Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa

Critical Perspectives

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JOHN L. AND
JEAN COMAROFF

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IBB = 419: Nigerian Democracy and the Politics of Illusion

Andrew Apter

On June 23, 1993, the day of the annulment of the national presidential election, the military committed the most treasonable act of larceny of all time: it violently robbed the Nigerian people of their nationhood.

—Wole Soyinka

The government has by its own actions legitimized a culture of fraud and corruption.

—Chief Gani Fawehinmi

. . . the postcolonial state stems to a great extent from its own representation.

—Jean-François Bayart

ON 26 AUGUST 1993, Nigeria's self-appointed military "president," General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (popularly known as IBB), broke down in tears. At least that is how the popular story goes. It was during his televised farewell address, twice postponed until late evening, when the tired general finally announced that he would "step aside" from office, that he allegedly cried like a baby. Of course the tears were never shown. The momentary breakdown, if it actually occurred, was edited from the final broadcast, in which IBB attempted a graceful exit from the eight years of kleptocracy that brought Nigeria down from a middle-income nation to among the poorest in Africa. IBB had indeed exhausted his country and his options. Democratic return to civilian rule was repeatedly postponed from 1990 until the ill-fated elections of 12 June 1993, which he annulled on vague charges of improprieties that were never formally established. In the following weeks, IBB tried to buy support, disbursing *billions* of naira to governors, senators, even traditional rulers flown to Abuja each week as his guests. But no alliance or coalition formed, and finally, even the military turned against him. By 26 August, the game was up. Were IBB's invisible tears those of a leader betrayed by his nation or of a nation betrayed by its leader? Were they a hidden sign of his personal failure or a collective representation of relief and despair? Did they flow from the dictator's body or from the popular imagination? Or were they a smokescreen, part of a well-crafted vanishing act giving IBB the last laugh?

These questions are not merely rhetorical, but reflect a more general crisis of representation pervading the political and economic condition of Nigeria today. For most external observers, the failure of "June 12" represented the most recent breakdown of Nigerian democracy, undermined by the familiar syndrome of state patronage and rampant corruption unchecked by ineffective courts. As the 1983 elections of Shagari's Second Republic revealed, in a system where wealth and power depend upon political access to state petroleum revenues, no party can afford to lose the vote. Rather it will engage in widespread intimidation and electoral fraud before conceding victory to the opposition (Apter 1987; Hart 1993; Joseph 1987). However, the aborted elections of 12 June 1993 represent not the latest version of a familiar story—the return of electoral tragedy as democratic farce—but a new type of crisis; one that is of a different order of magnitude from mere vote rigging and competition for the national cake. For, unlike the last elections of the Second Republic—which were actually held, even if rules were broken to produce questionable results—the elections of 12 June 1993 never really took place. At least, not in any politically meaningful sense. As subsequent events and information have revealed, IBB's long-awaited elections were a ruse, a confidence trick, an elaborate simulation of the democratic process. A consensus is growing to the effect that, almost from the very start, IBB had no intention of giving up power. However, my argument extends beyond the ambitions of an individual dictator, beyond the personification of corruption and greed, to grasp the *logic* of his dictatorship—a regime of arbitrary truth and pervasive illusion that developed as the oil-economy collapsed.

At issue is the correlation of different forms of value, particularly exchange value and truth-value, as the oil economy boomed and then went bust. During the 1970s, when the petro-naira was stronger than the dollar at an exchange of 1.60 to 1, Nigeria was flush with buying power. Expatriates of all stripes and colors invaded the Nigerian universities and professional workforce as teachers, doctors, agronomists, and architects. Nigeria was a land of third world opportunity. Money could be made from large contracts and experts could find markets for their knowledge. Nigeria's problem was the proverbial fate of all oil economies, which is not how to make money but how to spend it. The national currency may have been fixed at an artificially high rate of exchange, but it was backed by oil, which was globally distributed through OPEC. Under these conditions, Nigeria enjoyed a high degree of international visibility and credibility. As the quality of everyday life improved for increasing proportions of the population, a new fetishism of commodities animated the nation, based less on the objectification of productive relations than

on those of consumption and exchange. In the new object-world of imported commodities and rapid growth, seeing was believing. Commodified forms of national development were in the last instance backed by petrodollars, represented by letters of credit, contracts, trademarks, bridges, monuments, museums, highways, traffic jams, and a rising nouveau bourgeoisie. Whatever practical obstacles to finalizing a contract might occur—be they revised estimates, kickbacks, or successive mobilization fees—Nigerian social, political, and economic life was ultimately redeemable in foreign exchange. If the oil-rich state was not exactly democratic, at least it was accountable in dollars and cents.

All of this created an image of modernity that was backed by hard evidence. Or so it appeared. The infusion of oil money into the economy did not generate the alienated, impersonal, rational calculus of the modern industrial economy as variously portrayed by Marx, Simmel, and Weber. After all, oil capitalism is not industrial capitalism, wherever petroleum's final destination may be. Rather, the monetization of an oil-rich Nigeria gave rise to a celebration of visible "naira power," a national measure of value that could hold its own in international markets while attracting considerable foreign investment.[1] If money remained "magical"—powerful in its capacity to buy influence, erotic in its ability to buy love, with its hidden source beneath the ground a state-owned secret—its consequences were tangible. They signified "objective" growth in the universal language of the dollar. The naira was a credible currency not because of its internal semantic properties, such as denominational units or engraved designs, but due to its favorable relation to the dollar and the pound.[2] In the object-world of imports and exports, it bolstered the authority of the state by presiding, with its imprimatur, over a regime of national renewal. For, whatever Nigeria's boasts or demands, the buck stopped with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Oil thus underwrote the veracity of a range of discourses, from the technical and scientific to the national and even racial, as the redeemable and redemptive wealth of the black and African world. The state emerged as the locus of truth, not because it wielded arbitrary power but because it was the locus of distribution. It pumped oil revenues into the expanding public sector while diverting dividends—such as import licenses, contracts, and jobs—to political clients and even potential opponents of the regime.

By 1983, however, the oil economy had entered its downward spiral. Things began to fall apart. The credibility of the nation and the naira began to wane as the civilian chaos of the Second Republic gave way to a succession of military takeovers. After IBB toppled the Buhari-Idiagbon regime in the bloodless coup of 27 August 1985, one of his explicit goals was to restore Nigeria's credibility by floating the naira to establish its "free" market value. The new regime sought to attract foreign investment and eliminate illegal traffic in foreign exchange. The result, coupled with a stringent Structural Adjustment Program designed to stimulate domestic production, was massive inflation, devaluation, and extensive deterioration of public institutions and infrastructures (Anyanwu 1992). As the world price in oil dropped, Nigeria's dependence upon petroleum increased, creating a political economy of dwindling resources and intensified competition to appropriate them. By the late 1980s, in an atmosphere of frustrated expectations, broken contracts, and unfulfilled national development plans, a new kind of crime began gaining momentum—less violent than the roving gangs of armed robbers who took over at night, but more pervasive within the dramaturgy of Nigerian business culture and everyday life. Referred to colloquially as the "419," after the relevant section of the Nigerian criminal code, it covered a range of confidence tricks involving impersonation and forgery for fraudulent gain. The "419" has continued to grow as a major industry in Nigeria, second only to oil (or in some accounts, third, after narcotics) as the nation's major export earner of foreign currency.[3] In what follows, I will expand the equation "IBB = 419" to illuminate not just the failure of the 1993 elections but their broader significance within the crisis of representation that developed after the dollar dropped out of the naira—when the mysterious "substance" of monetary value literally disappeared.

The Art of the Deal

On 4 September 1991, the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce issued a warning against fraudulent deals with Nigerians. In an article titled "Singapore Weary of Nigerian Businessmen," the 5 September 1991 *Daily Times* reported that according to the executive secretary, at least thirty of its members received letters from Nigerians promising to pay several million dollars in return for help in transferring large sums of money from Nigeria into Singapore bank accounts.

In a related incident, one Singapore computer company lost $23,000 worth of computers over a shipping deal made on a false bank draft. By the time the forgery was discovered, the computers were on their way to Nigeria.

The story is a ripple on a tidal wave of financial fraud that is sweeping across the globe, "from South Dakota to Ulan Bator" according to Cindy Shiner's recent (30 August 1994) *Washington Post* exposé, "Scamming Gullible Americans in a Well-Oiled Industry in Nigeria." It belongs to a hybrid narrative genre—combining low tragicomedy with high moral parable—about greed, corruption, and ruinous deception perpetrated by crafty Nigerians on their credulous marks. The *Economist* calls it "The Great Nigerian Scam," otherwise known as "advanced fee-fraud" or, more simply, "419" after the Nigerian criminal code enacted to prosecute such cases. Its basic features involve all the trappings of advanced parastatal oil-capitalism, replete with faxes, forms, stamps, insignia, letters of credit, invoices, corporate logos, and bank accounts, which figure as props in a well-staged illusion. The *Economist* explains:

> A typical "419" letter is written—supposedly—on the headed writing paper of the NNPC or some other state enterprise. A supposed official cheerfully admits to some scheme to rip off his employers, and offers the foreign recipient a 30% share of the $40–60 [million] or so which, he says, he needs to send urgently overseas. The recipient, normally a company, simply has to send details of its bank account, invoices for its fictitious services rendered to the state corporation—and some sheets of its own headed writing paper, blank but signed. Absolute secrecy is requested for a "highly classified" transaction. (1995, 36)

To set the proposed money-laundering operation in motion, the mark typically greases a few palms, with $5,000 in "fees" and a few more thousand in "taxes," with some Rolex watches and airplane tickets thrown in to soften senior gatekeepers and bank managers, not unlike ordinary kickbacks of business as usual. In the meantime, the signed letterhead, purportedly used to make the transaction look legitimate, is sent to the victim's bank manager with instructions to transfer thousands or even millions into a dummy account held by the scamster. In most cases, the credibility of the scam rests on references to excess funds accumulated through inflated contracts negotiated during the oil boom. Many foreigners, including businesspeople from the heartland of America, have some sense of Nigeria's prominence as a major oil-producing nation, even if they cannot locate the country on a map. This awareness, coupled with the misguided sense that the "third world" plays by flexible rules, generates considerable gullibility. An editorial in Nigeria's *Daily Times*, appropriately titled "Much Ado about 419" to play upon the "nothingness" behind the elaborate decoys (and more obliquely, upon the foreigner's shared responsibility for the crimes), elaborates on the techniques of *faire croire:*

> The foreign victims are taken in by fake circular letters or unauthenticated fax or telex messages relating to purported approved transfer of funds running into millions of US dollars arising from excess claims on some alleged foreign contracts awarded between 1979 and 1983. These purportedly authorized letters lend support to enable the transfer of funds from Nigeria to off-shore bank accounts with a promise to share in the illegal proceeds. To make the deals look authentic, the fraudsters infiltrate public places like the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the Central Bank of Nigeria, Merchant Banks and strategic government departments. The crooks use government facilities and impersonate public functionaries and in the end leave large sums of unpaid telephone and postal bills. In many of the "successful" cases, the tricksters disappear after receiving substantial deposits as advance payments which are supposedly meant to "soften the ground" and bribe "officials" who might be sitting in on the "deal." (27 February 1992, 18)

Here we can see how the oil boom, specifically during the last contracting heyday of Shagari's Second Republic from 1979–83, establishes the backdrop of such financial dissimulation. It provided a historical context of considerable fiscal accumulation and gave rise to the corporate forms and monetary instruments that marked Nigeria's participation in global market transactions. Two remarkable dimensions of the "419" deserve special consideration: the range and scale of operations; and the performance art of the con games themselves, which involve stagecraft, impersonation, and those collusive fabrications that Goffman (1974, 83–123) unpacks with such acute sensitivity in his phenomenology of social interaction.

