

Corruption in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Given the notoriously recurring character of corruption as a social phenomenon in the Nigerian polity from colonial times to the present, it is my humble opinion that the enterprise for the study, analysis, explanation and solution of this persistent and progressively worsening problem is too serious and important to be left alone to social scientists, historians, philosophers and lawyers. Hence, the need for scholars to involve their readers and listeners in the process of analysis and explanation by making their presuppositions and, therefore, their predilections explicit in their works, this has been taken into consideration for the purpose of this exercise. A historical perspective therefore of corruption in Nigeria can serve as a panacea to its continuity.

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the prevailing practice among most social scientists and other students of society (like lawyers, historians and philosophers) who claim or make a pretence at objective, values-free analysis and explanation of any social phenomenon. I openly acknowledge that all attempts to explain social reality, or any aspect of it are necessarily informed by philosophical and moral presuppositions, explicitly or implicitly made by scholars concerned.

Consequently, a historical perspective of corruption in Nigeria begins with seeing corruption as a form of anti-social behaviour by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits in its perpetrators, is inconsistent with the established legal norms and prevailing moral ethos of the land and is likely to subvert or diminish the capacity of the legitimate authorities to provide fully for the material and spiritual well being of all members of society in a just and equitable manner. It is important to note the following;

A. Corruption was not invented by, nor is it peculiar to Nigerians. On the contrary, it is a global phenomenon with deep historical roots, although it manifests itself with significant similarities and differences in different societies, depending on the particular system of power c distribution and the legal and moral norms operating therein.

B. Corruption, like all social phenomenon, is intelligible only in its total social context: its peculiar form, dynamics and degree of social and cultural acceptability or tolerance being critically related to the dominant mode of poverty distribution power configuration; and the underpinning moral and ethical values of operation in a given society.

C. Corruption in Nigeria is a kind of social virus which is a hybrid of traits and those derived from and nurtured in the indigenous Nigerian context

FROM PETTY THIEVERY TO ARMY ROBBERY.

Colonial Period .

Classical colonial rule that lasted until the end of the second world war was essentially the unrestrained autocratic and authoritarian rule of a small band of British colonial officials aided and abetted by their compatriots and the European Christian missions and monopoly trading firms operating in Nigeria. This international bourgeoisie of usurpers of the Nigerian peoples sovereign power and authority established a kind of praetorian or military rule (Dudley, 1973:21-39) underpinned by a mode of capital production, appropriation and accumulation that was dominated by the monopolistic and Oligopolistic practices of major European trading firms. Thus, the colonial authorities and their collaborators presided over a fraudulent and corruption accumulation system, which surpluses for shipment to the metropolis from Nigeria peasant farmers and other petty producers via unequal terms of trade, Nigerian workers via meager, often below subsistence wages, all adults via primitive and exorbitant taxation and the entire population (including unborn generations) via exclusive monopoly rights of exploitation granted to British and other European firms over Nigerians mineral and other natural resources.

This mode of colonial authoritarianism generated a crisis of accumulation whereby, in the fanonian sense “to be white was to be rich and to be black was to be poor”. Since the only role available to most Nigerians in the colonial were menial ones like peasant farming, petty trading, petty clerical and subordinate jobs in the bureaucracy and the trading firms. By the end of the second world war, this crisis of accumulation had resulted in such sharpening of the contradiction between the British colonial rulers and the ambitions up-and-coming Nigeria bourgeoisie or faster elite as to enable the latter to challenge the power monopoly of the farmer, thus

forcing a change in the colonial project. This however resulted only in the cosmetic transformation both of the mode of capital accumulation and the structure of governance dubbed by historians as the policy of decolonization during the last decade or so of British colonial rule in Nigeria.

PERIOD OF DECOLONIALISATION (1952-1960)

The most striking feature of the politics of colonization was the deftness with which the British colonialists arranged to perpetuate themselves in a dominant position over the wealth of Nigeria and its accumulation process by putting in place a spurious power-sharing arrangement or partnership between themselves and their monopoly enterprise on the one hand, and the fledgling Nigerian bourgeoisie on the other. Care was, however, taken to ensure through a series of cleverly stage-managed constitutional project from the Richards constitution of 1946 to the independence, constitutor 1960, that British international Bourgeoisie remained the senior partner in this power sharing arrangement.

