

Democratic Transition and Political Violence in Nigeria

Ebenezer Obadare

Résumé: Des temps coloniaux à nos jours, l'activité politique a toujours été accompagnée d'un certain niveau de violence au Nigeria. Les deux tentatives d'instauration de la démocratie civile durant la première et seconde républiques se sont soldées par un échec en raison de l'anarchie sociale. Une fois de plus, le pays est en plein à une convulsion sociale, en témoigne une avalanche d'attentats à la bombe et d'assassinats dans tout le pays. Le présent article soutient que la violence politique actuelle au Nigeria est le résultat du processus de transition politique raté, et en l'occurrence, l'interruption brutale du processus de transition qui était supposé introduire la Troisième République. Par ailleurs, l'article affirme que la violence, dans sa nature, est totalement différente de la violence politique que connaissait le Nigeria avant, constituant ainsi une génération nouvelle du phénomène. La conclusion qu'il est possible de tirer provisoirement est que la violence politique peut avoir un impact négatif sur le dernier programme de transition du Nigeria, étant donné surtout le penchant bien connu des militaires à user du prétexte d'instabilité pour perpétuer leur règne.

Introduction

Nigeria faces a debilitating crisis, spawned by the shocking annulment of the 12 June 1993 elections. The consequent resurgence of political violence throughout the country is the concern of this paper. A spate of bombings has convulsed Lagos and other parts of the country. People perceived to be critical of the Nigerian military junta have been assassinated¹.

* Department of International Relations, Obafemi A. University, Ile Ife, Nigeria.

1. Cases in point here are the unresolved murders of Chief Alfred Rewane, a benefactor of the opposition National Democratic Coalition, NADECO, and Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, wife of Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled 1993 presidential elections.

Politics and violence are like Siamese twins in Nigeria. Political activity has always featured a notable degree of violence, in both the colonial and post-colonial phases of the country's chequered existence. Arthur Nwankwo's (1987:71-72) comment on the place of violence in the colonial social order is apt:

The colonial strategy was despotic. Inevitably, Nigeria was administered with the most unspeakable cruelties, and with unbounded forces of annihilation which rendered mass murder an administrative technique of the colonial regime. *The obvious outcome was that pre-colonial societies were smashed into pieces through raw violence* defined in colonial literature as 'punitive expeditions', 'patrols' or 'pacification' (emphases mine).

The seeming kinship between political activity and violence has not changed significantly since independence. A retrospective survey of the First Republic (1960-1966), for example, would show how the social fabric gradually unraveled until the fateful military intervention of 15 January 1966 (Anifowose 1982). Again, the threat of possible collapse into complete anarchy triggered the putsch of 31 December 1983, which effectively interred the Second Republic (Adamolekun, 1985; Ayeni and Soremekun 1988).

Contemporary political violence in Nigeria is different in two ways from what happened in the past, and this deserves close scrutiny. The bomb explosions, all apparently directed at military targets, add a new and worrying dimension. This paper holds that the current wave of political violence springs from political disaffection occasioned by the sudden termination of the democratic transition process, when it was virtually at the point of crystallisation.

This paper will consider the connection between the legitimacy of the regime and political violence, something that the literature tends to take for granted (Leiden and Schmitt 1968; Ninsin 1992; Nwokedi 1994), and the implications of political violence for Nigeria's democratisation project, especially given the readiness of Nigerian

military leaders to use the bogey of political instability to justify military rule *ad infinitum*.

Situating the Study/Context of Analysis

We proceed from the hypothesis that it is impossible to understand in isolation either the process of democratic transition in Nigeria, or the phenomenon of politically related violence. A full understanding requires them to be considered together.