The global scale of the "419" erupted rather suddenly in 1990, when, after several years of deliberation, IBB deregulated the banking system and foreign-exchange market, sending the naira into its downward spiral. As the naira dropped against international currencies, the "419" took shape, following the circuits of global capital that had developed in the era of flexible accumulation (Harvey 1989, 141–200) throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Financial scams reported in Thailand, Canada, Scandinavia, Austria, the United Kingdom, and the United States engaged the energies of Scotland Yard, the FBI, Interpol, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and a variety of private and subsidiary agencies like the Better Business Bureau and the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FINCEN) of the U.S. Treasury Department. In an article titled "Nigerian Scam Lures Companies," published in the *New York Times*, 21 May 1992, Steve Lohr reported that according to the managing director of Kroll Associates, a large financial-investigation company based in New York, "You almost never see a net spread this wide in white-collar fraud" (D1). The State Department's Office of Public Affairs even published a pamphlet of "Tips for Business Travellers to Nigeria." Its list of "scam indicators" includes large financial deposit transfers in exchange for a substantial percentage with discretion, letters claiming the soliciting party has personal ties to high government officials, and "any deal that seems too good to be true" (Shiner). Estimates of the annual income earned by this "well-oiled" Nigerian industry range from Scotland Yard's $250 million to more than $1 billion according to Terry Sorgi, who worked as a commercial attaché for the U.S. embassy in Lagos and handled 474 Nigerian fraud cases in 1992 alone.[4]

Sorgi claims that the average money-laundering sting nets $150,000, although amounts exceeding $1 million have been received from forged real estate purchases and merchandise orders. Among newsworthy Canadian victims, Corrine Baker lost $470,000 (which her sales and promotion company raised for charities) when she diverted it to Nigerian bank accounts in Germany and England in anticipation of a 30 percent share of $20 million promised to her by her Nigerian correspondents. They convinced her to forward a percentage of the total to get the money released and pay for legal fees; as a result, she was charged with defrauding her Canadian clients. In another case, a Toronto investment broker lost $690,000 after traveling to Nigeria several times in one month to seal a deal. In an article titled "Beware of Scam, Hotel Owner Says," the *Montreal Gazette* reported a related incident, in which two Calgary oil and gas companies lost a combined total of $625,000 to Nigerians who said they wanted to launder millions by issuing fake invoices to the government for supplies of the firms' oil-field equipment (20 February 1994, A6).

Lured by the prospect of windfall profits, overseas businesses have paid dearly for their mistakes. Among the counterfeit purchase order victims, a New Zealand businessman lost $200,000 worth of computers and supplies when he shipped the equipment against a forged letter of credit. In the United States, George Davis, a retired Texas oil engineer, also received a fake purchase order from a Nigerian company for $15 million in industrial hardware from his business, International Equipment. After sending more than $70,000 in processing "fees," Davis had to file for bankruptcy. On a more sanctified register, Houston evangelist Jerry Smith (pastor of Woodland Trails Baptist Church and author of religious books distributed in Nigeria) and the Reverend Don Kettler (of St. Joseph's Cathedral, Sioux Falls, S.D.) lost $32,000 and $90,000 respectively in their efforts to release bogus legacies bequeathed to them in Nigeria. In both cases, the beneficiaries were convinced to pay inheritance taxes and legal fees up front, only to discover that the anticipated bequest did not exist.

In one of the most spectacular cons, EER Systems, a private aerospace engineering firm that has worked for NASA and the U.S. Department of Defense, lost $4.4 million in a simulated deal with the Nigerian Ministry of Aviation. After the firm's president met with his "partners" in Nigeria, they convinced him to use wire transfers to deposit $4.4 million into Nigerian accounts to expedite a $28.5 million deal that, of course, never materialized. Instead, the three Nigerian associates have been charged with wire fraud by a federal grand jury, but the Nigerian government is in no hurry to extradite the confidence men. For, despite official disclaimers and the establishment of a Nigerian Task Force on Trade Malpractices in 1992, evidence is growing that the Nigerian government's complicity in the international "419" goes all the way to the top. Although the Justice Ministry published a wanted list of 1,200 suspects, and investigators have made a few arrests, no convictions to date have been carried by the courts. Perhaps the most delightful "419," and one that directly implicates the Babangida regime, was the fleecing of South Africa's foreign minister, Pik Botha, in a deal that combined political tactics with financial injury. According to Chris McGreal in a 4 September 1993 *Guardian* feature story titled "Victims Caught in a Web of Corruption," Arthur Nzeribe, one of Nigeria's most controversial politicians, approached Botha to underwrite a new African magazine that would provide sympathetic coverage for Pretoria, on condition that the South African connection was kept secret. According to the deal that was struck, Nzeribe's and Botha's foreign ministries were each to put 320,000 pounds sterling into a British bank account from which either could withdraw. When Botha deposited his money, Nzeribe took it out. Whereas the South African foreign minister never recovered a penny, "the Nigerian politician has since gained further notoriety as the military's front-man in using the courts to cancel Nigeria's presidential election" (Foreign section, 11).

To be sure, there is a certain degree of righteous third world banditry to the Nigerian "419." In a country that has been a dumping ground of surplus (and often defective) commodities, operating under unfavorable terms of trade dating back to a colonial economy that diverted producer profits into British securities (Helleiner 1966, 161–62), the "419" might appear as just deserts. Some Nigerians see it as reparations for colonialism and the slave trade. Fred Ajuda, a "419" hero who traveled with a police escort in Lagos, has called himself "a black man's Robin Hood"("Great Nigerian Scam" 1995). Nigerians are quick to point out the scams could not work without unscrupulous Western dupes seeking illicit profits. Indeed, their techniques—raiding bank accounts, using dummy corporations, banking on trust, building confidence—echo the language of high finance with its corporate raids, hostile takeovers, and most especially its fictitious financing and capital formation (Harvey 1989, 194–95). Of course, the dividing line between legitimate and illegitimate business is permeable, increasingly so as the instruments of financial speculation retreat into virtual reality. Instead of criticizing the perpetrators or the victims of the "419," however, I focus on the underlying conditions of its efflorescence in Nigeria, not only as a phenomenon to be measured in dollars but also as a phenomenology of *transacting* value.

In the spending spree of the oil boom, when economic growth was both visible and credible, there emerged a new Nigerian elite of urbane, cosmopolitan, and studiously bourgeois businessmen, contractors, and professionals. The old elite of first and second generation colonial civil servants and lawyers, with school ties to London and Oxbridge, was not so much displaced as swallowed up by this burgeoning bourgeoisie, inflated by new money and the plethora of degrees and certificates afforded by the oil bonanza.[5] Many students from the boom era studied in second- and third-tier schools overseas—in the United States, India, and the Soviet Union—retaining the prestige of "been to" status while relying less on the cachet of school name. Others entered elite ranks by passing through Nigeria's university system, which built new campuses, expanded postgraduate programs, hired more faculty, and graduated more students. Universal primary education—and, in some states, secondary as well—widened the net of middle-class recruitment by providing schooling opportunities in the cities and in the bush. And the military emerged as a popular career pathway to important friends and powerful patrons.

By 1976, however, economic growth produced a new social anxiety, a credibility crisis within the status system as the old hierarchy was overwhelmed.

The margins of the elite became vulnerable to invasion by a nouveau riche that grew up as quickly as the new houses and hotels it built. At this moment, a flurry of certificate racketeering scandals emerged, as fraudulent examination results were discovered among high school graduates seeking jobs or admission to training colleges and universities. Whatever its scale might have been—and there is no doubt that documents were forged, examinations were leaked, and results were bought—the discourse to which it gave rise indicated a nation, as Chinua Achebe put it (in his novel of the same title), "no longer at ease." Thus an editorial titled "Do Something about Certificate Racketeering" in the 11 January 1976 issue of the *Nigerian Observer* warned the public to beware of false graduates; maintaining that the few cases of certificate racketeering actually probed were but "the tip of the iceberg," it declared the whole country at risk. The problem was said to have developed in the remote "townships and rural areas" where "amongst the teeming teenagers will be found pushers and hawkers doing their dirty trade, hustling the young, easily gullible idle student to find a criminal way out of the difficulties of exams" (3). In language reminiscent of nineteenth-century American advice manuals that "protected" country youth from city "seducers" (Halttunen 1982, 1–32), but rerouting the flow of evil from city to country, the editorial remonstrated against false representations—not just credentials but also the social identities that they purportedly reflect. In almost prophetic anticipation of the "419," the editorial focused on the social conditions of all official documentation: the "receipts, licenses, currency, cheques," that, like certificates, must be "security printing jobs"—that is, "distinctive enough for all to see and identity, yet defy easy reproduction and so improper mass circulation." Read as social allegory, the "improper mass circulation" of bourgeois credentials and identities, propelled by a booming economy, threatened the social basis of a more genuine distinction, which was visible but *not* mechanically reproducible. If seeing was believing during the oil boom, being seen could also mean passing and deceiving.

The social dislocations precipitated by the influx of petrodollars were different from those resulting from the oil bust; but they shared connections beyond money. The anxiety generated by an expanding middle class in Nigeria was not confined to the isolated acts of technical forgery that it may have encouraged. It grew out of the processes of bourgeois self-fashioning, bordering on the impersonation of social standing, produced by the sudden circulation of cash and commodities. Fortunes *were* made during the boom, and the art of the business deal was negotiated with tremendous style and lavish celebration. "You got the contract? Great! Join me for a Gulder!" exclaims the sophisticated executive to his associate on the telephone in one contemporary television beer commercial. Magazine advertisements reveal modern Nigerians dressed for success, with chic couples using Western deodorants and proud mothers cooking with vegetable (not palm) oil for their nuclear families.

As the petroleum economy internationalized the state (Watts 1992, 35), the nation followed suit, embellishing cosmopolitan modernity with Nigerian hospitality. Obviously the fruits of the boom were not evenly distributed; most Nigerians could only aspire to the lofty heights of the new elite, even if money flowed into the informal economy through patronage networks and the parasitic service sector. Nonetheless, the hotels, nightclubs, business offices, and banks of Lagos and Ibadan were bustling with deals, and it is from the culture of contracting that developed at this time that the elaborate cons of the Babangida era derived.

To appreciate the more dramaturgical arts of the "419," I shall focus on two cases profiled at some length in the press: the first involves Canadian real estate broker Ben Vanderburg; the second, Charlie Pascale, an American businessman who tried to outsmart those who duped him.

One of the remarkable aspects of the Vanderburg con is that, despite losing $60,000, the victim was so taken in by his Nigerian associates that part of him still believes them to have been sincere in their efforts to protect $32 million against government theft. In an article titled "Nigeria Bank Scam Dupes Broker" in the 31 December 1994 issue of the *Toronto Star*, Rick Haliechuk reported that Vanderburg received a call from a man identifying himself as Dr. Shoga Elias from the Ministry of Finance, requesting help on behalf of a group of Nigerians who wanted to get their money out of the country and invest it in real estate. Included in the proposal was a $10 million cut to Vanderburg for his role in keeping the money "out of the hands of corrupt rulers." All he had to do was fly to Lagos with three Rolex watches, for the Nigerian bankers they would be meeting, and $15,000 for "processing fees." When he arrived in Lagos, Vandenburg was met at the airport and driven to the home of another high-ranking official in the Ministry of Finance, where he saw a parked red Porsche. That evening, he was introduced to the "group" trying to get its money out. According to Vanderburg, "I felt very, very comfortable, very much at home. . . . They were cultured, well-to-do people, educated, fluent in English." The following day, more meetings took place to work out the transfer of funds to Canada. Vanderburg was puzzled that the Canadian-educated, Nigerian lawyer working for the group was named Mike Anderson. But he explained that he had changed his name in Canada. More disturbing was his statement that, according to a new government decree, the group would have to come up with an $800,000 cash fee. At another staged meeting with bankers, government bureaucrats, and the investment group—"many of them wearing Nigerian ceremonial dress and 'looking like a million dollars'"—Vanderburg was praised for the wonderful job he was doing for patriotic Nigerians. He was then asked to raise $170,000 as his part of the processing fee, whereafter the Canadian embassy in Lagos contacted him and informed him of the scam. Two weeks after his return home, the principals were still contacting him, as if the deal were going through. Even after losing $60,000 in fees, plane tickets, and gifts of watches and cellular phones, Vanderburg maintained, "I would be happy to meet them and give them a hug; that's the kind of people they are. . . . They're so convincing, it's beyond belief"(A1).

