append the theoretical abstraction of the empty signifier with a human face or two and it may append my dispassionate analysis with the emotive forces that drove this dissertation from its conception. This chapter will begin where my efforts to understand Nigeria began and end with some assessment of where those efforts have led.
A Personal Experience

If blood is to be found in this dissertation’s theoretical efforts, it is the blood of those who inhabit Nigeria, those who every day negotiate the political, economic, and discursive powers that pervade their lives. And yet, I cannot present the experiences of others in isolation of my own. The motivations behind this dissertation, the ethical urgency that compelled it along, the pain that inevitably accompanies knowledge, all of these found life in my experiences with and in Nigeria. I traveled through Nigeria with the hope that what I would learn there would help me better understand the discourse surrounding the democratic transition, but I was not entirely prepared to encounter the people whose lives depended entirely on how that discourse was articulated and on the phenomena that that articulation would enable.

Many personal encounters were very uplifting. I was impressed with the eagerness with which I was invited into academic discussions among professors. I was touched by the willingness of strangers to take me under their wing. A small boy sat on my lap during a crowded church service trying to hide a mango from his mother; a young girl slept on my shoulder during a long sermon. I saw countless other quick and sincere smiles while crammed, once with 18 people, into dilapidated Eastern European minivans.

On the other hand, there was a darker side; some experiences in Nigeria remain painful years later. Half a dozen immunizations, a constant stream of prophylactic medication, and unwavering vigilance held cholera, malaria, yellow fever at bay, but all these efforts could not prevent the emotional scars that resulted, not from powerless
victimization, but from the curious condition of my being at once both powerful and impotent.

**A Hungry Boy**

At the core of this condition lay the constant exposure to severe destitution: the emaciated gardener who asked to share my bread when I returned to my hotel; the aged and blind women, led by young children begging for money; the greying man who asked for a bite when he saw me carrying a loaf of bread on the street; the small children everywhere with small plastic bowels tied around their necks, begging for food. I often carried around small bags of peanuts, packages of crackers, or little sacks of cookies as I traveled, and I found that I could sometimes help someone by offering a bite without drawing a crowd as giving money inevitably would.

On one occasion, however, a small boy approached me on a quiet street with his plastic bowl extended. I reached into my pocket and pulled out one of six cookies and placed it in his bowl. He immediately called to his friends across the street who eagerly ran to me. The children surrounded me with bowls held out, and I began distributing the remaining cookies. A larger girl began pushing the younger ones aside. I was annoyed, exhausted, and I thought my cookies were gone. I walked away only later to notice that another small boy, maybe four years of age, was following me. I did not have anything more to offer, or so I thought, and I felt even more annoyed. I walked more quickly, hoping he would leave. Only after we were well out of sight of the other children did I again check my pocket where I found an unexpected half cookie and gave it to him. He
smiled and departed. I was devastated. It was painful to see the desperate need, but infinitely more painful to know that I could have helped more quickly or with more generosity, yet I did not.

**Deadly Paths**

Driving with seven other passengers in a small Peugeot through thick rain forest, we discussed music and politics. During a moment of silence, I noticed along the side of the road a man’s corpse: alone, motionless, mangled, and bloody. I felt a tangible shock, compounded upon my noticing a look of disgust from a woman in the front seat. It is naturally sobering to pass death so closely, but so much more sobering was the social context that this unnamed man inhabited. The initial tragedy, that someone had killed and abandoned this man, seemed magnified by his having remained there for all to see.

As shocking as this was, the experience of seeing the dead man has been far less disturbing than my encounter with the young boy. In contrast with the encounter with the living child, I did not feel the deep internal tension that accompanied my direct involvement. This tension came not only from my close proximity to the boy, but from the power I had to temporarily ease his suffering. In a country devoid of ATMs and where credit cards and checks were meaningless, I had to carry over $1,000 in cash. This small fortune was the equivalent of three years’ salary at Nigeria’s minimum wage (a wage many aspired to). I had the power to purchase thousands of pounds of food and to give it out freely. Yet despite this power, I felt impotent to help in any meaningful way. And that felt much worse than my unequivocal lack of power to help the dead man. For
the dead, I could do nothing and was thus relieved of pain, guilt, and the responsibility that unavoidably comes with power. However, because those who inhabit the South are not dead,¹ the North inevitably confronts the South with coinciding power and impotence. It is this discomforting tension that lies at the heart of understanding and critiquing U.S. Foreign Policy.