Democratic transition in Nigeria is better understood within the larger canvas of Africa as a whole. In most African countries undergoing the slow but painful transition from authoritarianism to a semblance of civil governance, the nexus of international and domestic forces in propelling the process of transition is all-important. The international forces include the termination of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet behemoth, the attendant unpopularity of the communist worldview, and the consolidation of the democratic ethos by the apparently victorious liberal societies of the Western bloc (Fukuyama 1992). We should not dismiss, however, the importance of the domestic challenges to decades of dictatorship in many African States. These included the collapse of social infrastructures, economic stasis, the continued marginalisation of unfavoured minority groups in mostly heterogeneous societies and the virtual reduction of governance itself to unbridled accumulation and crass opportunism on the part of a largely short-sighted political elite (Ake 1996; Ndongko 1997; Amuwo 1992).

Any reference to the role played by domestic forces in the shaping of opposition to continued dictatorship must dwell on the resurgence of civil society from the mid-1980s. This was a phenomenon throughout Africa, where one regrettable concomitant of the domination of the social space by *status quo* forces had been the emasculation of civil society. As if taking a cue from international dynamics, groups in civil

society began to shake off their lethargy from the mid-1980s (Wiseman 1990, 1995), the quality of their activities increased. Abutudu (1992:7) captures this movement as follows:

Since the late 1980s, ...the activities of the various groups in confrontation with the authoritarian state have become more focused, systematic and organised. There is increasing co-ordination among different groups and democracy defined in fundamental human rights, and multi-party elections have become specific goals. *No doubt, the international climate has played a remarkable role in these developments.*

Nigeria benefited from this continent-wide process of increased civil consciousness. A reliable symbol of the qualitative rise in public awareness was the proliferation of human rights groups, starting with the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), in 1987. Coalescing under the ambit of the Campaign for Democracy (CD), these groups (in the face of official harassment and incarceration of their leadership) mobilised civil disobedience against the annulment of the 12 June 1993 elections (Abutudu 1995; Sesay and Ukeje 1997).

The process of transition in a large majority of African states has been accompanied by widespread instability. Why has democratisation in Africa left such a legacy of bloodletting? Scholars differ profoundly in their rationalisations. One school attributes the social disequilibrium which followed democratic transitions in Africa to the absence of necessary structures, given that 'political changes had occurred mainly through military coups d'etat' (Omitoogun and Onigu-Otite 1996:1). An opposing school, however finds congenital problems in transitional processes themselves. As Rene Lemarchand (1992:181) has argued, in his avowedly pessimistic assessment of transitions in Africa: 'transitional processes ... tend to unleash rising social demands, thereby sharpening political competitiveness among ethno-regional entities ...'

The social cost of transition in Africa has been prohibitive in terms of the number of human lives lost, as Nwokedi's (1994:49-50) grim statistics show :

... both the protest against authoritarianism and the resistance to this democratisation were particularly violent in some states with scores killed in Cameroon, Niger, Gabon, Burkina Faso and Nigeria while hundreds were massacred in Mali and Kenya and thousands in Togo and Zaire for example.

In the particular case of Nigeria, the immediate concern of the present study, the persistent manipulations and tactical somersaults of the military leader, General Ibrahim Babangida, had arguably prepared the ground for violence. Thus, with the unexpected abrogation on 23 June of the 12 June presidential elections, a particularly tortuous programme of transition was brought to a fitting anti-climax. One commentator characterised the Babangida transition programme as 'the most protracted and open-ended transition ever undertaken in Africa because the agenda (was) endlessly being amended and some of the items already completed (were) changed day after day' (Eghosa Osaghae 1991:103) The study examines the Babangida transition programme with particular emphasis on the ingredients which pre-disposed it to violence.

Conceptual Framework

We need to remove some of the ambiguities surrounding the two basic concepts around which the analysis in this paper revolves. These are 'transitions' and 'political violence'. An attempt will be made to examine the extent to which an organic linkage exists between the two.

Violence is inherent in every social formation regardless of the nature of its political forces and levels of development. Generally known as the 'problem of order' or the 'Hobbesian problem', violence continues to enjoy a high degree of attention in social thought (Arendt 1972; Zimmerman 1983; Fanon 1965; Galtung 1981; Giddens 1987; Salmi 1993; Miller 1984; Apter 1996). This has, however, generated

more intellectual confusion than clarity, particularly over the meaning, causes, nature, possibilities and social utility of violence. Nonetheless, there is a fair consensus that violence emanates from a conflict of interests in social life, itself an inescapable aspect of the human condition (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 1981).