Like any well-planned con, Vanderburg's story illustrates the "collusive fabrications" whereby one party is "contained" by the activities of a "net" or team (Goffman 1974, 84). Exploiting the difference between social appearances and realities, the con artists simulate a business opportunity in which the mark invests, getting in deeper and deeper until the illusion pops and the game is up. The primary frameworks deployed in the "419" include the instruments of international finance, institutional offices and venues like the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the Central Bank, and, most importantly, the staged class habitus of a privileged elite that saturates the mark with subtle cues of shared affinities. The Porsche in the compound convinced Vanderburg that his Nigerian associates were serious, that they were for real. The business meetings and parties constructed a credible social reality of "cultured, well-to-do people," a representation from which material consequences would follow as long as the mark's credulity was sustained. And unlike the constructions of "primary" social reality (Goffman's "keyings"), the truth-value of the appearances is not shared—what is "true" for the mark is "false" for the fabricators. Such unequal terms of social interaction create unequal terms of financial exchange: money changes hands in one direction only, despite the expectations of a return. Vanderburg's case was really quite simple, illustrating how deeply he invested in the "reality principle" of his associates.

The case of Charlie Pascale is more complex, because it adds an extra level of framing to the interaction, rather like the logic of counterespionage that his story resembles. According to "Charlie's Hustle," an article by Tom Dunkel in the 27 February 1994 *Washington Post*, Pascale's invitation came directly from Mr. Dodo Oto of the NNPC's accounting department, offering a 25 percent cut of $35 million in excess revenues that needed to be spent before a year-end audit. In exchange for the use of his Alpha Electronics company account, Pascale would keep $8 million for himself. Recognizing the deal as a money-laundering scheme, he played along, putatively planning an exposé if the deal fell through or proved illegal. Employing his own cloak and dagger tactics, including code words, mail drops, and hidden cameras, Pascale traveled to Nigeria where a meeting with a man named Alhaji from the Central Bank was arranged:

> The meeting took place in a parlor filled with tasteful bamboo furniture. Alhaji seemed someone of substance. He was "impressive," Charlie later faxed to [his business associate] Johnson. Things were looking up! The missus served cold drinks and hot tea on a silver tray. Then a man named Julius, who identified himself as a representative of the bank, asked Pas-

cale for . . . $750,000. The money, he explained, was needed to cover the "transfer tax" levied on the $35 million before it left the country. (F1)

The stage thus set in a convincing bourgeois interior, the plot thickened. The man called Alhaji appeared taken aback by Julius's sudden demand, and turned on Mr. Oto from the NNPC accounting office, threatening to kill him for apparently bungling the negotiations. According to Pascale, "Oto essentially crawled over on his hand and knees and squatted." Pascale pulled out in time, although he continued to fax his partners from the United States, losing another $5,500 in airplane tickets that he sent to Julius. What makes this particular case so interesting, beyond the dramatic stagecraft, is the secondary playing of the fool against the fool. The con combined elements of bourgeois respectability with bungling slapstick, playing ever so delicately upon third world "mimicry" (Bhabha 1994, 85–92) and mimesis (Taussig 1993) of the West to reinforce the mark's sense of confidence and superiority. Pascale was taken in by his superiors in the game because they allowed him to feel that he was their superior. A history of colonial stereotypes and paternalistic conceits were thus brought into play—of the evolué who tries too hard, and of the enterprising liberal who thinks he knows better. In some scams, the advance fee is called "an economic recovery tax," playing on the possible meanings of economic recovery as "getting better" and "getting back."

As the dialectical laminations of the "419" deals increase in complexity, the foundations of social interaction begin to crumble. Unstable identities are represented by shifting names, like the Nigerian lawyer Mike Anderson who had changed his name in Canada; by general names like Alhaji, which refers widely to any Muslim who has been to Mecca, and can be used even more liberally to denote bigmanship; by first names like Julius, which are untraceable, and by false ones like that of Dan Musa, who, according to one "419" report, did not exist, yet managed to transfer 13,000 pounds sterling through the Central Bank and into a fake company account (this story is also reported in McGreal, "Victims Caught in a Web of Corruption," *Guardian*, 4 September 1993, Foreign section, 11). As Scotland Yard's fraud investigator explained, "the victim is left facing bogus people with bogus documents. . . . Identifying the people behind one of these . . . is a big problem" (Lohr, "Nigerian Scam Lures Companies," D1). In many stories involving elaborate venues (e.g., "There was a plaque and a doorman in a hat, and the office had lots of NNPC documents"), the dupe returns to find an empty office, a dead telephone line, and no trace of his business associates. Michelle Faul of the *Chicago Tribune* described how one Houston businessman who was offered four million barrels of crude oil at $2.50 below the market price became convinced that the deal was straight "because he was taken to meetings at the state-owned oil company, shown paperwork at the Central Bank, introduced to military officers in government offices and shown the tanker said to be loaded with oil" ("Dangerous Fraud in Nigeria," 1 June 1992, 8). These examples illustrate how the "seeing is believing" of the oil boom has given way to the visual deceptions of the oil bust, a social world not of objects and things but of smoke and mirrors, a business culture of worthless currency, false facades, and empty value forms. Oil, the "underlying" substance of economic value, might lend credibility to Nigerian business ventures and to the "glib and oily art" of the deal. But its pathways—from public institutions into private coffers—have become uncertain. Many "419s" simulate oil's direct purchase and sale, while others invoke the revenues that it has generated. If its presence or absence makes a real difference in transacting value, its decreasing availability as a national resource has undermined Nigeria's credibility, both at home and abroad. The instabilities of social identity produced at the margins of the rising middle class, when the state expanded the public sector with oil revenues during the 1970s, have now reached into the center. In a *Toronto Star* article titled "Crooks and Con Men Stain a National Image," Bill Schiller recounted the words of Alhaji Aliyu Atta, Nigeria's inspector general of police: "Con men are threatening to submerge the nation's economic well-being into one despicable abyss of fraud and corruption" (10 May 1992, F3). To understand how democracy was thrown into this abyss, when the "419" entered into politics, we can turn to the Big Con of 12 June 1993.

The 1993 Elections

Addressing the nation during his 1992 budget speech, General Babangida proclaimed: "We must hold ourselves collectively responsible for the negative image which our nation projects" (Schiller, "Crooks and Con Men"). Speaking for himself, and his inner circle of syndicate bosses, he knew what he was talking about. IBB's personal fortune, estimated between $5 and $7 billion (Useh 1993, 13), places him among world-class kleptocrats like the late Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and the late Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. Using the military regime to make deals and issue decrees, IBB constructed a labyrinthine business empire that he controlled directly, through the NNPC and the Central Bank of Nigeria (which he moved from the Ministry of Finance to the presidency), and indirectly, through front companies like Foundation Mira, white elephant projects like the Ajaokuta steel mill, and military-industrial contracts that provided a constant stream of kickbacks. Dubbed "Babangida Unlimited" by the popular press, this financial imperium emerged from the infamous Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), with which IBB became involved just months after coming to power. The BCCI link pinpoints with almost topological precision how international finance and fraud were coordinated with national banking and petroleum revenues by the Northern-based bloc of old power and new wealth known as the Kaduna Mafia.[6] The chairman of BCCI's Nigerian affiliate, BCCI (Nigeria) Ltd., was none other than IBB's godfather, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, whom IBB appointed as sultan of Sokoto in 1991. That same year, he installed his finance minister, Alhaji Abubakar, as the sardauna of Sokoto, thereby clinching Northern dynastic control over Nigeria's political and financial affairs.

In the early days of the Babangida era, after the bloodless palace coup, the regime appeared less venal. Return to civilian rule, not Northern politico-economic hegemony, was the order of the day. Turning over a new political leaf, IBB banned all former senior-ranking politicians—going back to the First Republic—from seeking elected office; this in order to produce a "new breed" of honest politicians and to break old party alliances and patronage networks. In the upshot, it was said, a new "political class" would emerge with a more contemporary and sophisticated political culture.[7] Thus started the official "transition programme" referred to as "directed democracy," a return to civilian rule, stage-managed by the military, which would organize grass-roots participation, mass mobilization, and a new constitution, and would arrange a series of elections beginning at the local level and ascending to the presidency by 1992. Thus was a bottom-up democratic process imposed from the top down, defining the rules of engagement and dictating the institutional blueprint "represented" by the new republic. The military government formed a new Directorate of Social Mobilization (MAMSER) to inculcate democratic values and produce an enlightened citizenry, a Constitutional Review Committee to help write a new constitution, and a National Electoral Commission (NEC) to oversee the political process. As we shall see, the Armed Forces Ruling Council, the NEC, high courts, and two political parties that ultimately emerged became the leading actors in an electoral charade that was fabricated, screened, revised, postponed, and choreographed by the regime's inner circle, only to be canceled at the final curtain.

To understand the false starts and stops of democracy under IBB, we might follow two orders of political action: the first, strategic and tactical, illuminates the tricks deployed by the dictator to sabotage the ballot and remain in power; the second, less conscious and more profound, concerns the epistemology of political representation that developed as the democratic process and its forms of governmentality degenerated into shifting claims and truth conditions.[8] From this latter perspective, the question of what went on in IBB's mind, his secret agenda and vested interests, becomes less important than the conditions of structural adjustment and the categories of accountability that established the official fictions of a new politics of illusion, a "liberal" variant of what Mbembe (1992, 11–18) calls a *simulacral regime*.

The first elections of the Babangida era took place as early as 12 December 1987, in (what were then) the 301 local government areas of Nigeria's twenty-one states. IBB had already created two new states from Kaduna State and Cross River State; this was justified as a reform to bring government closer to the people, but actually sought to spread the national cake (in this case, into

his wife Maryam's home area) to increase federal penetration at the grass roots. As we shall see, this strategy was repeated on 27 August 1991, when IBB purportedly yielded to popular demand by establishing nine additional states—which entailed new local government areas and, hence, new elections. The 1987 nonparty ballot for councilors in the 301 constituencies was annulled by the NEC due to a shortage of ballot boxes and alleged electoral malpractice. Angry protestors rioted in Lagos, burning vehicles and beating two police officers among those stationed to stop people moving between local government areas to cast multiple votes. On 11 December 1987, the *Reuter Library Report* related that in Ondo State, a candidate was arrested with 2,415 voting cards hidden under his bed. While the shortage of ballot boxes and even polling booths prevented many people from voting at all, the net figure of 72 million registered voters was clearly inflated, implying a total population of 150–200 million! IBB's transition program was not off to a good start, with grassroots elections at the local government area repeated on 26 March 1988, and again on 8 December 1990, when Nigeria's two political parties finally emerged.

The lifting of the ban on party politics and the creation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) marked a turning point in the reality principle of Nigerian democracy: a shift from the populist mechanism of a general will represented from below to that of a military general, or leviathan, establishing the conditions of representation from above. Not only did the rules of the game change; so did the game itself—away from the participatory model that IBB avowed and toward the carefully staged con of a political "419" in which elections were more simulated than real. Called "democracy by fiat" by one Nigerian journalist (Ofeimun 1989), Nigeria's "two-partyism" (Oyediran and Agbaje 1991) was promulgated in the new draft constitution of May 1989, a document that voiced the recommendations of the civilian Political Bureau and Constituent Assembly but gave the last word to the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). The idea of stipulating two parties, given Nigeria's troubled electoral history, was to break the formation of ethnic blocs that characterized the First (1960–66) and Second (1979–83) Republics by a simple limitation of alternatives that would cut across ethnic affiliations, and by wiping the slate clear of all past parties and politicians. To prevent religious (Muslim versus Christian) and regional (North versus South) divisions from forming, the constitution required that both parties have their headquarters in Abuja, the new federal capital, and that their names, emblems, and mottoes contain no ethnic, religious or geographical connotations (Oyediran and Agbaje 1991, 222).

