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NIGERIA'S EXPERIMENT WITH DEMOCRACY

Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria experienced two democratic regimes, unfortunately both collapsed long before they had the opportunity to prove their worth. The lofty ideals of democracy are much respected in Nigeria, but in its two and a half decade's history of independence it had only few years of democratic government.

The eclipse of the first democratic regime was because of the lack of national unity and tribal feuding which raked the new republic. Even though military took over power amidst an apparently deep tide of disillusionment with civilian politics, democracy remained a much cherished ideal. The rise of Shehu Shagari to power in 1979 was believed to have provided a significant step along a journey which might culminate in the fulfilment of the great democratic dreams for the African country. The oil boom which coincided with the advent of the second attempt at democracy added more to these hopes. However the hopes were soon tarnished, when democracy was set on trial on the last day of 1983 and was replaced by military rule. It is a great setback for the whole lot of African states which hoped that the largest and potentially most powerful African nation would be a model of democracy for them and set a precedence.

In this context the present paper attempts to examine Nigeria's experience with democracy and in the process asserts that national intergration and economic stability are essential for the success of democracy. The first part of this study examines the problems of national unity and the consequent failure of the First Republic while

the second part highlights the problems of economic mismanagement, corruption and electoral fraud which were among the main causes of the collapse of the Second Republic. The paper then moves on to examine the inherent causes of the failure of democracy in Nigeria and finally to throw some light on its future prospects.

I

Pre-independence background

The Northern and Southern Nigeria functioned independently under the British colonialists up to 1914, when the two were amalgamated by Sir Fredric Lugard, under one Governor General. With this act he laid the foundation of one of the worst colonial legacies in the country's history.¹ For the administrative convenience of the colonial power, a geographical unreality had been created instead of the historical reality.

The vast and diverse mass of land which was assimilated so carelessly by the British colonizers, lacked many of the basic characteristics of a united country. Not only were the North and South different in their precolonial history, but also in size of territory, population, religion, ethnicity and administration. Nigeria on unification consisted of two provinces; the North, with an area of 255,7000 square miles and the South, with only 76,684 square miles. The population likewise had been grossly misrepresented with the North having 9 million and the South 7.5 million.²

By 1950, Nigeria was divided into three administrative regions, viz, Northern, Eastern and Western and were given their own legislatures and governments. The predominantly Muslim North, feudal and backward, consisted chiefly of a series of Hausa/Fulani kingdoms united by the bond of Islam. The West was the traditional homeland of the

1. Grace Stuart Ibingra, *African Upheavals since Independence*, (Westview Press, Colorado, 1980) p. 38.
2. *Ibid*, p. 39.

Yorubas, mostly Christians, partially conquered and were being Islamized from the North. The East, mostly Christian or animist, was dominated by Ibos, possibly the most modernized and dynamic people in Nigeria, who prided on a progressive outlook.³ Besides these three major groups, there were more than two hundred other tribes that were pieced together in Nigeria. Thus in a country of 250 ethnic groups only three unequal regional centres of power were created. And in each of these regions, a single tribe predominated thereby strengthening regionalism and simultaneously the rivalry and conflict among tribes.

Although the North was considered to be an exclusive preserve of Islamic culture and the South as that of Christians, the religious lines in Nigeria did not totally correspond to the old divisions of North and South. About a third of the former North was populated by Christians while almost a half of the Yoruba population of the former West were Muslims. Religious differences underlay and exacerbated many of the regional tensions of the First Republic (1960-66). During the Biafran revolution its rebel leader Ojukwa made a great effort to present the civil war in religious term of "Christian Biafra" against the Muslim North.