By progressively transferring formal authority to rule to their Nigerian surrogate bourgeoisie under decolonization, the departing British colonialists succeeded in securing their acquiescence in the retaining, even consolidating and enhancing of the existing structures accumulation under which foreign monopoly capital dominated all key sectors of the economy export-import trade, extractive and manufacturing industries, banking, insurance, shipping e.t.c. The sweetener of this part of unequal partnership was the admission of several key and political influential members of Nigeria ruling bourgeoisie from the three regions and Lagos into a lucrative but honorific and powerless partnership and directorships (and as agents, distributors and representatives) in the major foreign enterprises. This was in addition to the new opportunities of the private accumulation which became open to the political influences / member of the Nigeria bourgeoisie who became minister, chairmen and members of public co-operations or parastals with powers limited only by the veto of the ultimate colonial authority to award contracts for public projects, issues commodity buying agents licenses award scholarships to cash-strapped indigenous contractors and businessmen. All these new roles in the public domain opened the doors to new forms of corrupt and substantial capital accumulation to major members of the Nigerian ruling class as opposed to the pre-decolonized era when, because of their marginal position in the scheme of things, they had several limited access to corrupt accumulation. It is to the period of decolonization that pervasive phenomenon of “Ten percent” or “kickbacks” dates, as executors of a whole array of public policies insisted on a prepayment to themselves of at least 10 percent of the value of the favour being sought by members of the public. (contracts, licences, scholarship, employment etc) before performing the duty for which they were already being paid generous salaries and allowances from the public treasury.

INDEPENDENCE AND ITS IMMEDIATE AFTERMATHY (1960 – 1966)

Since the dominant character of the colonial state and economy in Nigeria was the marginalization of the African population and the virtual monopoly of political and economic power by the white agents of British rule, scarcity of capital, for investment in commerce, industry and agriculture and also in personal and social development, like higher and professional education, was a pervasive phenomenon throughout the country. The problems confronted by the two latter-day financial giants of the first republic in their attempts to raise capital in the closing decades of colonial rule amply illustrate the phenomenon of capital famine among all sections of the indigenous population. Neither Azikiwe in the 1920s nor Awolowo in 1944 was able to raise substantial fund to fund their higher education overseas. Azikiwe had to work and study initially in the U.S before he accumulated enough credits to win scholarships and fellowships which enabled him to complete his university education. As for Awolowo, because of the limited borrowed resources at his command, he was not able to register with London University as an internal student of law, but rather as an external student relying on private studying during his three year sojourn in England from 1944 – 1947. Both men also confronted the crisis of capital formation in their respective ventures to set up newspaper organizations in the 1930s and 1940s (the West Africa Pilot and others by Zik and Nigeria Tribune by Awolowo) as instruments for promoting their political ambitions. Both organizations operated at a low level of capitalization and excellence before the introduction of majority African governments in 1952 when the new political dispensation opened new avenues of capital formation to the two leaders.

The point of this illustration with the cases of Awolowo and Azikiwe is first to underscore the fact that dearth of capital was not peculiar to the two men, but rather that their plight was typical among Nigerians under colonial conditions. Secondly, this experience of capital famine by the up-and-coming Nigerian elite who entered into the power – sharing partnership with the British colonial authorities in 1952 and ultimately took over from them at independence in 1960, profoundly affected their attitude to the use of state power and state treasury when they acceded to supreme political power just before and at independence. Even before independence, Zik as premier of Eastern Nigeria has been exposed by the Foster Sutton Tribunal of Enquiry of 1956 into the African Continental Bank (ACB) to have abused his position as Head of Government to divert

huge sums of Eastern Nigerian Government funds into his own bank, the ACB, thus solving the Banks problem of chronic shortage of operation capital and in the process substantially enriching himself. In the same way, the G.B.A Coker Commission of Inquiry of 1962 into Six Western Nigerian Public Corporations revealed several ingenious and brazen devices by which Awolowo and his colleagues in the leadership of the Action Group Government of Western Nigeria enriched themselves and their party fabulously at the expense of the accumulated funds of the Cocoa Marketing Board, property of the whole people of Western Nigeria.

