

## EXAMINATION OF PERVASIVE CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: 1966-1975

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### Abstract

*The public sector of every nation is very critical to her national development. This is made possible through its ministries, departments and agencies. This work is titled Examination of pervasive corruption in Nigeria: 1966-1975. The work considers major issues of corruption and corrupt tendencies especially during the Yakubu Gowon's Administration. The work made robust use of secondary sources of data. As a result of the very glaring and obvious challenges experienced then and now, it was recommended amongst others that, Government should ensure that the code of conduct Bureau does not just bark but should be seen to bite all erring senior officers of Government, no matter how highly placed and that the fight against corruption in Nigeria should go beyond lip service which is currently being observed.*

*Key words: Public sector, bureaucracy, administration, public space, corruption.*

### 1.1 Introduction

It is no news that Nigeria is richly endowed by providence with human and material resources critical for national development and advancement. However, since gaining political independence, Nigeria has continued to meander the path befitting failed, weak and juvenile states. A state that had very great prospects at independence and was touted to lead Africa out of the backwoods of underdevelopment and economic dependency; Nigeria is still stuck in the league of very poor, corrupt, underdeveloped, infrastructural decaying crisis driven, morally bankrupt and leadership deficient country.

Rather than become an example for transformational leadership, modern bureaucracy, national development, national integration and innovation, Nigeria seems to be infamous for whatever is mediocre, corrupt, insanely violent and morally untoward.

Thus, one cannot but agree with the position that Nigeria is a victim of poor leadership and convoluted systemic corruption which has become pervasive and cancerous in the country's natural life. With Nigeria's vision of becoming the giant of Africa and the entire black race, Nigeria is one of Africa's most underdeveloped countries.

Despite its huge human and material resources how did Nigeria find itself in this present position? What are the probable causes of the evident lack of good

governance and sustainable development in the country? Why is the state so fragile? To what extent can the re-introduction of civil rule address the various crises brought about by the long period of military rule in the country? In short, how can Nigeria's squandered development hope be fully restored? How can we overcome the recent tag on us as a fantastically corrupt nation? This paper is an attempt to look at the historical examination of corruption in Nigeria between 1966-1975.

## 2.1 Definition of Key Terms / Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework

### Corruption; Public Space, Nigeria, 1966-1975:

Corruption: Available evidence/report indicates that corruption in Nigeria dates back to 1954 (ACBF, 2007). For example, the intensity of allegations of corrupt behaviour in the public sector led to the establishment of the first corruption related commission of inquiry to probe allegations of abuse of office levied against, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, who was by then the leader of government business, and was later elected as the first premier of what was then Nigeria's Eastern Region. The probe was instituted by the military sole administrator, appointed in 1962 and it found most of the functionaries of government at that time guilty of corrupt self enrichment during their tenures. The first attempt by the military to purge itself of its corrupt elements occurred when the Murtala Mohammed led military regime instituted a probe of all the military governors who served in Yakubu Gowon's administration. All but two were found guilty of corrupt self-enrichment.

Corruption according to the Cambridge Dictionary, corruption is defined as any illegal, bad, or dishonest behavior, especially by people in positions of power. In same vein, the Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary defines corruption as the dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery. Generally in the state polity, corruption is seen as the misuse of state resources for personal gain.

Public Space: The bureaucracy or public service broadly defined, refers to that machinery of government designed to execute the decision and policies of political office holders. It is the institution that is charged with the responsibility for formulating and implementing policies and programmes of the government. The bureaucracy could therefore be described as the agency through which the activities of the government are realized.

According to Chukwuebuka and Chidiubem (2011) the public service consists of the civil service parastatals and agencies. It should be noted that bribery and corruption, patronage, nepotism, enthezzlement, influence peddling, use of one's position for self-enrichment, bestowing of favours on relations and friends, moonlighting, partiality, absenteeism, late coming to work, abuse of public property, leaking and/or abuse of government information are also very rampant in the public service. A sharper delineation of public service in Nigeria comes from the Marxian model which sees

bureaucracy as an instrument of oppression, exploitation and marginalization in the hands of the dominant class who control and manipulate the state and its apparatuses in the society to consummate their economic and political domination. In view of this, the public service is an instrument of the state reflecting the bias, interests and preferences of the ruling and dominant class.

### 3.1 Review of Related Literature: Nigeria Between 1966-195

Nigeria, between 1966-1975 was characterized by military rule. Military rule is government controlled by members of the armed forces. This could only be achieved through force known as coup d'état. A coup d'état is a violent change of government by the armed forces to remove an existing government. Military rule became prevalent after independence especially in West Africa.

