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CORRUPTION UNDER MILITARY REGIMES IN NIGERIA: 1966-1999

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Abstract

On the 15th of January, 1966, Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and some of his colleagues staged the first coup d'etat in Nigeria. That experience ushered the country into periodic convulsions of coup d'etat and counter coups. From that period up to 1999, the military ruled the country for 37 out of 55 years since independence. While on the saddle, the respective military administrations made significant contributions to nation building. However, in spite of their positive contributions, almost all the military regimes were involved in corruption which they advanced as one of the major reasons for the overthrow of the respective civilian administrations. Evidence reveals that corruption even thrived more during the period of military than civilian rule in the country. Having been deeply entrenched into the fabric of the Nigerian society; corruption has grown to thwart national development and appears impossible to be curbed. In view of the seriousness of the malaise in the last 50 years, it becomes imperative to examine how the respective military regimes tolerated corruption beginning from the General Gowon administration in 1975 to the regime of General Abubakar in 1999 when the military finally handed over power to a democratically elected government. The paper adopts a historical and narrative analysis method.

Introduction

Nigeria gained her independence from Britain on the 1st of October, 1960, and the first civilian dispensation lasted a little more than five years. On the 15th of January, 1966, the military intervened in governance and since then, the country had seven different military regimes for a period of

three decades. The present civilian dispensation started on the 29th of May, 1999, after more than 15 years of un-interrupted military hegemony and rule. Most Nigerians believe that the seed of corruption which was sown during the colonial period and which has reached its apogee at all levels of the country was effectively nurtured during the military rule as it was the *modus operandi* under the system. Cumulatively, these administrations, particularly the Babangida and Abacha -regimes brazenly wrecked unmitigated havoc on the nation's economy through mass looting of the treasury. Some commentators like Agedah (1993); Gboyega (1996); Eminue (2006) and Mamadu (2009), have carefully highlighted the wilful "pillage of the nation" during the long and miserable years of military governance which we have documented in this work. It should be noted that the climax of this pillage, perhaps, occurred under the Abacha administration. Abacha's propensity for financial squandermania or misappropriation was legendary. His regime was characterized by "a culture of freewill spending", "a rip-off of unparalleled proportions", an era of unprecedented recklessness and rascality as demonstrated by his plundering of the Central Bank of Nigeria. In order to have a glimpse of the scenario, it is necessary to examine acts of corruption under each of the military administrations.

General Johnson Thomas Aguiyi Ironsi's Administration (15th January - 29th July, 1966)

Extensive literature exists on the causes and impact of the first military coup d'etat in Nigeria. Therefore, such issues need not detain us in this discourse. However, it is necessary to note that the first coup which ousted the Alhaji Tafawa Balewa-led administration paved the way for the first military regime in Nigeria led by General Ironsi who ruled the country for only six months before he was brutally murdered on the 29th of July, 1966 by officers of northern extraction. Though the Ironsi administration identified various ills of the First Republic politicians including corruption, and also promised to probe such incidence and bring parties to book, his government did not back up its promise with appropriate muscle. At least there is no record indicating that the government officially instituted panels of inquiry to probe any First Republic politician (Agedah, 1993).

General Yakubu Gowon's Administration (29th July, 1967- 29th July, 1975)

According to Elaigwu (2009) although there was corruption during the Gowon era, Gowon did not enrich himself through abuse of office. He noted that some of the military officers who overthrew his government in 1975 confirmed this impression. But his lieutenants (military and civilian) evidently wallowed in the vortex of corruption by enriching themselves at the public expense, even though Gowon had promised that he would eradicate corruption. The nation saw his lieutenants display conspicuous consumption amidst the abject poverty of the masses. In his broadcast of 1970, General Gowon had expressed his displeasure with public officers who enriched themselves through abuse of office. He then promised that:

New measures will be introduced to make those found guilty of corruption disgorge their ill-gotten gains. Special tribunals will be set up to deal speedily with corruption in all organs of public service and our society generally. This war against corruption is a continuing process and the military must set a new pattern in combating this evil before return to civilian rule (Elaigwu, 2009: 367).

