

## Corruption and Social Action in Nigeria

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**This paper is essentially a case study of corruption and social action in Nigeria. It is primarily concerned with actions of individuals and groups outside of government against corruption and government. It hopes to focus attention on the genesis of corruption in Nigeria since independence and on an alternative system for action against corruption in traditional African culture. It takes only a sheer courage to say that leadership and government in Nigeria since independence have been hamstrung by corruption. The system, ipso facto, has been a monumental failure. It is, therefore, incumbent on concerned philosophers and social thinkers to begin a search for an alternative system of political philosophy. It is the intention of the author to set the ball rolling on this agenda by x-raying the problem inherent in the status-quo.**

Since independence, corruption has been on the increase in Nigeria. Nigerian pre-capitalist culture and post-independence western capitalism made her become an ultra-capitalist country. Unfortunately too, it is among the periphery nations in the global economic system. In consequence of her peripheral and capitalist status, the majority of Nigerians are illiterate, poor, and oppressed. Characteristically, there is a wide disparity of income among her citizenry. Corruption in the country can, in the main, be linked to tribal and ethnic rivalry, religious bigotry, nepotism, favouritism and so on.

Political and economic independence in Nigeria is therefore a mirage. According to Alexander Madiabo, "The Federation of Nigeria, as it exists today, has never really been one homogeneous country, for its widely differing people and tribes are yet to find any basis for true unity. Thus, for administrative convenience Northern and Southern Nigeria became amalgamated in 1914. Thereafter the only thing these people had in common became the name of their country. That alone was an insufficient basis for

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true unity"<sup>7</sup>. And according to Adewale Ademoyega, "Nigeria's political problem sprang from the carefree manner in which the British took over, administered, and abandoned the government and people of Nigeria. British administrators did not make an effort to weld the country together and unite the heterogeneous groups of people"<sup>8</sup>. Just as the global socio-economic system is structured to make the rich nations richer and the poor nations poorer, so also the Nigerian domestic socio-economic system is designed to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Against this background, economic planning in Nigeria Since independence has been bourgeois and capitalist economic planning.

Oil, a major revenue-yielding sector in the Nigerian economy, serves the interests of the capitalist and the privileged classes instead of being utilised in the communalistic way of African culture. Christianity and Islam have either encouraged this neo-capitalist or imperialist system or remained criminally quiescent in the face of it. Mass media, governments and other institutions have been inadvertently encouraging the system. It seems that the problem of Nigeria is a problem ideology, and whose perception and practice of the status quo is epistemologically and ontologically alien to African culture. It could be argued that Nigeria has had no leadership since her independence from the colonial masters. And the absence of the status of any Nigerian leader in the British hall of memories, where there are many other African leaders like Nkrumah, Gaddafi, Nyarere and so on, could testify to the lack of leadership in Nigeria.

### **Corruption and Changes of Government in Nigeria**

It is interesting and objective enough to observe that the sociopolitical history of Nigeria since her independence shows a history of corruption which invariably leads to socio-political instabilities. Professor A. Adeyemi of the Department of Public Law, University of Lagos, says this of corruption in Nigeria: "Corruption has now become a major factor contributing to the Country's present state of under-development, a major consequence of this being the breeding of an inefficient and lax favouritism, rather than an efficient productivity. All of which again, leads to the entrenchment of graft in the body politic and expressed in the rapid depletion of the public treasury inflationary trends, unemployment and depression of the economic"<sup>9</sup>. It is pertinent to ask: What is corruption? It is defined by Oxford Dictionary as "rottenness, putrid matter, impurity, bribery . . ."<sup>10</sup>. This definition is very significant in Nigerian context. When for example, there is bribery in a socio-political system, it means that the system is rotten; it also means that it is a state of impurity and so on. Socio-politically, corruption in Nigeria is a condition where there is bribery, favouritism, discrimination, religious bigotry, tribalism, ethnicism and so on. The commonly conceived notion of corruption as bribery, embezzlement and fraud cannot exist in isolation from the tripartite constitutional framework bequeathed to Nigeria, for it is

regionalism, ethnicism, tribalism and favouritism that that abet, if not cause, embezzlement, bribery and fraud. As a result of the ethnic and tribal diversities in Nigeria, individuals lack the patriotism and love for the whole.

Against the background of corruption<sup>4</sup> tribalism and lack of patriotism, social actions among individuals, groups, students and the military have taken place at various times as circumstances demand. Among others, it is believed that the coup d'état of 1966 led by Major Nzeogwu was an action against the corruption of the first republic; the overthrow of the governments of Gowon and Shagari in 1975 and 1984 respectively were as a result of the systemic corruption then.

The Nzeogwu-led coup d'état of January, 15th 1966 was the inevitable consequence of the chain of political and social misadventures and myopia of the first leaders of the republic of Nigeria. The 1964 election was not only the immediate cause of the coup, but also was the singular and last event that betrayed the corrupt tendencies of the leaders and the privileged class. As it were, there were alliances up on alliances among the political parties to gain control of the national and state governments for their selfish and personal interests. Consequently the stage was set for this selfish adventure chiefly between the UPGA (United Progressive Grand Alliance) based mostly in the South and NNA (Nigerian National Alliance) mostly based in the North. As a prelude to social action by some military boys, social action among the common people found a fertile ground among the Yoruba ethnic group in Western Nigeria where there had been a lot of infighting between the late Chief Akintola and the late Chief Awolowo. While chief Akintola was for NNA, Chief Awolowo was for UPGA. Since the politics of the first republic was on tribal and ethnic lines, Chief Akintola was perceived as having been bought over by the Northern dominated and controlled party, NNA. Since NNA could never win a fair election in the West, it was alleged that elections there were systematically rigged with techniques that had been perfected for many years. According to *Help Magazine*, "At the polling booths opposition polling agents were prevented from being present in the booths. It was arranged that their identity discs should not be signed by the appropriate official. So that only government agents were admitted to the booths. Thousands of ballot papers disappeared from stores, to find their way into government ballot boxes. When all else failed and an opposition candidate was elected, the last resort was to reverse the result and declare the winner"<sup>5</sup>. Historians and political observers argue that through this method, Chief Akintola, then the incumbent premier, got entrenched again as the premier of Western region. Consequently, the people of western Nigeria embarked on actions including riots, political murders and arson, resulting in over two thousands deaths. This happened around August 1965.