Thus the stage was set on 3 May 1989, when the six-year ban on party politics was lifted and all eligible citizens were allowed to form political associations that might qualify as one of the two recognized political parties, subject to the NEC's approval. In a two-month flurry of political activity to meet the

15 July submission deadline set by the NEC, forty-nine associations emerged around powerful patrons of the Babangida administration, factions within the Constituent Assembly, "geo-ethnic and religious caucuses" (Oyediran and Agbaje 1991, 224), and former politicians hiding behind clients. Given the short amount of time provided for such associations to organize, raise funds, and develop constituencies, many fell by the wayside, and only thirteen presented themselves to the NEC for registration.[9] According to the NEC, the new generation of "transparent" politicians failed to meet the standards of transparency. In its report to the government, the commission endorsed none of the aspiring associations, charging that:

> All the associations made deliberate false claims. . . from the inclusion of false, including ghost names and addresses on membership lists, to the affixture of somebody else's picture on the membership card belonging to another person; to the padding of names from voters' register; and to the offering of various forms of corrupt inducements to people so that they can pose as members of associations for verification purposes. (quoted in Oyediran and Agbaje 1991, 225)

Here we can see how the distinctive features of the "419"—unstable identities, misleading images, false numbers, and official registration forms—entered into politics, attributed at this stage to grassroots politicians but playing into the hands of the dictator. Whatever truth there was to the accusations, the incipient system of political representation was nipped in the bud. According to a Reuters 7 December 1989 Money Report titled "Nigerian Elections Put Back to End 1990," IBB disbanded all thirteen associations, claiming that "none of the groups had broken decisively with a history marked by tribal politics, religious bigotry, electoral fraud and violence." In their place (and outside the options outlined in the NEC report), he established two entirely new political parties ex nihilo: the Social Democratic Party (SDP)—which according to Kenneth Noble in the 8 November 1990 *New York Times*, he called "a little to the left," and the National Republican Convention (NRC), "a little to the right of center" ("Cynicism Clouds Nigerian Election," A17).

At this stage, the big con of the "transition programme" began in earnest. The federal government, operating through the Directorate for Social Mobilisation, wrote and published the manifestos of both parties, each of which mirrored the regime's basic social and economic policies, including its commitment to structural adjustment (figure 10.1). If the SDP had a progressive, populist tinge, sometimes characterized as welfarist and even socialist by the opposition, the NRC saw itself as conservative, even ruggedly free market. Echoing the most general qualities of the American Democratic and Republican Parties, Nigeria's new parties were short on content, long on rhetoric, and considered essentially the same. In his 8 November 1990 *New York Times* article, Kenneth Noble quoted Pini Johnson, a Nigerian journalist and editor:

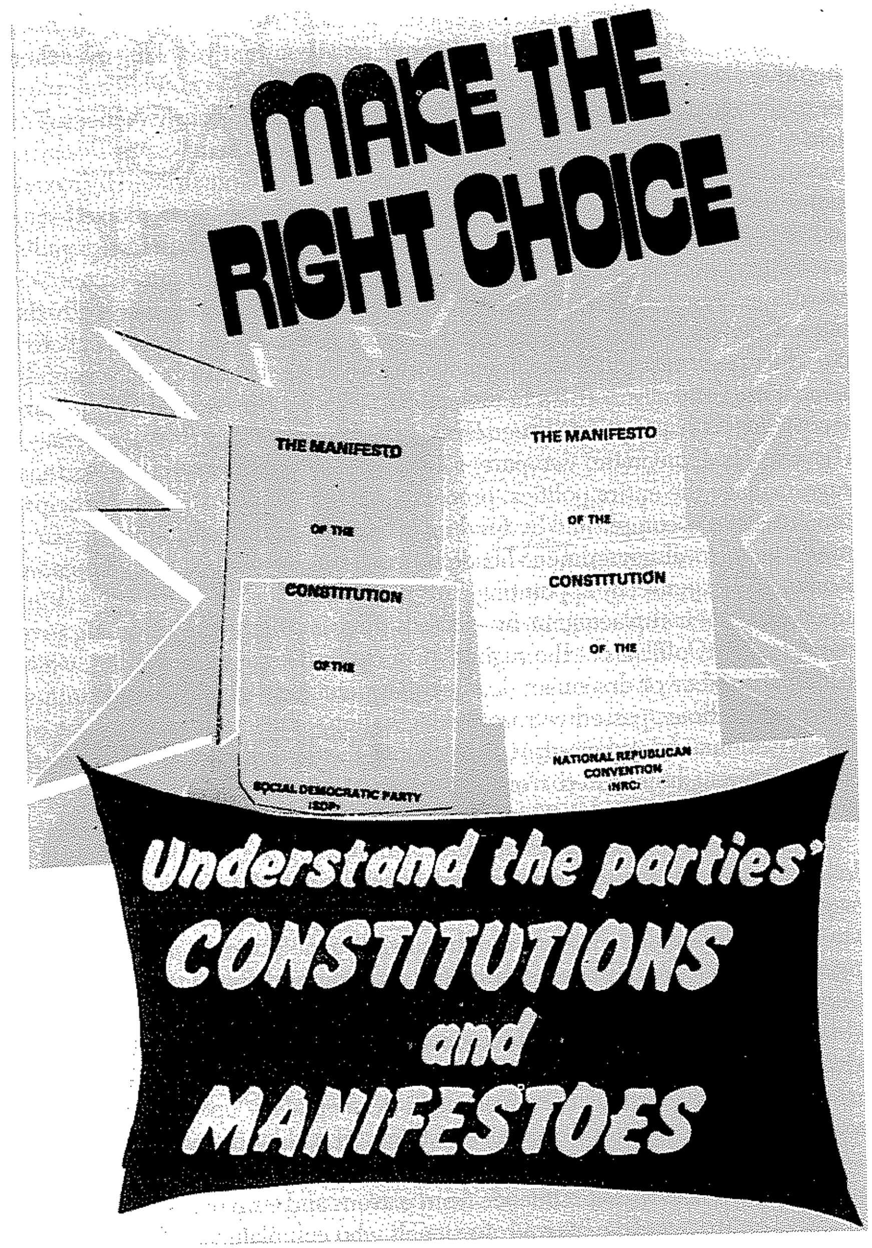

Fig. 10.1. The regime's mirror-image political parties (SDP and NRC), Federal Ministry of Information (Lagos). From the *Nigerian Interpreter* 5, no. 4 (July–August 1991).

"These new parties have no message. They're just parroting what they've been told to say. . . . The problem is that the military is constantly looking over their shoulders, so they can't say or do anything out of line" (A17). Political rallies for the rescheduled local government elections were notoriously vacuous. The parties lacked ideology and social base. But IBB called them "expressive symbols of the new political order"; even if their platforms were drafted by a committee of the AFRC, had they not been "debated" in party conventions at state and national levels to refine the final manifestos? The imputation of populist involvement was common with IBB. He employed it in the national constitutional conference, in the IMF and structural adjustment debates, with the national census, and in changing election dates; it allowed him to rule unilaterally while pretending to follow the advice of civilians. Like a liberal version of democratic centralism, IBB's new democratic order empowered the military to represent "the people" to themselves. In the name of "directed democracy," a "grassroots democratic" two-party solution permitted the state to design and stage-manage the entire political process, forestalling any real mass participation. This was accomplished by funding both organizations; by building party offices in all local government headquarters, state capitals, and in Abuja, at tremendous expense; by appointing party secretaries at all of these levels (later supervising their replacement by elected officials); by holding training programs for party officials at the regime's Centre for Democratic Studies, while issuing a number of draconian decrees that detained critics, banned professional associations, passed retroactive legislation, and prohibited judicial review (Oyediran and Agbaje 1991, 228–29). With such an overarching political infrastructure administered from above, IBB could recommence the long electoral march to Nigeria's Third Republic.

In the last three years of his misrule, IBB lived up to his nickname "Maradona," after the Argentine soccer player known for his deft dribbling and zigzagging on the playing field. Nigerian's electoral experience from 1991 to 1993 was marked by sudden election annulments, disqualifications, and rescheduling, and by reversals of bans and balloting procedures dictated from Abuja. In December 1991, the NRC won a small majority in the gubernatorial elections, which had been postponed to accommodate the nine newly created states, while the SDP gained a majority in the thirty state assemblies. To prevent ballot stuffing and stealing, the government developed an "open queue" voting system, whereby registered voters would line up and be counted behind the poster image of their candidate. The method was controversial, subjecting people to intimidation and influence from patrons and employers—and drawing criticism from middle-class professionals who complained of lining up for hours under the hot sun or in drenching rain. In the meantime, IBB lifted his earlier ban against all former politicians and public officials from entering the race; as Kenneth Noble reported in the 20 December 1991 *New York Times*, after meeting with the AFRC in Abuja, IBB announced that "the time has come for the old and new to mix, to cooperate and compete"("Nigeria Ends Ban for Ex-Officials," A7). A floodgate of power brokerage and influence peddling was suddenly opened, releasing not only the old political guard but also leading members of the military government into the political fray, adding to the collective sense of uncertainty and doubt. But, despite the growing cynicism and apathy among Nigerians, many of whom suspected IBB of a secret agenda to stay in power, elections to the National Assembly on 4 July 1992 were successfully held, with the SDP winning a majority of seats in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.[10] At this point, IBB's house of political cards began to look real, with a bid for the national presidency a significant challenge. The duties of the National Assembly were not yet specified, and IBB would later dictate that its members could officiate on matters cultural but not political! But with a substantial amount of political machinery in place, the keystone of an elected presidency would establish the reality of the Third Republic. And it was this reality that IBB simulated, projected, and hijacked in the final stages of his political "419."

The presidential party primaries had already been postponed several times: 4 August 1991 to 7 September; then to 19 October, after the creation of new states and local government areas; finally, to 1 August 1992, whereafter the AFRC stopped the fledgling vote, citing vote rigging and widespread malpractice, and commanded the NEC to repudiate the results. One notorious figure to emerge at this time was SDP multimillionaire and presidential aspirant Arthur Nzeribe, who boasted of 25 million (some said 32 million) pounds sterling in his campaign "war chest." As Karl Maier reported in an *Independent* article titled "Nigerians Contemplate the Price of Democracy," General Olusegun Obasanjo (the former head of state) warned of an emergent "moneyotocracy . . . a government of moneymen for more money for themselves and for those who paid their initial bill for the elections"(1 August 1992, 11). Bills indeed ran high, as both parties imposed levies of 10,000–13,000 pounds on each candidate, ostensibly to reduce their number. By the second round of voting on 19 September 1992, the SDP frontrunners were Major-General Shehu Yar'Adua and Olu Falae, while Adamu Ciroma, Bamanga Tukur, and Umaru Shinkafi led the NRC. All important officials in previous military and civilian regimes, these candidates and their campaign finances were investigated by the dreaded State Security Service (SSS), in a catch-22 arrangement whereby the NEC announced its right to ban candidates without explanation after the primaries.

For many, the writing was already on the wall. In October, the military government suspended the primaries and banned the frontrunners from further participation because of their "money-politics." Another round of primaries was scheduled, and the handover date to civilian rule was pushed back to 27 August 1993. By this time, few illusions remained for Nigeria's enervated electorate. If any enthusiasm could be mustered it was less for a valid democratic process and more for a way of removing the dictator. Kole Babalola of the Inter Press Service reported another surprise twist in a 21 December 1992 electronic bulletin titled "Nigeria: Voting System Needed 'Nigerian-Factor' Proof": the NEC announced that the secret ballot would be reintroduced to avoid influence peddling—but this time in a modified form, called an "open secret ballot," as it was openly displayed but gave voters some measure of secrecy. An appropriate name indeed for the open secret, publicly voiced, that IBB had no real intention of leaving office; also an appropriate figure for the oxymoron "Nigerian democracy." With a low voter turnout, the Southern business tycoon Chief Moshood Abiola emerged as leader of the SDP, and his Northern opponent, the wealthy but relatively unknown Bashir Tofa, captured the NRC. The potential for a North-South split presented by the candidates was softened by the fact that both were Muslim, with Abiola's influence extending well into the North, given that he was the vice president of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), second only to the sultan of Sokoto, who was its president.