The first public outcry against corruption came in about March 1974, when a business woman, Miss Iyabo Olorunkoya was arrested in London and taken to court on charges of hemp trafficking. In her defence, she implicated two top military officers, Brigadier Funso Sotomi and Brigadier Benjamin Adekunle. Although the two officers denied the allegations, the episode was embarrassing to Gowon because the names of his two top military officers were mentioned in corrupt deals in London courts. Gowon later reluctantly retired the two officers from the army (Elaigwu, 2009).

On the 8th of July, 1974, a Lagos-based businessman, Mr. Godwin Dabo accused the Federal Commissioner of Communication, Mr. Joseph Tarka of abuse of office and corruption. He advised that the Commissioner should resign his appointment within seven days or face disgrace. A few days later, Mr. Dabo went public and swore to a 12-point affidavit in a Lagos High Court accusing the Commissioner of "abuse of office and enrichment".

The matter became one of the most sensational scandals in Nigerian history (Joseph, 1995). Among the allegations of wrong-doing was that Tarka owned and operated a coded Swiss Bank account with the Swiss Volks-Bank Limited in Geneva. He also owned the "Nigeria Investment Quest Limited" with his wife, Mrs. Francisca Tarka as Director, and his private secretary, Mr. S. Ikowe, as its Managing Director. Mr. Dabo alleged that this company had close trade links with the Ministry of Communication where Mr. Tarka was serving as Commissioner. Consequently, the press and the members of the public asked the Commissioner to resign his appointment honourably if he failed to prove his innocence. He eventually tendered his letter of resignation. According to Agedah:

Dabo's accusations were thereafter confirmed by four separate probe panels. The first probe panel was led by ex-police boss, Sunday Adewusi. The second was a military intelligence squad headed by Col. A. A. Ochefu. Another team was under the headship of Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi, a former boss of the defunct Nigeria Security Organization (NSO). The fourth one, led by retired Major-General Joe Garba, also confirmed that the Commissioner indeed indulged in corrupt practice (1993: 28-29).

In September, 1974, another allegation of impropriety was made against Mr. Joseph Gomwalk, the Military Governor of Benue-Plateau State. (Gowon's home state) In May, 1974, Mr. Aper Aku (who later became the civilian Governor of Benue state), wrote a letter of complaint against Governor Gomwalk's administration to Gowon. When no reply was received, Mr. Aku followed up with another letter in which he accused the Governor of nepotism, tribalism and financial wrong-doing (Agedah, 1993). Specifically, Mr. Aku accused Gomwalk of four main wrong-doings: (i) improper and imprudent relationship with Votensiki Nigeria Limited which had got contracts for road construction from the government. (ii) improper relationship with Benue-Plateau Construction Company Nigeria Limited or BEPCO (iii) property ownership at the expense of the state's tax payers (iv) favouritism and tribalism in recruitment and promotion in the public service. Mr. Aku later swore an affidavit in the High Court of Jos against the Governor alleging financial wrong-doings in the award of contracts and

expenditure of public funds. In his 26-point affidavit, Aku elaborated on the four broad accusations enumerated in his letter of 13th August, 1974, with details of figures, cheque numbers, names of other people and companies involved and specific contracts awarded improperly (Elaigwu, 2009). In his reaction to Aku's affidavit, the Governor stated that the allegations were malicious, a distortion of facts and untrue. Following the widespread outcry, General Gowon called the Governor to Lagos to present a point-by-point explanation of the issues contained in Aku's affidavit and Mr. Gomwalk obliged. Gowon later responded thus:

I am satisfied, after listening to explanations and having had time to check all the relevant references as provided by Mr. Gomwalk, that he has not been guilty of any wrong doings as alleged by Mr. Aku in his affidavit. In view of the public interest in the matter, Gomwalk was authorized by the Federal Military Government to release his detailed explanation.