**Haunting the North**

The images of suffering to which I was exposed haunt me to this day. Multiplied by the billions, these spirits haunt the North because the North has power to help but by the North’s inactions the suffering continues. Haunted as such, by the images, news, literature, and immigrants which stream from the South to the North, the North feels compelled to act. However, because most assistance would require the tangible sacrifice of material resources or political power, the North looks for means of assistance—means to appease these ghosts—on the cheap. It seeks the magical solution to ills free of sacrifice. Like the tidbits of food I gave to those I passed in desperate need,

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¹. W.E.B. Du Bois captured the nature of this relationship as well as any contemporary scholar. Although he does not address North-South relations explicitly, he delves deep into similar power relation by addressing the relations among races at the close of the 19th century. He explains in “Strivings of the Negro People” (1897) that under all the rhetoric of race relations of that era, lay the question implicitly asked, “How does it feel to be a problem?” This problem is defined by racial hierarchy and compounded by economic disparity (“To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships.”), but its essence is one of perception and identity. The ‘problem’ subject negotiates “a world which yields him no self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”
democratization has become the magical remedy for all of the South’s ills. Democracy promises to ensure protection of human rights, to stifle corruption, to allow freedom and the expression of the human soul. Democracy does not cost the North much to promote, and can be articulated such that it is relatively easy to sell. Moreover, democracy is easily measured and celebrated with the successful election of an internationally accepted leader. Finally, democracy (as it is articulated in today’s U.S. foreign policy and Nigeria’s domestic policy spheres) is built upon the same foundation that defines, drives, and sells global capitalism. Both democracy and capitalism rely on economistic competition and an atomistic ontology which magically lead to the creation of some greater cooperative, cohesive community.

However, constructing a naturalized consensus of what democracy means and then marketing it, eclipses other (perhaps more emancipating or more peaceful) variants of democracy and thereby contributes to the untold hardship of millions and even to the deaths of thousands.\(^2\) When the described promises of democracy then confront the

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2. At its most fundamental level, this story is one of people trying desperately to meet their most essential human needs: nourishment, shelter, dignity, identity, society. A resilient and inventive group, we humans tend to meet most of these needs for the most part. We tend to discover fulfillment, or at least some degree of fulfillment in the quest thereof. We fall short, usually not because of any inherent internal human deficiencies, but because just at that moment when we reach out for fulfillment, we are so often offered a shallow imitation of that which we seek—our material needs are drowned in materialism, our dignity is stuffed with pride, our identity and society are saturated with divisiveness. ‘Democracy’ promises it all—wealth, expression, freedom, identity, social acceptance—but when a thinly constructed and opportunistically implemented, democracy falls short on almost every count. Even worse, that particular construction democracy born of U.S.-Nigerian discourse as it is applied in the already divided and impoverished Nigeria paves the way for other dangerous imitations (religious opportunism, selfish notions of fairness, vigilante methods of achieving justice and order) as apparently viable alternatives to meet these basic human needs.
harch realities it neglected, hardships ensue. It is no surprise that the State Department’s early sales pitch, “Democracy will solve your problems,” was modified after democracy hit to ground to “The road is long and hard.” In fact, those early messages—that particular articulation of democracy—fanned the flamed of ethnic and religious turmoil and blinded politicians to the impending bloodshed.

Nevertheless, the Clinton Administration chose to cope with and to insulate its citizens from guilt by refusing to see the pain and moreover by refusing to admit any role in it. When President Clinton visited Nigeria in 2000, he would not venture from the physical and emotional safety of the artificially enclosed capital city, from the images of traditional dancers and musicians, from the comfort of his five-star hotel. He would not see, and he would not let his constituents see the Nigeria that haunts them and testifies of the deadly costs of their glib, self-serving democratic discourse and its practical implications.