The final act that followed is now known as "June 12," the date of the long-awaited presidential elections that the AFRC and the NEC kept promising and postponing. Days before the ballot, in a televised debate between the candidates, Abiola's popularity soared when he proposed specific plans for rehauling the national economy and for initiating a rational petroleum policy; Tofa presented no vision or leadership qualities, announcing that he would work out solutions after assuming the presidency. In the meantime, the federal government decreed that no court order could stop the elections from proceeding, thereby according the NEC exclusive regulative powers. This made the regime appear sincere. It seemed even more so when a conservative organization of former politicians and wealthy merchants, called the Association for a Better Nigeria (ABN) and representing Northern oligarchic interests, won an order from the Abuja high court to ban the polls on 10 June, arguing that IBB should remain in power for four more years due to "religious" tensions in the country; in response, NEC president Humphrey Nwosu invoked his constitutional powers to overrule the order so that the elections could proceed.[11] Again, voter turnout was low (30–40 percent), given the frustrations and disappointments of the past. But an international team of observers invited by the military government and led by British High Commissioner Sir Christopher MacRae judged the elections to be the most free and fair in Nigeria's postcolonial history.

Despite a ban on the release of early results—which included a presidential decree to imprison any journalist or editor who published returns prematurely—votes tallied from fourteen states at the NEC headquarters in Abuja (and publicly displayed on an electric billboard) showed Abiola leading Tofa by 4.3 million to 2.3 million; estimates had it that he was winning nineteen states to eleven.[12] With a presidential victory so close at hand, the Northern-based Association for a Better Nigeria (ABN) struck again, together with the NRC, declaring the election results "unofficial and unauthentic." This time it won and sustained a court injunction (from the same Abuja high court) against the release of the final results. Despite the military decree barring judicial intervention, and two counterrulings against the nullification from high courts in Lagos and Benin City, on 23 June the federal military government sealed the returns. It also suspended the NEC, ordered yet another round of primaries, and invented new rules that disqualified Abiola and Tofa from the race. According to popular testimony, NEC president Nwosu was visited by the State Security Service (SSS), which coerced him into accepting the ruling and forced him to confess that he had taken bribes. Civil unrest in Lagos and Ibadan erupted as protestors took to the streets (figure 10.2), shouting "IBB must go!" and declaring, at least on one demonstrator's placard, that "IBB = 419."[13]

IBB had lost all credibility by wasting the nation's money and trying its patience in an electoral charade of "pro forma democracy" (Ibrahim 1993, 137) that he himself directed and choreographed. He invented the parties and set the stage; he changed the rules, the dates, the ballots, and the candidates by pulling the strings of his puppet court at Abuja; he reversed his own decrees and subjected the populace to a prolonged series of false initiatives and empty motions in order to maintain himself in power. Ballot fraud there was, but it was stage-managed from Abuja. The equivalence between IBB and the art of the con was not just metaphorical. It was literal. One of the principal actors in the electoral illusion was Arthur Nzeribe, a model mercenary who had made a killing by selling arms to both sides during the Biafran war and had sought the SDP presidency for himself; but also, as we have seen, he had distinguished himself as an international con artist in the propaganda scam pulled on Pik Botha. On 17 July 1993, *Newsday* reported in "Nigeria Election Scam" that Abimbola Davis, the ABN's number-two official, confessed—at a news conference held in hiding forty minutes before he fled the country—that the annulment of June 12 was engineered through "an organized confusion by just a few of us to prolong the lifespan of the present military administration" (Nassau and Suffolk edition, 8). From this account, Nigeria's politics of illusion emerges as the deliberate work of a professional team of confidence men, whose expertise was matched by the enthusiasm of security forces in jailing civilian groups like the Campaign for Democracy and union leaders.

But a more pervasive condition of verisimilitude and dissimulation was also sabotaging the nation. Epitomized by the "open secret" ballot that produced "unauthentic" electoral results, this condition eroded the distinction between truth and falsehood—and with it, the very existence of truth-value. For example, when Abimbola Davis's confession was first published, government newspapers like the *Nigerian Times* proclaimed it a fabrication by enemies to discredit the ABN. But who was the ABN? And who was the government?

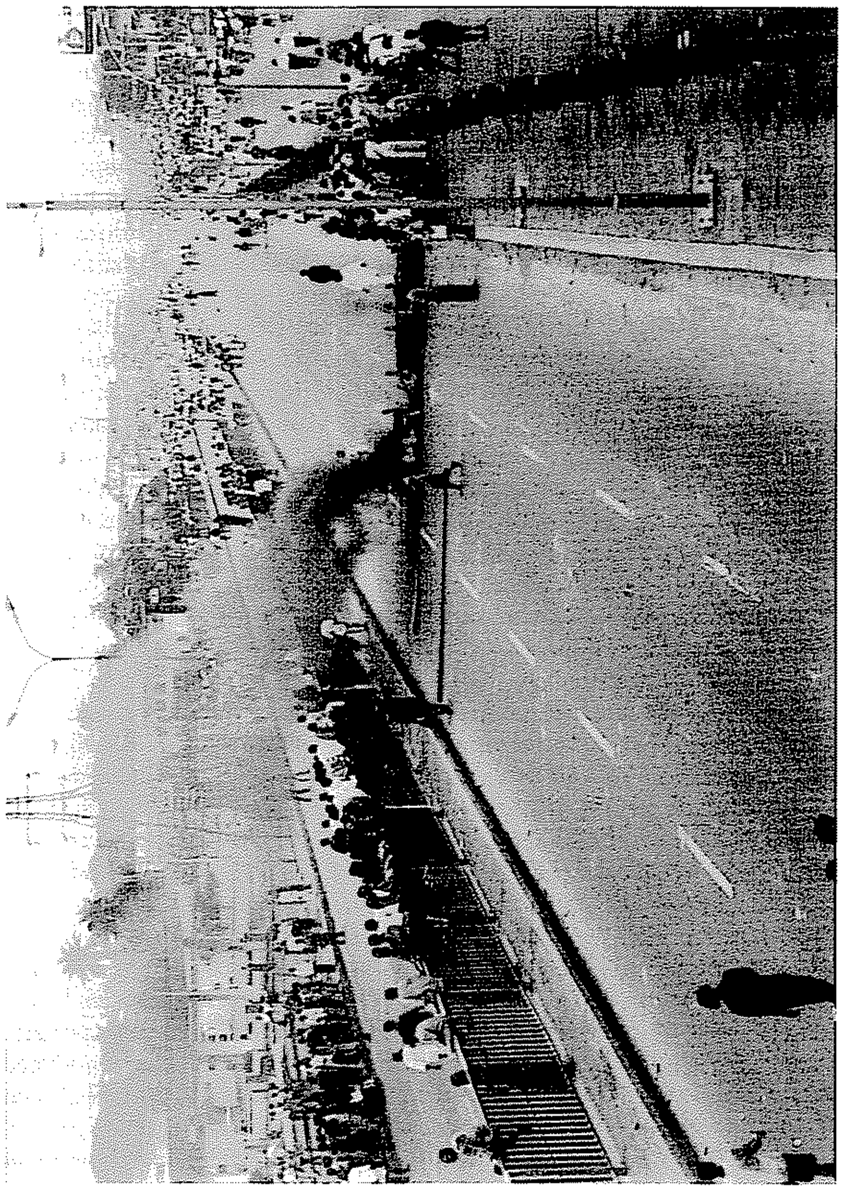

Fig. 10.2. Protesters on Ikorodu Road, Lagos, 23 June 1993. Photograph by Andrew Apter.

With senior generals defecting from the military in protest against the annulment of June 12, with courts overturned, with governors and incumbents of the national and state assemblies lost in a legal-rational twilight zone, the state itself began to dissolve.

Not that the battle was over. IBB remained the enemy, and his eventual resignation on 26 August was a brilliant victory for his political opponents, who blocked his every move to buy support. But the very instruments of opposition, the largely symbolic warfare on the streets and in the press, reflect the epistemological uncertainties and unrealities of the time. In addition to general strikes and "stay at homes" that brought public life to a standstill (and in which more than a hundred lost their lives), the techniques of "419" were turned against IBB to discredit him further. Plans and secret photographs of his hideout mansions in Minna and around the world were published, with drawings and sketches providing "evidence" of his embezzlements (figure 10.3). One photocopied letter that circulated throughout Lagos "documented," in near-perfect officialese, a British banker's inability to transfer 66,500,000 pounds of First Lady Maryam Babangida's ill-gotten gains into a Swiss account. The only blatant error was the positioning of his letterhead on the bottom of the page. That these tools of resistance were "forged" had little to do with their ultimate truth-value, because IBB and Maryam *did* build mansions and embezzle millions. This simulacral quality of political protest, *no less true for its falsity*, or *real* for its *unreality*, reflected a general quality of the Nigerian state and its imputed forms of governmentality. Take the census, for example, that administrative instrument of bureaucratic rationality that once documented, quantified, and categorized the citizenry—and that, under IBB, proved to be worth its weight in words. "We attach great importance," he proclaimed, "to the 1991 census as a way of laying a solid foundation for a stable third republic." What the 1991 census did provide, in addition to evidence that the population was 25 million less than supposed (down to 85 million), was an opportunity for the state to harass its population, to close all borders, to prohibit all movement, and to command people to stay home from work while officers counted heads. Or consider Nigerian maps, no longer adequate to the nation's shifting territories, local government areas, and dilapidated roads; or its national museums and monuments, once proud harbingers of a new Nigeria and now bankrupt, plundered, and poorly maintained, devoid even of visitors. The forms of governmentality that flourished under colonialism were gradually emptied during the Babangida era, deployed not as means of rational administration and taxation to impose order and control but as technologies of obstruction and interference.

Nowhere is the breakdown of governance more clearly manifest than in the civil service reforms associated with structural adjustment. Like the twisted logic of "directed democracy," IBB's version of administrative perestroika was designed to streamline the service and protect its leaders from

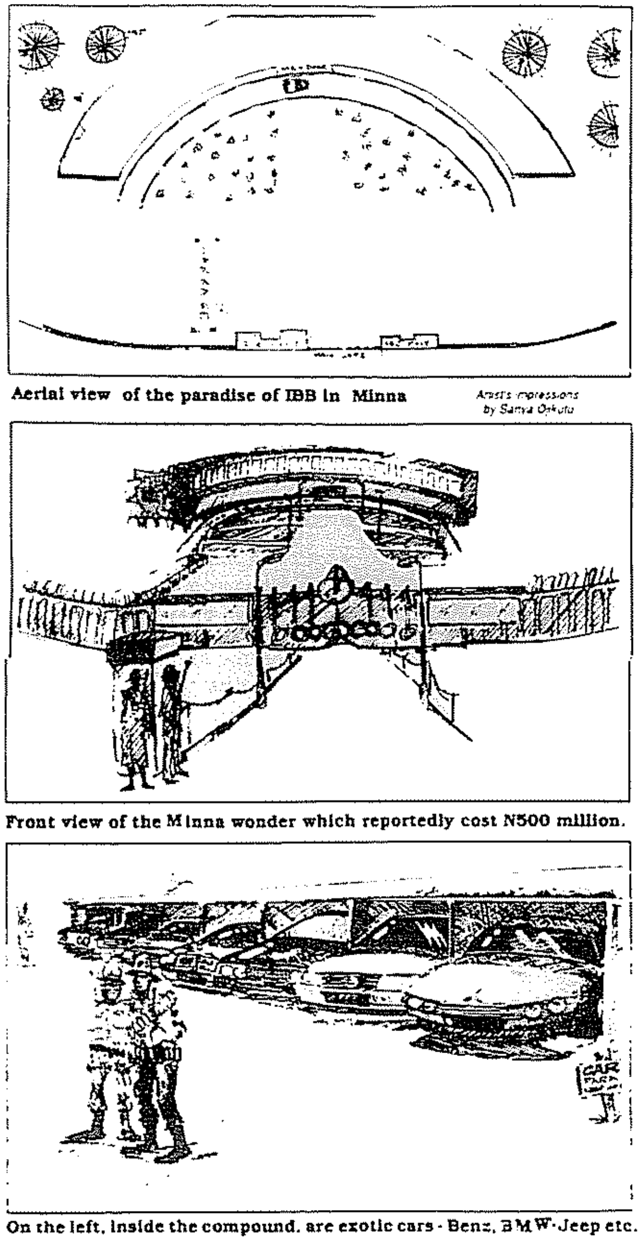

Fig. 10.3. "Graphic evidence" of IBB's Minna mansion. Sketches by Sanya Ojikutu. From *Fame*, 21–27 Sept. 1992, 5.

those "mischievous civil servants" who "deliberately misled their ministers" into making decisions "inimical to government interest" (Imoko 1991, 7). To protect his loyal ministers from undisciplined and unpatriotic subordinates—according to the official line—IBB decided to make the minister of each ministry its chief executive and its accounting officer as well. Somehow the "reform" was supposed to emphasize "professionalism" in the service. But, in practical terms, it allowed each minister to authorize his own embezzlements without cutting the Accounting Office in on the deal. Unilateral powers of plunder and patronage were thus accorded to a restricted inner circle, less expensive to maintain than multiple lines of misappropriation and more loyal to the center. The old 50 percent rule still applied; it obliged a subordinate to send half his loot "upstairs" or face the sack. The men at the top, however, no longer had any strings attached, no potential exposés or incriminating documents that could not be contained.[14] When Ernest Shonekan—head of the ephemeral interim government—probed the NNPC after IBB "stepped aside," the petroleum ministers could not account for nearly *$12.4 billion* of missing revenues that had accrued from Nigeria's Gulf War windfall (Ukim 1994, 9).