Gowon then reaffirmed his confidence in his Military Governor. In addition he reiterated his government's determination to rid Nigeria of corruption but warned that "a situation in which highly respected national institutions such as our law courts and the press are used as instruments of blackmail against highly placed public officials with a view to damaging their image and discrediting the military regime will no longer be tolerated" (Elaigwu, 2009: 272). Many Nigerians were dissatisfied with Gowon's statement. Students demonstrated, the press expressed their disenchantment, and even some military officers expressed contrary views on the issue of corruption.

Cement Amanda Episode

The emergence, by 1974, of the famous Cement Amanda in a way signalled the beginning of multi-million dollar corruption in the country. According to Yar'adua:

Under the Gowon administration, hundreds of ships had been queuing for months to enter the overstretched and poorly managed port facilities in Lagos, Port Harcourt and Warri and more ships were arriving every day. What started as a bottleneck was caused

principally by a massive ordering of cement by the army intending to build barracks for soldiers after the Nigerian Civil War. 13 million tons of cement at a cost of 960 million Dollars, and an additional four million tons ordered by the Ministry of Works caused problems that sparked a scam, as vessels parked themselves in the Atlantic Ocean demanding demurrage payments that reached the then extraordinary sum of 1 million Naira per day for cargoes that were sometimes non-existent or for orders that had never been placed. Beyond the creeks and channels surrounding Lagos, hundreds of ships littered the horizon, a symbol of the inertia and corruption of the Gowon regime. Airports in Lagos and Kano were overwhelmed as importers tried or bypassed the congestion in the ports. Roads in most towns were saturated and the country was being choked to death (2004: 102).

Generals Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo's Administration (29th July - 1st October, 1979)

A number of reasons compelled the duo of Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo to pick up the mantle of the nation's leadership. These included the pervasive and ever recurring problem of corruption...which permeated the entire strata of the Nigerian nation. Added to this was Gowon's unfortunate declaration that he would no longer hand over power to an elected civilian government in 1976. Mohammed, on assumption of office, embarked on an historic battle against corruption in all its ramifications. His administration did not only make daring attempts at fishing out corrupt officials from the public service, it also set up tribunals which found virtually all Gowon lieutenants guilty of corruption. This unprecedented attempt in many ways brought to fore the need for continuous accountability on the part of public officers (Agedah, 1993). Obasanjo, in his book, *Not My Will*, sums up General Gowon's era thus:

Corruption became unchecked in almost all facets of national life and virtually became a way of life. Officials abandoned their offices with impunity to attend to their private businesses; the attitude of workers at all levels was to say the least, lethargic. There was general indiscipline all round as if nobody was in charge of the affairs of the nation. Everybody, except the few self-disciplined ones, did as he liked. There was absolute lack of political motivation...the arrogance and corruption of Gowon's lieutenants were also well documented, at least as

was revealed by the various Tribunals findings instituted by General Murtala/Obasanjo regime (Obasanjo, 1990: 16).

The government instituted an assets Investigation Panel to look into allegations of graft and misuse of public funds leveled against most senior lieutenants of General Gowon notably the various state Governors and the administrator of the defunct East Central State, including some Federal Commissioners. The outcome of many of these probes were not only revealing but were also clear vindication of Nigerians who had, during the Gowon era, accused a number of public officials of corruption. The total sum in earnings and assets misappropriated by the affected Governors which were seized was put at more than ₦10 million. One of the Governors, a Police Commissioner, had a multi-million Naira farm at Tiga, seized by his successor in office, Lt. Col. Sanni Bello. A former Governor of North Central State was also forced by the Tribunal to refund huge sums of money, illegally acquired properties in Kaduna and Gombe (Agedah, 1993). Agedah (1993) also notes the corruption case against the Kwara State Military Governor who was indicted for his dubious involvement in the negotiation and investment of ₦3.33 million Kwara State funds in the United Match Company Limited (MATCHO), Ilorin, in 1973. His successor, Col. Ibrahim Taiwo, was so disturbed that he had to set up a Board of Inquiry to investigate him. The Board found the former Governor guilty and was compelled to forfeit a bungalow and a two storey building both located in Ilorin.

