

**NIGERIA AT 50: GAINS AND CHALLENGES OF GOVERNANCE - BEING
THE TEXT OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY KANU G. AGABI, CON, SAN
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INTRODUCTION:

I thank you for the privilege of addressing you on the subject of the gains and challenges of governance in our country in the last fifty years. I dedicate this speech to all those men and women who made the sacrifices by which they were able to bequeath to us the great heritage which, for fifty years now, we have squandered and dissipated. May God grant that henceforth we may be clear in vision and repent of those actions and utterances that have undermined our capacity as a nation so that we may, in turn, be able to bequeath to our children as great a heritage as it was our fortune to inherit. May the Lord grant that we may be able take our proper place at the fore-front in the battle for the redemption of the African continent and the black race. As long as there are men and women like you, who are prepared to confront these issues and to discuss them openly and frankly, there is hope for the nation and the black race.

I speak to you at a time when corruption and flattery have taken a stranglehold on the nation; a time when a new gospel is taking root to the effect that somehow, good can come out of evil. We live in an age which teaches that bread alone will suffice and that it does not matter how we acquire it. The scriptures enjoin us to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all other things shall be added unto us. But now we are being told to seek all these other things first in the hope that the kingdom of God can be purchased later.

In the last fifty years our country has come to enjoy the dubious reputation of being one of the most corrupt in the world. This, truly, is the age of corruption. Even then, we have one consolation. It is this. There will never be a shortage of those who oppose the evils that now threaten us on every side. Throughout history, God has always ensured that whenever there was evil to be opposed there would be those to oppose it. And whenever there was truth to be spoken there would be those to speak it. We may crucify the agents of truth. We may behead them and offer their heads as trophies to those who flatter us but the truth shall be spoken and in the end shall prevail. It is with that conviction and

that faith that we live in this darkness. And however dark it becomes it is for God that we wait. We are resolute in our determination that one day this nation shall be transformed into the kingdom of God. Thank God that he made us so patient and so resilient, so hardworking and so forgiving. It is to the patience of the people, their resilience and hard work, their intelligence and understanding that we owe the continued survival of the nation. At such a time as this we pray never to despair or to presume. We pray for our leaders that they may understand that only the truth shall make us free and that as long as the people are in bondage they too shall be in chains. We share the optimism of the psalmist who foretold that ancient Ethiopia shall raise her hands to God. It was that vision and that optimism that was shared by the great black spokesman, Edward Blyden, who, addressing the Maine State Colonization Society on the 26th day of June, 1862 said:

"I look for the day when black men in this country, roused to a sense of their duty to Africa, will rush to those shores to bless that benighted continent. "Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God." The Almighty hath decreed it. Soon shall those beautiful valleys, now lying in melancholy loneliness, be peopled by a happy and thriving population. Soon shall those charming hilltops all over the land, now trodden by the foot of man, be crowned with temples to the Most High. The vast wilderness and the solitary places, yielding to the hand of culture, shall blossom as the rose. Genius and learning and skill shall revolutionize the land. Ethiopia, in all her length and breadth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

And so it shall be. This nation, too, as bleak as the prospects may seem, shall one day raise her hands to God. This country, in all her length and breadth, shall be covered with the knowledge of the Lord. Our genius and learning shall bear fruit and the nation shall be peopled by a happy and thriving population.

In the last fifty years we have fought one brutal and senseless war which involved the nation as a whole. As for the wars which various communities have fought and continue to fight against one another, those are innumerable. Some communities have been annihilated in those wars. As a nation we have suffered all sorts of frustrations that diminish our nationhood, our humanity and the

realization of our national objectives. We have had to contend with ignorance, disease and poverty. We have watched, helplessly, the emergence and entrenchment of violence. We have witnessed the emergence and glorification of factional groups which promote the cause of the tribes. It is a matter for regret that these groups and factions continue to thrive in the nation at a time when, all over the world, boundaries are collapsing and men and women are seeking unity not on the basis of tribe or tongue but on the basis of our common humanity.