As Nigeria developed over the years, a new but important factor surfaced—division of the classes. Inequalities of income generated a class of new rich. Standard of living of the majority of ordinary farmers

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and wage earners had hardly risen since independence, but a part of the middle professional class have moved into a moderately affluent and modern life style. Decolonisation devolved power to regional governments controlled by politicians, businessmen and professionals whose

3. J.N. Saxena, *Self Determination : From Biafra to Bangladesh* (University of Delhi, 1978) p. 28.

social and commercial ties extended across the region. Petty traders and contractors and artisans could not take advantage of the new opportunities.⁴ Soon it became clear that hopes for "life more abundant" were only to be realized for the few.⁵

National unity seemed more and more far fetched as class distinction typified Nigeria. Thus the country which emerged from colonialism with the most formidable problems of national unity confronted the consequences of regionalism, ethnic and religious division of the population which were exacerbated by a widening gulf between the rich and poor. The problem of national unity had therefore, to remain endemically the focal point of concern in civilian rule of the First Republic and in successive military rule.

Independence and the Problems of National Unity

Nigeria became independent in 1960, as a federation comprised of three regions, in each of which, the ethnically dominant group controlled power through a party. Although independence came to Nigeria after a long and arduous transition from colonial rule, it was beset by a multitude of problems. The government of the federal Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa could not cope effectively with the problems of national unity, even when the First Republic was established in 1963. Strong waves of regionalism engulfed Nigeria as soon as it was set on democratic lines. The eastern Nigerians feared that the Prime Minister Balewa who was a Northerner himself, was plotting with the western Nigerian politicians for a northernisation of Nigerian army. Competition for sectional advantage defined the politics of this era of politicians.⁶

Nigerians found that colonial rule had been replaced by a rule of politicians who became the focus of resentment. The regime was

4. Gavin Williams and Teresa Turner, *Nigeria in West African States ; Failure and Promise* ed. by John Dunn, (Cambridge University Press London, 1978) p. 151.

5. *Ibid*, p. 151.

6. *Ibid* p. 146

identified with the corrupt and blatant enrichment of the few at the expense of the many. Nepotism, tribalism and repression were among the instruments with which the politicians were blamed to keep themselves in power. In Tivland in 1960 and 1964, in Ibadan district in 1968 and in Yorubaland in 1965, supporters of opposition parties resisted the forcible imposition of regional government's power upon their communities. They attacked government buildings, tax clerks and police. The violence did not simply involve people in politics, it was also a popular rejection of the rule of politicians.⁷ Thus the missing ties of national unity in the Republic engendered an internal political warfare and bitter struggle for power and wealth among the three major parties: (1) Northern Peoples Congress in the North, (2) Action Group in the West and (3) National Convention of Nigerian Citizen in the East.

Military Rule and its Impact

In the first six years of independence, political power in Nigeria was grossly misused. The first of a series of major explosions against this came in January 1966, when a group of young, predominantly Ibo officers launched a coup d'état which resulted in the death of the federal Prime Minister. Although the coup failed, as the plotters were unable to impose their authority throughout the country, Nigeria like a majority of African states was to experience a succession of military governments starting with General Ironsi's regime. Ironsi, who was an Easterner, wanted to establish a unified structure upon the whole of Nigeria. He was soon captured and murdered in July the same year when a second army revolt in North brought Yakubu Gowon, a Northerner from a minority tribe to power.

Immediately after coming to power Gowon initiated the idea for the creation of twelve states, within the federation, in place of three former regions. The objective of this was to decentralize the decisive power from the three large ethnic groups—Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo—into

7. *Ibid*, p. 152.

the hands of the minority groups in all three regions. This was the bone of contention between the Easterners in the early years of Nigerian independence. The Easterners having failed to impose their won unified structure refused to attend the constitutional conference set up by Gowon to initiate his idea and reacted by declaring independence of the East as the Republic of Biafra. The central government could not accept this secessive act and civil war broke out. The bloody civil war from 1967 to 1970 was fought between the troops of Yakubu Gowon and the Ibo tribe. It was in January 1970 that federal forces could achieve control over the tribes.