Apart from corruption-motivated political rascalism, corruption itself had been so evident among political leaders and the privileged classes that the ordinary person was helpless. Nigerian foreign assets were looted and

depleted with reckless abandon. Economic analysts observed that by 1954 when Nigerian founding fathers assumed authority in the regions, the country's total assets were £243.7 million. But by 1960, this fell to £174.2 million and fell again to £76.8 million by 1964. The dwindling of the foreign assets was attributed to the drawing of the capital resources of the country by Britain and other foreign companies and banks with the active collusion of Nigerian leaders. Nigerian leaders were also alleged to have given active support to oil companies to underprice Nigerian crude oil. Corruption was so evident at both national and state levels that one might be right to argue that the politics of the first republic was the politics of self interest. Public and governmental institutions were not left out; they were all corrupt. Adewale Ademoyega, one of the leaders of 1966 coup, observed; "The safety valves of the nation were reposed in such institutions as the courts, census commission, the electoral commissions the police and finally the Armed forces. But the sanctity of these institutions was being politically assailed, assaulted, and dragged in the mud, so that the national leadership was nearing collapse"<sup>6</sup>. He also observed; "Under the system, the vast majority of our people, that is to say, about ninety-nine percent were extremely poor and lived in abject poverty; while a few millionaires were being created here and there all over the country, by using their political connections to divert government money into their hands"<sup>7</sup>. All that can be deduced from the foregoing is that crisis, whether social or political, is a crisis of self-interest and personal gains at the expense of the masses.

By 1965, the nation was drifting purposelessly. It was alleged that the election rigging in the western region was nationwide to the extent that the incumbent prime-minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was re-elected. The then President and the Commander of Armed forces council was in a dilemma as to whether to swear the Prime Minister in again in a second term or not. It is argued that he did not want to do so because there was evidence of mass vote rigging all over the country. Some Political analysts argued that he had no power to do so as a ceremonial President. But one thing that is obvious is that the authority of the government had been weakened by the disillusionment of the masses. It was under these circumstances that Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu led four other majors to overthrow the national government of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa on January 15, 1966. First of all they used Kaduna as the base for their military action. As a result the parliamentary cabinet decided to hand over power to the most senior military officer, Major General Aguiye Ironsi. Before then, Nzeogwu and his team of revolutionaries had killed some prominent politicians which included Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Prime Minister), and Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, both from the North. This further weakened the position of the new head of state, Ironsi, who came from the Ibospeaking area of the south. The further consequence was the killing and maiming of the Ibos in the north by the aggrieved

northerners over the killing of their leaders and then finally the resultant civil war between the rest of Nigeria and the successionist Ibos (Biafra). The revolution started by Major Nzeogwu could not achieve its aim because it was perceived by the other parts of the country as a pre-meditated Ibo coup. The confusion and crisis saw the rise of Yakubu Jack Gown as the Nigerian head of state until he was overthrown by another social action against corruption under his regime.

The reaction against injustices and corruption in the first republic was something that was either supported or carried out by groups and individuals. As records shows, it all started in the western region by the students and the common people in the street. The mass-media played its role too. In Nigeria under military regimes, the mass media is less active in social action than under civilian administrations. Under the first republic civilian government, the newspaper and electronic media were owned by different federal and state governments. These media were therefore loyal to the governments in control of their states. What this means is that these media were being sponsored by political parties. The advantage of this to social action therefore is that the media of the opposing parties would be exposing the weakness of the party in government, thereby informing and mobilising the masses for action. This was what actually happened during the 1964 election. The military boys got the support of the masses because they were informed of the corrupt tendencies of the leaders.

Although the military action was not successful, it shows that there were revolutionaries in the Nigerian Army then. Adewale Ademoyega, one of the five majors who planned the coup, in his book *why we struck* cited revolutions that have been carried out by the Armed forces in other countries to support their action. According to him, Genghis Khan's Army in the thirteenth century wielded the divided tribalistic mongols of central Asia together. The Cromwellian Army of the seventeenth century developed the parliamentary system in Britain. The Napoleonic Army of the nineteenth century rescued France from anarchy and established the principle of liberty and fraternity. The Bolshevik Army of Russia inspired by marxist principles established the rule of the proletariat. Other revolutionary Armies include the People's Liberation Army of the China and Dr. Fidel Castro Army of Cuba.

General Yakubu Gowon, who became the Nigerian military head of state in 1967 following the confusion and crisis generated by corruption and tribalism, was in power until 1975. His tenure of office immediately after the civil war in 1970 was a period of oil boom and this perhaps clouded the regime's sense of leadership and accountability to the people. Historians recall that "Gowon's regime witnessed an unprecedented rise in corruption in the country's body politics, nurturing a coterie of powerful Nigerian millionaires—the veritable fat cats"<sup>8</sup>. It is said that in 1974, the Federal government needed 2.9 million metric tonnes of cement through the Nigerian National Supply Company, but placed an order for 16.23 million metric

tonnes. Although Nigeria was supposed to be paying £40 per tonne, actually, it was gathered that instead by 75 per tonne was being paid. This means that someone was being enriched by \$75 per tonne for 16.23 metric tonne. It was obvious also that state military and civilian administrators, federal and state commissioners were irresponsibly enriching themselves, because after all there was money as a result of the oil boom of the decade.