These two case judicially investigated corruption in Eastern and Western Nigeria were not unique. On the contrary, they were only two dramatic examples of a phenomenon that was pervasive all over the country during the First Republic. The only difference between the North and South at this time was that in view of the monolithic solidarity of the Nigerian People's Congress (NPC) government of the North, with the emirate authorities of the Sokoto Caliphate System serving as a cementing factor, there was no split in the NPC akin to that between Azikiwe and E.O Eyo in the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) government in the East in 1955 – 56 and that between Awolowo and Akintola in the Action Group in 1961 – 1962. Consequently, there was no insider revelation of the goings – on in the Northern Nigerian Govt, as the Eyo faction of the NCNC made before Foster – Sutton and the Akintola Faction of the Action Group made before Coker.

In effect, therefore, the succession of the Nigerian Political elite at independence to the sovereign political authority meant that they could now attempt to solve their central problem of dearth of private capital by broadening their accumulative base through exploiting maximally the public wealth of the state which was previously unavailable to them. They were thus able to diversify their activities into new, often dubious and fraudulent forms of primitive private accumulation at public expense. These forms included the fraudulent award (including outright sale) of unsecured government loans, produce buying and import-licenses to their cronies, the inflation of government contract values (and the consequential enlargement of payable “kickbacks” to themselves) and the straight forward looting of the treasury by its major political groupings that dominated the politics of the first Republic to monopolize, or at least have the lions share of the loot from this systematic plundering of the wealth of the Nation was a major factor in intensifying and embittering the contest for political power along ethno-regional lines – a process whose high points were the Action Groups Crisis (1962) Census Crisis (1962 – 1963) Federal Election Crisis (1965), making the country move or less ungovernable and culminating in the Kaduna Nzeogwu Military coup d'et al of January 1966 and the tragic and disastrous intrusion of the Nigerian Armed Forces into the political life of the country.

MILITARY RULE AND FOUNDATION OF KLEPTOCRACY (1966 – 1975)

The abortive Nzeogwu – led coup de'tat of January 15 1966 lasted for only for a short period in its futile attempt to end its misrule, ineptitude and corruption of the proceeding five years plus. In spite of its failure, it set the agenda of military rule in Nigeria as a “corrective” form of governance committed against corruption and indiscipline and in favour of restoration of democracy and justice. This agenda set by Nzeogwu in his broadcast on Radio Kaduna on 16 January has been opportunistically and fraudulently adopted by all subsequent military regimes, including the Abacha government. The truth of the matter, however is that this original, supposedly revolution and patriotic agenda of Nzeogwu has been observed mainly in its breach by all the successor military regimes. The Gowon administration resulting from the Northern-sponsored counter-coup of July 1966 was the first substantive military regime that had ample opportunity over a period of nine years to fashion the Nigeria state in the image at the military. Apart from the initial effort of continuing and ending the work of the Ironsi regime in exposing the corruption activities of the first republic politician through various investigations of public officers, the Gowon regime quickly settled down to its own project of stripping the state through different forms of primitive and fraudulent accumulation. In addition, to all the pre-existing forms of unlawful enrichment for public officers in the civilian and armed services, the Nigeria civil war (June 1967- January 197) provided sensational opportunities for unlawful enrichment. For example, the misappropriation of the salaries and allowances of soldiers killed in action for several months by their commandants; the gross inflation of military procurement contracts; the payment of inflated contract fees several times for the same goods or services or none at all; the looting of public and private properties in occupied territories by both the Nigerian and Britain armies. The classic case was the looting of millions of pounds sterling from the central Bank Benin in 1968, a crime which both armies blamed each other.

The immediate post-civil war period coincided with the era of petroleum boom when Nigeria's petroleum production grew phenomenally and the revenue from petroleum sales grew even more dramatically especially after the Yom Kippur war of 1973 when there was a four fold increase in international petroleum prices. This was the time when the Nigeria treasury was so awash with petrol-dollars that Gowon's governor of the Central Bank declared publicly that money was not Nigeria's problem, but how to spend it. Given this apparent over-abundance of cash in the national till, it was not surprising therefore that there was a dramatic escalation in the incidence of corruption made in sworn affidavits against J.S Tarka, Gowon's federal

commissioner for communication, by Gowin Daboh and against Joseph Gomwalk, Gowon's Benue-plateau state military governor by a school teacher, Aper Aku.