How the U.S. policymakers articulated and then promoted democracy, set a stage for profound human suffering. The images of suffering extend beyond the 10,000 dead to those who continue to live in poverty, in uncertainty, and in discursive structures that allege meaning and closure while offering little of either. Four years and 10,000 dead later, the discourse of democracy remains powerful and the role of the United States remains central. The following text, taken from a single day’s Nigerian newspapers (23 May 2003) reveals how this is so.
Four Years Later

On the fourth anniversary of the Fourth Republic, Olusegun Obasanjo was again inaugurated president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In academic terms, democracy had been largely consolidated, yet its promises remained largely unfulfilled. One reporter best summarized the contradictions accompanying this consolidation of democracy with the following account:

With more than 20 African presidents and delegations from Britain and the United States in attendance at the Eagle Square venue in the capital, Abuja, 66-year-old Obasanjo swore to "bear true allegiance" to Nigeria and defend its constitution.

Some 20,000 policemen were deployed to provide security, tightened after opposition threats to embark on mass protests against Obasanjo's 19 April victory they allege was massively rigged. Local and international observers had also noted serious breaches of the electoral process. Troops and police searched vehicles entering Abuja while police helicopters encircled overhead.

Thursday's inauguration marked a significant milestone as one of the few instances of civilian-run transitions in the country's history. Previous attempts in 1964-65 and 1983 were overturned months later by military coups.

His first four years witnessed the return of relative freedom in a country that had suffered draconian military rule. But it appeared to lift the lid as well off simmering discontent among its more than 250 ethnic groups. Ethnic and religious violence have flared in several parts of the country in the past four years leaving several thousand people dead and tens of thousands displaced.

The economy has also seen little improvement, with latest indicators showing more than 70 percent of the population leaving below the poverty line despite the country's huge oil wealth.

"Four years ago we had no illusion that we will put right in a few years the destruction of two decades," Obasanjo said. "We had no magic wand with which to achieve instant transformation." (UNIRIN 2003)
Despite the historically unprecedented success of a second inauguration, much is amiss. The symbols of international presence were waning. The peace is uncertain and requires massive enforcement. The economic and political accomplishments of the previous four years were questionable. And the president has substantially reduced his rhetoric of high expectations. Nevertheless, in the same day’s press the hope of a new dawn was articulated echoing the messages of the previous inauguration four years earlier.

**A New Dawn**

Despite the difficult conditions that accompanied this second inauguration, it acted to propel the language of the new dawn that had been so popular four years earlier. In Obasanjo’s inauguration speech, he claimed that, “All Nigerians deserve commendation for their patience with a learning curve that began with the transition from the darkest episode of our history to the dawn of hope” (Obasanjo 2003). With similar language, Ghana’s President, John Kufuorr, addressed the ECOWAS secretariat in Abuja with his speech titled "A fresh dawn for Africa" (Mohammed 2003). Another journalist proclaims that “We are on the threshold of another history; the inauguration of the fifth Republic!” (Aremu 2003).

**Material Connections**

As the advertisements of the 1999 inauguration revealed, some continued to tie their economic ambitions to the democratic hopes of Nigeria. Econet Wireless Nigeria Limited celebrated Nigeria's fourth Democracy Day with the "Buddie Inauguration
Offer” which enables its customers to get “an Econet line handset and N2000 free air
time” for only N19,999.00. Emeka Oparah, the Corporate Affairs Manager of Econet
explained that, ”this is yet another demonstration of our commitment to national unity
and development. . . . May 29, 1999 marked a watershed in our history and it is worthy
of celebration [and] this is yet another opportunity for us to demonstrate that we are in
this business to provide our customers more than just a connection” (This Day 2003b).

Still the Pariah

In the week of the inauguration, the nodal point, pariah, was still operating. Some
used the looming threat of pariah status to motivate support of democracy. Segun
Odusola, chair of the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), Bauchi State
chapter warned “Nigerians to guard jealously, the country's democracy from hawks who
are bent on truncating our growing democracy” (Awofadeji 2003). Such actions “could
make Nigeria look like a pariah nation in the eyes of the international community”
(Awofadeji 2003, journalist’s paraphrasing).

