

1

Introduction to Nigeria (1900 - 1999)

The British conquered different parts of what is now known as Nigeria at different times during the nineteenth century. By 1900, the whole country was under British colonial rule. However, the northern and southern parts of the country were under separate colonial administrations until 1914 when the two parts, together with Lagos, were amalgamated under Governor Frederick Lugard and named the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.

In 1939, the southern group of provinces was *divided into two* - the East and the West - and in 1954 Nigeria, still under colonial rule, became a federation of three powerful regions -North, West and East. The North covered *about* three quarters of the country's total landmass and accounted for about half of the total population. The ratio is still about the same today. The dominant ethnic group in the North is Hausa – Fulani in the West Yoruba, and in the East Igbo.

Nigeria became independence on October 1, 1960, under a conservative federal coalition government which had Nnamdi Azikiwe as Governor - General, Tafawa

Balewa as Prime Minister and Obafemi Awolowo as Leader of Opposition. The Northern Regional Government was controlled by the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), the senior partner in the Federal Government; the Eastern Regional Government came under the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), the junior partner. The Action Group (AG) which provided the federal opposition was in control of the Western Regional Government.

Within two years of independence the political agreements which produced the Federal Government had broken down and what looked like an experiment in democracy had been extinguished. But the regime dragged on for three more years before it collapsed. In 1963, a fourth region, the Mid-West, was carved out of the West.

In January, 1966, a group of radical army officers led by Majors Nzeogwu, Ifeajuna and Ademoyega, attempted to overthrow the federal government. They failed and General Ironsi, the head of the army, took over power at the centre and appointed military governors for the regions. A counter-coup took place in July, 1966 and Colonel Gowon became head of state. The counter-coup was resisted by Colonel Ojukwu, the military governor of Eastern Region under Ironsi. On May 30, 1967, Colonel Ojukwu declared the Eastern Region independent under the name of Republic of Biafra. A war between Nigeria and Biafra broke out five weeks later. The war lasted 30 months and ended with Biafra's surrender and reincorporation into Nigeria (January 1970).

Gowon remained Head of state until July 1975 when he was overthrown in a coup led by General Murtala Mohammed. Mohammed ruled for a little over six months and was assassinated in an attempted coup on February 13, 1976. General Olusegun Obasanjo, his deputy, became head of state. Obasanjo immediately initiated a programme of transition to civil rule.

On October 1, 1979, Nigeria returned to civilian rule under President Shehu Shagari who was elected on the platform of the National party of Nigeria (NPN). He was re-elected in a very controversial election in August 1983. But four months later, in December 1983, Shagari was overthrown in a military coup led by General

Muhammadu Buhari and Brigadier Tunde Idiagbon. The two officers became Head of State and Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, respectively.

On August 27, 1985, General Buhari was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida, his Chief of Army Staff. Babangida immediately declared himself president. Two important developments took place before the end of 1985. First, the process which eventually culminated in the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in June 1986 was initiated. Secondly, a coup attempt, leading to the execution of several army officers in March 1986, was announced just before Christmas.

In January 1986, the new military president appointed a 17-member Political Bureau to draw up proposals for a new political and socio-economic system for Nigeria. The Bureau, after conducting a 12-month country-wide debate, recommended socialism, but this was rejected by Babangida's regime. Simultaneously the regime launched a campaign against leftists and radicals.

In July, 1987, the Federal Military Government under General Ibrahim Babangida announced a 5-year programme of transition to civilian democratic rule. Between July and December 1987, the government set up the Directorate of Social Mobilisation (MAMSER), the Constitution Review Committee (CRC) and the National Electoral Commission (NEC). In December 1987 Local Government Elections were conducted nation-wide on non-party basis (since the ban imposed on political activities (since December 30, 1983, was still in force). On May 3, 1989, Nigerians were permitted to form political parties but were warned not to include in their membership former politicians and public officers who had been banned from politics. Also to be excluded were people whom the government described as "extremists" by which the government meant radicals and Leftists. Several political parties, including the Nigerian Labour Party (LP), were formed.