An important factor in the Gowon regime, and in all subsequent military regimes, attaining its apogee in the Bababgida–Abacha administration was the total lack of budgetary discipline and financial accountability. For instance, there was no year in Gowon nine years dictatorship when the military of defense (translate to “the armed forces”) did not overshoot its approved estimates of expenditure by several million pounds sterling or Naira, without going through the inconvenient process of passing through the executive council or supreme military council a supplementary appropriation decree. The ministry of defense with the convenience, if not the active encouragement of the government, also consistently ignored the auditor-General queries concerning these vast unauthorized and illegal expenditures every year.

From the foregoing, it would seem that the phenomenon of corruption attain a distinct and higher stage of development during the nine years of Gowon's administration. For one thing, the government of the first republic had to observe a minimum level of formal accountability to their elected legislatures, their larger public and electorate, if they hoped even to be able to rig the next election, as they usually did, with a modicum of credibility. This meant that they had to pay attention at least to the institutional arrangements for ensuring accountability, notably:

- (a) Keeping strictly to the provision of the budget and raising a supplementary appropriation bill in the legislature before overspending the original budgetary appropriations.
- (b) Passing all government accounts of expenditure through the scrutiny, sometimes hostile, of the public account committee of the legislature.
- (c) Observing a matter of public policy, the fundamental civil right to freedom of expression, including press freedom, on any act or policy of government including the way and manner in which the government managed or mismanaged the wealth of the nation.

By freeing the rulers from the restraints imposed on them under the principle of accountability, military rule transformed itself, as it did in many Latin America countries in the 1960s and subsequently, into a “kleptocracy” or “thieving as a system of government” or what Stanislaw Andreski (1966) terms “institutionalized robbery of the state by its very custodians”. Andreski's list of the variety of graft sustaining a Latin America Kleptocracy of 1960s or 1970s corresponds almost on a one-to-one basis with observable facts in Nigeria at the end of Gowon era: the widespread speculation and bribery indulged in by petty state officials. The ruthless and heavy financial exactions of the police from the ordinary people, the racketeering surrounding the collection of customs duties, the fraud appertaining to the award of government contract and licenses of various kinds, the fraudulent transactions involved in government sales and purchases and, of course, “the straightforward transfer of funds from state treasury to the private accounts of the principal members of the ruling clique”.

In view of the ramified nature of corruption and its great profitability to the members of the ruling cabal, it was hardly surprising that from 1973-1975, corruption was the single most significant issue on which Gowon administration became seriously embattled with the Nigerian public. It was also hardly surprising that Gowon and his cronies reneged in 1974 on their promise made in 1970, to handover power to an elected civilian government by 1976, declared that 1976 was “no longer realistic”. In affect, this declination by Gowon sealed the fate of his regime and provoked the Murtala Mohammed- Obasanjo palace coup against him on 29 July, 1975 on the grounds of the unacceptable level of corruption in the government and the grave dishonor done to the armed forces by Gowon's setting aside of the 1976 handing over date.

The Murtala-Obasanjo regime that succeeded Gowon on 29 July, 1975 learnt some lessons from the circumstances of Gowon's fall from power. In the first instance, it waged a very noisy war against corruption and indiscipline. A whole rash of assets probes of top public officers were set up by the regime at the federal and state levels which revealed many scandalous cases of fraudulent and unlawful enrichment on the part of many high-ranking officers, and resulted in the dismissal from office ten out of twelve states governors, many federal and state public corporations and hundreds of lesser functionaries. As a consequences of these asset probes, those found guilty of unlawful enrichment (like state governors, federal and state commissioners etc) were made to forfeit to the state monies, landed properties, stock and shares and other assets adjudged by the assets probes and the government to have been acquired in excess of their legitimate earnings during the relevant period. The regime also promptly promulgated a four-year transition to civil rule programme which it kept to meticulously, in spite of the abortive Dimka-led military Coup resulting in Murtala Mohammed's death six months after the regime came to power. The war against the twin vices of corruption and indiscipline was more noisy than effective and there are quite a few knowledgeable people who considered it a phoney war, drummed up more for the regimes self promotion than out of concern for public morality and morale of the Nigeria state. Among the factors contributing to this dim view of the regime's war against corruption and indiscipline were the following;