Others felt that communal conflict and crime had already caused Nigeria to fall
back into international pariah status. One journalist commenting on the communal
conflicts near Delta region’s ports stated that “in international shipping world, Delta ports
have assumed pariah status. No foreign ship is ready to go there, especially now that
hostage taking is the in-thing. (Momoh 2003). An international business tycoon,
Towobola Adedoyin Mulikat Lasisi, pleaded for more security to remove the pariah label
imploring that “my fervent appeals go to the good Nigerians to uplift the country's image.
They can only do this by exposing criminally minded people whose activities have turned Nigerians into pariah not only in Britain but in other European countries” (Rasak 2003).

**U.S. Exemplarity or Bush v. Gore and Obasanjo v. Buhari**

In addition to the textual snapshots presented above that echoed the discourse of the previous inauguration with such familiarity, a new crisis arose in 2003 that further expressed the democratic discourse in a new manifestation. In the 19 April 2003 election, two retired generals, Muhammadu Buhari and incumbent Olusegun Obasanjo, contended for Nigeria’s presidency. On April 22, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) declared Obasanjo the winner with 24,456,140 votes (61.94 %) compared with Buhari’s 12,710,002 votes (32.04%). International assessments of the process were mixed. The European Union observer team declared that the elections were “marred by serious irregularities and fraud in a certain number of states,” and that “minimum standards for democratic elections were not met.” On the other hand the British Commonwealth observer team assessed the elections with “a pass mark” (Ajayi 2003).

Those opposing the INEC ruling and Obasanjo’s reinstatement activated a democratic discourse to support their case. Buhari and the leadership of 17 other political parties organized the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP), of which Peoples Redemption Party candidate Alhaji Balarabe Musa summarized that, “we agreed that the elections were rigged and such rigged elections cannot sustain democracy and an
not even sustain our country, therefore, we both agreed that we will be guided by
democratic norms” (This Day 2003d). In a five-page statement the CNPP argued that
allowing [the electoral decision] to stand will subvert the democratic form
of government instituted by the constitution and, worse still, would
entrench election rigging as a permanent feature of the Nigerian polity
[and that] democracy would have been irretrievably stultified, together
with the legitimacy which democratic elections confer upon government;
the obligation which the fear of defeat at an election imposes on
government not to neglect the welfare of the people. (This Day 2003d)

All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP)'s deputy governorship candidate, Okey Nwosu
argued that “We cannot accept a government instituted by fraud that will be exercising a
questionable mandate” (Ikumawoyi 2003). Neglecting the difference between a
departing military head of state and an elected president, Nwosu suggested that the
proper action would be for Obasanjo to step down from office in 2003 as he had done in
1979 as a military head of state. He the argued that “the President will be taking Nigeria
30 years back if he takes advantage of his incumbency to inaugurate a government
derived from an election adjudged by all Nigerians and the international community as
fraudulent” (Ikumawoyi 2003).

On the other hand others looked to this controversy as a sign that Nigeria had
matured into a strong democracy (which now included a strong, independent judiciary)
by approximating the outcome of the Bush/Gore election. The Editorial Board of This
Day explained,

It is a truism that judicial decisions are strictly dependent on the merit of a
case. Only facts and superior arguments determine the outcome of a case.
With a judiciary generally perceived as one of the best in the world, one
wonders why some of the aggrieved candidates are still sceptical of the
tribunals. It must also be remembered that the America presidential system
which we have been aping for ages was also visited with electoral
imperfection in their last presidential elections. How was it resolved? Through the legal process, and Al Gore without hesitation congratulated George Bush when he was declared winner by the Supreme Court. Implicit confidence in their judiciary! It should not be different in Nigeria. (This Day 2003c)

Although the board may have overstated the judiciary’s independence, their language reinforces both the need to resolve conflict through institutional means as well an even clearer picture of how those institutions should function – like those in the United States, a country that Nigeria has been “aping for ages.” On a similar note, “distinguished Nigerian” Tunde Akingbade, claimed to a reporter that,

In the United States, if you remember the last election, there was problem in Florida between Bush and Al-Gore, and they couldn't even finish counting the votes. At the end of the day, the controversy of who won. Al-Gore just didn't say, ‘look, let's pull the country down’. So, that way I believe that Nigerians from the last election, we have crossed the bridge which was unbelievable. We all thought that the whole country was going to be on fire and we thank God that we crossed that bridge, and it's a kind of lesson to those who are planning for the next election. (Vanguard 2003)

