



OXFORD JOURNALS  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

## The Royal African Society

---

Classes, Crises and Coup: The Demise of Shagari's Regime

Author(s): Shehu Othman

Source: *African Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 333 (Oct., 1984), pp. 441-461

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#) on behalf of [The Royal African Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/722918>

Accessed: 18/06/2014 22:34

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oxford University Press and The Royal African Society are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *African Affairs*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# CLASSES, CRISES AND COUP: THE DEMISE OF SHAGARI'S REGIME

SHEHU OTHMAN

ON 31 DECEMBER 1983 the Nigerian Armed forces sacked the civilian government of President Shehu Shagari. Nigeria's second attempt at democracy had floundered after only four years and three months.<sup>1</sup> Brigadier Sani Abacha explained the reasons for the coup in the first military broadcast:

Fellow countrymen and women, . . . You are all living witnesses to the grave economic predicament and uncertainty which an inept and corrupt leadership has imposed on our beloved nation for the past four years. I am referring to the harsh, intolerable conditions under which we are now living. Our economy has been hopelessly mismanaged. We have become a debtor and a beggar nation . . .<sup>2</sup>

Later that day, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, the new leader, elaborated on the above theme. He accused the dismissed politicians of subverting the 1979 Constitution, squandermania, indiscipline, electoral frauds, misuse and abuse of office, amongst others.<sup>3</sup> The charges were sweeping, and evidence for most of them palpably obvious. For the undiscerning pundit, and many there were, these must seem sufficient, if convenient, explanations of the recent coup; more so as this has become a standard explanation of so many coups the world over. But Nigeria is perhaps no more nor less corrupt, or economically mismanaged than other peripheral capitalist societies where military intervention has not occurred. The danger with such modes of explanation is that they, like 'tribalism', explain everything and nothing; so do the propositions that the coup was provoked by an allegedly bloody plot by comparatively junior but radical officers and massive frauds in the 1983 elections.<sup>4</sup>

This article therefore sets forth the demise of Shagari's regime as one of basically domestic intra- and inter-class conflict, and its relations to the political conditions under which both Nigerian and international capitalism operated. Thus, the analysis takes as its point of departure the

The author is a postgraduate student at St Antony's College, Oxford. He is grateful to Gavin Williams, Anthony Kirk-Greene and, especially, numerous interviewees who must remain anonymous for their assistance.

1. This is Nigeria's fifth coup since formal independence in 1960. Two were against civilians while the others, including an abortive one were directed at the military itself.

2. Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Lagos, 31 December 1983; *The Times* (London) 3 January 1984.

3. Full text of the speech is reproduced in the National Concord (Lagos) 2 January 1984.

4. See *The Guardian* (London), 7 January 1984; *The Observer* (London) 8 January 1984; Wole Soyinka, 'Why Shagari Couldn't Last', *The Guardian* (London) 3 January 1984.

Nigerian political economy. It rejects the 'pre-emptive strike' theory, as it does the 'failure of electoral politics' thesis. The concept of social class as used here refers to groups differentiated by their place in the production process, access to markets for commodities, and their relation to the state. Thus, they are also differentiated by unequal access to resources, power and privileges.

But class forms or their fractions may disguise themselves as solidarities around non-class criteria, like ethnic or status affiliations, but may organize themselves to gain privileged access to means of production and to appropriate market opportunities and state resources. Again, class relations foster inter-group linkages within societies and between societies.<sup>5</sup> People who own or control the means of production (including labour power) have monopolistic control over markets for commodities and opportunities for profit-making as well as to state decisions, will be referred to as a bourgeoisie.

#### *Politicians, politics and the State*<sup>6</sup>

Nigerian elites have generally sought political power as a means of advancing their economic interests. They have used state power to gain access to a share of profitable opportunities and the finance necessary to establish themselves as a bourgeoisie. The neo-colonial political economy opened up avenues for Nigerians to establish themselves as capitalists—but only as clients to foreign firms, or as pretty independent merchants. Similarly, nationalist politicians, bureaucrats and middle-level managers depended on produce marketing boards to line their pockets, acquire money capital and finance their political party activities.<sup>7</sup> Competition for office and its spoils—the principal object of politics—was premised upon appeals to geo-ethnic solidarity and sentiment.

But thirteen years of military rule (1966–79), the Biafran conflict and rapid expansion in oil production and revenues have produced remarkable changes in the nature of state form and the political economy in general. In 1972 and 1976, indigenisation decrees excluded foreigners from (certain economic activities). Collaboration between the state, foreign banks and firms financed the acquisition of shares and properties by indigenous managers and civil servants. Success in business became dependent on favours granted by the state since it is the major source not only of money but also of vast opportunities (such as contracts, loans, subsidies, import and export licenses) as well.

The Federal Government, thanks to booming oil wealth, also became the major arena of the conflict between private interests.<sup>8</sup> In 1967 12 states

5. Gavin Williams, *State and Society in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Afrografika, 1980) pp. 68, 72.

6. Much of the analysis here follows Williams, *State and Society*

7. *Ibid.*, Williams, *State and Society*, p. 33.

8. *Ibid.*, Williams, *State and Society*, p. 15.

had been carved out of Nigeria's four regions in an attempt to regulate political conflict and competition. This gave the bourgeoisie of each state access to its own arena of exploitation and protection from outside subversion but failed to eliminate competition for control over public resources. Nor did it prevent fractional conflicts both within and between sections, ethnic groups, classes and their fractions. Politics became a zero-sum game; no impersonal rules were sufficient to regulate resource allocation, access to office and its spoils. Because the state itself was the major source of money and opportunities, it could neither remain outside these conflicts, nor effectively assert its regulative functions. In effect, it was unable to maintain cohesion, provide stable bourgeois domination and effective class rule.

Neither the regime of General Yakubu Gowon (1966–75) nor that of his successors, the Muhammed/Obasanjo regime (1975–79), implemented what Allison Ayida<sup>9</sup> termed the 'institutional reforms' necessary for the development and strengthening of the capacity of capitalist production in Nigeria. Nor did they establish a framework for the regulation of conflicts between foreign and domestic capital, amongst local capitalists, or between classes. They also failed to ensure a stable bourgeois domination of Nigerian society.<sup>10</sup> The process of transferring constitutional authority by the military to the civilians in 1979 modified slightly the physical parameters of political contest but not the object of that contest itself. Only five out of 52 political groups met the stated requirements of, and were registered as, national political parties.<sup>11</sup> They were formed around state-based affiliations. Except for the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP)<sup>12</sup> which had its main basis among the *talakawa* (commoners) such as the peasants, petty traders, craftspeople, urban poor and the lumpen proletariat of Kano State, all the parties were essentially bourgeois ones. And despite claims of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) to socialism, there was little difference between its policies and those of other parties.<sup>13</sup> The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) emerged from the 1979 elections the most

9. Ayida was then Federal Permanent Secretary, Finance, and in 1975 became the Secretary to the Federal Nigerian Government. He was the architect of Gowon regime's major policies.