Frequent changes of government since independence

The last fifty years have been characterised by frequent changes in the government and the leadership of the nation. One of the greatest ironies of our time is the fact that the army of a peace loving and non-violent people who had opposed colonial rule without bloodshed, took up arms and shed the blood of its own people for reasons which have never been very clear. Under the military we came to learn that violence and treachery are legitimate weapons for the acquisition of power. Unfortunately, given all that have happened since the advent of civil rule it would appear that we are still of that mentality. It is no wonder then that our affairs are now characterized by intolerance and suspicion. For a nation that became accustomed to changing its leadership through the barrel of the gun is it any surprise that our youth are now seeking to command attention and to enforce their will, whatever it is, by the use of violence? That evil foundation was laid in 1966 when we assassinated our duly elected leaders and instituted military rule. Once that government was allowed to stand it became an example that power could be founded on bloodshed. The assassination of the Prime Minister and others with him was followed almost immediately by the assassination of Gen. Ironsi who had assumed power after the coup of 1966. Under the rule of Gen. Yakubu Gowon, we fought and killed one another in a senseless and brutal war, from the effects of which we are yet to recover. Gen. Yakubu Gowon was overthrown by Gen. Murtala Mohammed who himself was later assassinated. He was succeeded by Gen. Obasanjo who returned the nation to civil rule under Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Before Alhaji Shehu Shagari could settle down we overthrew him and installed Gen. Muhammadu Buhari. Gen. Buhari was overthrown by Gen. Babangida who stepped aside for Chief Ernest Shonekan. Chief Ernest Shonekan was ousted by Gen. Abacha who died in office and was succeeded by Gen. Abdulsallam Abubakar. It was he who promulgated the Constitution under which the present

administration came to power. Against that background is anyone surprised that we seem to be at home with dictatorship, with corruption, with violence and with treachery? Against such a background is it any surprise that the seeds of democracy are having such a hard time taking root? Against such a background, surely, it will take some time before democracy becomes a part of our spirit and consciousness.

The emergence of corruption

The illicit acquisition and retention of power by the military marked the emergence of corruption. If power, which hitherto was believed to be sacred, could be acquired by force, there was no reason why lesser things could not be so acquired. If the leaders of the people could be assassinated with impunity and their authority taken away, there seemed to be no reason why people could not be robbed and thereafter killed in order to eliminate the witnesses. And so a culture of impunity began to take root. And that is how, slowly and imperceptibly, we reached the point at which the nation now proliferates with robbers and assassins. It is worthy of observation even though the nation now proliferates with assassins and murderers, not a single assassin is standing trial for that offence. On the contrary, the killing of the innocent is now glorified by been attributed to militancy. If the prayers of the nation are not rising up to heaven at this time it is because our prayers are stifled by the all the blood of the innocent rising up from the ground and crying to God for vengeance.

The multiplication of offices and the appointment of the unqualified.

Prior to and up to the time of our attainment of independence in 1960 the public services of the regions and of the federation were administered by the British. After independence we assumed responsibility for these matters. It was for us a time of learning. It was a time when the nation had manpower problems. These manpower problems were compounded by the civil war which led to the withdrawal from the federal public service of all public servants from the then eastern region. The situation was made worse by the creation of more states. We went from three regions to twelve states. Today there are 36 states and 774 local government and area councils. The new offices created were in many cases filled by the appointment of persons without the requisite qualifications or experience. That is the history corruption in our country - the appointment to high offices of unqualified persons. These unqualified persons were in no position to appreciate the consequences of their actions or inactions. When they

compromised the system they did not know what exactly they were compromising. And in order to retain their offices they fell back on tribe, ethnicity or religion. That is the origin of the undue importance now attached to tribe, to religion or state of origin. This situation has been compounded by the fact that indigenes of one State, however competent or patriotic, cannot find employment in the public services of other states. The same with Local Government Councils. In a vast majority of cases only indigenes of the area are staff of the Councils. This has given rise to much inefficiency and corruption.