The Governor of the former South Eastern State was also found guilty of corrupt practices. The probe panel accused him of amassing a total of N 3,261,074.38 during the 1971/72 financial year. It was also discovered that the sum of ₦1,906,238.70 was overspent in respect of capital budget while ₦1,354,835.68 was overspent in recurrent vote. It was also claimed that "unvouchered expenditure" amounted to ₦6, 276.00 (Agedah, 1993).

The Governor of the former Mid-Western State had a litany of charges levelled against his person and government. Because he was found guilty of a number of corrupt practices, the government and his multi-million naira Palm Royal Motel was confiscated. In addition to forfeiting a house on Eguadase Street in Benin City to off-set 50 per cent of his salary

while in office, his 10 farms which were located in different parts of the state were also seized by government.

The Administrator of East Central State was also found guilty of a number of corrupt offences. His wife was indicted alongside for making questionable donations to an organization, *Otu Olu Obodo*, which she allegedly established and whose membership was restricted to wives of state commissioners. She was said to have donated about 6,000 bags of fertilizer to the organization. In addition, the administrator was discovered to have made a cash grant of ₦500,000 to the same organization. The administrator was eventually made to forfeit about ₦200,689.00 in assets to make up for the wealth he acquired from "unascertainable sources". He was also made to hand over to the Federal Government "in satisfaction of the equivalent of 50 per cent of the total salary he received while in office".

Agedah (1993) also states that the former Governor of Benue-Plateau State was again indicted by the Justice Alfa Belgore Panel in December 1975. One of the findings of the panel was that the Governor sold a house in Jos valued at ₦800,000 to the Head of State at a ridiculously low amount. There were also issues of impropriety levelled against the Governor in connection with his handling of Rayfield Hotel in Jos. The Belgore panel also found that the Governor "who hardly had ₦630 in his bank account in 1967", when he was appointed the State Governor had by 1975 acquired property and shares running into several thousands of Naira. He was made to forfeit two of his houses in Naraguta Avenue, Jos which was used as repayment of ₦99,000 the sum the contractor had undercharged for the buildings. His house at Lantang Road, Jos, was also seized in addition to three other property in Jos and Lagos.

The former Governor of Rivers State was also indicted and was made to forfeit the sum of ₦101,000, two-storey block house sited in Tombia, Nembe Brass, and two developed plots along Recreation Layout in Port Harcourt. Also impounded was his house on Victoria Island Lagos, which was built by the state government contractor, Michelloti, which won contracts worth ₦15.48 million from Rivers State government.

A former Governor of the defunct North Central State was also found guilty of official improprieties, like his other colleagues. He therefore had to lose his farmland situated along Kaduna-Jos Road, Kaduna to government because he was found to have developed and maintained the

property from the resources of the state government. Equally, his property in Maiduguri and an undeveloped plot of land in Victoria Island, Lagos were also forfeited to the government.

At the end of the day, out of 11 Governors and one Administrator, only Brigadier Mobolaji Johnson of Lagos State and Brigadier Oluwole Rotimi of Western State were absolved of corruption. Total value of assets confiscated, following investigations, was worth more than ₦10,000,000. The Governors and the Administrator of the East Central State were dismissed from service. During the regime of Mohammed/Obasanjo, there were cases of corrupt practices leveled against officials of the administration, but the cases were not as pronounced as what obtained under Gowon (Agusiegbe, 1991).

General Muhammadu Buhari's Regime (31st December, 1983- 27th August, 1985).

The Buhari administration did not really enunciate an elaborate economic programme. It spent 20 months in power trying to establish civil order which had been grossly eroded by the Shehu Shagari administration. Part of its "house cleaning" crusade led to the imprisonment of several public officials on charges of embezzlement of public funds and public enrichment. Some officials bagged very long jail terms. Alhaji Barkin Zuwo, Chief Aper Aku and Professor Ambrose Ali, former Governors of Kano, Benue State and defunct Bendel State respectively, were believed to have died as a consequence of their imprisonment over corruption (Abia, 2008). With the price of crude oil still plummeting, the regime chose countertrade, which was described as "strategy of survival". Under the arrangement, Nigeria supplied Brazil with crude oil worth 500 million dollars, in exchange for consumer goods; industrial raw materials and completely-knocked down part for Volkswagen of Nigeria Ltd. Similar deals were struck with France, Austria and Italy. However, the initiative was shrouded in so much secrecy and resentment followed; controversy also trailed the insurance licences for the exercise (Abia, 2008).

