



*Alhaji Shehu Shagari*

followed. The last four years was therefore a renewed experiment in democracy. The government is young, not only because its principal actors are young, but also because they have a short history of self government.

There are a whole range of sources of conflict. Nigeria could be three nations. The British created, by political imposition, the politico-geographical entity called Nigeria. It was ethnic rivalry over the spoils of state which almost destroyed the first republic. The ruling classes from the regions simply couldn't decide how to distribute resources in an equitable manner between themselves. Being rulers of their own 'nations', they were able to rally their subjects by appeals to a common belonging, as an expression of their disagreements.

The last 23 years might be interpreted as a lesson in being a Nigerian. The most recent manifestation of this growing sense of nationalism was the expulsion of the Ghanaian immigrants in February. However, this was overshadowed by the inefficient and shambolic way in which the exercise was carried out. Many Africans condemned the expulsion, which was seen as a betrayal of the long tradition of pan-Africanism which gave birth to the Organisation of African Unity. Being Nigerian was clearly incompatible with African brotherhood.

But Ghanaians are just one group of people who have flocked to Nigerian cities. Nigerians themselves form a strong migrant group. Alongside the international airports and hotels, the express railways and air conditioned offices are the migrants, who live precarious lives selling cigarettes, pop drink, Kola nut — strong in caffeine — fried meat, fried fish and fried yam on kerbside fires. The economists call this the

#### NIGERIA COMES OF AGE

Last month Nigeria celebrated its 23rd anniversary. It was also a celebration of survival. The four year old political system, an adaptation of the presidential system, had just carried Nigeria the nation through the major test of elections. There was, as was widely reported, chaos and disorder. The elections were free, a commentator wrote, but they were not fair. However, the Shagari administration now has another four years to pursue its goal of development.

Nigerian politicians talk obsessively about catching up with the West. Unfortunately, this rambling mass of land which can be divided into three major ethnic groups and a huge number of different languages, and which numbers over 100 million people, is most definitely trapped in the Third World.

Six years after independence in 1960 the country experienced an attempted secession. Thirteen years of military rule

informal sector, and it is growing at a rapid pace in Nigeria, creating new sources of tension.

In trying to catch up with the West, Nigeria has imported western technology. Industrialise, industrialise is the message. But western technology, which represents over a century of constant refinement so as to reduce the input of labour, seems wholly incongruous with the fact of Nigeria's abundant labour supply.

For despite its oil wealth, Nigeria is still a Third World country, an exporter of primary products. Its manufacturing base is small, and is dependent on the West not only for machinery but in some instances for physical raw materials. Nigeria does, however, have its own steel industry, which is central to industrialisation. But competition from foreign steel manufacturers — and this is the case with most Nigerian products — who sell cheaper and possibly better quality steel could destroy the industry. The textile industry based mainly in the north is constantly suffering under the impact of foreign competition. In fact a genuine manufacturing base is relatively absent from Nigeria. Simultaneously with Nigeria's failure to develop an industrial base, ex-military officers have turned farmers. Along with an increasing number of businessmen, they are transforming the

face of the Nigerian countryside. The machine and the new relations between workers and the land has become a pervasive force in precipitating migration to the cities.

Lagos, Nibadon, Port Harcourt, Benin, Warn, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Kaduna and Kanot are cities bursting at the seams with workers that cannot be formally employed. These migrants bear the remnants of their feudal past as they troop into the cities.

In Northern Nigeria, Islam dominates cultural life. It dictates the pattern of work. Nonbelievers and Christians are ill-advised to transgress their codes. Women have been known to be stoned if they walked past muslim men in prayer.

Occasionally muslims go on the rampage. One year they burnt down the staff club, which sold alcohol, in a northern university. In December 1980 a charismatic Cameroonian migrant led a sect of muslims into an attack on non-muslims in several northern cities. The rioters were reputed to have gone for people who lived in upstairs houses, wore watches, certain types of shoes or drove a car. It was a rebellion against modernity.

The root cause can found in the main participants. They existed on the fringe of the city. They service those who live in the Government Reserve Areas where the

ex-colonials used to live, the big Alhajis in their flowing white robes, Italian shoes, Parisian briefcases, Swiss watches, German cars and a house in Kensington. Inequality breeds discontent, and in Nigeria discontent is not simply expressed through economic organisations such as trade unions, but also in religious and ethnic forms, organisations and movements.

Inequality is fed by corruption, which pervades from the minor official to high ranking ministers and civil servants. Public offices are everywhere used for private gains. At the interface of the international and domestic economy personal gains running into millions are common. Corruption, some Nigerian and foreign businessmen believe, helps to oil the state's efficiency. It permeates through the society, so much so that President Shagari has had to call for 'ethical revolution'. A code of conduct bureau has been established. Today it is still struggling to gain the co-operation of ministers and top public officials.

Nigeria is chaotic, disorderly, conflict ridden. It is also a society in transition, from feudalism to capitalism, from a number of small states to a larger nation state, from colonialism to independence, from the traditional to the modern.

Ferdi Dennis

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