10. G. Williams, (ed.), *Nigeria: Economy and Society* (London: Rex Collins, 1976), p. 186; Ayida, 'The Nigerian Revolution, 1966–76', Presidential speech to the Nigerian Economic Society (Ibadan: UP, 1973).

11. They were: Great Nigeria Peoples Party, National Party of Nigeria, Nigeria Peoples Party, Peoples Redemption Party, and the Unity Party of Nigeria. Tunji Braithwaite's National Advance Party joined the race for the 1983 elections.

12. The PRP is very difficult to characterize ideologically. Its leading figures made claim to 'democratic humanism', avoiding the term socialism, while its radical and bourgeois radical elements insisted the Party was socialist or progressive. The Party's constitutional provisions and some of its policies, however, place it as a left of centre party. See also R. Joseph, 'Political Parties and Ideology in Nigeria', *Review of African Political Economy* No. 13, (May–August), 1978.

13. A good analysis of the parties' policies and ideological standpoints is in Joseph, 'Political Parties', pp. 78–90.

successful nationally. Its leading figure, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, became President, but only after some wranglings before the Supreme Court. To understand many actions of the Shagari's regime, especially those leading to its collapse, it is essential to analyse the class basis of the NPN as well as its own internal balance of forces.

*The Political Economy of the NPN*

The NPN<sup>14</sup> came into power in October 1979 with the support of bourgeois elements who sought to advance their business and political interests at the national level, or saw the NPN as the best avenue to state power and federal protection, as well as southern ethnic minorities, the northern intelligentsia, aristocratic elements and their clients. Its ostensible goal, hence its motto, was to build 'One Nation, One Destiny'. Its ranks were filled by a staggering blend of what are party ideologue called 'men of fibre and integrity... "timber and calibre"... young radicals [and] old reliables'.<sup>15</sup> In politico-economic terms, these persons were Nigeria's top bourgeois elements, seasoned politicians, political and economic managers of local power, university dons and administrators and retired military and police commanders. Of historical significance was the fact that the leadership of the NPN comprised former leaders of the parties which formed the Nigerian National Alliances (NNA) in 1965, notably the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in the west.<sup>16</sup>

So powerful was this coalition that the NPN came to see itself as the natural party of government.<sup>17</sup> There was scarcely any difference between its stated objectives and those of the state as provided for by the drafters of Nigeria's 1979 Constitution. Chuba Okadigbo, an NPN founder member and later President Shagari's Political Adviser, wrote of the NPN thus:

Nobody can stop them. No organization can stop them. No government can stop them. Only the people—the voting masses of Nigeria—can stop them. But the masses will not stop them for they are making their appeal for One Nation with One Destiny under One God.<sup>18</sup>

Ideologically, the Party was conservative in the sense that it made no pretensions about changing the class nature of Nigerian society. It was

14. It was officially formed on 24 September 1978. For a detailed account of all the parties' formation, see O. Oyediran, (ed.), *The Nigerian 1979 Elections* (Macmillan Nigeria, 1981); A. Kirk-Greene & D. Rimmer, *Nigeria Since 1970* (London, 1981), pp. 3–45; and H. Adamu & A. Ogunsanwo, *Nigeria: The Making of the Presidential System* (Kano: Triumph Publishers, 1982).

15. Chuba Okadigbo, *The Mission of the NPN* (Enugu: Nwanko Associates, 1980), pp. 38–9.

16. Williams, *State and Society*, p. 16.

17. Joseph, 'Political Parties', p. 83.

18. Okadigbo, *The Mission of the NPN*, pp. 15–16.

committed, as were other parties, to 'make Nigeria work'.<sup>19</sup> Housing and agriculture were top of its priorities, while other social services would be made efficient. The Party pledged to support workers, but only within a co-operative framework of nation-building. Its stance in international politics was one of co-operation with members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations. It also promised to support African liberation forces. But the Party did not address itself to the question of the foreign domination of Nigerian society.<sup>20</sup>

It was in its economic philosophy that the class basis of the NPN was graphically portrayed:

In line with the constitutional provision of mixed economy for the country, the NPN will pursue a policy of encouraging the fullest development of private initiative and private enterprise to the extent consistent with and complementary to Government's control of the commanding heights of the economy as defined in the Constitution.<sup>21</sup>

Through its policy of 'Zoning' (i.e. the distribution of political offices amongst geo-ethnic groups) the NPN had shown itself the most ardent advocate of the concept of 'Federal Character', itself an elaborate constitutional device of allocating state resources to the ethnic, linguistic and regional blocs in Nigerian society.<sup>22</sup> In practice, this meant that the three most important positions in the NPN (Presidential and Vice Presidential tickets and party Chairmanship) went to Nigeria's three biggest geo-ethnic groups, with they and others sharing the rest. Joseph has thus observed: 'What [was] clearly taking place within the NPN, and might be extended throughout the political system . . . is the legitimizing and consolidating of the basic patron-client networks of Nigerian society'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, a fiery opponent of the NPN has stridently commented:

The real, hard core of the National Party of Nigeria is made up of a tiny oligarchy drawn from particular parts of the northern States of our country. This oligarchy is made up of a number of families with their clients, dependents and agents. This most significant of facts about the nature of the NPN is covered up by the colourful and noisy front-men,

19. Manifesto of the NPN 1979, reproduced in Okadigbo, *The Mission of the NPN*.

20. Only the PRP was concerned with such issues and presented a radical foreign policy platform.

21. *Manifesto of the NPN 1983*, (NPN Publication, n.d.), section 1(c).

22. For a critical article on the concept of 'Federal Character' and its implications, see A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, 'Ethnic engineering and the 'federal character' of Nigeria: boon of contentment or bone of contention?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 6, (1983), pp. 457-76. Another useful paper is, Tunji Olagunju, 'Federal balance and Federal Character', paper presented at the conference on Nigeria held at Keele University, September 1980.