1. About a month before Murtala's assassination on 13 February 1976, one Obarogi Ohanbamu, former senior lecturer in law at the University of Lagos and at that time, Editor – in – chief and publisher of a monthly news magazine. The African speak, published a story concerning a rumor in circulation about then row of houses owned by Murtala Mohammed in Kano. Ohanbamu wondered whether Murtala could confirm or refute the rumour, and if it was, whether he could explain how a public servant could mobilize the capital for such an acquisition. Ohanbamu was promptly arrested thereafter and detained incommunicado until a few days after Murtala's death when he was produced in a Lagos court by the Attorney General of the federation who accused him in the open court of slandering the late head of state, but requested the court to caution and discharge him since he had seen the error of his judgment and had apologized for it. The error according to the Attorney-General arose because he was unaware that Murtala had declared his assets to him (the AG) on his accession to office and had deposed that he had made over all his houses in Kano to the state. However, nobody saw the document with which this deed of transfer was consummated.

2. By MKO Abiola's testimony, he and Mohammed became friends in the early 1970s after a stormy meeting between them when he went on behalf of ITT to collect a Multi-Million Naira debt owed to his company by Nigerian army signals under Murtala's leadership. As a result of that friendship, Abiola was able to reap a rich harvest of government contracts for his company and himself worth many hundreds of millions of US dollars while Murtala was inspector of army signals, later federal commissioner for communication and then head of state, and for a long time after Murtala had been removed from the scene. It is also significant that the director General of the post and telegraph department in the ministry of communication, who was opposed to the initial government-ITT central on technical and professional grounds as a telecommunications engineer, was suspended from his post during Murtala's short tenure as commissioner and was top of the list of about 1,000 public servants compulsorily retired by Murtala's regime for no reason within its first three months.

3. The Murtala – Obasanjo government appointed a judicial commission of enquiry headed by Justice Belgore to investigate the circumstances that caused under Gowon's ruler ship, the cement ships armada that was choking off the free passage of other ships into and out of the Lagos port at Apapa, thus strangulating Nigeria's external trade and threatening to bankrupt the Nigeria economy as a result of the huge demurrage fees the cement ships queuing to be unloaded were accumulating against Nigeria with each passing day. It is interesting that the report of the commission was printed but never made available to the public, the Government white paper on the report which it was sanctimoniously stated that the commission had cleared Obasanjo of any wrong doing was made available. This was in spite of the fact that not only was Obasanjo- Murtala's second – in – command at the time, but he was also the Director of Army Engineering Corps and later Federal Commissioner of Works throughout the cement armada Scandal – caused by the Ministry of Defense's grossly inflated order for cement meant for implementing the country wide military barracks project with which Obasanjo must have been concerned in both positions. The white paper did not reveal the evidence on the basis of which he was cleared by the panel of inquiry of any wrong doing.

4. In 1978, when it was revealed that the U.S – based Lockheed corporation had bribed political and military decision – makers worldwide in order to induce them to buy planes, Nigeria (where the culprit was never apprehended, let alone punished) was about the only country named as a victim by the U.S congress. In a cover-up inquiry conducted by the government, one faceless Greek businessman, allegedly formerly resident in Nigeria, was fingered as the Culprit, but nobody could locate him. This was in spite of the fact that Lockheeds target was the Nigerian government through the Nigerian Air Force as possible end user.

5. Soon after October 1979, following the handing over of power to the Civilian government of Shehu Shagari, many of the regimes general retired into multi – million naira farms, industries, commercial enterprises and real estate business at home and abroad. Nobody has been able to explain satisfactorily how the generation of Army officers many of whom served for twenty years or less came with such gargantuan fortunes.

6. For no explicable reason from 1977 the Obasanjo government started borrowing heavily on the Euro – dollars market at exorbitant interest rates and at a time when Nigeria's crude petroleum was in excess of 2 million barrels per day and petroleum sales revenue was more than \$20 billion U.S dollars per annum. In this way, Obasanjo's government succeeded in inflating Nigeria's external debt stock from the modest level of \$560 million U.S dollars in 1975 when Gowon was overthrown (CBN, 1975:8a) to \$6.8 billion in 1979 "Prior to the change of government (Okigbo, 1986).