Non-enforcement of the laws.

The last fifty years have been characterized by non-enforcement of the laws. Under military rule, law was largely enforced by the military. And whenever the military found it necessary they ousted the jurisdiction of the courts. This had the effect of weakening the police force and the judiciary. The police were poorly paid, poorly trained, poorly equipped, poorly accommodated and had little or no motivation to do their work. They were totally inadequate even in numbers. In a nation of over 120 million people we had, as at 1999, a force of a little over 130,000 ill motivated men and women. In the last twelve years we have more than doubled that number but it will take some time before we can give the police force the kind of training that is required or equip them adequately as they ought to be equipped. Because the machinery of law enforcement is weak, many violations of the law have gone undetected and unpunished. .

So long as the society is founded on injustice, the function of the laws will be to defend and sustain injustice. And the more unjust they are, the more respectable they will seem. Anatole france.

Have we been able to offer even judicial justice? The constitution promises more than that. In the past fifty years, of the three arms of government, the most transparent, the most consistent has been the judiciary. It is to the judiciary that we owe the survival of the nation. It is important that recent events do not undermine the confidence of that institution in itself.

The civil service.

In the past fifty years the spirit of that institution has been broken with the civil servant no longer has confidence in himself. It started with the promulgation of decree no 17 of 1984 under which civil servants who had been unjustly dismissed or retired from the service were not allowed to challenge their dismissal or retirement in the courts. The ultimate result was the decline of the service and the entrenchment of corruption. Various attempts were made to politicise the service. These attempts have had the effect of undermining the commitment of the civil servant and efficiency of the service. The notion has taken root that the civil servant does not have a say or that if he is allowed a say that he cannot have his way. That is the attitude that has destroyed and continues to destroy the service. The civil servant must have a say. Giving our unique experience, if there is need to amend the constitution to give the civil servant a say we should do so. The nations whose achievements we seek to emulate are those which have placed greater authority to their civil servants than we have given to ours.

The presidential system

After military rule, a system of government in which we had absolutely no experience - the presidential system of government - was instituted by the military. The people had no say whatsoever in the choice of that system. Before military rule we were a parliamentary democracy. Whatever the ills of parliamentary democracy we sought to avoid through the presidential system I do not know. One thing I do know - the presidential system of government is that system which best resembles military rule in that it is a dictatorship under the constitution. All power is vested in one man in the hope that the power so vested will be exercised to weld together a nation that tends to be divisive. The powers so vested are intended to enable the president to take drastic measures - drastic measures that will compel the nation along that path of austerity and sacrifice without which we cannot be a self reliant nation. Because of those tendencies toward division which culminated in the civil war the military hoped that the presidential system of government would assist us to meet the challenges which then confronted us a nation. Because corruption continues to thrive, because violence goes unchecked, because the system itself is so expensive and difficult to maintain and because its gains are not so obvious, we are entitled to wonder whether the presidential system of government is, after

all, what we need. In many of our states dictatorships have been instituted, the structures for accountability erected by law have been destroyed. No one can now deny that in many of our states the legislature has become an arm of the executive. At the national level the legislature has come under justifiable suspicion of collusion with the executive with the result that the executive and the legislature no longer act as checks on one another.

A strong national government.

The Constitution envisages a strong national government. This strong national government is consistent with the constitutional principle of limited government. It is now apparent that unless the national government is strong, the nation will disintegrate. In all its provisions the Constitution looks to an indivisible and indestructible nation. We may restructure or rearrange the nation as we please but its integrity as such must be preserved and protected. Because the Constitution is not a product of the will of the people, its declaration to that effect has come to be mocked. If we mock the constitution then we must mock all that the military bequeathed to us. In the course of their tenure the military enacted several laws of which the Constitution is only one. They did several things which have become binding and which cannot now be reversed. They created States and local governments all of which we have accepted. They entered into contracts many of which have been executed. Many of the institutions by which the nation is governed today derive their origin from the military. We cannot accept democratic rule instituted by the military while rejecting the constitution upon which it is founded.