23. Joseph, 'Political Parties', p. 84.

hangers-on and jesters this oligarchy uses, drawn up from other parts of Nigeria.<sup>24</sup>

This claim is undoubtedly extravagant. But it was true that real power within the NPN rested with the Party's northern elements who formed an unofficial organ called the Northern Caucus. Within this caucus, however, was a powerful clique officially called the Committee of Concerned Citizens but best known as the Kaduna Mafia. The dispute between this group and other northern elements was to become NPN's most serious internal rift, whose major significance, I will argue, lay in provoking the collapse of Shagari's regime. There were, of course, other unofficial power blocs within the NPN. These were the Yoruba Solidarity Front, the Ibo Caucus, and the ethnic Minorities Caucus, itself divided into southern and northern sections.<sup>25</sup> Faced by the overwhelming strength of the Northern bloc, and exacerbated by their own inter- and intra-sectarian squabbles, these other blocs could not but play second fiddle. Most southern elements had after all been 'fully negotiated' into the predominantly northern National Movement (NPN's precursor) as individual clients rather than as geo-ethnic power blocs in their own right.<sup>26</sup> The implication of this strategy was blatantly stated by *The Punch* newspaper:

It would appear that the decision not to form alliance or work with groups was taken to break southern solidarity. Hence if northern control of the National Movement that emerged was to be ensured, there was the necessity to remove instruments of power for southern participants.<sup>27</sup>

### *The Kaduna Mafia and the NPN*

Not much is known about the exact evolution or *modus operandi* of the Kaduna Mafia. A vastly influential Gowon adviser first knew of the Mafia during the Nigerian civil war (1967–70).<sup>28</sup> Its base is in Kaduna<sup>29</sup>—

24. Balarabe Musa, *Struggle for Social and Economic Change* (Zaria: NNPC, 1982), pp. 152–3. Formerly the PRP Governor of Kaduna State, Musa's tenure was marked by a protracted and vicious dispute with the NPN-dominated State Assembly which led to his impeachment on 23 June 1981.

25. Interview information.

26. For details of the strategies adopted by the National Movement, see Ibrahim Tahir, 'Federal character and political party organization', paper presented at the Seminar on Federal Character and National Integration at the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, Plateau State, Nigeria, July 1980.

27. *The Punch* (Lagos), 2 October 1978.

28. I owe this information to Tom Forrest.

29. Kaduna, originally a *Gwari* territory, was the capital of the defunct Northern region, established by Lord Lugard, and was thus a colonial town, belonging to no ethnic group but the state. Hence it remains the focus for activities of those dependent on state patronage and discrimination in favour of the North and lacking a powerful home political base.



hence its name—and its purpose is ostensibly the promotion and defence of Northern interests, politically, economically, religiously and even socially. The Kaduna Mafia seems to consist of a cohesive amalgam of northern politicians, intelligentsia, top bureaucrats, managers, investors, gentlemen farmers, military and police commanders. Although many have entered into active business, their elements, associates and clients are still in government and related agencies.

A. D. Yahaya<sup>30</sup> traces their origin to the defunct Northern region Civil Service. Shortly after the first *coup* of January 1966, their representatives provided the stimulus and focus of opposition to the Ironsi regime in the North. Their first obvious guise was an elite association called *Ni'ima* ('prosperity') Club. Although the membership then embraced the lower cadre of senior bureaucrats, there was no doubt that their activities were known and approved by their superiors. As Yahaya also indicates, it is indeed significant that the defunct Northern region Governor, Lt. Col. (as he then was) Hassan Usman Katsina, was among those who made financial donations to the club. Together with their young peers in the Army and the Police and amongst students in the Universities, they 'sponsored and encouraged other political groups in the North to protest against [sic] the Unification decree' promulgated by General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi.<sup>31</sup>

Many of the Mafia figures were the product of Barewa College, an elite government school, established in the 1920s. This college, reported *Africa Confidential*, 'acquired a reputation for academic excellence and discipline, somewhat along the lines of a British public school'.<sup>32</sup> Some members of the Mafia have an aristocratic past, while some owe their membership or association to achievements in their various professions. Amongst other people, Mallam Adamu Ciroma, Mamman Daura, Dr Mahmud Tukur, Dr Ibrahim Tahir and Major-General Shehu Yar'Adua are a few obvious examples.<sup>33</sup> As Yahaya observes: 'Young and aspiring [Northern] bureaucrats saw [these] members . . . as ego ideals and as men of

30. A. D. Yahaya, 'Nigerian Public Administration under Military Rule: the experience of the Northern States', in L. Adamolekua, (ed.), *Nigerian Public Administration, 1960–80*, (Heinemann, forthcoming).

31. Yahaya, 'Nigerian Public Administration'. The Ironsi regime was toppled in a counter-coup on 29 July 1966.

32. *African Confidential*, 24, 6 July 1983.

33. All of them are aristocrats as well as Northerners. Ciroma was editor, then Managing Director, New Nigerian Newspapers Ltd. (NNN), later Governor of the Central Bank, and Shagari's Industry, then Agricultural Minister; Daura was editor, then Managing Director, NNN, Member, Manufacturer's Association of Nigeria; Tukur was Vice-Chancellor, Bayero University, Kano, and formerly Director, Cadbury Nigeria Ltd.; Tahir was a University don, Chairman, New Nigerian Development Corporation, Chairman, Nigerian External Telecommunication, and Shagari's Internal Affairs Minister; and Yar'adua was Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters (1976–79). He got the job while still a Colonel and in what was an unmistakable move to placate far northern opinion following the assassination of General Murtala Muhammed in February 1976.



competence who possessed management skills, and intelligence in the workings of government'.<sup>34</sup>

The degree of camaraderie and loyalty among members of the Mafia is reportedly akin to freemasonry, although perhaps with a less profound sense of obligation.<sup>35</sup> Without doubt, however, they share a passionate concern about the ethics of the nation, good government, the North, and its traditional values from which they draw upon their own legitimation. Coming as they do from the traditional Hausa/Fulani establishment, the core members of the group are culturally arrogant, and 'primarily concerned with the restoration of 'Northern' hegemonic status in the Nigerian political system'.<sup>36</sup> But the Mafia is, above all, the sophisticated faction of the northern bourgeois establishment. Their key members or associates are directors or owners of big firms, of industries, private and public banks, or of commercial farms. Unlike the Shagarite elements (the group which favoured Shagari's presidential candidacy) they are less concerned with commerce.<sup>37</sup>

As gate-keepers of the North, they have had considerable success in providing a strong support base of federal power, and therefore in influencing major national issues. Such issues as have been associated with their influence include: the creation of 12 states in 1967; the consolidation of a northern grip on the military hierarchy; the redressing of the indigenisation scheme's benefits in favour of the Northern bourgeoisie; the insistence on geographical balance as a criterion of federal loans to local capitalists; and the alignment of Northern political forces before the 1979 elections. Because of the importance which the Mafia had assumed in the Nigerian political economy, prominent Southern elements sought to form an *entente* with it. Yahaya states that these included Chief S. Sowemino, a prominent lawyer, Chief J. Udoji, President of Nigeria's Stock Exchange, Chief M. K. O. Abiola, the ITT boss in Africa, and many other top business executives.<sup>38</sup>

One geo-ethnic power group which has wielded some influence in the Nigerian political system is the Committee of Friends (COF) otherwise known as the Ikenne Mafia. Formed in the mid-1960s, it comes under the

34. Yahaya, 'Nigerian Public Administration'. It is interesting to note that the *New Nigerian* newspapers still hold much the same view of Dr Tahir and Mallam Ciroma, both of whom served under Shagari as ministers and were detained after the coup. In calling for their release, *Maigani* (Hausa metaphor for Private Eye), a faceless columnist, referred to Tahir as 'scholar par excellence' and Ciroma as 'a model minister who did not join the rapacious bandwagon'. Noting their 'selfless service and honest dealings', *Maigani* concluded: 'These *beaux esprits* are two great and good men whose innocence cries to high heaven', *Sunday New Nigerian* (Kaduna), 18 March 1984.