THE DEEPENING CRISIS OF THE NIGERIAN KLEPTOCRACY (1979 – 1983)

The circumstances and conditions under which politicians of the second Republic acceded to power on 1st October 1979 ensured that they would put corrupt enrichment at the very top of their political agenda. Among these circumstances and conditions was the peculiar constitutional order, midwived by the Murtala – Obasanjo regime, and governing such aspects of political life as registration of national political parties and election to various offices at all levels of government. The constitutional provisions governing the formation and

registration of political parties and election to public offices on the platform of the registered parties were such that nobody could hope to be elected to any public office without an huge financial outlay, which was often several times larger than the total legitimate remuneration which a successful candidate could reasonable expect to earn in his or her four year tenure in office. Since most members of the Nigerian political elite were not known to be motivated by anything but the crudest business considerations of how to maximize their profit from holding public offices, it became a matter of urgent necessity for them rapidly to recoup the capital outlay on their elections and show substantial profit on their investment. The strategy used by the politicians of the second republic to recoup their losses and expenditure while extending and consolidating their accumulative base, amounted to the refurbishing combining and enlarging of all known techniques of primitive accumulation previously at practiced in Nigeria. These ranged from spurious and grossly inflated contracts and consultancies, importation, a multi – billion pound sterling commodity seam with the Johnson – Mathey Bank (JMB) of London, and the huge National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) rip – off to the unabashed looting by National and State Assembly men in the form of grossly inflated salaries and allowances for maintaining non – existent aides and constituency offices, or irrelevant and irresponsible travelling expenses to exotic and far-flung parts of the globe.

A brand new addition to the politicians formidable arsenal for looting the resources of Nigeria was the pervasive practice whereby the executive arm of government at the state or federal level appointed liaison officers specifically to lobby members of the legislative arm, irrespective of party affiliation, to support legislative projects sponsored by the executive arm in the legislative assembly. Each legislative project was negotiated in-turn between the executive’s lobbyists and the legislator’s and the latter’s consent for supporting the project was secured either with the payment of a substantial cash settlement to the legislator concerned or the award of a substantial government contracts, including contracts to lift crude petroleum. As a result of this squandermonia of epic proportions, which coincided with a sharp decline in Nigeria’s oil revenue from 1981, the government of the second republic found the somewhat reduced national income inadequate for their own private accumulative project. Consequently, they borrowed a leaf from their immediate past predecessor, the Obasanjo government and preceded to boost the external debt stock of Nigeria from 1979 level of \$6.8 billion to about \$15 billion.

In view of the foregoing, it was not surprising that the government of the second Republic rapidly lost public credibility and support, or that the Nigerian people received with relief, even joy, news of the Buhari – Idiagbon – Babagida coup that toppled the second Republic on 31 December 1983. No less a person than Sani Abacha acting on that occasion as the “Public Orator of the Nigeria Armed Forces” justified the military intervention on several grounds of acts of omission and commission, including the fact that our leaders revel in squandermonia, corruption and indiscipline and continue to proliferate public appointments in complete disregard of our stark economic realities (Falola & Ihonvbere 1982, 29 – 30).

THE SECOND COMING OF THE MILITARY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CORRUPTION TO ITS HIGHEST POSSIBLE LEVEL (1984 – 1999)

The twenty – month Buhari – idiagbon – Babagida regime which succeeded the second Republic was distinguished by its stem, even harsh response to the twin ills of corruption and indiscipline among the public officers of the second Republic. Several top functionaries at federal and state levels were incarcerated for almost the whole tenure of the regime without being charged or tried for any offense, while some were tried secretly by special military tribunals and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, including life for crimes ranging from “unlawful enrichment” to contributing to the economic adversity of the country”. Furthermore, the regime mounted a public propaganda war against corruption and indiscipline (WAI) complete with a special paramilitary squad for its execution known as the WAI brigade.