The amendment of the constitution

The Constitution is only a written document and like all written documents it has its errors and omissions. It behoves us, therefore, who long for the prosperity of our country, calmly and deliberately to examine and consider such defects as may exist in it, and set ourselves to the work of remedying them to the best of our ability. Whether we like it or not, it is the peoples' Constitution and it is our work to correct its deficiencies. It is unfortunate that the recent exercise in constitutional amendment did not address some of the more fundamental issues. There is urgent need for a further amendment of the constitution. We must be willing to take up and address the most fundamental issues. Our courage must not fail us in this respect. For instance, after fifty years legitimate questions persist as to the relationship between the national government and the states. This has to be addressed. In the light of recent events the question is now been

put: what is the use of the constitution and what are the uses of the laws if they do not protect the people? In the face of the constitution and in the face of all the laws that have been promulgated it is now apparent that the laws alone will not suffice. It is not enough to have good laws. We must also have good men and women to enforce the laws.

Lacking a sense of history.

It is a matter for regret that after fifty years we were unable to adapt the received laws to meet our local needs. We suffer from an inferiority complex. After fifty years we still bear foreign names. I have no objection to our honouring the ancestors of other nations who deserve to be honoured. But it ought not to be the case that we continue to regard our own ancestors as barbarians and idol worshippers. We speak to one another in foreign languages. We eat foreign foods. We wear foreign clothes. Our religion is foreign. We have been made to believe that we have everything to learn from the rest of the world and nothing to offer in return. We are a people without a sense of history and it is no wonder then that we are gradually losing our sense of family. We are governed by laws which are not a product of our culture and evolution. The laws by which our ancestors had regulated their affairs were set aside by the British. In their place new laws were promulgated which were not a product of the culture and experience. Some attempt was made by the colonial government to preserve Customary law and Sharia law. That attempt, surely, did not go far enough and that, perhaps, is responsible for some of the agitations which gained ground on the advent of civil rule that our indigenous laws should prevail over the received or the written law. Those agitations appear to have died down but they are not entirely without merit.

Nevertheless it is necessary to remind ourselves that if we are going to avoid anarchy we must enforce the law as it is to be found in the statute books, not in the Bible or the Quran. If it is not found in the statute books then it is not the law. Mere usage, tradition or custom is not enough. No part of the public law can be buried in the practices of a person or a community. Mere acceptance by the people of a practice is not enough. It must be law. Yet again, at a time when extra-judicial bodies are taking matters into their own hands, it is necessary to remind ourselves that determination of the law is the responsibility of the judges and no one else. We look back now with regret for the support which groups like Bakassi Boys received from the governments of some of those

states in which they operated. That support and encouragement gave impetus to other identical organizations that erupted in other parts of the country.

Misconception of democracy

Democracy has brought with it hatred, fear and prejudice. With the advent of democracy irrational people have committed irrational crimes against the nation. This irrationality we have to fight with dignity, diplomacy, education, understanding and dialogue. We have to address the roots of hate and make concerted efforts to eliminate all injustices and exploitations in every part of the country. We have proceeded on the false assumption that politics without force or without fraud cannot produce results. We have aimed to be strong in numbers without being strong in spirit and in truth. For some of us politics is as a game of intrigue and deception. We have a total misconception of democracy. Democracy, for some of us, has meant the right to do as we please, the right to live as we please without regard for the rights of others, the right to lie, to cheat, to kill and to manipulate the people and the government if only we can get away with it. Our methods must be right. The result can never be acceptable once the procedure is wrong. The only guarantee of a right result is due process. Both the end and the means must be justified. Whether in or outside politics good and bad are not, and cannot be equal. To fight falsehood with falsehood or vice with vice, as we have been trying to do for fifty years, can only lead to the triumph of evil. The collapse of military rule ought to have been a lesson to us that a government not founded on justice and the will of the people cannot stand. What we have today is the shadow of democracy. What we have presently is certainly not the substance. However, the appearance of the shadow is an indication that the substance cannot be too far away.