Three distinct sub-themes are relevant to this study: the causes, the character, and the utility of violence. No doubt, violence springs from a variety of causes, each of which may be useful to explain varying political realities. Ivo K. Feierabend, *et al* (1972) have contended that political turmoil is usually the consequence of social discontent. In this light, one possible cause of violence could be aggression arising from frustration, a theory popularised by Gurr (1970). Political violence could also break out as a result of malfunctioning within a social structure (the systematic hypothesis), or a fallout of clashes among dominant groups in a society (group conflict hypothesis).

As we argue below, political violence in contemporary Nigeria is best understood within the frustration — aggression — violence mode. The source of frustration was clearly the annulment of the 12 June 1993 elections, capping a litany of political malfeasance by the Babangida regime. Gurr's theory is also useful to the extent to which it can explain why initial reaction to news of the annulment was more truculent in the Western part of the country. Gurr perceives a relationship between the perception of frustration/ deprivation and the intensity of reaction. As he states, 'mild deprivation will push more across the threshold, very intense deprivation is likely to galvanise large segments of a political community into action' (1970:9). In Nigeria the sense of deprivation (the annulment) was arguably more intense among the Yoruba, the dominant ethnic group in Western Nigeria, from where Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of the elections came from.

Yet, the violence which followed the annulment is also illustrative of a much deeper malaise in the Nigerian polity. We speak here of the

inveterate intolerance of dissent manifested in the contraction of the space for popular participation, the exclusion of unfavoured groups from the conduct of governance, and the blocking of traditional channels for ventilating social grievances. According to Nwokedi (1994:8) '...the use of violence by the elements in civil society expresses the absence of institutionalised modes of interest articulation in the states where this occurs'. The eight-year long regime of General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993), a military dictatorship *par excellence*, was distinguished by its suffocation of critical organs of civil society (Ibrahim 1997). These organs capitalised on the annulment to break out (Okoroji 1993).

Beyond the problem of cause(s), another difficulty revolves around the definition of violence itself. Salmi (1993) captured this problem very well when he noted that 'most people think of violence in a narrow context, equating it with images of war, murders or riots'. Yet,

... violence comes in many more forms. The range of phenomena that could be induced under this label is quite extensive. If one accepts the notions that any act that threatens a person's physical or psychological integrity is a form of violence, then one needs to consider that occurrences as diverse as racism, pollution or poverty can be symptoms of violent situation (p. 16).

To adopt this expanded definition of violence would produce an illuminatingly different understanding of the Babangida transition programme. It is arguable that the entire transition programme took place under an atmosphere of 'repressive violence' (Salmi 1993:20), especially as certain critical social forces were effectively excluded from it. (Lewis 1984; Agbese 1991). In fact, Salmi's (1994) definition of repressive violence could be taken as a theoretical rendering of the political habits of the Babangida regime. According to Salmi,

Repressive violence corresponds to the deprivation of basic rights other than the right to survival and protection from injury ...Repressive violence relates to three groups of fundamental rights: civil, political and social rights ...Political rights refer to the degree to which citizens can participate democratically in the political life

of their region or country (right to vote, holding of elections, freedom to meet and to form associations or parties, freedom of speech and opinion, and freedom of the press). **With respect to social rights, one of the most usual forms of repressive violence is that which prevents people from creating or belonging to a trade union, or from going on strike** (pp. 20-21).

As stated earlier, the Babangida programme became remarkable for its clampdown on the press, trade unions and the so-called 'old breed' politicians, who were routinely banned and unbanned. Why did the Babangida regime suspect the activities of such popular forces and deal with them with such undisguised asperity? The answer is perhaps to be found in its nature as a military regime with a commandist pedigree and a boasted reliance on the use and efficacy of violence.