Tribal affiliations and ethnic heterogenity were so strong in Nigeria that it dominated every sphere of the society and the Nigerian army was no exception to this. The civil war was a reflection of this disunity among the diverse ethnic groups which prevented national integration. The cleavages with which the army was poisoned were the product of a number of factors accumulated over the years. The pattern of recruitment whereby officers and other ranks had come under British rule, to be drawn from mutually antagonistic regions, led to a dangerous incongruence⁸. The ensuing danger was effectively masked until the disappearance of the last British officers from executive roles. Ethnic affiliations hightened the inherent conflict between discipline and independent initiative. The army fell apart in 1966 into competing groups.⁹

Although some of the military rulers had taken steps in an effort to remove the structural basis of regional and ethnic strife in Nigerian politics, the Nigerian army itself could not rise above regionalism, ethnic affiliations and mutual suspicion. General Gowon's policy of reconciliation and large scale plans to harness the massive oil revenues to economic development were widely acclaimed and his generous treatment of the defeated Biafrans did much to heal ethnic divisions in Nigeria but he was accused of being too insensitive to the peoples'

8. William Gutteridge, "Africa's Military Rulers : An Assessment" in *Conflict Studies* ; No. 62, October 1975, p. 13.

9. *Ibid*, p. 14.

needs.¹⁰ The regime proved ineffective to the task of moving from reconciliation to reform. Corruptions continued as it had done under the civilians. The army became a privileged class forgetting that they made the same types of accusations against their civilian predecessors. Many of Nigeria's serious problems remained unresolved: inequalities in wealth and income, urban rural unemployment, industrial and agricultural backwardness, waste of the revenues from Nigerian oil and above all governmental ineffectiveness. When the census figure controversy¹¹ compounded these problems, General Gowon decided to abandon plans to return to civilian rule promised earlier. Such unconstitutional action was not tolerated by the Nigerian people. Gowon's regime was ousted in a bloodless coup of 29 July 1975 and General Murtala Muhammad from the predominant Hausa group came to power. He too was murdered and was succeeded by General Olusegun Obasanjo.

The thirteen years of military rule clearly demonstrate that the Nigerian army was as vulnerable to the divisive ethnic and regional rivalries and conflicts as the politicians they overthrew. The hankering after a return to civilian rule had been a feature of government since the overthrow of General Gowon in 1975 and the successive military rulers had no other alternative but to set about this transformation in a purposeful and goal oriented fashion. However, there were many Nigerians who believed as early as in 1979, that the army did not have the intention of handing over power to civil authorities permanently. This is because there was a strong feeling that whoever would be assigned to run the new democratic Nigeria of 1979 would be bound to run into serious trouble, given the deep regional division

10. *Ibid*, p. 1.

11. Attempts at impartial national census in Nigeria failed in 1962 and again in 1964 creating violence and controversy. The inherent causes were that northern Nigeria alone become capable to form a national government without reliance on any Southern party which was widely protested. Moreover, the population figures raised the problems of revenue allocation and distribution of resources.

and the widening gulf between rich and poor, This would be conducive for the army to return back to power with a fresh mandate to rectify the ills of civilian rule. The real test was thus to come when Nigeria embarked on the road to civilian rule for the second time.

II

In 1979, elections were held in Nigeria. The civilian government was chosen through a series of five elections for the two houses of the Federal Assembly, the state assemblies for the nineteen governorships and for the President. Shehu Shagari and his right of centre National Party of Nigeria (NPN) achieved a consistent one-third of both votes cast and seats of offices won, with the four other parties obtaining a reasonable share of the legislative seats and state governments. Shagari's success highlighted that his party, had support not just in the North from where it hailed, but that it had been able to make inroads into the other states. His victory was in fact seen as evidence of the breakdown in tribal affiliations, for his party was the only one which managed to permeate throughout the country.

The country seemed well placed to begin operating a democratic system, specially because military surrendered power smoothly. Moreover, Nigeria was blessed with considerable oil wealth which if properly managed would bring relative affluence and ease social and ethnic tensions creating an atmosphere conducive to the working of a

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democratic government. Furthermore, the new constitution, promulgated for the Second Republic had as its central aim, the creation of a system of government which would forge national unity. This was highlighted, for instance in the provision that the cabinet chosen

by the President must include one minister from each state, thus ensuring participation in the decision making process. Another interesting feature was that while the federation of 19 states had a strong central executive, the President as Head of State, in order to win, must secure at least a quarter of the votes in two thirds of the states. The provision also included the formation of an independent Federal Electoral Commission to ensure that all political parties are national, that they are run properly and do not engage in violence and fraud. The constitution of the Second Republic carefully constructed to counter large tribe domination and liberally equipped with checks and balances, was a significant effort towards democratisation and national unity.