The author seems to suggest that a prescription for behavior is to be found by mimicking U.S. institutions and history, and more importantly the measure of success is also found therein. Another likewise claimed:

When the American presidential election of 2000 between, the current American President George Bush jnr. and the former Vice President, Al Gore, the matter had to go to the courts, in fact, all the way to the Supreme Court. The American Supreme Court decided in favour of George Bush jnr. and so he won the elections on a very narrow margin. During the crisis, some analysts posited that because the American Supreme court had a republican majority and George Bush jnr is a republican, and also that a few of the judges in the then Supreme court were actually appointed by George Bush's father, George Bush Snr, the decision would tend to favour George Bush Jnr. So it went. Call it favouritism. On swearing in day, there were a few protesters calling George Bush a 'thief' for stealing the presidency. But he was sworn in nonetheless and America moved on.
Some years back, Nigerians spent months debating the type of political system to adopt. A lot of suggestions were proffered, traditional African political system of government, Parliamentary system, Presidential system, part parliamentary, part presidential, the French model and a prime minister and so on. We opted for the presidential system of government and the American model.

Unfortunately, the American system of government is governed by laws, which means for the system to work, laws must be followed and the courts are the instruments for that purpose.

As we march on in our new democratic dispensation, one lesson our politicians have to learn is how to accept election results graciously. In these elections some Nigerians have done so. (Edeki 2003)

There is a not so subtle irony found in this argument. Despite the apparent and probable corruption that the author suggests determined the electoral outcome in America, the passage of power was successful, not because it was fair or just, but because it was legal. The choice of the word “unfortunately” is revealing. Democratic laws are set in opposition to justice but valued in their pragmatic function. Nigeria’s “new democratic dispensation” depends on Nigerians learning these lessons and patterning their behavior accordingly.

Many argued that a the test of democracy was the ability for the will of the majority to find expression. Obasanjo, having won a large majority of the popular vote, should, therefore be declared president without contest. On the other had, some claimed that Buhari’s use of the courts to challenge Obasanjo’s victory reinforced the U.S. style democracy.

Buhari’s insistence on and respect for due process must be respected and must be seen as respect for democracy. The people who quote the George Bush jnr/Al Gore example forget that Gore only accepted defeat and congratulated Bush after the Supreme Court had ruled in Bush’s favour. In the future, when reference is made to the elections of April 2003 and the
problems that arose therefrom, it will be on record that before decisions were made, due process was followed. (Taire 2003)

Despite all of the comparisons equating U.S. and Nigerian democracy, Mr. Akin Oshuntokun, the Director of Media and Publicity at the Obasanjo/Atiku Campaign Organisation, explained one important difference. The international status of the two nations is still unequal. Drawing on the Bush v. Gore experience, Oshuntokun criticizes the negative assessments of the international election observers and explains that the international community deliberately will not want to see anything good about Nigeria. When George Bush defeated Al Gore at the last presidential election in the United States, they kept recounting the votes in certain parts of the United States. Bush kept winning and was declared winner eventually. Did we go there to release report that they rigged the election? (Ugbolue and Elesho. 2003)

Others saw in the weakness of U.S. democracy another similarity with Nigeria. Dr. Iyorchia Ayu, a former Senate president explains:

I must add that in most of the democracies, they are not 100 per cent rigging-free. You remember what happened in advanced democracies like United States, between George Bush and Al in Florida elections. It did not affect the legitimacy of President Bush. If the election that brought Bush had been cancelled or repeated, the outcome would have been different. Those who want to build democracy in Nigeria should be careful of the jaundiced views of the observers. There is no credible alternative to PDP government. If there are, they are not yet acceptable to the Nigerian people. (This Day 2003a)

Echoing this point, another author claims that the United State’s political maturity is measured not in its perfection but in its ability to deal pragmatically with the inevitable imperfections that the U.S. and Nigeria, like all democracies, will share. “It is a statement of fact that there is no true democracy anywhere in the world, it was out of
sheer political maturity that Al Gore conceded victory to Bush in that disgraceful performance where Al Gore won the popular votes, but the court used some technicalities to favour Bush” (Farukanmi 2003).