35. *Africa Confidential*, 24, 6 July 1983.

36. Yahaya, 'Nigerian Public Administrator'; interview information.

37. Although people like Ciroma, Professor Abubakar and Tahir severed their visible links with the Mafia once in Shagari's Government, Shagarite elements nevertheless suspected them of having double loyalties. Interview information.

38. Yahaya, 'Nigerian Public Administration'.

direct aegis of Chief Obafemi Awolowo (born at Ikenne) and embraces his closest Yoruba followers. It is the cradle of the Yoruba bourgeois establishment, backed by an array of big banks, firms and businesses since the days of the Action Group. As an offshoot of the Action Group, it remains the organizational core of the Yoruba bourgeoisie and the dominant political force in Yoruba heartland, but with little influence beyond. In Lagos State, notes Oyediran:

[The group] operated [throughout the first military era] as a political party in all respects but name. It organized members at ward level, sponsored candidates for nomination to various offices including the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC), local government election into the eight local government councils in Lagos State, and the CA (Constituent Assembly).<sup>39</sup>

The influence of this group, however, falls far short of the Kaduna Mafia's. For the COF is essentially mono-ethnic with very few clients outside its fiefdom. It has never been deeply rooted in federal power nor has it controlled it. Prominent allies like S. G. Ikoku, Anthony Enahoro and the late J. S. Tarka had deserted it, while the initially promising flirtation with northern political minority elements in the Progressive Parties Alliance (PPA) proved short-lived and disastrous. COF's determined attempts to forge a nation-wide alliance both before and after the 1979 elections signally failed.

On the other hand though, the Kaduna Mafia—through both its key figures and its military allies—was able to do just that. Thus, the Mafia sponsored one of its chieftains, Mallam Adamu Ciroma, for the NPN Presidential ticket in 1978, but lost to Alhaji Shagari. Ciroma was a good candidate, but the odds were heavily against him. Only in 1977 he had admitted having received Naira 50,000 'commission' from Dr O. Saraki (later Senate NPN leader) in the Leyland bribes scandal. Maitami Sule, the man who beat Ciroma into third place, had chaired the inquiry.<sup>40</sup> Ciroma could not win over many southern elements because they feared the worst of his morbid 'Northernism'. The Ibos especially held him responsible for the anti-Biafran sentiment of the *New Nigerian* of which he was editor and later managing director.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, Shagari had emerged from the 1975 Federal Assets inquiry unspotted.<sup>42</sup> Generally perceived as not having the 'chicaneries' of First

39. O. Oyediran, (ed.), *The Nigerian 1979 Elections* (Macmillan Nigeria, 1981), p. 46.

40. *Report of the Panel of Inquiry into the purchase of British Leyland Buses by the Secretariat of Fastac*, (Federal Ministry of Information (FMOI), Lagos, 1978), p. 16.

41. Interview information.

42. *Federal Military Government's Views on the Report of the Federal Assets Investigation Panel 1975*, (FMOI, 1976), p. 13.

Republic politicians, he was able not only to muster two of the three biggest bloc votes—his home state of Sokoto and Oyo state—but most Southern votes as well. Importantly, the three most influential party officials then (the late Aliyu Makaman Bida, Umaru Dikko and Dr Nwakamma Okoro) had thrown their weight behind Shagari and organized the convention accordingly.<sup>43</sup> Thenceforth began an uneasy co-existence between the Mafia and pro-Shagari elements. The former, save a few, showed little enthusiasm in the campaigns leading to Shagari's election in 1979. Consequently, they were thinly represented in the government Shagari subsequently formed.<sup>44</sup> The debilitation of the Mafia had begun.

### *The Crisis of Commercial Capitalism*

The Mafia watched the Shagarite elements, their associates and clients (mainly commercial capitalists) appropriate to themselves immense political power and influence, win large contracts and control over sources of private accumulation such as, import licencing. Contractors associated with the regime received various contracts running into millions of dollars. They collected large sums of money as 'mobilization fees', but many failed to perform. One Bako Kontagora, for instance, won several federal and State contracts worth Naira 8m. He allegedly collected substantial sums as mobilisation fees, but failed to execute the job. Politicians in Ogun State collaborated with a representative of a foreign firm to transfer abroad Naira 2 m for the supply of generator plants worth Naira 1 m. Thirteen Federal Ministry of Housing contractors were awarded contracts by the Shagari regime worth many million Naira and, between them, they owed the government two-thirds of these for contracts not executed when the government fell.<sup>45</sup> The *New Nigerian* reported an incredible saga of how the costs of many multi-million naira contracts in Abuja, the new federal capital, were inflated, and paid for, and how the companies concerned failed to complete the jobs. As the paper commented, 'mobilization fees had become . . . a legal avenue for fraud and theft of public funds . . . [and] the springboard for emergency, and therefore, incompetent contractors and a breeding ground for corruption false living and ostentation'.<sup>46</sup>

The findings of two high-powered committees on excessive contract cost during the Shagari period have also revealed how the contract system had become an organised and systematic fraud. The Ministerial Committee headed by Professor S. Essang, then Finance Minister, in 1980 established that the cost of government contracts in Nigeria were 200 per cent higher

43. Interview information.

44. Interview data. Also see Joseph, 'Political Parties', p. 83.

45. Brigadier T. Idiagbon, 'Address to Media Executives', Lagos, 7 March, 1984, in *To Rescue the Nation*, (Federal Ministry of Information, Lagos, n.d.), pp. 25–6, 30; *Nigerian Observer* (Benin), 10 March 1984.