However the best and the finest are even prone to decadence, when those who are operating it overrule the lofty principles behind it. This was the fate of Nigerian democracy in the four years of civilian rule under President Shehu Shagari. Instead of easing the age old problems of Nigeria, civilian rule seemed to have compounded them, causing the decay of one of the most promising black African nation. The causes of this decay were manifold, notable among them were (i) Economic mismanagement. (ii) rampant corruption, (iii) faulty electoral process.

Economic Mismanagement

The years of civilian rule is characterised by two markedly distinct phases. The first was of considerable prosperity, with a high oil price and demand and the second of hardship when oil price fell by 25% and sales by 50%. In the four years of Shagari's rule, Nigeria had gone from a state of economic euphoria to one of economic anxiety.

When Shagari came to power in 1979, Nigeria's opportunities looked unlimited. The advent of the democratic regime, coincided with nearly the deepest period of world oil crisis which pumped enormous foreign exchange into the Nigerian economy through its oil exports. At times, it even became the leading supplier of crude oil to

the US and nearly surpassed Japan as America's largest creditor¹². A false confidence overcame Nigerian policy planners, who failed to foresee how quickly the tide of oil would turn, especially against oil producers. Oil production in the country increased to the near maximum output level of 2.2 million barrels per day in June 1980. By July 1981, production slumped to 85 mbd¹³ and in the following month in the face of impending glut in the international oil market the country reluctantly announced discount on its oil prices to bring it down to \$ 36. In consequence, the real value of Nigeria's major export product could no longer support the current level of government spending. Shagari government was forced to declare an extensive series of austerity measures banning many imports.

By 1983, Nigeria's oil revenue which provides 90% of its foreign exchange earnings, dropped more than 50% from its 1980 peak, from \$ 22.4 billion to \$ 9.6 billion.¹⁴ To add to these misfortunes, it was necessary again and again to cut oil prices drastically in order to keep Nigerian oil competitive with oil from the North Sea. At OPEC meeting, Nigeria had to agree to a production quota of 1.3 mbd, despite the severe shortfall it represented, in the country's foreign exchange earnings compared to its needs.

Nigeria's increasing dependence on petroleum as the main foreign exchange earner, reflects the economic difficulties of the country. False confidence bred by the global oil boom, accentuated the deep structural problems of the economy. The collapse of the world oil market exposed the structural defects of the economy, that had developed no other significant sources for generating new wealth and in fact had allowed to degenerate the one it had traditionally relied on: agriculture. Although the centerpiece of Shagari's domestic programme was agriculture, it was neglected in the face of burgeoning

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12. Jean Herskovits, "Dateline Nigeria : Democracy Down But Not Out" in *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1984, p. 181.
 13. Richard A Joseph, "The Overthrow of Nigeria's Second Republic" in *Current History*, March 1984, p. 124.
 14. Jean Herskovits, *op cit*, p. 182.

oil wealth. On the other hand, there has been an increasing reliance on foreign sources for essential food stuff together with consumer items and raw materials for local industry. As a consequence, when Shagari government declared its drastic controls on imports there was not only a shortage in commodities needed for a range of industrial processes but also a shortage of essential consumer goods. Food supply became country's urgent concern. This only proves that the government neither carefully planned the long range use of its foreign exchange reserves nor pursued any comprehensive policy of economic management which might very well handle the country's economic challenges given the large oil revenues earned during the 'heydays.'