Our understanding of violence in the present context must necessarily go beyond demonstration, bombings and assassinations. We need to include, for example, the very act of the annulment itself as an act of political violence, especially as the military used the coercive powers of the state to stifle popular will and jeopardise the rule of law. This fits Nwokedi's (1994:12) characterisation of political violence as, partly, the 'use of force by ... the power incumbents to defend the *status quo* at all cost'. In this characterisation, the annulment was a last ditch act of violence intended to keep the Babangida junta in power.

Our final consideration in this section involves the theoretical relationship between transition processes and violence. To get to the heart of the matter: Are transitions necessarily violent processes? At the moment, the African experience predisposes one to answer in the affirmative, since most African countries have experienced comprehensive social convulsions as the direct or indirect fallout of democratic transitions. The handiest examples in this regard, apart from Nigeria, are Burundi, Cameroon, Niger, Gabon, Togo, Zaire, Burkina Faso and Mali (Omoruyi 1997; Lemarchand 1994). In Algeria, over 100,000 people are believed to have been consumed by the violence precipitated by the annulment, of general elections in 1992 (El-Kenz

1997; Stone 1997). In most of the states listed above, both governments, by virtue of their monopoly of the instruments of violence, and groups in civil society, partly out of frustration and partly in reaction to the repressive measures of the political authorities, have participated in an orgy of violence (Nwokedi 1994:15). Again, it is clear that in all the cases identified, violence broke out where the transition from authoritarianism followed the top-bottom model (Linz & Stepan 1978; Huntington 1991; Breytenbach 1996). This model refers to a situation in which 'the previous undemocratic regime remains in control of the agenda for reforms' (Brytenbach 1996:24), a control usually exercised to the detriment of opposition groups.

Yet despite the evidence above, transitions, are not necessarily violent in nature. In fact, violence has tended to be 'most prominent (only) in states where democracy has been subverted, has collapsed, or is non-existent'. (Nwokedi 1994:60). The Babangida transition programme which ended in the abrupt termination of an electoral process, falls squarely within this description. In the next section, we examine this transition programme focusing specifically on its violent dimensions and why its abrupt termination provoked even greater violence.

The Babangida Transition: The Road to Chaos

The Babangida transition programme has been accorded an extensive treatment in the literature (Okoroji 1993; Oyediran 1995; Aziegbe 1992; Obi 1997; Olagunju *et al*, 1993). Here, we intend to restrict ourselves mainly to those elements which nurtured socio-political instability and placed the country on the verge of another civil war.

We need to underline the irony that the entire transition process unfolded under a climate of authoritarianism, which only deepened scepticism among many who rightly perceived a serious conflict between the despotic means employed to reach a democratic promised

land. The persistent resort to totalitarian methods increasingly discredited the entire programme (Olukoshi and Agbu 1996).

However, it is misleading to view Babangida's avid manipulation of the transition programme as merely the manifestation of a single individual's caprice. True, President Babangida displayed outstanding dexterity in managing several knotty political matters, an ability which earned him the sobriquet 'Maradona'. Nevertheless, his entire attitude to the process of democratic transition and the transfer of power to civilians should be seen in a broader perspective. The argument here is that the Babangida regime was essentially neo-patrimonial. A key aspect of neo-patrimonial authority, according to Emelifeonwu (1995:47)

...is the low tolerance for other rival centers of authority outside the orbit of the state as well as the emergence of other key players or groups not sanctioned by the state. Understandably, for the neo-patrimonial authority to do otherwise is to undercut its authority and power base.

Consequently, to perpetuate themselves and hang on to their privileges, neo-patrimonial leaders naturally employ a variety of strategies involving 'a variable mix of carrot and sticks' (Lemarchand 1992:181). It is to be expected that neo-patrimonial leaders should be resistant to liberalisation or pluralism, which invariably leads them to clash with democratic social forces and precipitate social turmoil (ibid).