On October 7, 1989, the Military Government which, through the National Electoral Commission had considered the applications of the political parties that were formed in response to the regime's announcement, decided to proscribe all of them. Simultaneously the government announced the formation of two political parties: the "little-to-the-left" Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the "little-to-the-right National

Republican Convention (NRC). The Parties' constitutions, programmes and manifestoes were drafted by government agencies and then amended and approved by the government. Nigerians were asked to join either one or the other of the parties.

In January 1990, the government carried out a purge of the Armed Forces, and on Sunday, April 22, 1990, a very bloody coup d'état was attempted. The attempt failed, and 71 army officers were executed. In July 1990 the SDP and NRC held their inaugural conventions at Abuja, the country's new Federal capital. The parties emerged and operated as nothing more than government departments. In December of the same year (1990) local government elections were held on party basis (SDP and NRC), and by open ballot. In October 1991 the SDP and NRC held their primaries to select candidates for the legislative and governorship elections in the 30 states into which the country had been re-divided in August. The government intervened in several of the contests, cancelling several results and banning some candidates. The main election took place on Saturday, December 14, 1991, two days after the seat of the Federal government moved from Lagos to Abuja. Both the party primaries and the main elections were massively rigged. The newly-elected state governments were inaugurated in January 1992. Simultaneously the ban placed on former politicians and public officers was lifted. Immediately many of these politicians entered the race for the presidency. In March 1992 the National Population Commissions (NPC) which had conducted a national census in November 1991, announced that the population of the country was 88.5 million. On July 4, 1992, elections into the National Assembly (the Senate and the House of Representatives) were held. The elections were again massively rigged. Presidential election was held on June 1, 1993. The election, or rather, the result of the election, was annulled by the military regime. Before the annulment the result appeared to indicate that Moshood Abiola, the SDP candidate, would defeat Tofa, the NRC candidate.

On August 26, 1993 on the eve of the 8th anniversary of the coup d'état that brought him to power, General Ibrahim Babangida resigned from office and retired from the Armed forces. Ernest Shonekan, a civilian, was then sworn in as Head of Interim National Government, with General Sani Abacha as Defence Minister.

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Babangida's transition witnessed some of the worst riots, strikes and mass protests in the nation's history. We list some of them.

- In May and June 1986 workers and university students went on political demonstrations which were put down violently by security forces. At least four students of the Ahmadu Bello University were killed. The government responded by proscribing the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), the nation's apex organization for students, and de-affiliating the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) from the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the nation's only central labour organization. About this time it became open that the country which had operated secular constitutions had been secretly admitted into the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).
- In March 1987 there were bloody clashes between Christians and Muslims in Kafanchan in Southern Kaduna State. Many lives were lost and many mosques, churches, houses, vehicles were destroyed. The President described the disturbance as a civilian equivalent of an attempted military coup d'etat. A military tribunal was set up to try the offenders.
- In February 1988, following an internal crisis in the NLC, the government took over the administration of the Congress and appointed an Administrator for it. The government relinquished its control in December 1988. In May and June 1988 there were students' protests and workers' strikes over increases in the prices of petroleum products and the multiplier effects on the prices of other commodities. In July 1988, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was proscribed over a strike action.
- In June 1989 there were general demonstrations in key cities in the country over the increasingly harsh economic situation in the country. The protests were brutally suppressed and, in the course of this, many people were shot dead. A very blood coup d'etat was attempted on April 22, 1990.
- In 1991 there were bloody religious riots in Bauchi and Kano States. Several lives were lost and an extensive damage to property was recorded in both places.
- In May 1992 there were mass protests in several cities and in practically all the

nation's universities against the economic hardship in the country and the undemocratic character of the political transition programme. These were followed by ethnic-religious riots in the Southern part of Kaduna state. Several lives were lost in both. Tribunals were set up to try the offenders.

