



History lesson: Boom For The Bleeding Giant by Cameron Duodo

✘ Nigeria turned 49 on 1st October 2009. Incidentally, I turned 53 the following week on 12th October, 2009, which means for all intent and purposes, I am older than my country by 4 years. I spent the Independence Day in Nigeria. A very good thing? I'd say yes. According to the last contentious Census, still a majority of Nigeria's citizens are older than the country itself, and probably wiser. So what else is new? Every year our leaders say the same thing on this occasion. They tell us, even admit they have failed us, blaming other past leaders and exhorting us to have faith in the country and that things will change or improve before the next Independence celebrations.

This has been going on for 49 years, while inconsiderate, opportunistic leaders like James Ibori, Peter Odili, Orji Kalu, Michael Aondoakaa, Tony Anenih, Joshua Dariye, Ibrahim Babangida, Olusegun Obasanjo, and thousands others, past and present, are still taking us for a ride, pulling the wool over our collective eyes, have not repented and are still running loose to perpetrate more of their crimes against the Nigerian people.

I did not buy a single newspaper whilst in Nigeria because what I read or hear are very depressing, and I do not want to die young. Amnesty for militants; ASUU strike, Ibori and his antics; Oyo State Government offering 180 employment as taxi-drivers to graduates; more tales of corrupt officials and politicians; our lawmakers wanting immunity for themselves; etc. What a depressing state of the nation, not to talk of the still epileptic power situation; bad roads, insecurity; unemployment; no water; lawlessness, etc. Aarrgh!!!

So, I did not celebrate Independence Day. In fact the last time I really celebrated Nigeria's Independence Day was the one in 1970, where, after 10 years of Independence, two coup d'états and a bloody civil war, Yakubu Gowon was in power, and believe it or not, Nigeria seemed to be heading towards great heights. Ten years later, the Giant of Africa, as we like to call ourselves, was spiraling down into the abyss of degradation, corruption, neglect, ineptitude, mismanagement, insincerity, hopelessness; and we did not know it, even though the signs were there for all to see. Even the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo predicted the pain ahead, but nobody listened, though they knew the sage was right.

I have therefore decided not to give myself a heart attack by dwelling on and repeating what we know, but to reproduce an article (the original was complete with pictures) written in UK's Sunday Times Magazine of 15th September 1974, which should shed some lights on how we came about our present unfortunate and seemingly irreversible situation as we turned 49. Can we hope for at least a dim light at the end of the tunnel before we turn 50?



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I wish I could say yes, but I dare not hope. Please enjoy this long but interesting, illuminating and instructive article written by Cameron Duodo in 1974.

Boom For The Bleeding Giant

Nigeria is booming all right. In 1973, the year which saw the rich, industrialized nations staggering under the weight of their own energy/effluence ratios, while the bottom fell out of the foreign exchange holdings of the Third World countries dependent on them for aid, the country that was once derided as Africa's 'Bleeding Giant' bowed out to show symptoms of the rich nation's disease - financial indigestion.

Exports went up 55 per cent, and 83 per cent of that came from one commodity alone - crude oil. It gushed out of the oil fields at an average of 2.2 million barrels a day, and by the end of the year more than 93 million metric tons valued at about £1,300,000,000, had been produced. This year production may be well in excess of 2.4 million barrels a day, realizing an income of between £3500 million and £4000 million. And on top of this Nigeria has just acquired another 20 per cent of the largest producing company, Shell-BP (1.3 million barrels a day) bringing the country's total shares in Shell to a majority 55 per cent. The Nigerian Government has also taken controlling shares (55 per cent.) Agip (130,000 barrels per day), Safrap (90,000 barrels), Gulf (382,000) and Mobil (246,000). "Our balance of payments surplus will be at least 10 times greater than the £110 million we had last year," said an official of the Central Bank.

Illegal Strikers - Asking For A 50 Per Cent Pay Rise

Such figures are an ingredient of inflation, and in this respect Nigeria has begun to watch her figure seriously. Recently she slashed the prices of commodities which could be classified as luxuries - motor-cars, radio and television sets, beer, soft drinks and cameras - as well as essential consumer goods like rice, flour, maize, milk, cement and clinker and building materials. A wage freeze was in operation until August; it is now doubtful whether even such price reduction can stem the tide of rising expectations set in motion by the huge income from oil. Even as General Yakubu Gowon was flying into Moscow on May 20 this year to negotiate agreements that would provide training for Nigerians to take a greater part in manning the oil industry, 9000 dock workers at the port of Lagos were downing tools in an illegal strike for a 50 per cent increase in pay. There have already been strikes by railway workers and university teachers.