46. *New Nigerian* (Kaduna), 10 February 1984.

than in Kenya, and 130 per cent higher than in Algeria. The other committee headed by Dr J. S. Odama, a Presidential economic adviser, noted in February 1983:

The Committee is aware that the cost of most of the contracts are deliberately inflated with the result that the cost of the construction in Nigeria is currently about three times the cost of executing similar projects in East and North Africa and four times of the cost in Asia.<sup>47</sup>

Kickbacks paid to political parties, politicians and state officials had also taken on monstrous proportions. Fougere (Nigeria) Ltd., for instance, reportedly paid out Naira 10·790 m within Nigeria and Naira 13·5 m in foreign currency to unnamed NPN officials for various contracts worth Naira 746 m. According to the *National Concord*, one contractor, in 1983 used some companies as conduit and allegedly gave various officials of the National Youth Service Corps Secretariat kickbacks worth Naira 2·42 m.<sup>48</sup> The UPN also appears to have got a kickback worth Naira 2·8 m for a Naira 28·5 m contract awarded to another French construction firm, Bouygues (Nigeria) Ltd.<sup>49</sup> The implication of all this is disturbing not least because of the manner in which the deals were conducted. All these sorts of transactions were legitimized by collaboration between lawyers, architects, engineers, accountants, surveyors, and so on using their professional procedures and jargons of costings, designs, terms of contract, etc.

But a cruder kind of fraud and avenue for private accumulation was provided by the issue of import licences. State governments which had been issued with such licences to import rice and other commodities for their citizens in turn sold them to the highest bidders. One such middleman, is allegedly estimated to have made at least Naira 100 m from such deals. Middlemen usually hoarded the imported goods, creating artificial scarcity and thus hiking the prices. Federal officials simply presided over a notorious regime of importation from abroad, and doled out patronage with reckless abandon.

Nigeria's food import bill for 1980 was Naira 1,437·5 m; this rose to Naira 2,115·1 m in 1981. Only dwindling oil revenues forced a drastic cut for those of 1982 and 1983.<sup>50</sup> One NPN financier who allegedly gained

47. Quoted from Y. B. Usman, 'Middlemen, Consultants, Contractors and the solutions to the current economic crisis', unpublished Ife Lecture Series, no. 1, 23 January 1984, p. 28.

48. *National Concord* (Lagos), 9 March 1984.

49. *West Africa* (London), 27 February 1984, p. 471. Ex-Governor 'Bisi Onabanjo of Ogun State has in fact been found guilty of having corruptly obtained the money for the UPN and jailed 22 years. *Financial Times* (London), *The Times* (London), and *The Guardian* (London) of 1 June 1984. The UPN has insisted that this was not a 'kickback' but a 'donation'. Bouygues Ltd., however, denied either giving a 'kickback' or 'donation', and released documents showing that it paid the money (10 per cent of the contract value) to a sub-contractor as directed by its client. It seems likely that the UPN diverted the money to itself using the sub-contractor as a conduit.

50. *New Nigerian* (Kaduna), 16 February 1984.

from such spending is reported to have made an estimated Naira 140 m profit from the operations of his thirteen companies connected with the Presidential Task Forces on rice and essential commodities in 1983 alone. On a single occasion in 1982, according to the *Daily Times*, Alhaji Inuwa reportedly got a fantastic Naira 5.5 m for acting as a front to an official of the rice Task Force.<sup>51</sup> The government had been turned into a racket; indeed it had become a colossus of corruption. Instead of being a democracy, the government had, for all practical purposes, become a 'Contractocracy'—a government of contractors, for contractors and by contractors.<sup>52</sup>

Shagari's regime had started off well in its management of finances. By October 1980, a year after assumption of office, it had increased Nigeria's external reserves to Naira 5.5 b from Naira 3 b. It had also wiped off a Naira 1.4 b internal deficit inherited from its predecessors and had a comfortable surplus of Naira 1.53 b on the current account.<sup>53</sup> But within only two years Nigeria had teetered to the brink of bankruptcy. The commercial bourgeoisie and their comprador allies in the state apparatus had enjoyed a field day. When Shagari was ousted, Nigeria's external short, medium and long term debts stood at Naira 7.625 b (US \$10.21 b). But with short-term trade arrears added, it was Naira 11.1 b. Additionally, internal debts amounted to Naira 21.991 b.<sup>54</sup>

The general effects of all this was to cripple the federal government's ability to pay for certain imports and meet other financial obligations. Local manufacturers and their foreign partners could not get foreign exchange for the import of raw materials. Many of those that did had to buy the licences from hawkers, (the agents of the politicians!) and at the face value of whatever the licence was worth, especially if valid for foreign exchange allocation. Industrial production steadily declined, while the balance of payments position also continued to worsen. One local industry after another staggered to a halt. Chief Jerome Udoji, President of Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), stated that '1983 was the worst in all the industrial history of Nigeria'. One-fifth of Nigeria's organised industry, or 107 industrial establishments suspended production for 'four to eight weeks' that year, while others went out of business.<sup>55</sup>

Workers were increasingly retrenched while those in employment could not be certain of their wages and salaries, sometimes not being paid for months. Ironically and oddly too, monthly minimum wages had been

51. *National Concord* (Lagos) and *Daily Times* (Lagos) of 9 March 1984.

52. The term is originally Balarabe Musa's. See Usman, 'Middlemen, Consultants, Contractors', p. 28.

53. 1981 Budget Proposals presented to the National Assembly, 24 November 1980, in *Challenge of Change, collected speeches of President Shehu Shagari, Vol. 11*, (Dept. of Information, Lagos, n.d.), p. 49.

54. Idiagbon, *To Rescue the Nation*, pp. 22–3.

55. *The Guardian* (Lagos), 1 May, 1984.

raised from Naira 72.00 to Naira 125. But galloping inflation (believed to be 50 to 100 per cent in business circles, but 15 to 25 per cent officially) plus the effects of austerity measures introduced in the 1982 and 1983 budgets, eroded the nominal gain in worker's spending power. The sense of increasing pauperization and widening class inequality was not lost, even on some NPN activists, after the 1983 elections. They had come to realize that their party was committed, as some officials put it, to welding Nigerians into 'One Nation, with One Destiny but having separate Bank accounts'.<sup>56</sup>

It should, of course, be conceded that this crisis was heightened by an unexpected oil crisis. Oil provides about 90 per cent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, and about 84 per cent of annual government revenues. In 1981, production slumped from 2.56 million barrel per day (mb/d) to 1.44 mb/d. It dropped further to 1.2 mb/d in 1982, and to 1.1 mb/d in the first half of 1983. Consequently, Nigeria's export earnings fell from Naira 14.1 b in 1980 to Naira 10.9 b and Naira 10.0 b in 1982. Government revenues from oil similarly fell from Naira 12.4 b in 1980 to an estimated Naira 8.6 b in 1981, and only Naira 6.7 b in 1982.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Mafia Intervenes*

Something had to be done. But who was to do it and what was to be done? Given the democratic framework then in being, the Mafia seemed appropriately placed to engineer the necessary process. Order, discipline, good and effective government were needed to restore the economy to a sound footing. Or at least so the Mafia thought. For they are deeply concerned with these ideals—and for good reasons. Their bottling companies, light industries, investments and other business interests had all been suffering. They needed to sustain the confidence of their senior partners, the foreign capitalists.