Initially, the regime seemed to have raised the moral tone of the country, partly because the minority agents of corruption were intimidated into lying low by the regimes reputation for exacting harsh exemplary penalties. By the end of its first year, however, the Buhari administrations anti – corruption campaign seemed to have run out of steam, partly because of the subversive activities of “Fifth columnist” within the regime – IBB (Babangida), the number 3 man in the regime being the leading “Fifth columnist” for the twenty – months of the regimes stay in power, and for its own subsequent eight years of unmitigated autocratic rule. Babangida never took a public stand against corruption. On the contrary, IBB’s primary target of verbal and physical attack was what he identified early in 1984 as “undue radicalism or extremism”. But the main reason for the loss of steam of the Buhari regime campaign against corruption and indiscipline was the regimes inability to deal effectively with the problem of economic and social decline inherited from the preceding regime. The regime shot itself in the foot by trying to assert the country’s economic and social decline by doctrinaire and anti – people policy like mass retrenchment of workers in the public service, the introduction of many new taxes, levies and fees on citizens, drastic reduction in public expenditure, especially on social welfare and agricultural subsidy and the

wide spread destruction of the means of livelihood for small privately employed persons like Motor Mechanic, petty traders, food vendors etc. By pulling down their makeshift sheds, kiosk and Bukas in the name of Urban environmental Sanitation.

Subsequently, no eye brows were raised when the Buhari regime was toppled on 27 August 1985 in a palace coup masterminded by Babangida. The Babangida coup was received with marked indifference and the regime was cold shouldered by the public when it announced itself on 27 August 1985, in spite of the wide spread disappointment with the Buhari regime. The main distinguishing feature of corruption in the Babangida's regime was the pervasive culture of impunity, many of his acolytes, however high or low in states could loot the treasury to their own hearts contents with impunity, provided they remained absolutely loyal and committed to the leaders. IBB introduced the "Settlement Strategy", many actual and potential critics rested on the impeccable presupposition that if he corrupted enough Nigerians, there should be no body to speak out on the issue of corruption or public agenda. To some extents, the strategy, worked as many university Professors and other Academicians, leaders of their main professions, leading trade unionist, top clerics, evangelists and movers and shakers of the Organized Private Sector" of the Economic Scrabbled to jump on the Babangida regime's gravy train.

The tragedy of the Nigeria predicaments is that since Babagida double – crossed himself by annulling the 12 June Presidential election and was forced to "Step Aside" On 26 August 1993, nothing in our National reality has changed for the better.

When Ibrahim Babagida "stepped aside" he handed over to Chief Ernest Shonekan (as Interim Head of State) who was before the appointment was chairman of the transitional council to civil rule. The Interim National Government (ING) was conceived in corruption and crisis and born into corruption and crisis. Chief Ernest Shonekan resigned on the 17 November 1993. General Sani Abacha took over the reign of government as Head of State and Commander – in – Chief of Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. He dissolved the political parties and sacked all the politicians. The elected civilian governors, states and National Assembly members were overtaken by the change of government. Abachas decisions to sack the government brought an end to the 3rd Republic, which was conceived and crafted by General Ibrahim Babangida. The summary of it all is that, General Abacha who was a product of corruption from the previous regimes continued in the line of corruption and perpetuated himself in power, he died in power in 1993 thereby making history as the first military Head of State to die without a gunshot having ruled badly and autocratically.

Corruption has remained a cardinal and directive principle of state and National policy and continues to sap the vitality of our National economy and the creativity of our people.

THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF CORRUPTION ON THE NIGERIAN STATE

The fraudulent accumulation process has resulted, overtime, in the progressive and phenomena environment of Nigerian rulers (both Civilian and Military), the emptying of the National treasury and the indebtedness of the country almost to the point of bankruptcy, hence the critical dearth of resources for investment on the social, economic and overall cultural development of the masses of our people. Nigeria is therefore in paradoxical situation in which the scandalous almost legendary, wealth of key ruling class members exists to mock the unspeakable mass poverty, misery and degradation of the Nigerian people. This has, in turn brought about a situation of potential and actual violent confrontation between the minority plutocrats and the majority paupers and destitute, within which contexts the current urban phenomenon of "Area Boys/Militants" is just a minor manifestation. This situation is also highly productive, at the attitudinal level, a mass cynicism about and distrust of the political elite and constitutes a major factor in the persistent of inter and intra communal disunity, antipathy and strife as well as the progressively worsening problem of political and social instability since independence. Since the public treasury has been the primary and ultimate source of rapid and sensational private accumulation by the Nigerian political elite, the struggle to capture state power (and therefore National treasury) among factions tend to be rigorously excluded from sharing in the loot. Hence, the invariable tendency among elite factions to use the poor masses from their areas of origin (village, town, local government, state or ethnic group) as canon fodder and battering rams against their rivals and competitors from other areas, thus further dividing the people and undermining the stability of a Nigerian state and society that is already profoundly unstable.