In an era of planned privatization, a new line of directorates and programs, designed to mobilize the grass roots into sustainable development, provided unchecked access to the national cake in the name of the interests they were supposed to serve. In 1987, IBB launched MAMSER (the Mass Mobilization for Economic Recovery, Self-Reliance and Social Justice program) to raise political consciousness and lift the masses out of poverty. He then set up the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFFRI), with its associated Community Development Associations, Direct Participation Scheme, and Integrated Rural Development Scheme. Some funds *did* trickle down into fertilizer subsidies and irrigation projects in selected showcase projects. Usually in remote corners of Bauchi and Borno States, these projects had their "launchings" broadcast by the National Television Authority. And in several southern states, local rice cultivation resumed after the price of imported Uncle Ben's skyrocketed. But, in general, the regime's directed development, like directed democracy, was an illusion, providing money for the powerful in the name of the masses. During a videotaped interview in Ayede Ekiti, 8 September 1990, when I asked market woman Mama Juwe to comment on IBB's regime, she replied repeatedly, "Aiyé ti bàjé!" ("Our life is spoiled!"). What about conditions for women? It appeared that Maryam Babangida's "Better Life for Rural Women" program, designed to organize and empower women in the countryside, lived up to its more popular appellation, "Better Life for Rich Wives." The first lady, together with the wives of governors, launched their projects in state capitals, sporting the finest lace and fanciest headties, forever out of reach and out of touch.[15]

But, to appreciate more fully the conditions of simulated governance that dominated and infiltrated everyday life in Nigeria, creating an entire world as misrepresentation, let us return to oil, the mysterious and elusive substance of value itself.

The Crisis of Value

In 1991, after finishing a degree at the London School of Design, Bisi returned to Lagos where she set up a small interior decoration business. In a 29 November 1993 interview in Ibadan, Bisi told me that among her first clients was a young woman like herself, seeking advice on how to design the office space of her own new business. Bisi visited her client's unfurnished workplace to discuss preliminary ideas and plans. While she was there, a man named Alhaji suddenly rushed through the door in an extreme state of agitation. "The deal is off!" he exclaimed to the woman. "The chemicals and paper arrived safely, but the *Ọ̀ọ̀ni* [of Ife] is pulling out." He then proceeded to unpack his load, and demonstrate the efficacy of the paper and chemicals by taking blank sheets of paper from a roll, dipping them in a tray of black liquid, and pulling out crisp new fifty naira notes. He had barrels of the liquid chemical, but the problem was finding another partner to take the *Ọ̀ọ̀ni's* place. Only then did he notice Bisi, off to the side, a witness to the demonstration. He was furious. "Who is this woman? She has seen everything! How can we trust her?" At this point, Bisi felt mesmerized and dull, the effect, she later concluded, of the juju medicine that Alhaji was using to make her gullible. Combining threats with propositions, Alhaji and the woman reluctantly agreed to cut Bisi in on the deal at a bargain price. All she needed to do was return quickly with 20,000 naira and they would "release" her with a share of the money-making supplies. Bisi recalls returning to her office, getting the cash, and calling her sister at the last minute for advice. Her sister brought her back to her senses, and Bisi went home. Days later, she ventured past her "client's" office and saw that it was vacant.

Bisi's story represents a species of "419" known as the "neon money" scam, perpetrated mainly against fellow Nigerians, although Westerners have fallen for it as well. In this case, the con artist invoked the celebrated traditional ruler and business millionaire, the *Ọ̀ọ̀ni* of Ife, to provide "recognition" and hence credibility to the ruse. Craig Spraggins of the U.S. Secret Service, who specializes in uncovering "419" operations in Nigeria, described to me during a 16 August 1995 telephone conversation other versions of this con, in which the "neon" money supplies are said to have been put up as "collateral" by the CIA during their covert operations. In both examples, secret sources of wealth and power are associated with mysterious, if not illicit, forms of procurement and profit. In cultural terms, the roots of this belief in money-magic go back to traditional idioms of money-fetishism and illegitimate wealth in southern Nigeria. One story I collected in Ayede-Ekiti during fieldwork in 1984 related

how a rich man kidnapped children by stunning them with juju medicines and led them to his house, where he had a large calabash that he would fill with human blood and bring to a room with no windows. After he uttered incantations, the blood would turn into money, which the man spent whenever he needed it.[16] This notion of effortless gain at the expense or even "consumption" of others is echoed in various witchcraft beliefs as well, but the underlying template that motivates it is the conversion of blood into money; bad money, to be sure, sometimes referred to as "hot" or "soaked," curiously "infertile" in its capacity to be spent frivolously, without reciprocal advantage or gain. What is so interesting about Bisi's story, and the genre of neon money in general, is how it transposes this template into the oil economy, in that a black chemical that, like oil, comes in barrels, possesses the money-producing valences of human blood.[17] As Barber (1982) and Watts (1994) have so vividly demonstrated, Nigerian oil money has always generated a certain malaise, a negative moral tinge if not connotations of evil.

It is this negative valence, the unreal quality of the nation's effortless oil wealth, that is reflected in ideas of neon money, the ethereal precipitate of the money form that took over after the monetary value of oil declined and detached itself from the national currency. This is not to suggest that oil has become worthless in Nigeria; rather, that the decline in world prices and mismanagement by the state has radically diminished its contribution to the national economy. The downward trend, exacerbated by the deregulative measures of structural adjustment, produced a general crisis of value, of runaway inflation, distressing depreciation, defaulting banks, and, above all, the impoverishment of everyday life. As Anyanwu has argued, "Unless it is brought under control inflation will destroy the very fabric of Nigerian society"(1992, 7). His prediction may be near at hand. As I have suggested, IBB's regime of fraud and deception gave rise to a national culture of "419," in which illusion has become the very basis of survival.

Macroeconomic indicators reveal a precipitous drop in real wealth under General Babangida, with increased proportions of foreign exchange being committed to debt servicing. Just as significant as a net decline in real income and GDP are the sociocultural indicators of privatization and deregulation, particularly in the banking system and foreign exchange market. In an effort to stimulate domestic investment, the Central Bank floated interest rates and authorized merchant banks and investment houses to engage in high-risk speculation.[18] The result was a flurry of uninsured investment companies offering outrageous returns on substantial deposits, such as 30 percent interest on "Midas Gold Notes" for a minimum deposit of 50,000 naira advertised by the Midas Merchant Bank Ltd. in the *Financial Post*, 19 June 1993 (4) (figure 10.4). Like the legendary Midas touch, these deals seemed to work like magic, with fast profits and turnovers whetting the appetites of the young professionals. The new managers sported fancy cars and even patronized the arts, but

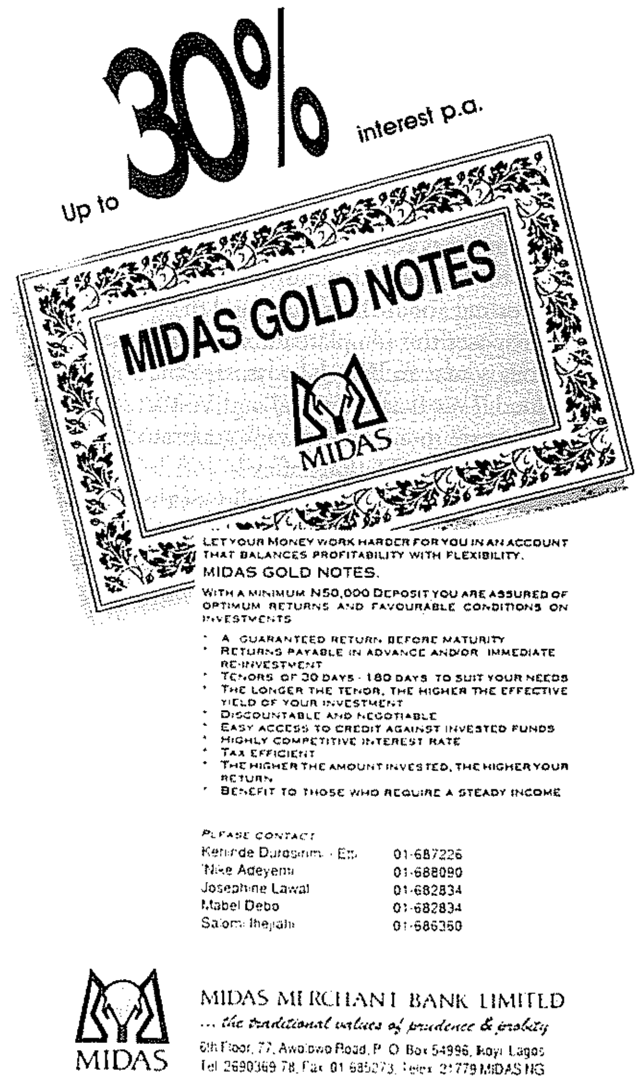

Fig. 10.4. Advertisement for Midas Gold Notes. From the *Financial Post* 5, no. 22 (6–19 June 1993), 5.