#### Nigeria Military rule from 1966-1975

In January 1966, a group of young army majors led by the charismatic major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu overthrew the civilian government of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Their aim was to restore socio-political and economic stability and to eradicate corruption between 1962 and 1965. Nigeria indeed has witnessed many crises, which ranged from the disputed census and the controversial federal elections to the inconclusive violent western regional election of 1965, all of which selectively eroded Nigeria's stability and unity. But the partial and selective manner in which the military operation was conducted left much to be desired.

In Kaduna, Ibadan and Lagos the event was marked by much bloodshed and led to the assassination of both top military officers and leading politicians. The Igbo-controlled eastern/mid-western regions were left unsheathed by the event. However, the forceful intervention of Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, General officer commanding, and other loyal officers like Lieutenant colonel Yakubu Gowon, commander second battalion Nigeria Army, Ikeja and his men, aborted the assumption of office by those who masterminded the plot. At the end of the day, the loyal troops under Ironsi assumed the reins of power. They overthrew the civilian politicians which was initially welcomed in the south and tolerated in the North. However, as events unfolded and the identity of the coup makers and their victims became known, the event of January 15, 1966, began to be seen as an Igbo bid to dominate Nigeria. Consequently, every action of Ironsi, especially the enactment of the unification decree that abolished the regionalism in place of unitary government and united administration, became misinterpreted as part of an Igbo grand design to rule the country.

The non-prosecution of the plotters was another point the northern officers and men held against Ironsi, this views; whether founded or not generated much disquiet in the north and culminated eventually in the violence and riot against the Igbos in various Northern cities. On July 29, 1966, a counter coup plot took place, spearheaded by

northern officers and soldiers who said they acted to forestall further Igbo attack on them. Major General Ironsi, Lt. Col. F.A Fajuyi (military Governor of the western group of provinces), and many Igbo officers and men were killed in Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta. For three uncertain days Nigeria had no head of state. The northern instigators of the counter coup chose the most senior northern officer, Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, Army Chief of Staff under Ironsi and their candidate for the Office of Head of State.

On August 1st 1966, Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon became the Head of state and supreme commander of the Nigerian Armed forces. Prior to his elevation, he was largely unknown to most Nigerians, but was popular with the army, where he had held important posts as adjutant general and army chief of staff positions that had endeared him especially among the northern officers corps and the rank and file.

Gowon had attended the renowned Government (now Barewa) college Zaria and on graduation, joined the army in 1954 as an officer cadet, and by 1963 had risen to the rank of lieutenant colonial.

Gowon inherited a Nigeria that was politically unstable and on the verge of disintegration. His assumption to leadership displeased Lieutenant Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, who refused to recognize him. The armed forces, which had struggled with credibility issues since the January coup, faced total collapse.

Furthermore, massacres of Igbos in northern cities, and the exodus that followed made no prospects of 'one Nigeria' highly unlikely, as far as the Igbos were concerned. Mutual trust was now replaced by ethnic suspicions and hatred. Though worried, Gowon did not allow these problems to overwhelm him. In an effort to win public acceptance for his regime he abolished the unification decree and reverted to a federal structure. He won over the largely Yoruba population of the western region when he released political prisoners, including Obafemi Awolowo and his colleagues (who had been charged for treason in 1963).

The failure of Gowon and Ojukwu to reach amicable compromise necessitated the meeting of the Supreme Military Council, (SMC) at Aburi Ghana on January 4-5, 1967. Gowon's political inexperience manifested itself when he agreed, with Ojukwu, to accept confederation. But, when the SMC met in Benin to ratify the draft decree of the Aburi agreement, Ojukwu refused to attend on security grounds and so disowned its provisions. With his mind already made up to secede from Nigeria, he hastily promulgated the Revenue edict, which appropriated taxes from the east due to the federal government. Further attempts at peaceful resolution, by the national reconciliation committee under Awolowo, failed.

As a result, Gowon's attitude hardened and on May 27, 1967, he declared a state of emergency and split the country into twelve regional states. The creation of two states

for the eastern minorities was intended to undermine support for Ojukwu and present an excuse for attacking the Igbo. On May 30th Ojukwu, as expected, declared the state of Biafra and the country was embroiled in a civil war for thirty months.

On January 12, 1970, the Biafran forces formally surrendered to Nigeria. To allay the fears of Biafran returnees, Gowon declared his famous policy of 'No victor no vanquished. He embarked on the '3R' program of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation. In principle, it was a laudable scheme but in practice it left much to be desired in its implementation. Winning the war was the high point of Gowon's administration, but he failed to win the peace. He lost whatever goodwill Nigerians had for him when he was unable to successfully implement his program.