It is not difficult to locate the Babangida regime within the above paradigm. What needs to be added is that Babangida was assisted in his assiduous juggling of rival forces within the Nigerian federation, by revenues from oil, Nigeria's prime foreign exchange earner. This helped him shore up his authoritarian base (Soremekun 1995). Where the carrot of inducement appeared not to work, Babangida duly fell back on the unreformed machinery of the state, primed since the colonial times to repress its perceived antagonists (Ihonvbere 1995; Ake 1996).

The entire transition programme thus turned into a virtual charade, characterised by persistent state intervention and/or disruption. As Abutudu (1995) has observed,

... authoritarian means of constructing a democratic order have been the hallmark of the Babangida administration's transition to civil rule programme. It was reflected in the way the main elements of the Political Bureau were rejected. It was reflected in the composition of the Constituent Assembly in 1988 in which a substantial portion of the membership was handpicked by the presidency; the authority of the Constituent Assembly was highly circumscribed by the military's imposition of 'no-go' areas.

He continues,

Thus, the Constituent Assembly was told not to address issues pertaining to federalism, state creation, the presidential system, fundamental human rights, etc,... Furthermore, the National Electoral Commission, NEC, was directly responsible to the government. The fact that NEC was hardly autonomous from the administration turned it into an instrument whose reports the government used in rationalising many of those steps that marked its authoritarian attempt to construct a democratic order (pp.19-20).

It is no surprise, then, that by October 1992, the Babangida 'transition to Civil Rule' programme had been amended 62 times (Babatope 1995:32). Such amendments included the extension, thrice, of the life span of the regime in 1990, 1992 and 1993 (Nwokedi 1994:40), the disqualification of gubernatorial aspirants by NEC two weeks before the December 1991 intra-party primaries (Babatope 1995:31), and the banning and unbanning by decree of 'discredited' 'old-breed' politicians in August 1987, December 1991, October 1992 and June 1993 (ibid).

It appears only natural that the perverse logic of the whole programme should have led in the dramatic annulment of the 12 June presidential elections, the successful conclusion of which would have ushered in Nigeria's democratic Third Republic. As writer Chinua Achebe (1993) puts it, 'It was significant that he (Babangida) should end his rule by installing the ultimate element of instability on our

political process; the ability of an incumbent to veto at will the election of his successor' (quoted in *ibid*: 39).

Predictably, the annulment threw the whole nation into a spasm of political violence.

Annulment and the Outbreak of Violence

Why was the 12 June 1993 presidential election annulled? It is our view that an adequate answer to this poser will go a long way towards our understanding the nature and topography of political violence in the post-annulment era.

There are contending explanations for the annulment both from official and unofficial sources. In his 23 June 1993 broadcast, General Babangida had alleged, *inter alia* that the two parties subverted the electoral process by bribing voters, and that there was an expected 'conflict of interest' between the personal businesses of the two presidential aspirants (Moshood Abiola for the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Bashir Tofa for the National Republican Convention (NRC)). He also charged that none of the presidential candidates would have 'enjoyed the loyalty, respect and cooperation of the Armed Forces' (Sesay and Ukeje 1997:31; Okoroji 1993:128-12). Taken together, these explanations would indict the entire transition programme, and they appear preposterous and unfounded (Sesay and Ukeje 1997). A more convincing explanation must be sought elsewhere.

This paper favours the argument which attributes the annulment to the realisation of what the Abiola victory and possible presidency represented for the balance of power in Nigeria's wobbly federalism. Thus, beyond Babangida's self-perpetuation project, it was clear that the Abiola victory represented a significant departure, as it signalled a shift of power from its traditional axis in the North to the South of the country (Soyinka 1996:62-64). It also represented a shift of power from

the armed forces to civilians. In our opinion, this threatened two-fold shift made the annulment of the elections inevitable.