Advancing by our own methods

After fifty years we ought by now to appreciate that our country is ours to build and no one is going to build it for us. The emphasis must shift from what others can do for us to what we can do for ourselves. That is the only way forward. If we are going to be able to eliminate corruption and violence we must strive to be self-reliant. We must begin to produce by ourselves the things that we need. Our currency will remain weak as long as we use it to purchase the luxuries of other nations. It is ironical that while we embrace globalization the internal boundaries of the nation are shut to citizens who are described as non-indigenes. If we are going to be self-reliant as a nation we must reappraise the

concept of globalization. For a nation that is far from being self-reliant, for a nation which has little or nothing to sell, there is no reason for us to keep our borders wide open so that the industrialized world can flood our markets with their goods - even those we can easily do without or produce by ourselves. It ought not to be the case that in all our cities and even in some of our villages our young men and women, in their thousands, are to be seen on the streets and highways selling goods manufactured by other nations which are less endowed than ours. We are not going to be self-reliant by enjoying the luxuries that other nations have invented. We shall become self-reliant only by making those sacrifices which those other nations made to invent those luxuries.

We watch foreign films. We listen to foreign music. We wear foreign clothes. We engage in commerce which is ecologically destructive. The ancestors of other nations are our heroes but our own ancestors we regard as barbarians not to be remembered. The assimilation of foreign cultures has been aided and facilitated by radio and television and the ease with which we are able to move in and out of the country. I know of no country whose borders are more open than ours. There is not a single luxury that the western world has invented that we have failed to import. European and American apples are sold at every street corner in our country while our own fruits rot away due to lack of processing facilities. We are not going to attain the heights that Europe has attained merely by enjoying the luxuries that she has invented. We can only attain those heights by making those sacrifices that she made and continues to make in order to invent more luxuries. We eat foreign foods.

As a nation, we must be able to advance by methods of our own. We must not continue to suppose as we have for long done, that the methods of Europe, the United States or Asia are final and that there is nothing for us to find for our own guidance. We must come to the realization that we too have something to teach the world. It ought not to be the case as it now is that we have abandoned completely the ways of our ancestors and destroyed some of our most important cultural institutions. We must rid ourselves of that complex which drives us to idolize the ancestors of other nations while disparaging or stigmatizing our own ancestors as barbarians. The future of the nation shall be determined by our own insights. It is for us, therefore, to recognize and build upon our own insights and capacities. Salvation can only come from within. And we must develop confidence in ourselves. We must cast away, by all means, that complex of inferiority that has taken a stranglehold on us.

The annihilation or the assimilation of the opposition

The advent of democracy has witnessed the annihilation of the opposition, particularly in the states. Through the use of caretaker committees all the states were able to wipe out the opposition with one stroke of the pen. At the same time local government lost its essence as a tier of government. It became an appendage of the state government. This gross violation of the constitution has gone unheeded. The nation must appreciate that the opposition is instituted by law and is essential for constructive government.

The need for national integration

There is absolute need to integrate the nation. As it is we are not one nation. Following the creation of states people have been largely confined to their states and it is now virtually impossible to obtain employment in states other than their own. A Nigerian ought to be able to seek elective office and to work in the public service wherever he lives irrespective of his tribe or religion. He ought to be able to find employment in the public service of the state of his residence. What should determine his eligibility for an office ought not to be his place of origin but his qualification. The present situation where an indigene of Enugu state, for example, cannot obtain employment in the public service of Imo State is unacceptable. The opponents of the nation never cease to contend that the nation is an artificial creation. They say that we are not one people; that we were welded together by the British because they found it politically and administratively expedient. To these opponents of the nation we point out that all nations are constructed. There is not a single nation on earth that was not constructed. America was constructed. Great Britain did not always exist as such. It is our recognition of one another as belonging to the same nation which makes a nation. Societies exist of which the people speak one language but are of different nations. We must be reconciled to our destiny as one nation and one people. The entire world is moving towards unity. Boundaries are breaking down - first trade boundaries, and later social boundaries. We must begin to reach out to one another across state boundaries. We must forget the past and forge a new nation of righteousness and peace founded on truth and justice. We fought a war in order to remain united. That war being over we must unite.