At this point, students, individuals groups and some military officers were becoming disenchanted with the system. Some individuals resorted to the use of court affidavits in a bid to expose corrupt officers. Such individuals include Godwin Daboh and late Aper Aku. Consequently, a Federal Minister of Communication in Gowon's regime, J. S. Tarka, fell when he was forced to resign in 1974 over serious allegation of corruption. Students were not left out in the social action. In Nigeria, they usually take over the role of mass media especially under military regimes where the press and the electronic media are highly gagged and censured. In 1970, students at Ahmadu Bello University protested against the administration of the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ishaya Audu. In February, 1971 students at the University of Ibadan used the cafeteria issue to go on rampage, during which one student, Kunle Adepeju, was killed by a police bullet. It was believed "that the anniversary of the incident was to provide excuses for the protests against the then increasingly unpopular Gowon administration"<sup>9</sup>. In 1974 and 1975 students at the University of Lagos demonstrated against the increasingly unpopular Gowon's regime. As if he was trying to perpetuate his regime and invariably corruption, General Gowon postponed his proposed handover to a democratically elected civilian government in 1976 to 1979. The outcome of this corruption was the overthrow of Gowon's regime on July 29, 1975 by General Murtala Mohammed. Unfortunately, he was assassinated within a few months in office by some retrogressive members of the armed forces in an unsuccessful coup attempt. He was therefore succeeded by his second in command, General Olusegun Obasanjo.

General Obasanjo's regime was not corruption free. Mr. Femi Falana, a Lagos-based lawyer, argued that General Obasanjo did not maintain the spirit of his predecessor against corruption. He says, "As soon as Murtala died, the succeeding regime institutionalised corruption in Nigeria by promulgating Decree No. 11 of 1976 (Public officers Protection against False Accusation). The decree was to become a ready instrument of coercion for General Muhammadu Buhari's regime seven years later, in the form of Decree No. 4 of 1984"<sup>10</sup>. It is believed that during Obasanjo regime between 1976 and 1979, corruption was on the increase, and it was during this period that 2.8 billion oil money went missing from the NNPC accounts as reported by the Senate majority leader in the succeeding Shagari civilian administration. Obasanjo's regime was, however, not forcefully removed in office as a result of any social action against corruption; it swiftly but calculatively handed over the government to the democratically elected government of

Alhaji Shehu Shagari.

It has been observed that Shagari's regime saw another dimension of corruption unprecedented in the country's history, as a Federal Ministers, State Commissioners and elected legislators awarded themselves fat salaries and at the same time engaged in contracts through proxies. "It is little wonder that this country has since then witnessed an orgy of brazen and wanton display of opulence, gluttony and mindless greed by Nigerian rich and powerful"<sup>11</sup>. The *Weekly Star* of 15 May 1983 was quoted as saying that "keeping an average Nigeria from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yam"<sup>12</sup>. It was the same year that the Minister of Communication, Mr. Audu Ogbe, was quoted as saying that "the Federal Government is losing 50 million every month as salaries to non-existent workers"<sup>13</sup>. According to *Analyst Magazine* (vol. 2 of 1987), when on Monday Oct. 1, 1979 Shehu Shagari assumed the reins of power as Nigeria's President, "the country's total external reserve stood at 2.30 billion. In the next four years of his rule Nigeria earned about 40.8 billion in foreign exchange. But on December 31, 1983, when he was over thrown, all the external reserves had vanished and Nigerian public external debt stood at 10.21 billion"<sup>14</sup>. Some University intellectuals were actually conscious of the brazen act of indiscipline and corruption among the politicians and the general populace. Of significant note was the late Professor Ayodele Awojobi, a mechanical engineer at the University of Lagos, who singularly and on several occasions dragged the Federal civilian Government to courts on several issues. In 1984 too, a Nigerian popular artist, Onyeka Onwenu, co-produced a documentary with the BBC London, *The Squandering of Riches*, which "spot-lights the glitzy life-style and plush opulence of Nigeria's rich, including the jet-owning generation of public officers"<sup>15</sup>.

In awakening the public consciousness against corruption, the press and the electronic media of opposing parties played a very significant role (the usual thing under civilian government in Nigeria). The students of higher institutions were always eager to tell their illiterate, semi-literate and non-chalant parents of the anomalies in any government through demonstration and riots. When one talks of individual social action against the government in Nigeria, Afro-beat musician Chief Priest Fela Anikulapo Kuti is immediately recalled. Since the beginning of his career in music he has shown his disenchantment and disillusionment with all Nigeria governments from 1960 to date. To achieve his aim, he has composed music and documentaries to portray the decadent and corrupt nature of Nigerian governments like the Balewa, Gowon, Obasanjo and Shagari regimes.

It is believed that Nemesis caught up with the second republic politicians of Shagari's regime on December 31, 1983 as General Muhammadu Buhari seized power in a coup d'etat. Buhari's regime engaged in commendable, but very stringent, measures against corruptive tendencies like cocaine-pushing and bunkering. The regime also launched a nationwide campaign

against corruption, called the "war against indiscipline"<sup>16</sup>. Discipline and reduced corruption were beginning to be felt when Buhari was overthrown by his Chief of Army Staff, General Ibrahim Babangida, on August 27, 1985. The state of affairs in Nigeria since 1985 has educated Nigerians on the difference between rule with an iron hand (for example Buhari/Idiagbon regime) and rule with a soft hand (for example Babangida regime). To some people, the coercive and undemocratic tendencies of Buhari's regime were bad but to many to day, Buhari's regime would have been the only solution to the decadent and corrupt nature of Nigerian society. On reflection, many have argued that Babangida's brand of democracy is at best encouraging corruption, and as such it is not the kind suitable for Nigeria.