The foregoing analyses need to be situated within the context of the nagging national question in Nigeria and the crisis which its non-resolution has generated among the constituent units of the Nigerian state most especially the three dominant minorities: Igbo, Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba (Dudley 1982; Joseph 1985). To briefly summarise, the national question in Nigeria revolves around the equitable sharing of political power, bureaucratic opportunities and economic resources among several mutually suspicious ethnic groups. Over the years, two critical developments have made the clamour for the 'answering' of this 'question' more strident and persistent: the perceived monopoly of political power by northern based interests, a monopoly strongly resented by power elites from other sections of the country²; and the increasing importance of oil in the nation's political and economic situation.

As the central government became more and more reliant on oil revenues, oil itself became 'an explosive element in majority-minority nationality relations in Nigeria' (Obi 1997:25; Soremekun and Obi 1993). Thus, even as it garnered more revenues from oil, the central government (dominated for twenty-seven out of thirty years by the northern dominated armed forces) became increasingly unaccountable, spawning calls for a democratisation of politics and a restructuring of the country's apparently dysfunctional federalism. These calls for socio-political re-ordering were largely ignored by the ruling elite who used an array of stratagems to cow opposition, ranging from financial inducement to cajolery and in a few cases to plain murder (the hanging on 10 November 1995 of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni

2. In what clearly constitutes one of the unsettling paradoxes of Nigerian politics, members of this self-same elite regularly collude with their northern counterparts, thus apparently contributing to the further reification of the northern hegemony.

activists following a fatally flawed pseudo-judicial process is an ample illustration of this latter point). Successive (mostly military) leaders have stubbornly held on to their accustomed privileges and power, and have thus deepened the crisis of legitimacy of the state in Nigeria (Obi 1997; Kwarteng 1993).

Thus, to return to our earlier submission, the Babangida transition programme took place within a worsening regime and a state legitimacy crisis and more vociferous agitation for a resolution of the national question. As Adebayo Olukoshi and Osita Agbu (1996:89) rightly put it,

... by the time the 12 June 1993 presidential elections were taking place, Nigeria was confronted by the resurgence of the National Question with all of the contradiction by which it manifests itself, including a deepening social crisis.

Likewise, it follows as a matter of elementary logic that:

...the 12 June presidential elections and their subsequent annulment by the military government of General Babangida contained elements of most of the major contradictions that underly the manifestation of the National Question in post-colonial Nigeria (ibid: 79).

It thus appears foolhardy to separate the reaction that greeted the annulment of the elections from the crisis of nationhood and general antipathy to perceived military/northern domination of the political space (Nnoli 1995). It becomes easy to understand why the annulment was rationalised in many quarters as the last ditch act of a military junta determined to ensure the continued location of the locus of power in the northern part of the country. Naturally therefore, greater outrage appeared to have been provoked in the southern and more particularly in the Western part of the country where Chief Abiola hails from. Thus, for several days, Lagos and other urban centres in the south became scenes of civil disobedience orchestrated by the pro-democracy groups under the umbrella of the then nascent Campaign for Democracy (CD). The West was once again enveloped by uncertainty and insecurity.

Perceived government agents were assaulted and their houses burnt, government offices were closed down, and the transportation system halted as a sea of pedestrians took over the major highways.

That the annulment was viewed by a large majority in the South as essentially pro-North was underlined by the fact that civil disturbances were confined to Lagos and other parts of southern Nigeria. As Omitoogun and Onigu-Otite (1996:21-22) argued:

The northern elite were circumscribed in their behaviour. They were concerned that the activities of the pro-democracy groups would stir up critical questions about the nature of the revenue allocation formula and other issues detrimental to their interests ... The passive attitude of such elements appeared to have ethnicised the political crisis arising from the annulment.