Gowon reneged on his promise to return the country to civil rule in 1976 pronouncing the date as unrealistic in 1974. Public confidence in his administration was further eroded when allegations of impropriety were leveled against his officials. The incidence of corruption reached a new height and he appeared both unwilling and unable to do anything about it.

On the international scene, Gowon pursued the non-aligned policy by making Africa its main focus. He was the founder of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Gowon was overthrown on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1975, in a bloodless coup, while attending the Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in Kampala, Uganda. He went immediately to Britain and enrolled at the University of Warwick, where he graduated with a doctorate in political science. For a time, he was implicated in the 1976 Dimka abortive coup in which his successor, Murtala Muhammed was assassinated. He was granted amnesty by President Shehu Shagari in 1980. Despite his shortcomings, history will not forget the role of General Yakubu Gowon in keeping Nigeria united.

#### Major Contributions/Achievements of The 1966-1975 Administration in Nigeria

This period can mainly be traced to General Yakubu Gowon despite the brief rule/regime of General Aguiyi-Ironsi.

1. Gowon successfully prevented the Biafran secession during the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war.
2. He demonstrated his belief that the end of civil war meant victory for Nigeria's unity and reconciliation. (No victor no Vanquished).
3. The post civil war gave unprecedented rise in oil revenues.
4. He encouraged local participation in increased economic activities.
5. His government promulgated the indigenization decree of 1972 which

declared many sectors of the Nigerian economy inaccessible to foreign investment and permitted minority participation by foreigners in several other states.

6. The 1972 decree' helped well-connected Nigerians to gain access to the commanding height of the economy.
7. He brought about the development of the then capital of Nigeria, Lagos, into an international city.
8. Gowon assisted in the creation of 12 states.
9. The expansion of government bureaucracy was part of his efforts.
10. By 1973 Nigeria was the world's ninth largest oil exporter; the petroleum price increase of the early 1970s and the Arab energy embargo of 1973 generated an enormous rise in Nigeria revenue.
11. The period procured for interesting foreign policies that involved economic expansion into the neighbouring African states.
12. Increased foreign direct investment.
13. Huge financial assistance to neighbouring African countries.
14. Nigeria became the leader in the formation of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) in 1975.
15. This period, 1969-1975 was one of 'self-confidence' and maximized effect and attention by world leaders on Nigeria.
16. One of the most notable achievement was the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC).
17. The control of our economy from foreigners to Nigerians.
18. Reinstatement of the federal system of government.
19. The 3R code of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction.

#### Short Comings/Failures/Criticisms of Gowon Regime.

The following are some of the short comings, failures and criticisms of the Gowon's administration;

1. He later decreed that Nigeria was not ready for civil rule and as such postponed the election date from 1976 to indefinite.
2. The execution of Murtala Mohammed in 1976 by a coup plotted by lieutenant colonel Buka Suka Dimka.

3. The growth of the Nigerian bureaucracy brought about allegations and rise in corruption.
4. Increased wealth in the country resulted in import licenses being issued.
5. There were stories of tons of stones and sand being imported into the country and of General Gowon himself saying to a foreign reporter that 'the only problem Nigeria has is how to spend the money she has'.
6. The notorious 'cement agenda' in the summer of 1975 and falsifying and inflating the amount of cement.
7. Gowon's governors acted as lords overseeing their personal fiefdom.
8. The Daily Times Newspaper was controlled to avoid crisis.
9. The first coup destroyed the political stability of the existing parties laboured for, by the founding fathers of the countries.
10. The 1975 coup destroyed the civil service system set by Gowon.

#### Theoretical Framework

In the course of this study, we used the following theory to examine the behaviours of the individuals involved in the study.

**Game Theory:** Game Theory is the logical analysis of situations of conflict and cooperation. Game theory could be formally defined as a theory of rational decision in conflict situations.

Model of such situations, as they are conceived in game theory involve:

- a. A set of decision makers, called players
- b. A set of 'strategies' available to each player, courses of action which he or she may choose to follow,
- c. A set of 'outcomes', the strategies chosen by each player determine the outcome of the game.
- d. A set of 'pay offs' accorded to each player in each of the possible outcomes. (Rapoport, 1974).

Game theory is the study of how players should rationally play games. Each player would like the game to end in an outcome which gives him a large payoff as possible.