### **The May 1989 Riots**

General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida is a complex and intelligent army officer, a political demagogue and military strategist and at best a politician. On coming to power, he opened a public and democratic debate on whether Nigeria would take the IMF Loan or not, and when it was rejected he adopted an equivalent, the Structural Adjustment Programme, as suggested by London and Paris clubs (all of which promote capitalism in all of its ramifications). The structural adjustment programme came into being around August 1986. The Government believed that the only way to reverse the economic misfortune that had plagued Nigeria since 1980 is through SAP: "SAP is the answer to our \$30 billion debt and to the amputated state of the economy"<sup>17</sup>. It seems that SAP could really be an answer to Nigerian economic doldrums. It is an economic philosophy that could make Nigerians look inward in order to resuscitate themselves from their economic misfortune. It requires Nigerians to be hard-working, to be creative and to cut their coats according to their sizes. It requires every one of them to be content with whatever one has; this involves everybody, no matter what position, rank or state of birth. Ultimately, it entails the full utilization of Nigerian agricultural and human potentials. All this would conserve the nation's hard earned foreign exchange, reduce inflation and increase the standard of living of an average Nigerian. A few months after SAP went into operation, an apologist argued that "cocoa and other farmers are busy smiling their way from the farm to the banks; ... that SAP is a check on profligacy, the terminal disease of Nigerians and that many Nigerians are now looking inwards rather than to Europe or America for deliverance; and that there has been a fantastic boom in non-oil exports"<sup>18</sup>. The public were informed of the adverse effect of SAP, but they were told that these would be short-lived and that everybody would be involved in making the sacrifices. "The cumulative adverse effect of these measures is a run away inflation, high prices of essential goods, abrogation of such cushions as subsidies"<sup>19</sup>.

Following the mechanistic configuration and calculations of SAP, the inflation did come, prices of essential goods skyrocketed and subsi-



dies on some essential commodities reduced. University students were among those badly affected, and as mass-mobilisers under military regimes, they are always sensitive to government actions. Food is outrageously costly, and text-books were scarce and expensive to buy. In short the poor parent's child could no longer dream of going to university. The number of naira equivalent to an American dollar has risen from four to about fifteen. "Food items, especially the staples—gari, yam, cassava etc, have continued to go beyond the reach of most Nigerians"<sup>20</sup> Paradoxically and ironically, SAP turned out to be a blessing to the privileged classes in Nigeria. SAP could not stop corruption in Nigeria. It instead encouraged it; businessmen, some government officials, cocaine pushers, and people with various connections were getting richer than ever. Business was booming for privileged people as there was always a big chunk of money coming from any business transaction. This partisanship and lopsidedness of SAP was evident in the way many big businessmen and privileged workers import various brands of Belgian, American, Japanese and British cars like Mercedes and Honda Accord. Different types of housing of western architectural designs were erected here and there in areas specially meant for privileged classes. In fact, the disparity between the poor and rich became unprecedented in Nigeria. The rich were becoming richer and the poor poorer.

The common people not only felt the impact of SAP, they also knew and saw that some others were living higher above average than before. They may have been willing to act, but for their illiteracy and lack of sense of direction. But it was the university students, whom I regard as mass media and mass mobilizers in Nigeria especially under military regimes, that ignited the flame of the May 1989 mass riots in Nigeria.

The mood of Nigerian country people was already tense. The conceptual environment for the civilian action against the government was already in existence when the National Association of Nigerian Students gave an ultimatum to the government to end SAP by May 29th. To stimulate and mobilize the public to action, hand-bills were distributed. They are believed to have originated from Benin, more precisely from among the university students of the University of Benin. From where the students got them or who gave them to them is still a mystery today. One of the hand-bills was alleged to have contained material lifted from the May 1989 edition of the American Ebony magazine alleging "that President Babangida is very rich and has lots of money abroad. It also alleges that his children go to school in Zurich Switzerland (which is true), and that he and his wife, Maryam, own business concerns abroad....."<sup>21</sup>. And the other hand-bill alleges that the Chief of General Staff, Augustus Aikhomu, "has money abroad and that he ordered the detention of a businessman Bashir Mohammed under the provision of Decree 2 not because he was a security risk, but because of a business deal between Mohammed and Aikhomu....."<sup>22</sup>.

The National Association of Nigerian students demonstration planned for 29th May started ahead of schedule on 24th May as a result of these handbills (which may or may not be true). Students at the University of Benin demonstrated peacefully on 24th May, but the following day saw the city of Benin in flame. Students, illiterate people on the street, unemployed youths, motor drivers, touts, madmen, market women, secondary and primary school children and workers were on the streets wreaking vengeance on real and imagined enemies of the society identifiable through their flamboyant life-style. The Bendel state House of Assembly and some Ministry buildings were set ablaze. "The city was in turmoil unrivalled since the 1978 'Ali must Go' episode"<sup>23</sup>. The mob, moving from street to street and shouting, 'Babangida Must Go!' 'SAP Must be Abolished!'<sup>24</sup>, found ready supporters in market women, motorists and even those in the lower cadre of government services. Motorists on the Benin road to other cities and workers were made to hold green leaves aloft in solidarity for the action. Prisoners numbering about 809 in federal prisons were set free and gari, rice, tomatoes and beans in the prisons were looted. The rioters later set the prisons on fire. The government of the state, Col. Tunde Ogbeha, was said to have ordered the police to "shoot at sight"<sup>25</sup>. The police, in obedience to their masters, unleashed their own terror on the demonstrations. It is said that about fifteen people including a police man were killed and many wounded. About 154 protesters were arrested and flown to Makurdi, in Benue state.

As the demonstrations and riots at Benin were going on, most Nigerian students believed the allegations against Nigerian leaders and distributed the hand-bills all over the country especially in the Southern parts of the country like Lagos, Ibadan and Enugu. At Ibadan, students were in the lead in mobilising the public. They first of all alleged that there was one Mike Uyi who was an agent of state security service, SSS, and called for his expulsion. They also alleged that his real name was Harrison Ugbile. But as Mike Uyi, he was the national president of the students Peace Movement of Nigeria and also of the peace commando, both of which were government sponsored movements. The students went to Uyi's room at the Sultan Bello Hall, "packed his property and burnt them".<sup>26</sup> By 28th May, the demonstrations and discontent on the campus had spiralled into the township of Ibadan. Like in Benin there were road-blocks, burning and the looting of government properties. By 30th May, the University was closed down.