Rampant corruption among the ruling class cabal has, overtime, taught a dangerously descriptive lesson to the generality of the people: being honest and law abiding does not pay.

Consequently, some of the ordinary people who have learnt this lesson from the top then try replicate the corruption practices of their leaders at their lowly levels in the form of petty acts of bribery, peculation and embezzlement of public funds. It is in this way that corruption as a way of life has become pervasive and popularized in the Nigeria polity.

The obsession of many members with primitive private accumulation at the expense of the public

means that they tend to divert resources earmarked from running and maintaining public institutions in their charge (institutions like Hospitals, Schools, University, public utilities, the Judiciary, the Police etc) to corrupt private purposes. Many young Nigerian of lowly origins after successfully passing out of schools, Universities and other institutions of learning cannot find gainful employment. This is because resources, which could have been used for Job creation have been looted by the leaders. A consequence many of these educated young people are either “Brain drained” to other lands in search of greener pastures, or get diverted into various criminal ways of making a livelihood like Armed Robbery, Prostitution, drug Peddling and Trafficking and all manner of racketeering. In this and other ways, greedy Nigerians leaders has squandered the future of their country and its children and reduced Nigeria to its present status of a pariah in the comity of Nations.

THE WAY FORWARD TO A RELATIVELY CORRUPTION FREE SOCIETY

The primary reason why all attempts at curbing corruption in Nigeria have so far failed is that, While Corruption has been deeply entrenched in the structures of the Nigerian states and society, all the advertised measures for combating it are conceived and operated at the level of form and symbolism. As long as the inequitable structures of a dependent Neo-Colonial states are allowed to reproduce in every generation a rampaging bourgeoisie of army Officers, Politicians, Bureaucrats, businessmen, academicians and touts whose *raison d’etre* is primitive accumulation and maximum consumption of imported luxuries, so long will all the former institutions and measures for combating corruption fail to make any significant impact on problem. This is because by the structural logic of the monopoly of state power in Nigeria by the bourgeoisie of power elite, all these institutions set up to deal with the problem of corruption area inevitable manned, controlled and operated by, and in the interest of members of this ruling class who have a vested and entrenched interest in sustaining an evening extending corrupt practices.

Consequently, these putative warriors against corruptions perform their task in such a way that they end up covering up rather than exposing corruption, thus helping to consolidate and perpetuate its hold on the society. The necessary expedient of empowering the Nigerian working people vis –a- vis the corrupt and subversive political elite can be facilitated by pursuing the following minimum political agenda of democratic governance.

1. The institutionalization of a multi party political system in which parties must be genuinely mass – based, National in outlook and exclusively funded by its members financial contribution which must be limited to what an ordinary working person can afford. This will safe guard the parties from being hijacked and turned into the political instruments of money bags against the people.

2. The constitutional entrenchment of the principle that the Nigerian people in their respective constituencies have the power to recall at any point in time any elected officials who has been found by due process to abuse or betray the people’s mandate.

3. The constitutional requirement that only men and women with proving ability and integrity should be appointed to the governing boards of public institutions, corruptions and businesses to ensure that the public resources and assert therein will be safe guarded and enhanced rather than looted and squandered by their officials, custodians as has hitherto been the case.

4. Freedom of information as an entrenched legal norms to include (a) the requirement of open declaration of assets by all public servants. (b) open an uninhibited access by interested citizens to all documents relating to, or dealing with any aspects of public policy.

5. The constitutional entrenchment of the principle of independence of the judiciary and the insulation of the appointment and tenure of Judges from interference by political decision makers whose conduct might be subject of adjudication by the courts.

6. The constitutional entrenchment of freedom of the press as the watchdog of the people’s interest, subject only to the limitation impose by the laws libel and defamation.

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