Failure of leadership of the continent and the black race.

The past fifty years have witnessed our inability or failure to offer leadership not only to the African continent but to the black race as a whole. At a time when we should have taken the initiative and provided that leadership we instead set for the continent a bad example. It was our bad example of dictatorship and corruption that was followed in Zaire and elsewhere in Africa. We could not complain about atrocities in Uganda as long as we were committing atrocities of our own. So deplorable were conditions in our own country that the apartheid regime in South Africa felt consoled that its inhuman treatment of its black citizens still left them better off than our own people. Had we been ourselves united we would have been able to prevent or at least minimize the genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. So this is not a time for division in our country. It is a time for unity on the basis, at least, of our common experience of dictatorship, of corruption, of poverty and injustice, of hunger and unemployment. We should look around us and see the rest of the world uniting. America has united. Europe is uniting. Asia is uniting. Africa must unite. The black race must unite. It cannot do so unless we offer the required leadership. There is absolutely nothing that the Yoruba nation can gain from being on its own which it cannot get, a thousand times over, from being part of a United Nigeria. The same with the Hausa nation or the Ibo nation. If God had intended that you should use your talents and your potentials just for yourselves alone He would not have endowed you so abundantly. You have been given so much precisely so that you can be your brothers' keepers. Here in this country you failed in that duty so that minority communities had no alternative but to menace you with protests and agitations. So stop your petty tribalism and ethnicity. Stand up and speak for the African continent and the black race. This continent has been called the dark continent. It is our responsibility to bring light to it. The Jews remember the holocaust with grim determination that it should never happen again and there is no sacrifice they will not make to avoid its repetition. Yet when we look back upon the slave trade it seems to make no impression upon us. Yet the chains with which our own ancestors were bound are there to be seen. The ships in which they were loaded like cattle are there to be seen. The warehouses in which they were stored before been shipped are there to be seen. The descendants of those slaves are still labouring under the weight of racism. Yet we remain untroubled. Our responsibility is to the continent. Our ideology must embrace not just the nation but the black race. The black world looks up to us for leadership. That is why, when in 1966 we overthrew our government, the rest of the continent

followed that terrible and bad example. When we became dictatorial and violent the rest of the continent became dictatorial and violent. When we became corrupt the rest of the continent became corrupt. Now that we have embarked upon democracy and due process you can see that the rest of the continent is beginning to follow our example.

The education of our youth.

In the past fifty years our educational system has grown from bad to worse. If our objective was to destroy our youth we could not do better than to give them the kind of education we are giving them now. I dare say that our children would be better off if they did not receive the kind of education they are getting now. We can never be self-reliant as a nation unless we give our children the right sort of education. The nation must teach not only the use of the mind but also the use of the hand as well. The studies which we offer ought to be of great utility to the nation. We should modify our curricula to meet our conditions. Education should not render its recipients unfit for the practical duties of life as it appears to have done. It should not make its recipients proud or distant from the community. Our studies must be relevant to our condition and our aspirations. The minds of our students must be more properly directed. We must begin to take more seriously those courses by which the minds and hearts of the citizens are formed. Emphasis must be placed on the knowledge of the mind. We must learn about our duties to ourselves, to fellowmen, to society and to God. Education must teach self-respect, a proper appreciation of our own powers and of the powers of other people.