According to *Newswatch Magazine*, by "Monday, May 29, an uneasy calm hung over the University of Lagos, Akoka. Students who were seen in groups, were busy discussing the turmoil that had engulfed institutions of higher learning in some parts of the country"<sup>27</sup>. Before then, students of other higher institutions in Lagos like Lagos State College of Education and Lagos State University had been demonstrating against their authorities over issues that were purely internal. But by 30th May, students of the University

of Lagos, Akoka had mobilised the public, Yaba College of Technology and Lagos Polytechnic all in Lagos, for actions against the alleged self-enrichment of Nigerian leaders. The demonstrators, "who had now been joined by primary and secondary school children, touts, thugs and other undesirable elements paralysed commercial activities in Lagos. They went from street to street chanting the slogans 'Babangida Must Go!' 'SAP Must Go!'"<sup>28</sup>. Federal government vehicles were burnt and the two-storey building which housed the Federal Inland Revenue was also damaged. Many government houses in different parts of Lagos were ransacked and damaged. "At Fadeyi, Yaba, for example, the head-quarters of the International Telephone and Telegraph., ITT, Nigeria Limited largely own by M.K.O. Abiola, was vandalised. Eye witness said assorted equipment were carted away from the block of offices"<sup>29</sup>. Lagos city was in total crisis; it seemed as if the government was about to be overthrown by the people. I was coming back from my office at Lagos State University when I saw the masses on the road with green leaves. I also looked and noticed that every motorist had green leaves on his or her car. I had to stop and collect a good quantity of green leaves and put them in front of my car (a Nigerian common person's car, a Volkswagen) since that was my passport to home.

The mass riot in Lagos lasted for over three days and the result was that business in most parts of Lagos was severely paralysed: "Banks, private and public offices and shops had to shut their doors. Schools, too, were shut as many children joined the demonstrators"<sup>30</sup>. It was a fierce battle between the police and the public. In most cases, police men were said to have fled when they saw troops of demonstrators chanting war songs and "Babangida Must Go".

On June 19, 1989, the Armed Forces Military Council (AFRC) announced the closure of University of Ibadan, University of Benin, Bendel State University, Ekpoma, Imo State University Okigwe, Lagos State University, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti and other higher and secondary institutions, all in the Southern part of the country. The Majority of the institutions in the North either did not protest or their planned actions must have been pre-empted by the University authorities and the universities closed, and so the riot was limited to the south. This re-echoes the role of ethnicism and tribalism in hindering social action and promoting corruption in Nigeria. It is believed that the northerners tacitly withdrew from the mass riot because the head of state and majority of the leaders came from the North. The government action in closing almost all higher institutions in the South for a long period seems to have given credence to this belief. Social activists like Professor Wale Soyinka, a Nobel laureate, Dr. Tai Solarin and Chief Gani Fawehinmi openly challenged the government action on this matter.

The riot signified the feeling of the public against the government, that is they have been alienated by the Military who have now constituted them-

selves into a ruling class and are wallowing in wealth and opulence instead of solving the economic predicament. A Lagos-based national daily *The Guardian* argued that the "situation was one of a cleavage between the military and civil society as if civil society were an enemy at war with the military. It was a picture of 'them against us'<sup>31</sup>. There had never been such a revolt against a military regime in Nigeria. The military leadership was shocked and surprised to the extent of tightening up security here and there. The President and Commander-in Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces in his speech to the inaugural session of the Armed Forces Consultative Assembly at Abuja on 5th June was quoted as saying "My appeal to you is that the military must not allow itself to fall prey to divisive antics of our detractors. We must not let the military as an institution be humiliated or be disgraced out of office as was the case in some countries which are now back to square one or even worse"<sup>32</sup>. The President must be referring to the civilian protests that led to the overthrow of Gaafar Nimeiry of Sudan in 1984 and the government of Argentina.

Reflecting on the crisis, Professor Wole Soyinka blamed the crisis on the lack of autonomy of Nigerian universities, the lopsidedness of SAP which favours the privileged class and "the uninterrupted flow of V-Boot Mercedes, the lip-service paid to the curtailment of extravagant perquisites by senior government officials, the high level sharing of prime-land, the booming luxury apartment proprietorship of exclusive residential areas by senior army officials"<sup>33</sup>. The uneasiness in the military was evident as a symposium on the alternative to SAP, organised by some social activists led by Chief Gani Fawehinmi and Dr. Tai Solarin, was aborted by the government. Chief Fawehinmi, in whose chamber the symposium was to be held and who had before the riot been championing a crusade against the government and corruption, was thrown into detention for months on 17th June 1989. SAP had become unpopular to the common person and the intelligentsia. Dr. Patrick Wilmot, a former senior lecturer in Sociology at Ahmadu Bello University, says of SAP; "confronted with the obvious contradictions of the structural adjustment policies imposed on many Third World countries by the IMF, the temptation is to believe that this international economic policeman is operating outside the realm of logic and reason. Programmes ostensibly designed to improve economic performance are found to destroy economies; instead of attracting capital, SAP invariably leads to capital outflows; it is said to take time but no one can say how much; if time is involved, there should be signs and indices of progression; but progression, in terms of any acceptable measure of economic performance, is negative massive unemployment, falling standard of living, falling capacity utilization, degeneration of the currency, corruption, widening gap between rich and poor. The real problem for SAP, and one which it cannot make public, is what to do when exploitation reaches a point when returns begin to become negative"<sup>34</sup>. Dr. Wilmot, an expatriate, was retrenched and extradited from Nigeria in

1988 for alleged anti-government activities. His marxist friend and colleague at Ahmadu Bello University, Dr. Bala Usman, was forcefully retired in 1989 for alleged involvement in political activities.