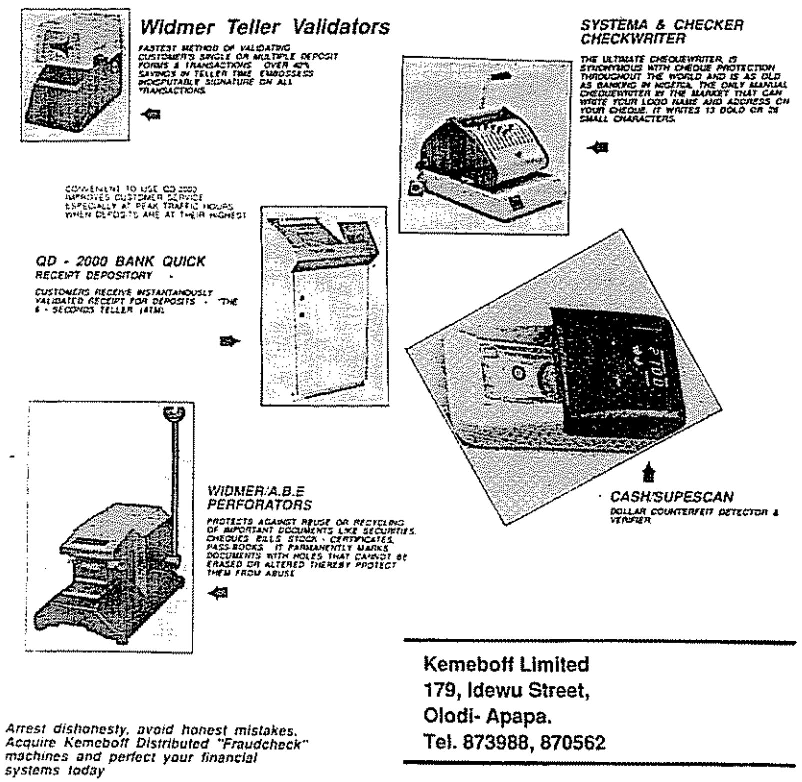

Fig. 10.5. Advertisement for counterfeit money detectors. From the *Financial Post* 5, no. 22 (6–19 June 1993), 10.

their wealth was insecure and ephemeral, invested in nothing more than the future returns on high-risk Ponzi schemes. Soon, the commercial banks and finance houses began to fall like dominoes with no government treasury to bail them out, and reports of more generalized bank fraud and counterfeit currency trafficking began to circulate in the press, together with advertisements for "fraudcheck" machines (figure 10.5). At the same time, the government raised the domestic price of gasoline, increasing transport costs of food commodities that were passed on to consumers, adding to inflation. With characteristically inverted logic, the government then blamed market women for greedy and unpatriotic pricing—as if they were responsible for the rising costs—and periodically mowed down their stalls with armored vehicles. As staples like cassava, beans, rice, and yams soared in price, even middle-class Nigerians began to go hungry, leading to popular expressions of hardship such as "1-0-0," " 0-1-0," "0-0-1," and even "0-0-0," where "1" refers to a meal consumed during the day and "0" to meals skipped for lack of funds. As costs rose and quantities diminished, the basic quality seemed to decline, in that people would describe the same foods as less "filling" than before.[19] A new "style" of clothing called "air-condition wear" flourished in markets like Aswani in Lagos that specialize in secondhand clothes, making a jest of penury and necessity. The austerity of the 1980s has given way to desperation in the 1990s. In another manifestation of the "419," a rash of born-again Christian prophets has swept the country, promising profit through prayer while extracting from their followers what little surplus they can muster. On a more professional register, business centers with photocopy machines, computers, faxes, and international telephone lines proliferated into bustling sites of activity as job seekers constructed professional CVs, printed up authentic-looking contracts, and purveyed the instruments of finance capital with the tools of the international "419."

As the cost of living rose and real incomes fell, and the professional middle class gradually withered away, oil was transformed from the lifeblood of the nation into the bad blood of corrupt government; or as Watts (1994) has so elegantly put it, from black gold into the devil's excrement. In the process, the rich have become criminalized, their wealth associated with expensive cars and the mansions of "Cocaine Alley" in Ikeja, Lagos; with theft of government revenues from the NNPC and its subsidiaries; with oil bunkering, black marketeering, and the moral bankruptcy of the daily "419." As medical supplies ran out in state hospitals, Nigeria became the number-one exporter of Asian heroin to the United States. In the popular imagination, oil money and drug money began to converge at the top, with IBB's family and inner circle directly implicated in trafficking; so much so, it is said, that he arranged the parcel bomb murder of journalist Dele Giwa in 1986 to prevent him from breaking the story (Olorunyomi 1993). In gendered terms, the inverse qualities of the new Nigerian woman, so conspicuously championed by Maryam Babangida, emerged in the witchlike counterpart of the female courier who used her "womanhood" to smuggle drugs (figure 10.6). Oil, furthermore, has come to represent a scourge against the natural and social environment, as the Ogoni fight for survival against the pollution that ruined their fishing waters, and against a regime that has waged a near-genocidal campaign in response to their demands for compensation (Saro-Wiwa 1990, 1992; Welch 1995). Fighting for their civil rights, and for all Nigerians who have experienced the erosion of civil society, the Ogoni—led by the late Ken Saro-Wiwa—have been portrayed as subversives and saboteurs, as unpatriotic vermin on the national body, and as a backward and subhuman minority "tribe." In his *Similia: Essays on Anomic Nigeria*, Saro-Wiwa (1991) wrote with brutal wit about "Babangidance," referring to government by cheating, a national culture of fraud, and

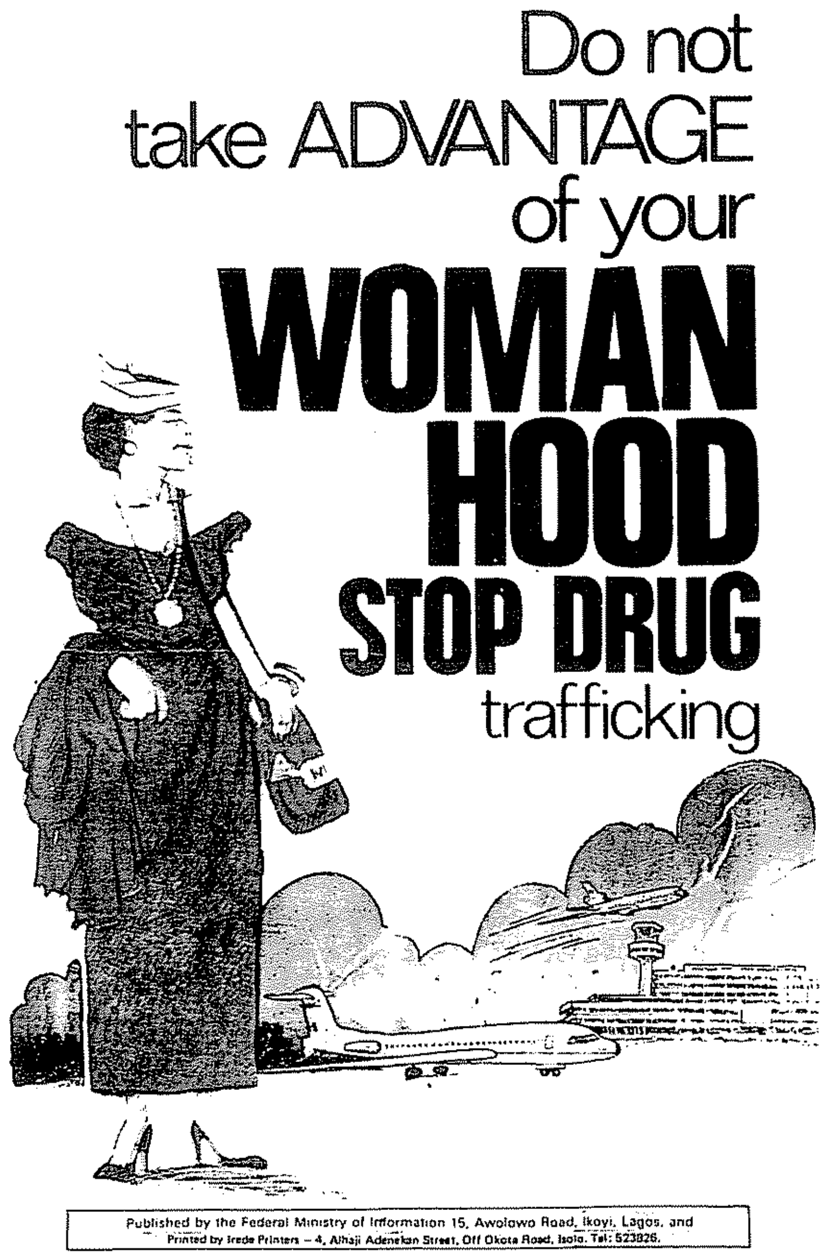

Fig. 10.6. Female courier as figure of illicit wealth (poster), Federal Ministry of Information (Lagos). From the *Nigerian Interpreter* 5, no. 4 (July–August 1991).

the resultant devaluation of life for all Nigerians as both individual and collective loss.

Significant here in Saro-Wiwa's political diagnoses are the cultural corollaries of inflation and devaluation, less anomic than *anemic*. When the substance or fetish of original value, oil, mutated from lifeblood to bad blood, Nigeria's nation form, once proudly modeled on the money form, grew weak and lost its shine. As the state privatized the oil industry—first by diverting revenues into private accounts, and second, by auctioning block allocations to private concessions that in many cases simply lifted and hawked the oil, without any new investment or exploration—the public sector virtually collapsed into mimetic representations of itself. Bureaucrats and civil servants still went to work dressed in threadbare suits dutifully starched and pressed: but, by the end of the Babangida era, they were earning about $20 per month, and spending up to a third of their salaries on transportation. Unlike the oil boom, when social distinctions were redrawn to accommodate a growing middle class, the bust set off a great leveling wave of rampant inflation that, as one contemporary report put it, "is better imagined today than quantified" (Ogbonna and Udo 1993, 6). What sort of instabilities has such hyperinflation created? Reflecting on Weimar Germany, Elias Canetti has argued:

> An inflation can be called a witches' sabbath of devaluation where men and the units of their money have the strongest effects on each other. The one stands for the other, men feeling themselves as "bad" as their money; and this becomes worse and worse. . . . It is a double devaluation originating in a double identification. The *individual* feels depreciated because the unit on which he relied, and with which he had equated himself, starts sliding; and the *crowd* feels depreciated because the *million* is. As the millions mount up, a whole people, numbered in millions, becomes nothing. (1984, 186)

Witches' Sabbath indeed. For all the historical and cultural differences between Weimar Germany and IBB's Nigeria—and the different magnitude of the inflation rates involved—this passage illuminates a fundamental transformation that occurred during the Babangida regime; namely, the unhinging of individual and collective identities from fixed social coordinates into the everyday arts of the "419."

Canetti continues to argue that the devaluation of the German mark was displaced onto the progressive devaluation of the enemy within, the Jew, whose destruction would restore the nation's vitality. Following this line, it is possible that the persecution of the Ogoni people will intensify as the economy continues to collapse, given how they have agitated against oil and state terror, and have been racially "othered" in distinctive ways. However, even if the state continues its pogrom, and General Sani Abacha's hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa on 10 November 1995 could be portentous, it is unlikely that the nation will follow its lead, since the Ogoni are generally "remote" and, unlike Jews in Germany, do not live among the population at large. More likely, the lumpen armed robbers and common thieves among them will be publicly executed on Bar Beach, as occurred under Buhari in 1984, to provide spectacular relief for the masses, while intellectuals, journalists, and activists continue to be jailed. In a recent government "419," forty alleged coup plotters, including former Head of State Olusegun Obasanjo and Chief of Staff (and SDP presidential aspirant) Shehu Yar'Adua, await uncertain fates in prison, having been tried by a secret military tribunal that has extended its jurisdiction to sundry critics of the regime. I call this a "419" because no evidence of a plot was ever publicly established, although the illusion of a trial has been sustained. But, whatever political traumas may lie ahead, a return to civilian rule seems less likely than ever. The decline of the oil economy under IBB, and the politics of illusion that he fostered, formed the nation's real transition program to a simulacral regime, a new Nigeria that is, quite literally, a shadow of its former self.[20]

Conclusion

In expanding the equation "IBB = 419," I have suggested that there is more to the relationship between cash and politics than mere influence peddling or vote buying. More, also, than the truism that "money is power." Inasmuch as "IBB = 419" ties electoral fraud to economic fraud, as indicated on the placard of the outraged protestor, the equivalence flows from an underlying cultural logic that developed under specific historical conditions; these range from the colonial antecedents of the postcolonial state and its inherited forms of governmentality to the political economy of the 1970s oil boom that went bust in the decade that followed. In short, "419" was not just a "culture of fraud and corruption." It was embedded, from the first, in wider webs of implicit meaning, embodied knowledge, and historical consciousness. I have tried here to penetrate the tissue of illusion that characterizes the everyday practice of "419" in order to grasp a more fundamental transformation of value that occurred during IBB's dictatorship, a transformation that produced a national crisis of representation with thoroughgoing political and theoretical implications.