The regime was a typical unitary system of government under a federal "garment" – a corruption of federalism, even as the duo of General Buhari and Idiagbon enthusiastically and with patriotic single-mindedness pursued the administration's crusade for discipline, respect for law and

order, public accountability or public probity – programmes which, although were welcomed initially by the public, became subjects of criticism subsequently on account of human rights violation, especially the detention of politicians under the Recovery of Public Property (Special Military Tribunal) Decree No. 3, and other “draconian” decrees (Eminue, 2006). Gboyega (1996) opines that there were reported cases of corruption against that administration but they were not pronounced.

General Ibrahim Babangida's Regime (17th August, 1985 – 27th August, 1993)

Corruption under General Ibrahim Babangida's administration got to an unprecedented level in incidence and magnitude. It was so phenomenal that Chief Olusegun Obasanjo christened it as “settlement”, the appellation by which most Nigerians now refer to it. Between 1985 and 1993, hardly did a day pass without a screaming newspaper headline revealing a blatant case of corruption involving a huge sum of money. Even if we discountenance the obvious sensational disposition of some newspapers, corruption seems to have become the norm rather than the exception under Babangida. In fact, during the period, corruption was elevated almost to a state policy (Gboyega, 1996, Maduagwu, 1996).

The benign treatment given to corruption issues in the early days of the Babangida administration foretold a much more conscious instrumental use of corruption to ensure the stability of the regime. For a military administration, General Babangida's government was unique in its unconcern about corruption within its ranks and among public servants generally; it was as if the government existed so that corruption might thrive. Thus, though the logic of its reforms compelled the government to address the problem of corruption, it did not take decisive measures to fight it. For instance, in 1987, the Political Bureau observed that many memoranda that it received saw corruption as “the bedrock of Nigeria's failure. It noted that:

Manifestation (of corruption) include the inflation of government contracts in return for kickbacks; fraud and falsification of accounts in the public service; examination malpractices in our educational institutions including universities; the taking of bribes and perversion of justice among the police, the judiciary and other organs of administering justice; and the various heinous

crimes against the state in the business and industrial sectors of our economy, in collusion with the multinational companies such as over-invoicing of goods, foreign exchange swindling, hoarding and smuggling. (Gboyega, 1996: 26)

Since it appeared as a deliberate design to use corruption as an instrument of regime stability, General Babangida treated allegations of corruption against his appointees with extreme levity. In June 1989, one Alhaji Bashir stunned Nigerians with the allegation that he had paid 500 thousand Dollars into the account of the Chief of General Staff, Vice-Admiral Augustus Aikhomu, at Standard Chartered Bank, Zurich. The purpose of the lodgment was apparently to ensure that his company, the First Oil Limited, got 40 per cent equity shares in Pan Ocean Oil Limited. Bashir made his allegations when the bid failed. Rather than set up a panel of inquiry to look into the allegation and assure the public of the integrity of the Chief of General Staff, the government arrested and detained Bashir. The government accused him of blackmailing top government officials. In addition, the Presidency issued a press release denying the allegation. (Gboyega, 1996).

Some of the military Governors that served under the Babangida administration were accused of corruption. They included, Navy Captain Olabode George, Ernest Adeleye, Mohammed Lawal, Navy Captain Ibim Princewill, and Col. Mohammed Maina. The allegations against some of these Governors were investigated and the accused retired from service, but no further punitive action like forfeiture of ill-gotten wealth was imposed.