The feelings of the populace and the actions ignited by the students seemed objective enough and justified as evidenced by the response of the government, which, on June 8, announced general measures to ease the pains of the structural adjustment programme. These include slight increases of the housing and transport allowances of workers and the subsidization of the prices of imported motor spare parts to lower higher transport fares. These measures, however, seemed cosmetic and superficial because the crux of the problem with Nigeria still persists; corruption and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Corruption, mass disenchantment and disillusionment, mutual distrust among the inner-circle of the government and the military that preceded the downfalls of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Gowon and Shagari's regimes seem visible in Babangida regime. People wonder whether Babangida could succeed in handing over power to an elected civilian government in 1992.

Following a cabinet re-shuffle by the President on 29th December, 1989, there were peaceful demonstrations by Christians in the Northern parts of the country because the Christians were not represented on an equal basis with the Muslims in the re-shuffle. I and most people got to hear of this first on the Voice of America, news bulletin of 11th January, 1990. According to the Voice of America, the stoniest Christian in Babangida's cabinet, General Domkat Bali, gave an indication of his retirement following his re-assignment to the Ministry of Internal Affairs from his former post as Defence Minister and Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to VOA, the Lieutenant General saw this as a humiliation and accused Babangida of ruling like a dictator. This comprehensive information which we got from VOA and not from any mass-media in the country shows that the press and electronic media are under gag and censure. And usually when the mass media could not perform the students take over the role through riots and militancy.

### **Endemic Corruption in Nigeria**

Corruption has since independence assumed endemic proportions in Nigeria "The phenomenon encompasses all official misconduct and other unorthodox practices, including the giving and receiving of bribes, misappropriation of public funds through embezzlement, or award of contract to relatives or favoured associates"<sup>35</sup>. In Nigeria, the belief is that you have to be corrupt in order to be rich and you have to be rich in order to succeed or get what you want. Nigerians are interested in jobs where there is room for receiving bribes and gratification. It has become a sub culture that one has to bribe someone in order to get something from any office. And a politician believes that money has to be used to canvass for elective office. Professor

Chinua Achebe says this of corruption in Nigeria : "I will only say that most people will agree that corruption has grown enormously in variety.....Public funds are now routinely doled out to political allies and personal friends in the guise of contracts to execute public works of one kind or another, or licence to import restricted commodities. Generally, a political contractor will have no expertise whatsoever nor even the intention to perform. He will simply sell the contract to a third party and pocket the commission running into hundreds of thousands naira or even million for acting as a conduit of executive fiat....."<sup>36</sup>.

Corruption is so endemic in Nigeria that one can hardly isolate corruption from governments and its social organs including the judiciary, the police, customs, immigration, extra-judicial bodies and so on. All these bodies are corrupt. As a result there is always a breakdown of social action against corruption. Corruption persists in Nigeria because members of the police and the judiciary are corrupt. Members of the police force are the most hated members of the society. In Nigeria, it is the policeman who is regarded as the thief. This is because the police are believed to have linkages with virtually all robbery actions in the society. The police are such a degenerate force that a London metaphysician, the late Dr. T. Lobsang Rampa, had this to say : "who has custody of the custodian ? Who police the police ? Absolute power corrupts. But does not the police now have absolute power ? And are they corrupt?"<sup>37</sup>. Rampa observes that a police force which regards everyone as a guilty is corrupt. He says that the police "are now hated, isolated, living in a dream of colourful uniforms, horse manure and stamping feet. It is time to re-organise them, show them that they are not God chosen by servants of the public"<sup>38</sup>. He then advised : "Teach the police courtesy, politeness, manners, let them chase (and catch) criminals, and let ordinary decent law abiding citizen alone. Only then will they regain the respect which most certainly is lacking now"<sup>39</sup>. In Nigeria, the single most important source of action against corruption has failed because it is itself corrupt. This is one of the contradictions of Western civilization.

Actions against corruption by governments in Nigeria since 1950 have been many and varied. In 1950s, the first panel of inquiry headed by Justice Strafford Foster Shutton was set up to look into the ACB-Nnamdi Azikiwe affair. On June 20, 1962, the Federal Government of Sir Abubakar appointed the Justice G. B. Coker Commission which accused Chief Awolowo of being privy to the diversion of large sums of money..... into the coffers of the Action Group Party.

On September 16, 1975, General Murtala Mohammed set up a Federal Assets Investigation Panel to probe the assets of former governors, administrators and commissioners under General Gowon's regime. In this case, over ninety per cent of them were found guilty. The 1979 constitution provided for the Code of Conduct Bureau/Tribunals which was later found to be ineffective because the Shagari refused to enforce it. With the fall of Shagari

regime, the politicians were held under the state security (Detention of Persons) Decree 2 of 1984 and tried by the Recovery of Public Property (Special Military Tribunals) established by Decree 3 of the same year. Over 96% of them were found guilty and jailed for several terms of imprisonment. Other measures against corruption included Decrees 7 and 20 of 1984, relating to the Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) offence, the Anti-corruption Committee which was headed by Retired Justice Kayode Eso, the Code of Conduct and Asset Declaration and so on.

Buhari's regime (1983—1985) instituted the programme of "War Against Indiscipline" as a grassroots action against corruption, but before the programme could be assessed, the regime was overthrown. The Babangida regime came to power in 1985 and promulgated MAMSER (Mass Mobilization for Social Justice And Economic Self-Reliance), yet, paradoxically, it seems that it can not survive without corruption. It is in this period that people could buy all sort of Mercedes cars against the spirit of Structural Adjustment.

Reformist policies may not be able to exterminate corruption. *Newbreed Magazine* reports, "Majority were also of the view that corruption, being a structural problem, will persist unless and until a structural change occurs in the system for a socialist-oriented one of far-reaching fundamental economic and social transformation along the lines of the present system"<sup>40</sup>. That corruption is structural means that it is systematic and that the phenomenon is erected on the structure of individual beliefs and consciousness. These beliefs and consciousness are liberalism and capitalism.