In this connection, the lessons to be learned from the international "419" are not about fraud and dissimulation as such. They are about a symbolic transformation whereby the value forms that emerged during the boom years have become detached from the value of oil itself, to become forms of value and sources of illicit profit unto themselves. The letters of credit, bank drafts, official signatures, and corporate logos that previously legitimated and authorized the international instruments of purchase and sale began to circulate like "floating signifiers," devoid of any real monetary or institutional referent—

until, quite literally, they hit their mark, a credulous dupe who went for the bait, losing his or her shirt by giving something for nothing. This truly dialectical transformation from value form to form of value, conflating the economic signifier (monetary instruments, purchase orders, bills of exchange, etc.) with the economic signified (money, commodities) has not, moreover, been limited to the pure realm of economics. It has extended into politics via such authoritative institutions as the NNPC and the CBN, which, as we have seen, participated in many ways. Some "bad eggs" working on the inside furnished their partners with the information, forms, letterheads, and even offices needed to work the scams. Others played key roles in siphoning off foreign exchange or petroleum into private, "dedicated" accounts, both for themselves and for others. The inability of the NNPC and the CBN to account for their expenditures and foreign exchange over the last seven years is itself endemic to the international "419," because fictitious forms and ghost accounts have undermined the very principle of accountability itself. By breaking its promise to back up its currency (Watts 1994, 441), the state has further inflated and devalued the naira, passing the cost of its fraudulent practices onto its citizens, while undermining its own credibility and violating the public trust.

Within this nation of masquerading value forms, democracy could not and cannot take root. If President Babangida remained unaccountable, making a mockery of the civil courts and even overruling his own decrees, the citizens themselves could not be counted, and did not count. Like the counterfeit value form of the business "419," IBB directed his "pro forma" democracy, producing manifestos, building hundreds of local government party headquarters, and printing registration forms and ballots—none of which bore any substantive relationship to collective concerns or preferences. The 1993 elections took place in a political vacuum, as if projected on a screen, and were thereby detached from a much abused electorate that had no way of registering its final judgment. There was, in effect, no political representation, because the ballot never really took place. True, the actual presidential vote was judged free and fair by international observers. But, because it was nullified, there was no need to trouble rigging it! Throughout the prolonged succession of aborted elections, banking on the cultivated expectation of a return to civilian rule, IBB was able to neutralize his opponents; first within the army, because a countercoup could hardly gain popular support with the Third Republic so near at hand; and second within the political class, many of whom revealed themselves during the primaries and ruined themselves by spending lavishly for ineffectual support. In this respect, it was almost overdetermined that Arthur Nzeribe, infamous perpetrator of the international "419," would play a critical role with the Association for a Better Nigeria in derailing the June 12 elections. This last point warrants further consideration, because it is precisely in the middle ground between structural determination and individual agency

that the culture of "419" writ large assumes theoretical significance for our understanding of the state and civil society in this part of Africa.

Two familiar analytical extremes frame current debate about postcolonial Africa. One, consistent with historical materialism, explains contemporary economic problems, and the so-called crisis of the state, in terms of colonialism and underdevelopment: it is a perspective that is sometimes too easily dismissed as blaming the West for everything that has gone wrong. The other, more consistent with methodological individualism, identifies the root causes as corrupt leadership, nepotism, and the plundering of public spoils by a privileged few. The politics of illusion in contemporary Nigeria, and the culture of "419" to which it belongs, however, are themselves a product of *both:* a history of global economic articulation, radically transformed by an oil boom gone bust; and a pernicious cycle of "feeding at the trough" (Bayart 1993) that, with a few exceptional regimes, has gone from bad to worse. Following the utilitarian principle of rational choice, we have seen how the fraudulent deal, as a conscious dissimulation by individuals and teams, has been refined almost to an art form in Nigeria. But, underlying and motivating the "419" we have discerned a structural transformation of value forms, whereby the public sector (the state) and the public sphere (civil society) have dissolved, leaving only traces of their former existence. The naira is still the naira, but it is now worthless. The same holds for the state, the civil service, and, most important of all, even oil. The lifeblood of the nation has become anemic, undermining its credibility at home and abroad.

In more cultural terms, the anemia of the oil economy, and of the body politic through which it circulates, is expressed by a number of idioms that contrast significantly with those that predominated during the oil boom. When oil was king, it informed the nation with the fetish of intrinsic value and the luster of gold—expressed racially in terms of blackness; culturally, in terms of a glorified national heritage celebrated extravagantly during the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77) and explicitly represented by the gold rectangle of the festival flag; and economically, in a strong exchange relation to the U.S. dollar. Today, oil scarcely circulates. The Warri and Kaduna refineries operate at fractional capacities, chronic fuel shortages lead to endless gasoline queues, and frequently the petrol itself is *diluted with water,* causing engine failure. But, if Nigeria today is no longer on the move, its devalued and inflated economy suffers from more than just anemia. We have seen how the Ogoni minority has recast oil as pollution, how wealth itself has lost its legitimacy, now associated with cocaine and theft, and how the degradation of the money form has destabilized social identity and diminished the quality of everyday life. Indeed, Ogoni ecopolitics reveals how the state has destroyed the very "ground" of civil society itself.[21]

But what is this sphere of civil society that functions rhetorically in the language of liberal political economy as the "natural" ground of effective democracy through a free market of interests and preferences? In a larger sense, the era of the "419" in Nigeria sheds light on the location of civil society in postcolonial Africa, where, following Kunz (1995), two dominant perspectives compete. The more Lockean viewpoint "posits [civil] society as a self-regulating realm, the ultimate repository of individual rights and liberties, and a body that must be protected against incursions of the state" (181–82). This vision concurs with the American constitutional separation of powers and protection of civil rights and liberties, such as free speech, assembly, et cetera that are ultimately "grounded" in a market mechanism with its own assumptions of natural law. It also presupposes norms of sincerity, trust, and accountability in the representation of individual and collective interests. A second, more "Hegelian" understanding of civil society, presents "an integrationist or holistic picture of civil society and the state" (182) where the former functions more as a sphere of communication and interaction within the nation-state as a whole. There is no question that as African states have liberalized in the late 1980s and early 1990s, pursuing uneven paths of structural adjustment and democratization, the liberal model has reestablished itself in Africanist scholarship, particularly among political scientists focusing on "weak states" and predatory regimes. The rise of the Nigerian "419" appears to support this perspective, in that pervasive fraud and deception have so clearly eroded the normative fabric of civil society. Indeed, the very appearance of "IBB = 419" on a protestor's placard in Ikorodu Road reflected this vision of civil society in the streets.

The dialectics of Nigerian rentier-capitalism, however, and the forms of objectification that it has entailed, suggest a Hegelian or even Marxian approach to civil society in Africa, not as a natural and autonomous domain to be protected and reclaimed, but as *a fetishized sphere of circulation within the national economy.* As oil accelerated the circulation of money and commodities through what were primarily political relations of distribution, the nation was naturalized as one blood and soil beneath a benevolent state rising above. But as the oil economy burned down and the dollar dropped out of the Nigerian naira, the illusory basis of the country's wealth became apparent, draining the very blood of the nation and its citizens. Within the sphere of circulation, the arteries of the nation were blocked by irrational shortages until even oil disappeared from the gas stations. And, as we have argued, when inflation soared, arbitrary exchange values destabilized the very phenomenology of exchange itself, giving rise to the era of the "419"—of fraud, con artistry, deception, and desperate survival. From this perspective, the breakdown of civil society and the norms of intersubjectivity governing accountable interaction and political representation in Nigeria can be attributed not only to the rapacious appetites of predatory rulers and multinational companies, but to the collapse of a sphere of circulation whose previously obscure relation to

"the hidden abode of production" (Marx 1976, 279) has almost literally disappeared.

Notes

1. See, for example, Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power* (1982), a novel that captures the spirit of the era. For a discussion of this and other novels and plays dealing with the dubious and deadly powers of oil wealth, see Watts 1994 (425–27).

2. In keeping with our semantic perspective, we could say that this truth-functional "meaning" of the naira denotes its "extension" rather than its "intension," its reference in dollars and commodities rather than its "sense" as constituted by a formal code.

3. See, for example, Cindy Shiner, "Scamming Gullible Americans in a Well-Oiled Industry in Nigeria," *Washington Post*, 30 August 1994, A15; and Bill Schiller, "Crooks and Con Men Stain a National Image," *Toronto Star*, 10 May 1992, F3.

4. See "Charlie's Hustle," Tom Dunkel, *Washington Post*, 27 February 1994, F1.

5. For a marvelous window into the world of this first elite, see Bola Ige's autobiographical *Kaduna Boy* (1991).

6. For the BCCI scandal, see Truell and Gurwin 1992; Beaty and Gwynne 1993; for the Kaduna Mafia, see Takaya and Tyoden 1987.

7. Decree No. 25 of 1987 banned all former and current public office holders from campaigning in party politics.

8. For a general definition of governmentality, see Foucault 1991; for discussion of colonial governmentality, see Thomas 1994 (105–42) and Scott 1995; also Bayart 1993 (249) for its relevance to the postcolonial state in Africa.

9. These were the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), Ideal People's Party (IPP), Liberal Convention (LC), National Unity Party (NUP), Nigerian Labour Party (NLP), Nigerian National Congress (NNC), Nigerian People's Welfare Party (NPWP), Patriotic Nigerian Party (PNP), People's Front of Nigeria (PFN), People's Patriotic Party (PPP), People's Solidarity Party (PSP), Republican Party of Nigeria (RPN), and United Nigeria Democratic Party (UNDP) (Oyediran and Agbaje 1991, 225).

10. Of 89 senatorial seats, 52 went SDP and 37 NRC; of 589 seats in the House, 314 went SDP, 275 went NRC. Two outstanding senate and four outstanding house seats were held in later by-elections. "Nigerian Elections: SDP Wins Majorities in Senate and House of Representatives," British Broadcasting Corporation, Summary of World Broadcasts, 13 July 1992. West Africa; ME/1431/B/1.

11. Tensions ran so high during these days of suspense that when the director of USIS-Lagos, Michael O'Brien, declared any further postponement of the elections to be "unacceptable to the United States government," he was expelled from the country for his "blatant interference" with Nigeria's internal affairs. "Nigerian Election Still Set for Today," *San Diego Tribune*, 12 June 1993, A13.

12. The constitution stipulated that the winning candidate needed one-third of the vote in at least twenty of the thirty states. Sources for voting figures are from "Complaint Delays Release of Vote Results," Agence France Press, 15 June 1993; and

Michelle Faul, "Candidate Declares Victory in Nigerian Election," Associated Press, 18 June 1993.

13. At this time, noted singer and critic Gbenga Adewusi produced an underground recording in the Yoruba *Oro* chanting mode that circulated widely in shops and on the airwaves. The artist, who was jailed and released, is credited for bringing IBB down with the song "Babangida Must Go!" and for influencing events with the power of his curse.

14. It would be interesting to see if the old method of covering one's misappropriation—burning down the government buildings where the records were kept—decreased after the "reforms."

15. This popular revision of an official appellation or acronym provides an example of what Mbembe (1992, 8), no doubt following de Certeau (1988, 168), calls the "poaching" of meanings, as when Cameroonians renamed the Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais (RDPC) "redépécer," as a gloss for "cut it up and dole it out!" Nigerians sometimes jokingly refer to NEPA, the National Electric Power Authority, as "Never Expect Power Again" because of its long and frequent power failures.

16. See Barber 1982; Bastian 1991; Fagunwa 1961; and Matory 1994 (123–24) for discussions of money-making magic. When Major General Muhammadu Buhari changed the currency notes after his 1983 coup (in an effort to regulate the money supply and to determine the amount that the Shagari government printed to buy votes), a rash of kidnappings were reported because—like everybody else—rich wizards *(oso)* using money-magic also needed new bills.

17. Haynes describes a scene in Baba Sala's first film, *Orun Mooru/The Oven Is Hot* (1982), in which Baba Sala is defrauded by an herbalist who "tricks him into believing he could magically fill oil drums with money, casting the magic of oil wealth in the idiom of 'traditional' money-magic" (1994, 3).

18. As part of SAP, the Central Bank abolished all controls on interest rates on 31 July 1987, which pushed prime lending rates up to more than 40 percent in some banks (Anyanwu 1992, 13).

19. I thank Robin Derby for this firsthand observation.

20. Since the time of writing, General Sani Abacha died in the arms of two prostitutes and Olusegun Obasanjo was released from detention to win the presidential elections of 27 February 1999. Yar'Adua died in prison.

21. I have developed this argument more fully in Apter 1998, where the concluding discussion of civil society as a sphere of circulation first appeared.

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