Compounding these problems was the new epidemic of the international financial crisis. Nigeria's democratically elected government borrowed far more than their predecessors. Shagari government embarked on over-ambitious projects which were beyond the means of the country. External debt rose from 1.1 billion *naira* in 1977 to 6.3 billion *naira* in 1982 and 7.7 billion *naira* in 1983.¹⁵ The urgent problem was however the short term debt which is made critical by the bleak prospects for an upturn in the oil market. The debt will probably continue to increase in view of the country's balance of payment deficits, which by the end of 1983 reached an alarming height.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) appeared to be the last hope for the long term financing needed to bridge the shortfall in foreign earnings of the country already on the throes of economic collapse. However there had been tough bargaining sessions between Nigerian officials and the IMF over the austerity measures demanded by the IMF as a condition for long term financing. Conditions were said to include cut in government subsidies, particularly on petrol, budgetary reform, more restrictive fiscal and monetary policies and the streaming of allocation of foreign exchange. The major striking point in the negotiations seemed to be the devaluation of the *naira* down to parity with the dollar. It was generally believed in Nigeria that IMF

15. *Ibid*, p. 183-84.

16. *South*, January 1984, p. 24.

conditions would lead to higher prices for many consumer goods and services and closing of more factories engendering greater foreign domination of the economy. Moreover the 20 to 30 percent devaluation of the currency would cripple the economy. It is important to note that the agreement was to include an Extended Fund Facility of about US \$ 3 billion over the next three years, with a further US \$900 million possible for loss of oil revenue.¹⁷ However external loans and refinancing were not enough to tackle the fundamental problem of the economy. Better internal economic management was the first priority that would have increased confidence in the government.

Corruption

Corruption in Nigerian administration was nothing new, it had flourished even under military rule, but under Shagari's civilian administration, it was more reckless and out of control than ever. The amount of government revenue misappropriated during civilian rule is not known, but it is believed to have been in billions. In 1983 alone corruption included the alleged mysterious exhaustion of \$ 2.5 billion annual allocation for import licences, fraudulent import-export transactions exceeding \$ 6 billion and an alleged \$ 20 million fraud in the accounts of the Federal Capital Development Authority in Abuja.¹⁸ However none of these charges were ever proven or punished in court. Western Economists have unofficially estimated the private wealth exported by top government officials in Second Republic at \$ 5 to \$ 7 billion.¹⁹

The effects of the outrageous corruption in the Second Republic were devastating for it coincided with the decline in oil income. The two together left the country further into debt and depression. Everywhere one turned, there was evidence of an economy on the

17. *Ibid*, p. 24.

18. Larry Diamond, "Nigeria : In Search of Democracy" in *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1984, p. 906.

19. *The New York Times*, January 20, 1984.

edge of collapse, which reflected clearly the greatest failings of Shagari's NPN.

Electoral Fraud

The final test of democracy in Nigeria was during 1983 elections. The whole stability of the Nigerian democratic system depended upon the observed impartiality of the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). FEDECO's task in 1983 was to oversee the parties in several key respects—in other words to fulfill a supervisory role in a multiparty system. Unfortunately the performance of FEDECO was disappointing. The list of registered voters which was published by the Federal Electoral Commission contained over 65 million names. This list suggested that Nigeria had a total population of 130 million Nigerians which is one third higher than the highest estimated population of the country. All the wellknown electoral irregularities of the past were therefore in evidence: multiple voting by individuals, the casting of ballots by under-aged youths, the stuffing of ballot boxes and the alteration of vote counts by corrupt officials. Electoral officials at virtually every level were bribed to falsify election returns. Malpractices were engaged in by all the parties but they were employed most systematically and most brazenly by Shagari's ruling NPN. The elections which involved an expenditure of approximately 300 million *naira* (more than 10% of the federal governments recurrent budget in 1983)²⁰ was a shameful and disastrous event for this country.

The results of 1983 elections marked a decisive shift in the character of the political system. Nigeria shifted from a competitive party system to a system dominated by one party. President Shagari was reelected by a substantial plurality of 47% of the total vote, obtaining over 25% of the vote cast in 16 of the 19 states, which was well above the constitutional requirement. The NPN increased its control of legislative seats and governorships from the 35% range of 1979 to nearly

20. *Current History*, March 1984, p. 122-23

70%. The opposition was effectively reduced to 3 parties enjoying regional support in the West, Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) in the East, Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), and in the North, People's Redemption Party (PRP)²¹. The general mass lost their confidence in the electoral process which facilitated numerous petitions in courts alleging vote rigging and malpractices in the polls. The country's experiment in representative civilian rule faced severe trial, which greatly contributed to its decline.