Maduagwu (1996) cites an American magazine, *The Enquirer*, of 19th January, 1993, which quoted a United States Congressman, Robert K. Dorman's claim that “Nigeria's national treasury is systematically looted by government officials”. Dorman further noted that, “roughly, 3,000 officials now have Swiss Bank accounts totaling 33 billion Dollars (about 700 billion Naira)” Earlier in 1991, Larry Diamond stated that “33 billion Dollars or so have been sent abroad by Nigerians. Maduagwu also quotes *The London Economist's* report of August 1993 that “given known Nigerian oil production and world oil prices, the gap between what the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) should have earned and what government says it earned was about 2.7 billion Dollars in 1992”. A Panel of Inquiry was set up by General Babangida's government to investigate the operation of the Central Bank of Nigeria, and in its report submitted in 1994 showed that the

- Dollars paid to Gregory Copley to write a 15 page-paper on the need for Babangida to continue in power;
- (ii) 1.2 billion Naira spent weekly between June 12 and August 26 to "settle" the political class and others in Abuja;
 - (iii) 615 million Naira spent on the illegal Association for Better Nigeria (ABN).

Eminue (2006), citing *ThePunch* newspaper, also gives a breakdown of what he calls an example par excellence of recklessness of public expenditure pertaining to the disbursement of the 12.4 million Dollars of the 1991 Gulf War windfall as follows:

A documentary file on Nigeria, 2.92 million Naira

- (ii) Purchase of TV/Video for the Presidency, 18.30 million Dollars
- (iii) Ceremonial uniform for the Army, 3.85 million Dollars
- (iv) Staff welfare at Dodan Barracks/Aso Rock, 23.98 million Dollars
- (v) Travels for First lady abroad, 99 million Dollars
- (vi) President's travels abroad, 8.8 million Dollars
- (vii) Medical (Clinic at Aso Rock), 27.25 million Dollars
- (viii) Gifts - (Liberia), 1 million Dollars, (Ghana), 50 million Dollars; Embassies London, 18.12 million Dollars; Riyadh; 14.99 million Dollars; Tehran; 2.76 million Dollars; Niamey; 3.80 million Dollars; Pakistan; 3.80 million Dollars, Israel; 13.07 million Dollars; T. V. equipment for ABU, 17.90 million Dollars; Ministry of Defence; 32 million Dollars; Security; 59.72 million Dollars; Defence Attaches; 25.49 million Dollars and General Headquarters; 1.04 million Dollars., (*The Punch*, May 17, 2005: 3).

General Sani Abacha's Administration (17th November – 8th June, 1998)

According to Eminue (2006), Abacha's kleptomaniac propensity for financial squandermania or misappropriation was legendary. He adds that he was not only "a lawless Head of State" who was "the custodian of the legal system", but "the alpha and omega, with the power to arrest and release offenders at will". The government was extremely corrupt. One only needs to revisit the recoveries of public funds from his former ministers like

that of Finance, Chief Anthony Ani; Power and Steel, Alhaji Bashir Dalhatu, and from Abacha's family members after Abacha's death. There was also the scam arising from the alleged 2.5 billion Dollars Ajaokuta Steel Project Debt Buy-back involving the Russian Federation during the Abacha administration. It was reported that the Federal Government had recovered 7.4 billion Naira from those three sources. Specifically, Chief Ani refunded 3 million Dollars (258 million Naira), and DM 30 million. Alhaji Bashir Dalhatu gave a promissory note to pay 5 million Dollars (430 million Naira), while his accounts were frozen by the Federal Government. Chief Ani, the Minister of Finance during Abacha's regime, also made some startling revelations on the looting of state funds by Abacha's cronies thus:

In May, 1996, the then National Security Adviser (Ismaila Gwarzo) wrote to the Head of State requesting for large sums of money in foreign currency for security work. I was concerned that one man should not hold and manage that large amount of money without checks and balances. I, therefore, advised the Head of State that a small committee, comprising myself, the Secretary to Government of the Federation and two others be formed to oversee the disbursement of this money...the committee was never formed and no request was again made through the Ministry of Finance....I was not aware that there were any withdrawals until December 1997 when I sent my staff to reconcile accounts at the Central Bank of Nigeria. It was discovered that there was systematic withdrawals by the NSA all amounting to 912 million Dollars in 1997. I reported these withdrawals to the Head of State who later told me that these were for security purposes. The NSA again withdrew 419 million Dollars between January and May 1998, ostensibly for security purposes...the drawings were made without reference to the Ministry of Finance and there was no cash backing for the drawings. Moreover, the various withdrawals were freighted out of the country to Beirut by cronies of the NSA...after the death of Abacha, I reported to General Abubakar and sought his permission to allow me search, discover and bring back the money to Nigeria...we have been able to retrieve just over 750 million Dollars. (Eminue, 2006).

Tell Magazine of November 23, 1998, reported that 50 million Dollars (4.3 billion Naira) was reportedly surrendered to the Federal Government by an un-named members of Abacha's family. The amounts recovered were not part of the 767,087,888.86 Dollars and 8 billion Naira

Security Votes and other funds recovered from the Abacha's family in February 1999. Nwakpa (1999) also observes that the government recovered from Abacha's sources 628,268,187.19 Dollars (52,525 billion Naira), £75, 396, 887, 93 and DM 80 million, in Security Votes swindled. This also excluded large sums of money in contracts reportedly awarded to members of Abacha's family or their fronts but which contracts were said to have been paid out to them.

Onyeka-Ben (1999) notes that, "the money recovered from the Abacha family became possible through the assistance provided by the former National Security Adviser, Alhaji Ismaila Gwarzo, who consistently maintained that he was just an errand boy in the pillage of state treasury. Later, Gwarzo admitted owning some property which the Federal Government confiscated. These included 28 houses in Abuja, 5 in Zaria, 3 in Kano and one in Gwarzo village, "all worth some billions of Naira". Gwarzo was also reported to have accounted for some money in the National Security Adviser Special Forex account, including N274,903,491, 91 lodged at the Central Bank of Nigeria, Abuja. Other property illegally acquired by Gwarzo which were confiscated by the Federal Government included many vehicles. He was also found to be in possession of 16 trailers loaded with fertilizer, but on investigation, he claimed that 10 of the trailers and fertilizers belonged to the late Abacha. Gwarzo also reportedly forfeited 128 million Dollars worth of shares in the West African Refineries in Sierra Leone among others.

Shortly after assuming power as Nigeria's democratically elected president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo disclosed that the Federal Government had recovered more than 800 million Dollars from the foreign accounts of corrupt officials while private property corruptly acquired both in Nigeria and abroad had been confiscated by the government. He added that the Abacha's family property confiscated were 4 developed plots at Maitama area, Abuja, 3 developed plots at Asokoro, Abuja, a house at Victoria Island, Lagos, 30 per cent shareholding in West African Refinery in Sierra Leone valued at 1,180 Billion Dollars – all owned by Abacha. Abacha's son forfeited 230 million Naira while the late Head of State's brother, Abdulkadir, forfeited 95 million Naira. (Onyeka-Ben, 1999). According to Eminue:

Alhaji Ismaila Gwarzo, Abacha's security goon, had a personal bank in an Abuja Guest House. About 250 million Dollars was retrieved from the house. In another instance, Gwarzo was said to have taken from the Central Bank of Nigeria, about 250 million Naira and another 80 million Dollars, and then about £40,000,000. Mrs. Abacha, was reportedly caught with so much money in different currencies totaling about 1 billion Naira... General Jeremiah Useni according to *Tell Magazine*, can conveniently boast of similar sums. This General who was Abacha's closest friend, also had an underground bank in a house in Jos. At his home in Lantang, security operatives managed to liberate 4 billion Naira, hidden away in cartons of beer. (2006:525).