### **The Need for an Alternative System**

Corruption has endemic, cancerous, and oracular tendencies. It is endemic because it normally catches up with a people or community. It is cancerous because it spreads from one person to the other until it engulfs the whole society. It is equally oracular in nature because once it spreads in a system, people tend to believe in it just as people of ancient times believed in and worshipped oracles. In a corrupt society, people tend to think that no one can be successful without being corrupt.

Secondly, corruption can easily be located among the powerful. It is the mostly privileged and powerful that can easily become corrupt. It is often said that "power"<sup>41</sup> tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It is a fact nowadays that the powerful desire to get more power, the privileged want to get more privileges, the rich want to get richer.

And thirdly, corruption is most of the time systematic and structural. It has to do with the consciousness, beliefs, institutions and governments of the people.

Naturally, therefore, to attack corruption means to attack these factors collectively and individually. The third province of corruption might be the most fundamental and should be tackled first if according to Karl Marx,

"It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness"<sup>42</sup>. Marx would regard corruption as a symptom of capitalist ideology, which turns people's lives upside down. According to him, "If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process"<sup>43</sup>. It is, therefore, logical that if corruption is structurally or ideologically removed there will be no powerful or privileged few and the phenomenon would have no place in the minds of the people.

We are all witness to the fact that Western liberalism has failed woefully to curb corruption in Africa, Asia and Latin America. There is, therefore, the need for an alternative conception of society. Incidentally, researches have shown that African and third-world cultures are ideologically more to the left than to the right. It is something of this nature : 60% left and 40% right. These cultures constitute a way nearer to holism than individualism. They emphasise the whole over and above the freedom of the individual who can not be trusted. Liberal governments have traditionally failed to appreciate that unguarded freedom to humans is tantamount to making them corrupt.

In ancient African societies, there was a tacit agreement developed over the year by the people to surrender some of their rights to a divine king, who then had a duty to facilitate and protect the rights of the members of the community. Power and authority as literally understood are used interchangeably in the African context. Although people talk of powers of kings and monarchs in African societies where they existed, it is not really 'power' that those kings had but authority. Totalitarianism is not peculiar to ancient African leaders. An African king "ruled with councils of elders, and if he abused his powers they were broken by making him perform some action that cut him off from the ancestral forces"<sup>44</sup>. Professor D. D. Raphael distinguished between power and authority. According to him, when we talk of power in social context "we are usually thinking of a specific kind of ability to make other people do what one wants them to do"<sup>45</sup>. and "to have authority to do something is to have the right to do it"<sup>46</sup>. The power which African kings were said to have is therefore a limited one which is an authority protect and serve the interest of the society as a whole. Elements of power come in when it is necessary to exercise it against some individuals or groups for the interests of the whole.

Kings and monarchs, therefore, perform social functions like the enforcement of morality and the protection of lives and properties. Morality is the quantifier or predicate of all conduct. "Man lives in a moral community and his behaviour is prescribed by relationship. Morality is the mores, the manners and customs of society. Good morality is living in appropriate relationship with other people, high and low, old and young .."<sup>47</sup> In ancient Africa, corruption was repugnant to the society. Significantly enough,



there were no police. Instead there were practical and theoretical entities like God, gods, ancestors and spirits, who acted as both custodians and overseers of public morality. "The existential pragmatic culture of the Africans lies in their closeness to nature and living by the dictates of natural laws and gods. The gods are guardian of societal morality, though God is the ultimate. The people try as much as possible not to commit any offence against their gods or society, for that would bring metaphysical evil. The gods are the watch-dogs of the societal morality and law. In African society, the gods are involved as witness to any event, bond or agreement"<sup>48</sup>. A corrupt person who acts in a way inimical to the society suffers a boomerang. This is called Nemesis. The gods normally associated with Nemesis were deities of Thunder and Justice. To the African, "the world is a spiritual arena, in which is seen the interplay of psychic forces"<sup>49</sup>. African society is purposive and self-consistent. "Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles"<sup>50</sup>. In African traditional setting "one cannot display acts of dishonesty and go scot-free. The foundation of co-existence was based on absolute piety. It seems that if people are made to swear by the indigenous gods, the administration of justice will witness some changes"<sup>51</sup>. When one takes all the sides of African culture into consideration, one can be able to imagine and believe that corruption in Nigeria and other places is a refraction of what was original. What accounts for human degeneration in terms of corruption is the shift of African life from nature as a result of imperialism.

While I do not advocate a resuscitation of the dead past, there is nothing bad in appropriating these elements in the ancient culture which make people conscious of their closeness and obligation to nature or God. Nigeria needs a change of system. In the absence of any smooth change for the better, then a revolution will be the answer. The military or the intelligentsia or the students can be the vanguard of the revolution to give it a sense of direction. This revolution should be a revolution for a new-past. This new-past can be based on communalism and holism and not necessarily scientific socialism.

The problem of corruption is a structural and psychological problem and, therefore, it has to be tackled as such. Any theory that intends to tackle the problem and refuses to acknowledge this will be at best reformist and revisionist. C. S. Momoh's doctrine of Moralism is a good example of a theory that is a reformist. C. S. Momoh of the University of Lagos, having beautifully advanced African socio-religious mores as means of tackling the problem of corruption, paradoxically and naively suggested that corruption can be tackled by "frankly acknowledging the phenomenon and legalising it. In legalising it we can then stipulate what percentage and what rate to charge for any services. The merit of the suggestion is that it will be possible to charge a public official to court this time not for corruption but for over-corruption."<sup>52</sup> This is a weird logic indeed, and which can neither be predicated on positivist or natural law theory. Interestingly and surprisingly

enough, it is the same Momoh who, while paraphrasing African deontic modalities, acknowledged the African belief that if people refuse to be good, they can be forced to be good. He says, "A doctrine in African ethics says that man is free to be good, but that man can also be forced to be good. As regards the issue of man being free to be good, experience has shown that man has not lived up to expectation. So the remedy has been to fall back on alternative proposition which is that man can be forced to be good"<sup>51</sup>. The idea of legalising corruption (whatever Momoh means by that) seems to be capable of encouraging it instead of curbing or exterminating it.