III

The modern history of Nigeria demonstrates a specific case of unpredictability in its course of events. Although heralded as a "showcase" for democracy during early 1960s and once again in late 1970's the country failed to sustain its democratic institutions. She had experienced six years of Westminster style democracy, that Nigeria inherited from Great Britain. The inherent contradictions and inadequacies of the 1960 constitution surfaced in less than six years during which civilian rule became thoroughly discredited. Apart from the historical, regional and ethnic differences that continued to plague the country, the politicians themselves had become grossly insensitive to the plight of the masses, while adopting an ostentatious lifestyle. This was compounded by people who had little or no respect for the letter and the spirit of the constitution. Added to this, were some of the constitutional provisions, which gave the Northerners a disproportionate share of the seats in the Federal Parliament. Within years these imbalances and inherent defects of the constitution surfaced and precipitated the fall of the first civilian government in 1966.

In their second attempt at democracy, the civilians predominantly in charge of drafting a new constitution in 1979, created a system featuring an executive presidency, an independent judiciary, separation of powers and other markedly American characteristics. They believed that democratic institutions on Westminster model were

21. *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1984, p. 91.

responsible for the failure of the First Republic. They also believed that American style institutions would better meet Nigeria's need as both United States and Nigeria shared problems of size, diversity and complexity. To some extent, the changes achieved the intended effect. The minority groups, who together make up roughly half the population were less afraid of domination and discrimination, in particular by the powerful Hausa-Fulani, Ibo and Yoroba groups.

The subdivision of Nigeria into smaller and roughly equal units has enabled the nation to move from being an outward leaning federation (characterized by weak central government) into being an inward leaning federation (with a strong central government). Whereas under the First Republic (1960-65), the federal government was hard put to mediate and reconcile the conflicting claims of the regions, it now had a sufficient preeminence to mould the political culture as well as to reflect it. The division of the old North into ten states, guaranteed the disappearance of regional feeling. Nationalist feeling had indeed become strong and since the states are relatively small units this in itself was no threat to national unity for localism in this sense is far less dangerous than regionalism.²² The five political parties which contested

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the 1979 elections were all bound by the constitutional requirement to support the "fundamental objectives" of national unity and to reflect the federal character of Nigeria. They were far less regional than the old parties of the First Republic. This proves that the problems of national unity—although not totally wiped out, were solved to a large extent during the Second Republic.

22. Martin Dent, "Conflict and Reconciliation in Nigeria: The Approach to the Elections" in *Conflict Studies*, No. 150, p. 5.

However the Second Republic was characterised by economic malaise which spread throughout the country and corruption, which went totally out of control both enriching a wealthy few. Moreover economic and social problems were deliberately neglected while all attention was focused on making the new structure of government work and on consolidating political parties and power bases. The outcome of this was an economy on the state of collapse. It is true that Shagari inherited many problems when he came to power and it is also true that Nigeria was not an exception to recession which afflicted the world, but his government made things worse by acute mismanagement of the economy and rampant corruption that engulfed Nigeria in the Second Republic. Shagari's mistake was not that he initiated corruption and mismanagement but that he used them to stay in power. He was blind to the rampant corruption that his associates practised to make him unpopular. The failure of the second attempt at democracy in Nigeria only confirmed that the empty shell of a multiparty system is no guarantee to the success of democracy and that the stability of any government or governmental system is undermined by economic uncertainty.

IV

When military took over power in Nigeria in 1983 in time of its economic distress and ensuing disillusionment with civilian politics, there seemed to be a fresh sign of relief over Nigeria. The new federal military government took over in the face of no resistance but to wide popular acclaim. However despite the disillusionment with the Second Republic, Nigerians have never wanted permanent military rule. On the contrary the Nigerians value democracy, as was proved by their reactions in 1975 coup when a military leader reneged on his promise to bring back democracy. In spite of their desire to stay democratic, Nigeria encountered military rule over and over again. Thus once the sense of relief over the change of Shagari government has passed, there is likely to be a deep sense of disappointment with

the failure that this military intervention represents for the country and for Africa as a whole.