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The greatest challenge facing the government of General Yakubu Gowon is how to prevent the oil boom from becoming a boomerang that will create social discontent and sweep the country off its feet into chaos and renewed bloodshed. The huge population (provisionally estimated to be 79,760,000 by a recent census, in comparison to the 56 million of the controversial 1963 census) cannot be blamed for expecting the oil boom to bring about a miraculous change in the standard of living. Yet, even if the money is wisely spent to that end, the mechanics of transforming the lives of people scattered over such a large country (356,669 square miles, or 3.7 times the size of the British Isles) could well defeat even regimes with a better back-up in terms of technological and manpower resources.

The sheer impossibility of speedy change is brought home if one travels through the country as I have just done. There is intense impatience with the complacency and lack of imagination of the men in Dodan Barracks (headquarters of the Federal Military Government) and acute resentment, bordering on hysteria, against the opulence of the businessmen who hang around the 'army boys' and use their contacts to make fat profits, conspicuously advertising the fact.

It is quit possible that the army's own vast expenditure would be better tolerated if it could curb the businessmen and their contact men. As it is, claims like the one made by General Gowon, in his budget speech on March 31 this year that "Nigeria is not yet a rich country," only provide ammunition for the acerbic tongues of the Nigerian intelligentsia. One journalist commented: "How can Nigeria be rich when it employs 250,000 to do nothing but carry out parades and the occasional military exercise? The £220 million being spent to finance the army this year represents 22.4 per cent of the entire capital budget of the Federal Government and 12.8 per cent of total capital and recurrent federal spending. Of course you do not grow rich by showering money on a group that constitutes 0-31 per cent of your population."

Little consideration is given to the fact that the army has become a *dues ex machina* which was created by the national irresponsibility that brought about the disastrous civil war, and that whoever attempts to demobilize it faces a great risk, not least of all, the men in Dodan Barracks. "Disabled Soldiers on the Rampage", ran a Daily Times headline in late April; a columnist in its sister paper, The Sunday Times, described the scene:

"'Run for your dear life,' was all I could wait to hear as panic-stricken, defenseless citizens bathed in hot confusion at Oshodi on the outskirts of our capital last weekend. I saw some frenzied uniformed men chasing wildly like chained hyenas just let loose. I was to learn later that they were soldiers. And barely a month before, on Sunday, March 31, traffic along the



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Agege motor road, also in Lagos, was paralyzed following an attack on vehicles along the road by some members of the army. On that occasion, like last week, about 12 vehicles were either seriously damaged or completely burnt and several innocent civilians were injured. The cause of that stampede, again like last week's was that a soldier had been involved in a fatal accident..."

Comments like these, over pitched though they might seem, are evidence of the courage of some Nigerian journalists in a country dominated by the military. The army's excesses are sometimes punished, as are some of the corrupt deals that come to light. On May, 4, for instance, it was reported that the General Officer Commanding the Third Infantry Brigade, Brigadier Yakubu Danjuma, had announced that 21 army officers had been tried and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment up to two years, for fraud and financial mismanagement. And he confirmed that 10 officers had been detained in the north-eastern state in connection with financial mismanagement.

But it is the green-coloured Mercedes-Benz cars with 'NA' (for Nigerian Army) number plates that attract most notice, as they bear the military top brass to and fro. And cynicism about the army's role in the country's moral state is enhanced by the treatment meted to the journalists, who alone can help to impart a social conscience to the more thick-headed members of the armed forces. The police are constantly pulling in editors and reporters for questioning a performance which usually manages to spread over several days, whenever they carry a 'false' report, or, in particular, a report which indicates that the journalists are privy to inside information and therefore have sources within the citadels of power.

The most notorious piece of brutality was inflicted on Minere Amakiri, chief correspondent of the Nigerian Observer, a government owned paper in the Rivers State capital of Port Harcourt. Mr. Amakiri had the unfortunate duty to reporting, on the birthday of the Governor of the State, Commander Alfred Diète-Spiff, that a teachers' strike had occurred in his State. He was given 24 strokes of the cane on his back and his head was shaved. He later sued his assailants and was awarded £7500 damages.

In spite of the harassment, however, Nigerian journalists continue to produce some of the most lively newspapers on the continent. The extent of the freedom of thought they exhibit in their writing, and their singular refusal to kowtow to authority, puts many civilian-run countries' newspaper to shame.