Momoh's doctrine of Moralism with respect to corruption is a bourgeois compromise with African culture. Momoh's doctrine of Moralism naively and paradoxically departs from the commonly understood meaning of moralism. And this is precisely because of its position with respect to corruption. Moralism is "the habit or practice of Moralism"<sup>54</sup>. Moralising means "to give moral quality or direction to; make aware of or subject to the influence of moral values"<sup>55</sup>. Moralism and not Momoh's doctrine of Moralism can be used to describe traditional African culture. Momoh's doctrine of Moralism is corrupt, and can corrupt the society. It cannot be taken as a timeless and eternal idea, instead it should be forgotten quickly before it feverishly plagues the society.

Again, the revolutionary claim of Momoh's moralism is problematic, because apart from permitting "people or those acting on their behalf to move to unseat any government who does not consider the interest of the other first"<sup>56</sup>, the Moralism hardly advocates a change of consciousness and institutional structures which are corrupt and make people corrupt. Momoh's Moralism is, therefore, reformist and cosmetic. Its revolutionary claim is a petty one. Revolutionary theory does not play a hide and seek game as the doctrine of moralism is doing. Revolutionary theory is always predicated on total change of institutional structures that breed injustice; it is always partisan: it is always definitely on the side of the poor and the oppressed. But the Moralism is non-partisan, it paradoxically wants to change the system and at the same time maintain it.

A revolutionary government is needed in places like Nigeria. The government itself needs to be strong, invested with authority and modelled along the line of kings and monarch of traditional African societies, in order to be able to carry out some institutional changes. It needs to have a good control of the production and distribution of essential goods. It is important, therefore, to consider what David Norton calls qualitative individuality which means that "Each person is entitled to those distributable goods whose potential values he can maximally manifest in the course of manifesting his own unique worth"<sup>57</sup>. This concept of individuality will be enhanced by the concept of meaningful work in which every person participates in the labour process. The labour process is the domain in which claims of human dignity can arise, gain legitimacy and provide the locus for public action.

Again, because of irrationality inherent in primitive accumulation, I shall add that the property acquisition of every individual be thoroughly checked. A system of laws should be set up to limit every individual, who can afford them, to at most, a specific living house, a specific plot of land and at most two private cars.

Each family shall be accommodated according to its needs. When the possessions of individuals are limited, there will be no need for them to buy numerous cars and to own many houses and plots of land. This property acquisition generates injuries upon the less advantaged. There is no doubt that it is the root of injustice and corruption in our society.

I would also add that any business enterprise that turns over more than say a million naira should be owned and controlled by the government. Individual ownership of such enterprises will stimulate property acquisition and corruption. There is need of the government to take over such enterprises and distribute the profits to the welfare programmes equitably.

These are principles of African culture, holism, and socialism. In any of these systems, corruption is bound to be minimal.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Ademoyega, Adewale, *Why We Struck, The Story of the first Nigeria coup* (Nigeria, Evans Brothers Ltd., 1981), p. 1.
3. Professor Adeyemi, A, quoted by Nick Idoko, '29 years of Unbridled Corruption' in *Newbreed Magazine* July 2, 1989, P. 7.
4. *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*, ed. E. M. Kirkpatrick (Britain, Ward R, Chambers Limited, 1983), P. 282.
5. For some detail on the immediate political events that led to Nigerian Coup and Civil War, see Walter Schwarz, "The troubled people" in *Help Magazine*, 1968, p. 6.
6. Ademoyega, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.
7. *Ibid.* p. 35.
8. Idoko, *Op. Cit.*, p. 13
9. Onome Osifo-Whiskey, *Newswatch*, July 10, 1989, P. 16.
10. Idoko, *Op. Cit.*, p. 14.
11. *Ibid.* p. 15.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
14. Idoko, *Op. Cit.*, p. 15.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
16. The 'War Against Indiscipline' which came into operation under Buhari/Idiogbon regime was carried out with such seriousness that some element of sanity descended on the nation's psyche. People were beginning to respect the law and avoid those things that lead to disorder. Corruption was minimal but not completely extinct.

17. Ray Ekpu, "Day of the Olive Branch," *Newswatch Magazine*, June 12, 1989, p. 6,
18. *Ibid.* p. 6
19. *Ibid.*
20. "Orgy of violence", ed, Soji Akinrinade, *Newswatch*, June 12, 1989, p. 12,
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, p. 18,
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.* p. 12.
27. *Ibid.* p. 10.
28. *Ibid.* p. 11.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. Bayo Onanuga, "Uneasy Times, Distrust and Suspicion draw a hedge between the Nigerian Military and the Civil Society", *African Concord*, 17 July, 1989, Vol. 4, No. 12, p. 11.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
33. *Ibid.* p. 11.
34. Wilmot Patrick, "Suffer The Little Children", *African Concord. Ibid.*, p. 6.
35. Idoko, *Op. Cit.* p. 9.
36. Achebe, Chinua, *The trouble with Nigeria* (Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1985), pp. 41 and 42
37. Ramp, T. Lobsang, *Twilight* (Britian, Gorgi Books, 1979), p. 17.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Idoko, *Op. Cit.* p. 7.
41. Power means, among other things, the ability to compel obedience, to control and to dominate.
42. Marx, Karl, *The German Ideology* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 42.
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45. Raphael, D. D., *Problems of Political Philosophy* (London, Macmillan Press Ltd. 1982), p. 68.
46. *Ibid.*
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56. Momoh, *Op. Cit.*
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