Besides, they have got their political fortunes at home to protect and promote. Most of them have played key roles in successive civilian and military regimes. They look back at their track records with relish and self-congratulation, and ask anyone who doubted to check it out.<sup>58</sup>

But never before has their grip of institutional sources of influence and private accumulation been so dramatically eroded as during the Shagari Years. According to Yahaya: 'It was inconceivable for anybody who did not accept their eminent status to be given any important assignment or appointment during the Obasanjo era'.<sup>59</sup> Their control of key Northern

56. Interviews, Lagos, NPN National Secretariat.

57. Statement by the Central Bank Governor in *National Concord* (Lagos), 9 December 1983.

58. Statement by Dr M. Tukur on behalf of the Kaduna Mafia in response to NPN-inspired leaks in the media, *New Nigerian* (Kaduna), 13 July 1983.

59. Yahaya, 'Nigerian Public Administration'.



institutions such as the New Nigerian Development Corporation (one of Nigeria's biggest indigenous holding companies), the *New Nigerian* newspapers, and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Kaduna, enabled them to support their business ventures and mould opinion in the North. At the federal level, they themselves or their associates were Permanent Secretaries, managers, directors and board members of public institutions like the Federal Mortgage Bank, the Bank of Commerce and Industry and the Nigerian Industrial Bank. These connections had been drastically undermined by Shagarite elements.

Members of the Mafia publicly expressed their concern about the way Shagari ran the government and their anxiety about Nigeria's future stability. They had previously favoured the NPN because it offered the chance for national consensus and stability under their aegis. With them out in the cold, they believed that that prospect had been wrecked by Shagarite elements, whom a Mafia enthusiast called 'primitive'. The ethics of business had penetrated politics, the ethics of politics had invaded business, while the ethics of the gangster had permeated both;<sup>60</sup> they felt they must act in defence of their collective class interests. Discussions between the Mafia and other political forces were begun, ostensibly to arrest Nigeria's politico-economic drift.

The dialogue between the Mafia and the PRP was especially interesting. General Yar'adua specifically confirmed having held talks in London with one PRP leader, the late Aminu Kano, on the future of Nigeria and asserted that 'both of us were not happy about certain trends which were emerging in the body politic of our country'.<sup>61</sup> According to an NPN chieftain, the motive was to hijack the PRP and groom it as an alternative northern party for the 1987 electoral contest, since it was thought likely that the NPN would break-up because of the determination of its northern members to retain the party's 1987 Presidential ticket. Whether this was true or not, Mallam Aminu scoffed at the advances. Aminu Kano, a man who has spent his whole political career defying established conventions, was not impressed by the seductive charms of bourgeois politics and its spoils.<sup>62</sup>

Around June 1983, the Mafia signed a secret pact with UPN's Chief Awolowo to further the attainment of his Presidential ambitions. The Mafia for their part, undertook to organize his electoral success in the north; in return, Awolowo was to back a disciplined and effective economic policy, a role for the Mafia in recommending the Northerners to be appointed to key jobs in the government he may form, a commitment to Abuja as Nigeria's capital, Nigeria's continued boycott of Israel, an

60. Williams, *State and Society*, p. 47 for a similar account of politics in the 1960s.

61. Personal statement by retired Major-General Shehu M. Yar'adua, *Sunday New Nigerian* (Kaduna), 3 July 1983.

62. Aminu is said to have reported the matter to the appropriate quarters in Lagos on his return. Interview.



educational policy that will promote both Western and Islamic knowledge in the North, and the establishment of a federal Islamic bank, among others.<sup>63</sup> The NPN obtained the agreement and flashed it out through three of its media organs. The Mafia was embarrassed and chose to reveal details of the contract. But the pact was only to be worth the paper it was drawn upon; Awolowo failed to win the election.

On 3 August a columnist on the Kano-based *Triumph* had prophetically observed: '... it is very unlikely that with such manoeuvres by the Mafia, things will remain the same in the country'.<sup>64</sup> How right he was! The agreement with Awolowo was symptomatic of the Mafia's desperation, while Shagari's 1983 election victory dealt a final blow to their hopes of influencing democratically the immediate 'future of our country'. The Shagari regime collapsed on 31 December, 1983. To decide in whose particular class interest the change was effected, must await thorough examination of the policies and actions of the new regime. There is as yet no definite connection between the Mafia and the military's actions, yet one should not underrate the significance of their links. This consideration does not question the patriotic credentials of General Buhari and his colleagues nor does it deprive them of their sense of moral revulsion at what had become in Nigeria a perversion of decent political and economic management. Rather, it is to insist that in any struggle for power and its spoils, there is usually a thin line between one's moral position and one's concrete material interests.

There had been strong rumours that the officers' coup was a pre-emptive strike against a potentially bloody one by more junior officers. Almost certainly, junior officers had been plotting a coup. Indeed, Abba Dabo, Shagari's Press Secretary, revealed that there had been eight abortive putsches against Shagari before 31 December 1983.<sup>65</sup> But as retired Lt. General T. Y. Danjuma disclosed, the junior officers' plot had been discovered and aborted before the Generals' coup,<sup>66</sup> and hence was not pre-empted by the latter. Even if this was the case, that evidence does not of itself indicate which of the two plots would have preceded the other. In the absence of that knowledge, one must, of necessity, dismiss the theory as academic. There is another compelling objection: the success of the alleged plot is taken as given, and its potentially disastrous consequences assumed; neither of these positions can be accepted.

Even less convincing is the 'failure of electoral politics' thesis. Shagari, so the argument goes, had won the election as a result of massive irregularities. The post-election violence (in the UPN heartland) (and,

63. Details of the pact were reprinted in the *Daily Sketch* (Ibadan), 4 August 1983.

64. Rufai Ibrahim, 'Of the Mafia, AWO and the race', *The Triumph* (Kano), 3 August 1983.

65. *Sunday New Nigerian* (Kaduna), 22 January 1984.

66. *The Guardian* (Lagos), 22 January 1984.

perhaps, the pre-election violence as well) together with the severe police response to it, had robbed the regime of much of its legitimacy. There is general agreement that there were electoral violations, and that all competitors were involved, albeit to different degrees. But with less than 50 per cent vote for the deposed President, it is surely going much too far to suggest that the election had been a 'breathhtaking electoral fraud'.<sup>67</sup>

Besides, the statement by Major-General I. Babangida, the new Chief of Army Staff, that the 31 December operation was originally scheduled for before the elections but was postponed until after<sup>68</sup> suggests that the plot would still have been executed, regardless of whether the elections were free of abuses or not. Arguably, the electoral malpractices may have reinforced the plotters' conviction that the civilians had forfeited the basis of their tenure, and thus shall be forcefully removed. But one does actually wonder if soldiers do genuinely care about the democratic basis of political power since their own method of acquiring it is *ipso facto* undemocratic. Like the 'pre-emptive strike' theory, the 'failure of electoral politics thesis' is at best an *ex post facto* explanation.