Nigeria now has a long road to travel both in overcoming its economic difficulties and in reestablishing a government that is accountable to the people. The crux of Nigeria's dilemma is that both military and civilian governments have proven unsatisfactory in the past. What lies ahead for Nigeria is very difficult to predict. There are several schools of thought which propose divergent solutions to the country's problem. Significant among them is the proposal of Civilian-Military Diarchy which the country's first President Namdi Azikiwe has long proposed as the only temporary solution to Nigeria's political instabilities. Dr. Azikiwe proposed "ex officio membership in the council of Ministers for the heads of the Army, Navy, Airforce and Police and a collective veto by them over any policy, affecting the rule of law, the democratic process, individual freedom and so on."²³ The stated idea behind this was not to establish a place for the soldiers in the policy formulating process, but to make them scrutinize the conduct of politics and public life and correct the abuses, if any.

The history of democracy shows that the Western model of democracy cannot be imposed in the Third World countries with their own peculiar social and political culture. There is a need to make adjustments and modifications if democracy is to thrive in these countries. In the end a system has to be devised which will have the necessary internal dynamism to control political turbulence and face the changed course of events. Nigerian experience proved this very strongly. The proposed system of Diarchy may provide the structural supports—the integrity for crucial regulatory institutions, that the Second Republic needed and lacked. It can make the difference between democratic success and failure in Nigeria, until such time as Nigeria has developed the maturity and experience and discipline to be able to dispense with military vigilance.²⁴

23. *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1984, p. 917.

24. *Ibid* p. 919.

But these are all expectations, what would be the shape of reality is difficult to predict. But few issues may be raised. In a "mosaic" society as Nigeria is, with multiple interest groups, at least a broad consensus of the different interest groups is a must for any system to work. How that consensus could be attained depends entirely on the group in power or those who matter in Nigerian politics. Secondly, in any transitional society, entrenchment of any group in power, or for

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that matter attempt at institutionalisation of power without achieving the consensus might itself contain the seed of instability. If "Diarchy" seems to be a workable solution for Nigeria, it could be tested with sufficient degree of flexibility and accommodation. Like Western democracy any preconceived model is bound to be inefficient, unless it contains the ingredients of Nigerian society itself.

It is too early to lay plans for a return to democracy, Nigeria's main concerns are now economic. The new military government describes itself as an 'offshoot' of the regime the handed over power to the civilians in 1979. Their first political steps have preserved the essence of many aspects of the 1979 constitution. They are creating civilian cabinets at the state level which reflects the federal character of the country. Freedom of speech has also been retained as before.²⁵ In a recent interview General Buhari expressed the view that there was nothing wrong with Nigeria's recent democratic system as such, that the problem was with "those who operated it and the way they operated it."²⁶ The new military government from their very first

25. *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1984, op. cit, p. 190.

26. *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1984. op cit p. 920,



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announcement stressed that their purpose is to cure Nigeria's economic ills and to root out the "Canker worm of corruption." Buhari imposed several austerity measures designed to remedy the economic malaise, however, despite the belt tightening, the economic crisis is far from over. For this is no less daunting a task than what it was before the coup. The difficulty is that the stability of such a diverse society as Nigeria cannot for long be sustained by freezing political activity.

A senior Nigerian ambassador who has worked closely with the top leadership of all Nigeria's governments said, "Democracy is ingrained in us—we will go back to it."²⁷ He, no more than anyone else can say exactly when the Nigerians will take the third attempt at democracy. However, one thing is very certain. It cannot happen unless Nigeria's economy improves, for its further deterioration can only undermine democracy's future prospects. Many thoughtful Africans believe that given time and opportunity to cultivate political maturity, some sort of home grown democratic system will take root in Nigeria, fulfilling the dreams that the country cherished for long.

27. *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1984, p. 190.