Game theory may be viewed, as a sort of umbrella or 'Unified field' theory for the rational side of social sciences where social is interpreted broadly to include human as well as non-human player (computer, animals, plants). It develops methodologies that apply in principle of all interactive situations. (Aumann and Hart 1992). Game theory

is a scientific discipline that investigates conflicts situations, the interaction between the agents and their decision (Horz, 2006). This theory is closely associated with the rand corporation after the Second World War.

In 1950, game theory developed dramatically, when John Nash developed game theory tools and concepts for general non-cooperative theory and cooperative bargaining theory. Game theory was broadened theoretically and applied to problems of war, political science and philosophy in the 1950's and 1960's.

#### Applicability of Game Theory as Theoretical Framework.

Game theory focuses on the analysis of strategic interdependencies between different actors; It makes it possible to understand how various players interact in a game situation, that is, a meeting place where actions are deployed (the market is a perfect example). considering that everyone is not in total control of their fate we reckon that the participants are in a situation of strategic interaction. The term strategy comes from the Ancient Greek, referring to the actions taken by a military leader in the field. The word has kept to that sense ever since. However, its acceptance broadened until it covered less bellicose situations, but in which the idea of conflict persists.

#### 5.1 Corruption in Nigeria Between 1966-1975: A Brief Account

The word corruption, as difficult as it is to define, has been said by Ayoade, (2006), as the use of public office for private gain. In this section, we shall be looking at a few accounts of such instances as follows:

General Gowon's Administration's policy of giving 20 pounds to every Biafran who had a bank account in Nigeria before the civil war, regardless of how much money had been in their accounts, was criticized by both local and foreign aid workers, as this led to an unprecedented scale of looting and robbery in the former Biafran areas after the war. Furthermore, because of the growth in bureaucracy, there were allegations of rise in corruption in government circles. Increased wealth in the country resulted in the issuance of fake import licenses. There were stories of tons of stones and sand being imported in to the country. Gowon himself got to a point where he once said "The problem Nigeria has is not money but how to spend it".

Indeed the corruption in Gowon's administration culminated in the "cement armada" in the summer of 1975, when the port of Lagos became jammed with hundreds of ships trying to unload cement. Somehow, agents of the Nigerian government had signed contracts with 68 international suppliers for the delivery of a total of 20 million tons of cement in one year to Lagos, even though the Lagos port could only accept one million tons of cargo per year. Worse still, the poorly drafted cement contracts included demurrage clauses highly favourable to the suppliers, meaning that the bills began to



skyrocket if the ships sat in port waiting to unload (or even if they sat in their home ports waiting for permission to depart for Nigeria). The Nigerian government did not fully grasp the magnitude of its mistake until the port of Lagos was so badly jammed that basic supplies could not get through. By this time, it was too late. The attempt of the government to repudiate the cement contracts and impose an emergency embargo on all inbound shipping, tied up the country in a series of litigations around the world for many years, including a 1983 decision of the United States of America supreme court.

The post war years saw Nigeria enjoying a meteoric, oil-fueled, economic upturn in the course of which the scope of activities of the Nigerian federal government grew to an unprecedented degree, with increased earnings from oil revenues. Unfortunately however, this period also saw a rapid increase in corruption mostly in the area of bribery, among federal government officials; and although the head of state himself, General Gowon, was never found complicit in the corrupt practices, he was often accused of turning a blind eye to the activities of his staff and cronies.

#### 6.1 Conclusion

The examined years saw Nigeria enjoying a meteoric, oil fuelled, economic upturn in the course of which the scope of activity of the Nigerian Federal Government grew to an unprecedented degree, with increased earnings from oil revenues. Unfortunately, however, this period also saw a rapid increase in corruption, mostly bribery, by federal government officials and although the head of state himself, General Gowon, was never found complicit in the corrupt practices, he was often accused of turning a blind eye to the activities of his staff and cronies. At a point, his silence was so loud that public officials did whatever they liked in the various ministries and parastatals.

As we conclude, it should be noted that corruption as it is today has been with us for a long time. The difference being that it has gone digital in modern times. Our country need to be intentional if the fight we so much advocate against corruption must be taken seriously.

#### 7.1 Recommendations

1. Government should ensure that the code of conduct Bureau does not just bark, but should also bite all erring senior officers no matter how highly placed.
2. The fight against corruption and corrupt government officials should go beyond lip services.
3. The issue of checks and balances in government should be strengthened.
4. Government agencies should be closely monitored to forestall corrupt influences.

5. There should be a reformed public administration and financial management system.
6. Transparency and access to information should be promoted.
7. Citizens should be empowered to demand for accountability from public officers.
8. The game theory, when applied, should not bring about war but the interest of the public citizens.

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