General Abdulsalami Abubakar (9th June, 1998 – 28th May, 1999)

The last military administration in Nigeria was headed by General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The regime was implicated by the Christopher Kolade Contract Review Panel inaugurated in June, 1999; just one week after Chief Obasanjo assumed office as President. The panel was empowered to scrutinize approvals for contracts and licences made between the 1st of January, and the 29th of May, 1999. To determine whether the procedure of award of such contracts was in conformity with existing regulations; to ascertain the relevance and priority of such contracts and licences and whether the expenditures involved were justifiable in the light of prevailing economic realities in Nigeria" among other terms and conditions in carrying out its mandate. The Panel reviewed a total of 4,072 contracts worth 639.62 billion Naira and 576 licences which the Abubakar administration handled, and concluded that "...though Nigeria was already neck-deep in corrupt practices, the General Abubakar administration made mockery of any sense of discipline and probity and at the scale that practically made saints of his predecessors in office. Put simply, the (Abubakar) administration engaged in "wilful destruction of the Nigerian economy and the public service" (Eminue, 2006). The Panel report also stated that:

General Abubakar spent the last five months of his tenure decapitating the country while maintaining an incredibly innocent man.... Quite unlike Emperor Nero who fiddled while Rome burnt, General (Abdulsalami) Abubakar willingly played along in the game of executive lawlessness, and in some instances, was mastermind of the process, for as the Commission observed, the

initiative for the contract awards came from the Presidency and the necessary contract documents were then prepared and submitted for anticipatory payment....The regime frittered away Nigeria's 2.3 billion Dollars in foreign exchange deals ... (and) despite a ceiling of 80 billion Naira approved as capital vote for government ministries and parastatals in the 1999 budget, officials of (Abubakar's) government approved and awarded contracts worth over 640 billion Naira within that short period of time before Obasanjo assumed office (Eminue, 2006: 528).

It is perhaps this magnitude of pillage that caused Ali (2001) to opine that "for General Abdulsalami Abubakar to place his credentials in proper perspective, he needs to extricate his honour and character from the purported odious stench of scam and sleaze hanging over his short-lived regime. The Panel noted that these unconventional developments led to a serious drop in Nigeria's foreign exchange reserve from 7.6 billion Dollars in January 1999 to 3.8 billion dollars by May 29, 1999. (Eminue, 2006).

Impact of Corruption

The truth is that Nigeria is grossly underdeveloped despite the rich human and natural resources. This is caused primarily by the canker worm of corruption. Obasanjo observed in his 1999 inaugural address that "corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of our society at every level. It has caused decay and dereliction within the infrastructure of government and the society in physical, social and human terms. It is a cog to the progress of the nation". By 1999, many institutions, such as schools, hospitals corporations and so on were in dilapidated condition as the funds allocated for the development of such institutions were often embezzled.

Attempts at Combating Corruption

General Murtala Mohammed was very determined to stamp out corruption from public life in the country. He embarked on what has been called "the great purge" of the erstwhile military Governors and other public officers. He set up an Assets Investigation Panel to look into allegations of corruption levelled against the Governors and other public officers that served under Gowon's administration. The outcome of the exercise was the dismissal of the Governors and the confiscation of assets totaling about

Like most other institutions in the country, the Nigerian military is an "inherited force", a legacy of our colonial experience; looking at its emergence and development is like looking at the history of colonialism in Nigeria. This is not surprising as the military was a critical element in the "success" of colonialism in Nigeria. Corruption is a virus that was injected into the nation's bloodline through the process of colonialism. It is therefore impossible to expect any institution that stems out of the colonial experience to be free of the virus of corruption.

It should be noted that the efforts of Mohammed and Buhari in curbing corruption were undermined by Babangida's regime. Not only did the regime encourage corruption, but ironically, in 1991, Babangida reversed the decision of Mohammed and promulgated a Decree which not only restored the ranks of the dismissed erstwhile military Governors, but also returned their seized assets. His action officially sanctioned corruption in the country and made the war against it difficult.

According to Eminue (2006), the military's involvement in politics has not been the blessing it was supposed to be. Looking back at the situation of the country, it would have been better they did not venture into governance. It was due to the magnitude of corruption in Nigeria that compelled the Transparency International in May 1999 to label Nigeria as the most corrupt country in the world.

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