It ought not to be the case, as it presently is, that our graduates lack the training and discipline, the patience and endurance to which they must all submit in order to succeed. We should not be experts in the geography and customs of other nations while knowing little or nothing about ours. Our youth should not know the statesmen of other nations while knowing little or nothing about our own leaders, whether past or present.

The electoral process.

We still have difficulty with the elections. When the parties go into an election determined to employ the most inferior methods to win, it is not possible to have fair elections. We must make up our minds as to the type of elections that

we desire. We cannot go up to heaven to bring down angels to conduct our elections. Our elections will be as fair as we want them to be. There is little that INEC can do if all those who are engaged in the elections are determined to employ unfair methods. It is for us to choose our leaders and representatives. In doing so we must comply with the law, but if we chose instead to exploit weaknesses in our law enforcement machinery we shall ultimately pay the price. Again the decision is ours whom to vote for. If we prefer to sell our votes to the highest bidder we will have ourselves to blame for the ensuing corruption or bad governance. Ethnic identity is the basis of most voting. Ethnicity is the easiest basis upon which to organize political loyalty. Once loyalty is not issue based it cannot be performance based. People lack the information upon which to judge performance and relatively few are going to base their judgment on this performance. and have no education as to the issues upon which they vote.

Destruction of important cultural institutions

We destroyed some of our most important cultural institutions the most important of which is the village and this was at a time when we did not have a substitute. We are neither the children of the village because there is none anymore, nor the children of the city because there is none either. We invented the slum. From these slums come crime. Conditions in the slums inhibit the cultivation of morals. We must embark upon programmes enabling the millions who have migrated to the cities to return to the villages and employ themselves beneficially.

Progress made so far

We are entitled to commend ourselves for the progress that we made so far. When we compare events in our country with those of other nations with identical experiences we find that our continued survival as one nation is a remarkable achievement and worthy of the highest commendation. The death of Joseph Tito of Yugoslavia was followed by the disintegration of that country. Violence and revolution in Iran, from which that nation is yet to recover, followed the death of the Shah. The overthrow of Somoza led to war and revolution in Nicaragua. The death of Samuel Doe was followed by civil war in Liberia and that nation remains till now a shadow of itself. Zaire, now called the Democratic Republic of Congo, has known only war and instability following the overthrow and death of Mobutu Sese Seko. In Rwanda and Burundi, in Somalia

and the Sudan, the story is the same. The economy of the Soviet Union collapsed and that nation disintegrated following the fall of communism. Nigeria, on the other hand, has moved forward as one nation, even if we still have to contend with corruption and some violence. The distresses and disasters that we have survived are proof that we are a resilient people - hardworking, honest, patient, forgiving and patriotic. We have proved that nothing can divide us anymore.

Gains of our democracy

Having said all that I have said, we may then ask: Has democracy resulted in equal opportunities for all Nigerians? Are we better today than we were in the past? Does merit count in our country? Are we a law abiding nation? Do we have zeal for our country? Do we respect our electoral laws? We are entitled to wonder if the democratic process holds any gains at all. Are we not entitled to be sceptical if, in a nation proliferating with assassins, not a single assassin is on trial for that offence, when, in the interim, men of rank and position have been assassinated? What can we say are the gains of democracy when innocent men and women are killed with impunity just because the outcome of an election has disappointed the expectations of some people? Is it in the interest of democracy, we may ask, that the opposition be wiped out or assimilated in virtually all of our states as is presently the case? Are the states dictatorships or are they a part of the democratic process? These are questions which have become urgent. Is it in the interest of democracy that the structures for accountability erected by law should be destroyed in virtually all of our states as they have been done? Are these the gains of democracy? Is it on account of democracy that flattery has become the order of the day and constructive opposition an act of enmity?

And yet there will be gains. The seed has been sown. It is being watered. Growth is slow. And that is how it ought to be. The enemy is also at work sowing tares amongst the good seed. The nation is inclined to be discouraged. But we need not despair. The good seed and the evil seeds may appear to be competing but at harvest time we shall be able to separate the good fruits from the evil ones.