One final point which deserves to be underscored relates to the manner in which political violence in the aftermath of the annulment fed on the realities of social life, especially in Lagos and perhaps other urban centres in the country. Urban centres in Nigeria usually contain a mix of the rich and the poor, with the latter always in a clear majority (Adisa 1995). This was not helped in Lagos or indeed other parts of the country, where the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) from the mid-1980s led to decreasing incomes and increasing unemployment, thus adding to the ranks of the urban poor (Olashore 1993; Okonkwo 1993). According to a report on the economic situation of Lagos State, '91 per cent of the urban population and 90 per cent of rural dwellers in Lagos State are living below poverty line' (Sanni 1997). With such social tensions, it is usually easy for things to get out of hand. In the period after annulment, the angst of existence readily meshed with the pain of electoral deprivation to kindle a social conflagration in Lagos and other Southern cities.

Conclusions

My fears are that true democracy may be delayed longer than any of us expects, and that if that happens, people will in their frustration start to

act in irrational ways... The bombings could be an expression of frustration when you start having that sort of thing — it represents a kind of frustration (Carrington 1997).

This essay has adopted an expanded definition of violence, to include not only traditional physical indices like riots and demonstrations, but also 'any act that threatens a person's physical or psychological integrity' (Salmi 1993:16). This conceptualisation helps us to understand the transition process in a new way, as something taking place in an atmosphere of 'repressive violence' (ibid, p.20), and containing several elements which easily predisposed it to more violence. In this sense, it was perhaps most fitting that the entire process should have been terminated by the single stroke of an annulment, which was itself an act of violence, as the military leader, Ibrahim Babangida used the coercive powers of the state to stifle the popular will and to trample on the rule of law.

Political violence in Nigeria has since metamorphosed from open demonstrations to faceless bomb explosions and assassinations, arguably a new generation of political violence in Nigeria³. As at the time of writing (December 1997) there have been 17 such blasts, beginning with the bomb which exploded at the Ilorin stadium in 1995 where the Kwara Chapter of the Family Support Programme was being launched (Abugu 1997.⁴ This situation has not been helped by the severity of the ruling military in violently suppressing open protests and in restricting the ventilation of social grievances by constantly and

3. To these new forms of political violence must be added the hijacking on October 25 1993 of a Nigeria Airways Airbus A130 from Lagos to Abuja by four men representing the unknown Movement for the Advancement of Democracy (MAD). The men reportedly demanded the installation of the winner of the annulled election, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, within 72 hours. For more on this incident, the second of its kind in the country, see Dapo Olorunyomi, 'The Godfather', pp.20-23 and Yinka Tella, 'A Mad Hijack', pp.24-26 *The News*, Lagos, 8 November 1993. See also Alex Kabba, 'The Story of a Skyjack', *TEMPO*, Lagos, 4 November 1993, pp. 3-5 and 12.

openly harassing independent media houses (CLO 1997). A climate of terror prevails in Nigeria today.

What are the implications of continuing political violence for the democratic project in Nigeria? It is hard to give a straightforward answer at present. If the submission of Bangura (1994) is anything to go by, the implications of political violence in Nigeria may be harder to anticipate than is supposed. Bangura cautions,

One of the dilemmas of social life is that even though violence seems to negate the human condition, it does sometimes kindle hope for a new and better beginning, and can play a key role in shaping identities, building bonds of solidarity and establishing group boundaries and a sense of self-confidence among groups in conflict (p. 22).

To what extent political violence is likely to produce this kind of situation in Nigeria remains unclear. For the moment, however, two things can be confidently asserted. The first is that the spate of bombings, all apparently aimed at military targets, has induced greater cohesion and enhanced esprit de corps among the military. Secondly, the military in Nigeria seems disposed to use the pretext of political instability to prolong the transition programme and to delay handing over to civilians⁵. Neither of these bodes well for the future of democracy in Nigeria.

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4. Since then, there have been two blasts in Kaduna, one at the Aminu Kano International Airport, Kano, eight in Lagos, one in Ondo, one in Zaria and the latest in Abuja.
 5. This is already happening. In an interview with the *Washington Times* of 30 January 1997 and widely reported by the Nigerian media, General Sani Abacha claimed that the local council polls hitherto slated for December 1996 had been postponed because of the bombing incidents in Lagos.

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