XXXXXXXXXX

- On November 17, 1993, General Abacha overthrew Shonekan and set up the Provisional Ruling council (PRC) with himself as Chairman and Lt. General Oladipo Diya, as Vice Chairman.
- On June 11, 1994, on the eve of the first anniversary of the annulled presidential election, M.K.O. Abiola declared himself President of Nigeria. He was arrested on June 23, 1994 and charged with treason. Soon after, the government clamped down on student and labour movements which were agitating for the validation of the result of the 1993 election and reduction in fuel prices.
- A Constitutional Conference was constituted in 1994. The conferent produced a draft constitution in 1995.
- In March 1995, General Olusegun Obasanjo and Major-General Shehu Yar'Adua together with several serving army officers, political activists and journalists were held for treason and were later sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.
- On November 11, 1995 Ken Saro-Wiwa and 11 of his Ogoni compatriots were executed by the Abacha regime.
- Early in 1996, a transition time-table was released which indicated that the Abacha regime would hand-over power to an elected civilian administration on October 1, 1998.
- On December 21, 1997 , General Oladipo Diya, the Chief of General Staff and Vice - Chairman of PRC, and several senior army officers and some civilians were arrested on charges of planning a coup d'etat against General Abacha. They were put on trial two months later. The tribunal sentenced Diya and five

others to death. Several others were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

- By the beginning of 1998 it had become obvious that the five political parties registered in 1996 were designed to ensure the transformation of Abacha into a civilian president in October 1998: All the parties had nominated Abacha as presidential candidate! As the manoeuvring for this transformation was going on, Abacha died suddenly on June 8, 1998.

XXXXXXXXXXXX

General Abdulsalam Abubakar, the Chief of Defence Staff, took over power and proceeded to release political prisoners and commute the death sentences passed on Diya and his colleagues.

On July 7, Abiola, who had been in detention in Abuja was announced dead during a meeting with some American visitors. The popular speculation was that these visitors had come to persuade Abiola to renounce his claim to the presidency in exchange for his freedom. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan and his Commonwealth counterpart, Emeka Anyaoku, had earlier met with Abiola for the same alleged purpose.

On July 20, 1998, General Abubakar made a broadcast, dissolving all the political parties and institutions of Abacha's transition and announcing that the military would disengage from governance on May 29, 1999.

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Four main social forces were in confrontation at the time General Sani Abacha died in June 1998. These were the Northern power-bloc, the Western power-bloc, imperialism, now known as the "international community" and the human rights/pro-democracy movement which was objectively allied to the Western power-bloc.

The Northern power-bloc, although politically and ideologically weakened by Abacha's arbitrariness and insane ambition to succeed himself, *did* not act in panic. To save itself or prevent an armed confrontation for which- it was, perhaps, not prepared, it decided to yield the office of President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to Yoruba West, provided the occupant of that office would not be Chief Abiola. Beyond this condition the bloc did not work out the implications of this tactical shift. The Western power-bloc insisted on a restructured federation and a shift in the location of federal presidency to the West. The presidency should be occupied by Abiola. Imperialism supported western presidency, but not Abiola, for two main reasons: first, insisting on Abiola would meet with Northern power-bloc's stiff opposition; and secondly, imperialism was certain that Abiola's presidency would be unpredictable. The human rights/pro-democracy movement wanted a provisional government which would organise a Sovereign National Conference (SNC).

The death of Abiola early in July-1998 removed the most critical issue in the struggle. Before long, the Northern bloc, imperialism and fractions of the Western bloc adopted Obasanjo as presidential candidate. As soon as this agreement emerged, it became clear that Obasanjo would become president. And he became president on May 29, 1999 after a general election in which he was declared the winner. It was immediately after Obasanjo was elected president - even before his inauguration - that his key supporters and sponsors, acting through proxies, started appreciating and reacting to the long-term and short-term implications of his presidency. This process of appreciation and reaction will run its course and this course is Obasanjo's transition.