All the major controversies of the day are freely aired and discussed - a fact which discourages



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the type of opinion-moulding associated with other military regimes, and which renders them so unstable. The main potential flash-points in the nation's life are known to everyone who cares to read. They are: should the armed forces hand over power, as promised by General Gowon, in 1976, and if so, should the civilian administration that replaces military rule be completely civilian or should a sprinkling of officers take part to 'police' the civilians and prevent them from committing excesses that could tempt the army back to power in a new coup d'état? How should oil revenue be shared among the states - through 'derivation', no matter how small their population, or through the size of population of a state determining division of revenue? Should the existing 12 states be allowed to remain or should new ones be created, and if so, where? Should the present capitalistic society be left untouched or is it creating too many nouveaux-riches among Nigerian businessmen, a situation which might lead to bloody class conflicts in future. Finally, what role should be played by Nigeria in Africa - and the world - given her great size and immense wealth?

A return to civilian rule in 1976, by which time military rule would have lasted 10 years, seems to be widely accepted. When General Gowon made his promise to hand over in 1976, he announced a nine-point programme which he said would have to be completed by the army before it would hand over power. It include: reorganization of the armed forces; implementation of a four-year development plan; eradication of corruption; a decision on the creation of more states; preparation of a new constitution; introduction of a new system of revenue allocation; a national population census; organization of national political parties, and elections for government in the states as well as the centre.

This is a vast programme, and those who do not want the military to hand over power to politicians are using the impossibility of completing the nine points in the near future to urge the military to stay. Others, like the former President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, suggest a 'dyarchy' of military and civilian personnel, in which the military would exercise a veto over the civilians' decision on important questions.

Some of the military governors have joined in the argument and indeed, the Supreme Military Council seems to be split down the middle over the matter. This is suggested by the way some members refer to the issue in public.

"We are determined to hand over power to civilians in 1976 as earlier promised in order to create a good history of military rule," says Major-General Usman Hassan Katsina, Commissioner for Establishments and Service Matters.



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“The Federal Military Government is committed to handing over power to a civilian regime in 1976. There is no question of military rule exceeding 1976 as the State and federal governments are executing the nine-point programme,” says Major-General Usman Hassan Katsina.

“The present military regime will not hurry to the barracks just because it has fixed 1976 as a date for return to civilian rule. If the people say we should continue, we shall have no choice, unless the right atmosphere prevails,” says Brigadier Mobolaji Johnson, Military Governor of Lagos State.

What of General Gowon? He said on October 1, 1970, that “the target year for completing the nine-point programme, and restoring the country to normal constitutional rule, is 1976. we shall hasten and try to complete the programme if possible.” But since then there have been changes, and it is believed that the statements by other members of the Supreme Military Council may reflect a certain amount of the feet-dragging they may have sensed. Certainly, General Gowon has made no pronouncement on the suggestions that he should stay on as Head of State after 1976.

Who are the civilians in the wings, waiting for the army to go? No-one will admit to organizing a political party, since ‘political activity’ is banned. Instead, there is talk about men ‘with influence’, who are ‘potential’ leaders of parties. Among these, the clear front-runner appears to be the present Federal Commissioner of Health, Alhaji Aminu Kano. He has substantial influence in northern Nigeria, which comprises six of the 10 states and two-thirds of the population. And he has contacts in the south of the country; his ‘Northern Elements Progressive Union’ was allied to the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) of Dr Azikiwe in the Sixties, and he also has a certain radical aura which places him apart from the normal traditionalist or feudalist northern politician. He wants a “wholly civilian” government after 1976.

Complex Processes - king-making and Sharing the oil

Another name heard is Alhaji Inuwa Wada, former Defence Minister in the Balewa Government. Some northerners blame him for not warning the late Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, about the January, 1966 coup, which cost both men their lives. But he is thought to have influence with the army, and he speaks his mind fearlessly; he has said that the nine-point programme of General Gowon need constitute no barrier to civilian rule, inasmuch as “anybody can implement the nine-point programme.”



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In the South, it is thought that the Yoruba leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, will not lead a party, initially, but will have his lieutenants out. Then, depending on developments, he may emerge, like De Gaulle, to take on the task considered by the young men of the day as beyond them. As former Federal Commissioner for Finance, he enjoys the reputation for resigning as soon as the civil war was over; his reasons have never been publicly stated, but the general understanding is that he spoke out against excessive post-war military spending.

Ranged behind these men of influence are a host of younger or more recently-arrived figures, many of whom have come into prominence in the past eight years as either federal or state commissioners. Among them are Alhaji Umaru Dikko (North-Central State); Chief Anthony Enahoro (Mid-West State) and Mr. J. S. Tarka (East-Central State). Professor J. B. Dudley of Ibadan University is also mentioned, as is Alhaji Babatunde Jose, Chairman of the Daily Times group, whose recent announcement that he will not go into politics after 1976 has been greeted with due skepticism.