Another writer quoted George Bernard Shaw (“Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few”) and looks even further back in U.S. history for cases of a corrupt electoral process to support the claim that

There is no perfect election anywhere. In 1960, it was almost glaring to all observers in the United States that John Kennedy did not defeat Richard Nixon in a race that remains the closest in American history but the latter allowed it to go because he wanted to protect the system. And we all know of Florida yet no one called for Interim Government while the controversy lasted. I believe that many of our politicians should also be prepared to make that kind of sacrifices. (This Day 2003e)

It is remarkable how much emphasis these authors place on the pragmatic expressions of democracy. Finally, in this curious reading of U.S. history, a journalist uses the Bush/Gore example as the United State’s imperfect but pragmatic example for Nigeria to follow.

At the last presidential elections in the United States of America, George Bush jr. was awarded the presidency with a narrow margin. Before the award, many Supreme Court justices were at each other’s throat. But Al Gore's concession on which Bush sneaked into victory kept America's democratic ideals going.

American citizens with their experience of democracy did not preach violence, but greeted the final decisions of the Supreme Court and Al Gore with relief rather than joy. Nigerians should learn from this. (Ifode 2003)

In addition to those individual insights already shared above, these quotes collectively reveal a few important insights into the discourse of democracy.
First, democracy has retained its pragmatic essence that had been its most fundamental characteristic at the beginning of the Fourth Republic. However, this pragmatic democracy has lost its previous economic tone. Four years of economic disappointment has compelled a slight rearticulation of the goods democracy bears, but it has not changed the essential calculous of democracy. Democracy is valued because of what it can deliver. Four years of political turmoil and sustained communal conflict, and the threat of more should the 2003 election be contended in the street, led these authors to value democracy because it can deliver stability. Just as the economic rewards promised earlier were not necessarily related to the freedoms and rights that scholars tend to associate with liberal democracy, the stability of 2003 is promised even if in direct opposition to those liberal goals such as a free, fair, and just representation.

Second, it is clear that Nigerians look to the United States, not only for the formal content of their constitution, but also for a guide to how that constitution should be put into practice. The political actions of Nigeria’s populous and its leaders are measured against the standards set by their U.S. counterparts for good or ill. It is remarkable that the value of this apprenticeship does not seem to depend on how just or moral the actions of the U.S. are. Whether these Nigerian authors agree or disagree with how the U.S. handled its 2002 elections seems to have little baring on whether the U.S. example should be followed. Without exception, these authors claim Nigeria should follow the U.S. lead.
Assessment

These last morsels of text reinforce much of what this dissertation initially set out to demonstrate. In the opening chapter of this dissertation, I claimed that most scholars of communal conflicts failed to explore how democracy had been articulated and how those articulations relate to communal conflicts. I proposed, therefore, “to begin that exploration – to consider issues of discourse and communal relations in order to understand how democracy was written and read across the North-South and international-domestic divides, and to reveal how the accompanying representative practices affected Nigeria’s domestic communal relations.”

Method

To accomplish these tasks, I applied the tools of discourse analysis (nodal points, classifications, positioning, logics of equivalence and difference, and the empty signifier) which allowed me to 1) take seriously the speech, actions, and identities of the Nigerian people as the window to understanding this moment in their history; 2) apply discourse analysis to the empirical Nigerian case; 3) take agency seriously; 4) embrace an explicitly political orientation; and 5) to focus on “the formation of an ‘us’ as opposed to a ‘them’” (Norval 2000, 224) which captures the political divisions between democratic and nondemocratic states in the international arena and the divisions and conflicts between ethnic, religious, and regional groups in Nigeria’s domestic arena.

Then I listened.
I listened to what academics had said about democracy and communal conflict. I discovered many neglected spaces where the consideration of agents, language, and international political-economic context should have been found. This dissertation has attempted to fill in some of those neglected spaces.

I listened to what the Clinton Administration had said about democracy and the need for Nigeria to embrace it. I heard clear articulations of a democracy devoid of liberal content but filled with promises of international status and economic rewards. This dissertation has attempted to expose those articulations and explore their consequences.