### *After the Coup*

Reactions outside Nigeria—particularly in the West—were both cool and ambivalent; official opinion regretted this 'tragedy for democracy', while the business circles made approving noises, but only after a US \$60m debt repayment had been received in London. In contrast, the instant reaction of many Nigerians was decidedly favourable. As with previous coups, it was a signal of possible relief from the frustrations of the immediate past. The views of two major opinion-moulding blocs were, however, best conveyed by two prominent Nigerians. Chief Awolowo said that 'with the way things [were] going in the country, the omens [were] still bad'.<sup>69</sup> But retired General Yar'adua, who only six months earlier, spoke of his respect for Shagari's confidence in him, said the coup was 'a welcome change from the rut . . . In the circumstances it is the best thing one would have hoped for'.<sup>70</sup> Within days, Mafia ideologue, Dr Mahmud Tukur, was appointed to the strategic post of Minister of Commerce and Industry.

The new regime declared that it would not condone the inflation of contracts, over invoicing of imports, kickbacks, forgery, fraud, smuggling,

67. Wole Soyinka, 'Why Shagari couldn't last'. For a reply to this, see Shehu Othman, 'Spoils of Power', *The Guardian* (London), 3 February 1984.

68. *West Africa* (London), 30 January 1984, p. 243. In an interview with the BBC (London), Buhari also categorically repudiated the pre-emptive strike theory. He revealed that the initial idea of the coup emanated from disappointment with Shagari regime's economic failures, indiscipline and corruption. Full text reproduced in *New Nigerian* (Kaduna), 19 January 1984.

69. *West Africa* (London) 16 January, 1984, p. 136.

70. *The Democrat Weekly* (Kaduna), 8 January 1984.

currency trafficking, embezzlement, or the misuse and abuse of office. Although a few fled the country, many dismissed politicians and their business associates were imprisoned. Millions of *naira* it has been alleged had been found stashed away in their houses.<sup>71</sup> They are facing trial before military tribunals for crimes against the State and the economy. Anyone found to have fraudulently gained or so assisted anybody or organization to acquire anything above Naira 1 m of public funds will get a life sentence, or a minimum of 21 years for anything less than Naira 1 m.<sup>72</sup> Those found guilty are unlikely to be part of the next political scene should Nigeria return to democracy within a decade or two. Whether their exclusion would cure the 'you chop I chop' malady of Nigerian politics, remains to be seen. Nigeria is once again back to the rule of military commanders and senior civil servants; like their predecessors, they may well make splendid collaborators.

Some harsh decrees have been promulgated to enable the regime to enforce its authority and decisions. Anyone deemed to be a security risk may be detained without trial for at least three months, or as long as the regime sees fit. Journalists who publish any false material embarrassing to the state or its officials may also be jailed by military tribunals. Some journalists and academics have already been detained under these laws. Except for a few, many journalists have simply adjusted themselves to the 'revolutionary mood', supporting even the most absurd of measures like public execution and taxation on the poor. They are, of course, all opposed to anti-Press laws. An anti-currency trafficking decree also makes an offence to possess without good cause any amount of foreign currency, or even a cheque cashable abroad.

The regime's primary concern is to revive the tottering economy. Thus, it places 'prime importance' on co-operation with the 'Barons of Commerce, Industry and Finance,' who, according to Brigadier Tunde Idiagbon, Buhari's number two, 'represent the first significant socio-economic group' he has had formal contact with. He warned them that 'outrages in terms of prices, quality and courtesy' will not be tolerated. Government's industrial priority, he said, is the importation of raw material to revive local industry, stimulate employment and provide essential everyday commodities.<sup>73</sup>

71. Some are: Governor Sabo Bakin Zuwo (PRP), Naira 3.4 m; Governor Sam Ibakwe (NPP), Naira 1 m plus; Governor Aper Aku (NPN), Naira 204,000 plus £10,000; Vice-President Alex Ekwueme, Naira, 42,000; Alhaji Yunusa Kaltungo, Majority Leader, House of Representatives (NPN), Naira 26,000 plus £12,000; Alex Emezio, businessman, Naira 107,469.10 plus £100,000; and Alhaji Sale Jambo, NPN financier and businessman, Naira 136,000. See *Daily Times* (Lagos), 20 January 1984. Governor Melford Okilo (NPN) of Rivers State was allegedly found to have acquired over 150 houses and plots in Rivers State, *National Concord* (Lagos), 2 March 1984.

72. Recovery of Public Property (Special Military Tribunals) Decree 1984, (*Federal Rep. of Nigeria Official Gazette*, 71, no. 15, Lagos, 19 March 1984), pp. A29-A52.

73. Idiagbon, *To Rescue the Nation*, pp. 7 & 10.

As at mid-March 1984, expired raw material import licences valued at Naira 572.2 m had been revalidated and applications for new ones were being processed. It is Government's new policy not to approve the establishment of any industry without a local raw material base.<sup>74</sup> The 1984 budget is geared toward these goals, including incentives to agriculture (and the likelihood of wider room for foreign private capital) but not without commitment to sizeable expenditures on Abuja and defence. Irrigation schemes (notorious for their massive appropriations and patronage) are to be expanded in all States, with the promise of easier access to credit, the efficient provision of inputs and higher producer prices to small-scale farmers.<sup>75</sup> Dr Bukar Shaibu, the new Minister of Agriculture, has the tricky task of reforming what has long been a wasteful, sordid and inefficient enterprise. As Shagari's *de facto* advisor on Agriculture and Water Resources (1979–83), he had been hamstrung by Ministerial excesses; hence he declined an offer to serve a second term.<sup>76</sup> Mobilization fees for contracts have been scrapped. If this policy is strictly adhered to, it would eliminate bogus contractors and check the expansion and influence of the commercial bourgeoisie. It may lead to better services, but it will not eliminate contractors altogether from the general arena of exploitation.