The king-making process will be a very complex one, for today's Nigeria is not at all a homogeneous society. The armed forces will play a part, traditional rulers, such as the highly-respected Emir of Kano, Alhaji Ado Bayero, will also have a say, albeit from behind the scenes, and the powerful business groups – feared everywhere as a sinister force – will no doubt use their influence. Take stakes are high, involving as they do control over thousands of millions of pounds. Most Nigerians dread the aggressiveness which in the past has characterized bids for power. They feel this could reassert itself with even greater venom during the new dispensation, and destroy the country's hopes of new prosperity.

If a constituent assembly is finally set up, it is likely that the question of allocation of revenues from oil to the states will occupy a central place in its deliberations, even if, in the meantime, the Supreme Military Council has been able to revise the present system, in line with its nine-point programme. The controversy over allocation of revenues has its roots deep in Nigerian history. Between 1946 and 1965 alone five commissions examined the question.

The system that operates at the moment gives the federal government all the proceeds from a 55 per cent profits tax on oil operations. Off-shore operations attract a royalty payment calculated at 10 per cent of the posted price; this also goes to the federal government. But the federal government takes only five per cent of the royalties from on-shore operations, calculated at 12½ per cent of the posted price. Of the remaining 95 per cent on-shore royalties, 45 per cent goes to the state of origin and 50 per cent is paid into a 'distributable pool account'



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operated by the federal government. Fifty per cent of this account is distributed equally to all states and a further 50 per cent is distributed to the states in proportions to their population.

Flashpoints: New States, Old Tribal Passions

This complex formula seeks to do justice to the states that produce oil and to those that produce none, but have large populations to support; but the figures that emerge show the vast discrepancies that exist.

Revenue Allocations to States

1974/75

State	Allocation	Population ('73 census)
Mid-West	£90m	3.24m.
Rivers	£65.5m	2.23m.
East-Central	£37.5m	8.06m.
West	£30.5m	8.9m.
North-East	£27m.	15.38m.
Kano	£22.5	10.9m.
North West	£22.3m	8.50m.
Benue-Plateau	£19.5m	5.17m.
North-Central	£19m	6.79m.
South-East	£18.5m	3.46m.
Kwara	£15.5m	4.6m.
Lagos	£13.5m	2.47m.

The federal government, in addition to these statutory allocations, is making available about £230 million in grants to the states in 1974/75, and also proposes to raise a development loan of just under £100 million, the proceeds of which will be passed to the states. However, the fact that the Mid-West State and the Rivers State, whose joint populations constitute only about 7.5 per cent of the federation total, take more than 43 per cent of the available revenue, rankles with the more unfortunately placed states.

One suggestion being bandied about is that if more states are created, the disproportion in allocation between the oil-producing and non-oil producing states will be minimized. But the creation of states is itself a flash-point in Nigerian affairs. What are the criteria that should determine the size of a new state? Population or area? Ethnic cohesion or administrative convenience? These questions are causing deep divisions within existing states, notably, in the East-Central State where there is a strong lobby for a new state to be called "Wawa". There is



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also a lobby for three new states in the West - Oyo, Ondo and Abeokuta. And the North-East and North-West states, it is argued, could each be broken up into two states. The current argument is that “the Americans started with only 13 states, but now have more than 50”. So, the debate continues, and it is a tricky one in view of the tribal passions it arouses, and the attendant suspicion that it is all being done with an eye on “other people’s oil money”.

The question of the rise of the Nigerian bourgeoisie and the almost hysterical reaction they evoke against themselves from the rest of the population can best be illustrated by an account in the Sunday Punch of the doings of one of them over the Easter holiday period:

“Perhaps it may not be the wedding of the year, both in Lagos and Monrovia. (Let’s see how the people of Lagos will out-do it.) It certainly holds the record in both cities as the talk of the town. It was a grand, elaborate champagne affair, as smooth as the bridegroom successfully pans and executes his businesses, for which he is certainly on the Division One League Table in Nigeria today. The groom is Sharp-shooting, fast-traveling businessmen, Alhaji Isyaku Ibrahim, well known in Lagos, Jos, Kano, London, Paris, Washington (you name it) and lately, Monrovia. The bride, the lovely Miss Charlotte Baker, native of Monrovia, Liberia...“the affair started on Thursday, April 11, with the bachelor’s eve party at the flat of the best man, Major Abdul Bello (Nigerian Air Force) at Maryland Estate (Lagos). Guests who turned out at the all-night show numbered 500, including a good number of the Lagos party hounds who can smell a beer within 10 miles radius. Most of them had champagne. Next came Good Friday and the all-expense-paid trip to Monrovia from Lagos by about 150 selected guests in two chartered jet planes, by courtesy of the groom. Guests at the Monrovia trip attended a maiden’s (spinster’s eve) party given by the bride’s family. After the church wedding ceremony on Saturday, the Monrovia team hurried back to Lagos same evening with about 50 Monrovia guests, courtesy of the groom. And to Lagos party No. 2 at Commander Wole Bucknor’s residence at Child Avenue, Apapa. Easter Sunday brought the following events. The grand champagne reception at Federal Palace Hotel. Chairman, Chief Fani-Kayode (well, you know him). Bride and bridegroom were toasted by the dapper, eloquent Alhaji Yusuf Maitama Sule (well, you know him). The guests were about 500. It was a fashion parade and some of the lovely girls wore expensive aso ebi lace - in the style of the affair...

“The round-up party came on Easter Monday, at the Alexander Road residence of the flamboyant people’s man, Mr. J. S. Tarka, Federal Minister for Communications... Next morning, the groom



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accompanied the Monrovia guests back home ...”

Suddenly, the reporter’s enthusiasm seems to flag and he begins to worry. Is anything wrong? He writes: “Of course, it doubtless cost a bit of money, but it’s his own bread, man. And he’s one hell of a fine fella. So don’t holler about the bread. Rejoice, man, rejoice!”

‘If we bumped off 200 or so, the rest might learn’

This report appeared in the same week that the papers told the story of a pregnant woman who had been hit in the stomach with a stick and killed in a fight with another woman over a monkey’s tail that both wanted to use in cooking soup. One journalist juxtaposing the two reports, commented: “That is the story of Nigeria today: immense wealth for the few and abysmal poverty for the many.” He produced another report, revealed that a businessman imported a Rolls-Royce from Britain by airfreight and that he paid spot cash when Customs officers charged him about £30,000 duty. I myself was told by a friend from a neighbouring country of a visit to Lagos: finding it difficult to leave a party being given by wealthy friends, he explained that if he did not go, he might miss his flight home. The casual answer was: “Oh, I’ll drop you with the yacht if you miss the flight!”

Needless to say, the envy of the many against the few is excruciating: “I’d like to see a movement come into being that would pick off some of the bastards one by one,” said the journalist just quoted. “if we bumped off 200 of them or so, or took out their eyes, the rest might learn some sense.” It is easy to dismiss this as fantasy – yet it should be remembered that just before the January 1966 coup and the harvest of slaughter it set off, similar callous talk about the “Nigerian malaise” was in the air. Everyone wants the army to uproot corruption, but no one is able to say how; fewer still have seriously examined the implications of punishing businessmen for profiting from their contacts, and the resultant collapse of free enterprise – a system that is almost taken for granted in Nigeria. So corruption grows – spreading new young roots: 118 students at the University of Lagos have been sent down for using forged certificates to gain entry.

Meanwhile, believers in the profit motive defend it aggressively. When the Federal Commissioner for Works and Housing, Mr. Femi Okunnu, warned that Nigeria’s Indigenization of Business Decree (which reserves certain categories of businesses to Nigerians and limits the percentage of shares foreigners might hold in other categories) should not be allowed to entrench economic power in the hands of “a few chieftains” of business, Chief Henry Fajemirokun, President of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce, rounded on him with all guns



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blazing. Mr. Okunnu's statement he said, was a "perverted interpretation" of the Decree, stemming "either from a peculiar idea of patriotism or from a nostalgia for the concepts of impracticable Fabian socialism of which I know the Honourable Commissioner to be so fond."

In an atmosphere like this, it is difficult for other African countries to expect that Nigeria might use her wealth to take up the leadership of Africa and steer the continent towards total independence. There was a chance during the oil crisis last year for Nigeria to demonstrate whether her thoughts were inclined outwards; a number of impoverished African states asked Lagos for concessionary prices for crude oil. They were all offered plenty of oil - but only at the going commercial price.

There are good Pan-Africanists in the Gowon Government, notably Alhaji Aminu Kano, but at the moment their power seems to be minimal. A West African Economic Community, backed up with a strong currency in the form of the Nigerian naira, is mooted, but France is endeavouring to keep it on the drawing board and Nigeria will have to show more diplomatic perspicacity if the community is to take off.

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THE SUNDAY TIMES Magazine, September 15, 1974, page 23-36
Cameron Duodo reports on the modern Nigeria.

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