I listened to what Nigerians had to say about their country’s identity, about their relationship with the United States, and about their perceptions of democracy. I listened to their efforts to fill democracy’s void with various ethnic, regional, and religious content. I listened to their verbal and physical combat over the hegemonization of the signifier, democracy. I listened while 10,000 died. This dissertation provided a forum for these voices to be heard. It gave room for agency and for the discourse that pervades it. It revealed patters in the voices that illuminated discursive currents and what those currents made possible.
Empirical Findings

Of the thousands of academic, administrative, and Nigerian voices I heard, I provided room for more than five hundred\(^3\) to speak here. Here is what they revealed.

First, the discourse of democracy is identity-laden. Officials from the Clinton Administration articulated the classifications of democracy and pariah and positioned them in direct opposition with one another. The democratic state was defined by its behaviors (especially the holding of elections) and by its membership in the society of civilized states. The democratic state was worthy of incorporation into the international economy and the accompanying foreign investment and free trade. The pariah, on the other hand, was defined by its resistance to international norms, especially democratic behaviors. The pariah was marked by its exclusion from international society of civilized nations. The pariah was labeled, exiled, and disciplined with social, economic, and political sanctions. The Clinton Administration designated Nigeria as a pariah.

However, the Clinton Administration also designated Nigeria as a vital economic interest, which might have created a foreign policy dilemma if the Clinton Administration had not been able to exert some control over the discourse. The Clinton Administration articulated a discourse of democracy heavily imbued with economic promise and social acceptance, while at the same time largely devoid of liberal ideals (human rights, protection of minority rights, civil rights, a professional military establishment detached from political processes, separation of church and state, etc.).

\(^3\) If the length of my Reference page is any guide, this dissertation cited more than 500 sources. Some sources contained multiple interviews or speakers, and some speakers were cited from multiple references.
This enabled the Clinton Administration to combine the social and economic promises of democracy with the treat of social and economic punishments for pariahship, and made the simple behavior of holding an election the key to conversion.

Nigerian officials and the Nigerian populous heard this discourse, lamented their pariah label and blamed many of their country’s ills thereon. They also heard the promise of democracy and voiced their demands for it. In response, Nigeria engaged in the requisite democratic behavior and was immediately showered by the international community with its least expensive rewards for this behavior. Nigeria’s pariah status was lifted and Nigeria was accepted as a worthy member of the international community. Dignitaries were exchanged, direct flights resumed, small amounts of military assistance were extended, and smaller amounts of foreign investment and foreign aid were offered. For the most part, the economic promises were not realized, and reality spoiled much of democracy’s dream. Poor infrastructure, corruption, and civil unrest prevent the investments from flowing into Nigeria as expected, and Nigerians began to realize that democracy alone could not solve these problems. It fact, democracy sometimes seemed to exacerbate these problems.

Although the material promises were slow to accompany democracy, Nigeria’s communal groups quickly sought the other promises implied in U.S. exemplarity, (‘fair’ political representation, ‘fair’ distribution of resources, and majority determined religious law), often at the cost of other communal groups. First, ethnic groups soon found themselves in violent conflict over representation and access to political power, and they fought over local and state boundaries. They fought over the processes and outcomes of
elections. Second, communal groups found themselves in violent conflict over the
control of economic resources, especially oil. Communal groups fought with each other,
with MNCs, and with the federal government over the control of oil and the revenue it
generated. Third and finally, primarily Muslim and Christian groups (along with the
various regional and ethnic identities that overlay the religious divisions) found
themselves in a series of very deadly disputes over whether democracy ought to be
implemented without religious law or unified with it (i.e. Sharia). Each group embraced
the empty signifier, democracy, and struggled to fill the void with its particular
meanings. Muslims argued that the democratic requirements of majority rule, security,
and rule of law all necessitated that Sharia be implemented as a democratic system. The
various Christian groups argued that the democratic requirements of civil rights, minority
protection, and separation of church and state all necessitated that Sharia not be
implemented. Regarding all of these conflicts, Figure 29 documented that the number
and lethality of these conflicts rose sharply with the inauguration of a democratic
administration. The multitude of quotes summarized above explained how these
conflicts were related to the discourse of democracy.

**Theoretical Progress**

In addition to these empirical findings, this dissertation has accomplished some
significant theoretical tasks. First, it has opened an avenue to explore a void neglected by
political science literature; at a time when democratization and communal conflicts are
both substantial features of the world’s political landscape, this dissertation is the first to consider their intersection in the context of the discourse underlying them.