Labour has been sent several clarion calls to the 'ethos of productivity and efficiency' in the interest of the national economy. A National Productivity Centre to sensitize workers' productivity consciousness has also been established in Lagos. Both Buhari and his Labour Minister, Brigadier S. K. Omojokun, have made it clear that 'frivolous industrial actions, particularly strikes and lock-outs' will not be brooked; nor will lack of financial accountability on the part of trade unions. As in Thatcherite Britain, the right of an individual worker to strike or not would be enforced, as would be the principle of 'no work no pay'.<sup>77</sup>

Federal and State Governments have sacked or retired thousands of their employees (although only a few military and police chieftains) as part of ostensible measures to revamp the economy. But workers and the lower level salariat have been hit hardest. In Plateau State, for example, all those originally employed between December 1981 and December 1983

74. *The Guardian* (Lagos), 22 March 1984

75. Full text of the budget in *New Nigerian* (Kaduna) 9–10 May 1984.

76. Two senior ex-Administration officials have confided to the author that although Dr Shaibu formally held the post of National Security Advisor, he never performed that function. Shagari had made the curious error of not seeking Senate approval for an advisor on agriculture, so turned to Shaibu instead. In fact, Dr Shaibu was also the Deputy Chairman (Shagari was Chairman), National Co-ordinating Committee on the Green Revolution programme. Dr Shaibu had been Permanent Secretary for Agriculture and Water Resources in both the Northern Region (1961–67) and Federal Government (1968–78).

77. *New Nigerian* (Kaduna), 28 February 1984; *Sunday Herald*, (Ilorin), 18 March 1984; and *National Concord* (Lagos), 19 March 1984.

were laid off, while those aged 50 and over were compulsorily retired.<sup>78</sup> The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has threatened a nation-wide strike action if the purges persist.<sup>79</sup> It is unlikely that the NLC will have its way entirely given the present charged mood of the country and a conservative leadership which only recently sacked all the striking pilots of its national airline.

Almost all State Governments have imposed one form of tax or another on their peoples. Peasants, artisans, workers, and even the unemployed will have to pay poll and cattle taxes, hospital fees, school levies, and so forth. But these have not been matched by increases in the personal taxation of the rich, although Government is considering the revision of tax laws and has imposed excise duties on many hitherto exempted local manufactures. The increases can, of course, be passed on to the consumer. The re-introduction of community and cattle taxes in particular will enhance the status and authenticity of traditional rulers and their agents. And they are likely, as they once did, to serve as instruments of extortion and oppression against the subordinate classes.

This is all the more likely as the Buhari regime has already forged an entente with traditional chieftains, the avowed exponents of traditionalism and particularity. On assuming power, Buhari sent out special delegations to them, giving reasons for the putsch and requesting support. They gladly obliged; at a meeting with Buhari in Lagos their representatives advised him to order the shooting of armed robbers on sight.<sup>80</sup> Niger State Governor, Lt. Colonel David Mark, added his voice suggesting that convicted ones should be burnt alive.<sup>81</sup> Colonel O. Diya, Oqua State Governor, also suggested that armed robbers should be shot in their own localities so as to expose their families to shame and thus deter others from letting loose their own children. A decree to re-introduce public execution is being prepared and Colonel Diya's proposal effected in some states.

University students' opposition to some of the government's measures particularly the re-introduction of school fees and levies, has been met by Government's refusal to even recognize their union as a legal organization. Deprived of a national organizational machine and faced by a standing policy of closing down any protest-bound University, the students scarcely have any other effective means of organizing themselves for political action. Some authorities have also outlawed the robust if pesky spectacle of street trading. Without sufficient goods to merit and pay for a stall,

78. *Daily Times* (Lagos), 21 March 1984, and *New Nigerian* editorial, 22 March 1984.

79. *New Nigerian* (Kaduna), 22 March 1984.

80. *National Concord* (Lagos), 8 February 1984.

81. *Daily Times* (Lagos), 19 March 1984.

many of the petty hawkers may be forced into the 'hidden economy' proper.

Clearly, the soldiers seem committed to their vision of a good society. They came to power against the backdrop of a venal regime, a regime they in fact saw as the source of venality itself. A decadent society, in their view, is an undisciplined society and a shameful one as well. Indiscipline, said Idiagbon, is the 'bane of the Nigerian society'. And

without discipline in the society at large, the country would degenerate into a jungle where respect for law and order is disregarded, traditional norms and principles are cast aside, criminal tendencies find fertile ground to flourish, and a sense of insecurity of life and property haunts the citizens.<sup>82</sup>

A return to sanity, the new government holds, must therefore be preceded by an infusion of disciplined values in society. The regime has accordingly launched a 'War Against Indiscipline (W-A-I)' to uproot manifestations of degeneracy and dishonourable conduct which, Idiagbon said, include

rushing into buses; driving on the wrong side of the roads; littering the streets, parks and dwelling compounds; cheating; taking undue advantage of scarcity to inflate prices for quick monetary gains; constituting ourselves into public nuisances; working without commitment; and devoting little or no time to the upbringing of our children.<sup>83</sup>

In fact, the concept of 'indiscipline' against which 'war' is to be waged has been broadly defined by Kano State Government to include sexual morality. Hence, all single women living on their own (traditionally considered as women of easy virtue) have been given three months notice within which to get married, quit their residences, or be prosecuted.<sup>84</sup>

Such then is the Buhari regime's conception of, and philosophical answer to, the chaos of Nigerian society. But it is a conception that, in my view, is simple, distorted and even dangerous. Indiscipline, as normally conceived by the Nigerian ruling class, concerns mainly the supposed misdemeanours of its lower classes *vis-à-vis* established norms. It constitutes a socially-defined ill, but not the objective cause of Nigeria's socio-economic degeneration. Nor in fact is the converse necessarily a requirement for development or even progress. For such values merely represent

82. Idiagbon, *To Rescue the Nation*, pp. 32-33; *Daily Times* (Lagos), 21 March and 10 April, 1984.

83. Idiagbon, *To Rescue the Nation*, pp. 33-4.

84. *The Democrat Weekly* (Kaduna), 8 April 1984.

part of the ideological veil which the ruling class and its ideologues draw upon to legitimate and perpetuate its class rule over its subordinate classes. And more important, they provide the ideological reflexes through which class power, class domination and class oppression is effected in the society.

Thus, with an austere and apparently nationalistic leadership in place, capitalists can hope for a more orderly arena within which to operate. Indeed, the regime seems resolute upon to instilling some 'old decencies' into Nigerian society. It will need every bit of goodwill, support and luck because the contradictions it faces are elephantine. The question of the instability of the Nigerian state clearly transcends moral revulsion at governmental perversion. In my opinion, at the future of Nigeria as Gavin Williams has suggested,<sup>85</sup> on the production, market, state and moral relations of Nigerian society which generate conflict within and between competing classes, fractions, sections and ethnic groups over access to scarce resources, and the absence of a bourgeoisie able to command the productive resources sufficient to settle its own crises peaceably, maintain the authority of the state, and accommodate the participation in politics of the subordinate classes.

85. Williams, *State and Society*, pp. 103-4.