Second, this is the first scholarship building on the Essex School’s foundations to be conducted outside the small population of professors and graduate students who have taught or been taught at the Essex School. Although scholarship should know no geographic boundaries, the divide separating the English and American schools of political science is too rarely crossed. My crossing has enabled me to tie the methods and theory of the Essex School to the literature of the American political science cannons, and to address the matter of U.S. foreign policy with the intimate familiarity that residency in the U.S. affords.

Third, this dissertation rose to meet Doty’s challenge to examine the “representational practices that occur in the process of [democracy’s] promotion,” and to address “What meaning and identities are being (and will be) constructed?” (1996, 144). It likewise addressed Checkel’s challenge to explore the processes that tie agents to the structures of meaning (1999, 84). By exposing the representation practices underpinning democratic discourse, I make room for agency both of the policy makers and of the Nigerian citizens as they navigate their passage through the democratic discourse. I also account for representational practices that cross international boundaries. I know of no other study that has so thoroughly incorporated discourse and agency across both national (U.S.-Nigeria) and political (policy maker-citizen) boundaries.

Fourth, this dissertation has relayed many voices of Nigerian’s whose lives are profoundly affected by these discursive currents. Although I do not feel that it is my
place to “give voice” or to permit others to “express themselves,” I do feel that the forum I have created here is a valuable place where readers may listen to what hundreds of Nigerians had to say about the meaning of democracy in their lives.

Finally, this dissertation is the first application of the empty signifier to fill more than a short chapter or article. Furthermore, although democracy functions so well as an empty signifier, this is the first case to explore that application explicitly. In doing so, this study has shown how democracy has been both emptied and filled, and how conflict over the filling of its void can take on very real, very bloody manifestations. Whereas this is the most purely theoretical of this dissertation’s labors, I have shown how a serious consideration of this element of discourse can nevertheless illuminate very tangible, very real, life and death phenomena.

**Avenues for Further Study**

U.S. foreign policy took a decisive turn in 2001, not because terrorism reared its ugly head – terrorism had long been with us – but because a new Bush administration changed how the U.S. would engage the world. Democratic discourse retained its Clintonian content, but it was utilized by the Bush Administration in coordination with the new, dominant classification scheme: the democratic state versus the terrorist. This mirrored the democracy v. pariah opposition except that it unanchored the pariah from the nation state. The terrorist could be anything and anywhere. This new coupling retained democracy as the carrot, but for a stick it replaced sanctions and social isolation with preemptive war.
U.S. policy also took a much more unilateral tone in 1993 which undermined the chains of difference that had previously linked all civilized democracies. This undermined the utility of social isolation that Clinton had been able to use so effectively against Nigeria and other pariah designees. It also placed the empty signifier back in the arena of contestation and threatened its role as an empty signifier. Whereas Nigeria’s transformation from pariah to democratic partner was uncritically accepted by the international community of democracies, the transformations of Afghanistan and Iraq will not be so easily passed off. In contrast to the Clinton Administration’s subtle manipulation of discourse and its associated behavior so as not to invite critical challenges, the Bush Administration used democracy to legitimize its much less subtle military efforts to control behavior. It is unlikely that the international community of both democratic and undemocratic nations alike will not begin to question the Bush Administration’s use of the signifier, democracy, as one of the weapons in its arsenal.

All of these changes and anticipated changes present scholars with avenues for further analysis upon the foundation laid in this dissertation. Future research may include the following endeavors:

• Track Nigerian discourse as the Sharia controversy continues to unfold, incorporating new discursive currents as Islam is linked (perhaps implicitly) with the nodal point of terrorism.

• Apply the findings of this single Nigerian case to other cases where the U.S. government has tried or is trying to market democracy, to contrast cases over time and across varying degrees of success. Lybia, Cuba, Palestine, and Apartheid
South Africa, North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq would make for interesting comparisons.

- Explore the Bush Administration’s discourse of terrorism and how it is associated with democracy.
- Explore the native texts of the targets of the Bush doctrine to determine how the Bush Administration’s proclamations on democracy and terrorism might affect impressions on the ground in countries like those listed above.

I would love to accomplish all of these tasks here and now, but the time has come for me to end this endeavor.