



## Colonialism and Corruption in Nigeria, 1900 – 2015

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### ABSTRACT

Colonialism has been conceived as a policy and practice of a strong power extending its control territorially over a weaker nation or people. So, a colonial territory is that political entity over which a stronger power exercises political control. From around the mid 19<sup>th</sup> to about the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, what we know today as the Nigerian nation-state was a classical colonial territory. Without bothering to obtain their consent or allow indigenous centripetal leaders emerge, a stronger British power proceeded not only to extend its control over the territorial space, but railroad its diverse peoples and cultures into a commonwealth they neither understood nor bargained for. What followed was a struggle of one group against the other, or others, either to ingratiate itself with the colonizing power, or assert itself against its pretensions. When the later disposition failed or became forlorn, all groups settled more or less for the former. In the midst of this novel social setting, the various cultural norms of transparency and sublime modesty in public affairs began to give way for new social ethos of competition and graft. The emerging urban areas provided a perfect arena not only for the social contact of the various culture groups, but one that saw to the flowering of seeds of dichotomy and discrimination amongst the people. This paper seeks to situate the so-called “culture of corruption” in Nigeria within the colonial environment, and posits that the aphorism, ‘culture of corruption’ is actually alien to indigenous Nigerian peoples. It contends that if the current so-called ‘War against Corruption’ must be successfully pursued, then the sublime virtues of indigenous cultures need to be propagated and adopted as national ethos.

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### Introduction

The phenomenon and concept of corruption have a direct correlation to another phenomenon and concept, in Nigeria, that of colonialism. As a human disposition, corruption necessarily operates among human communities. One can state without much equivocation that no human society is immune from the virulent miasma of corruption. It is however trite that corruption and or corrupt tendencies prevail at varying degrees, across societies depending on how, and to what extent each society tolerates such prevalence. The tolerance or otherwise of corruption is usually traceable to the nature and historicism of the phenomenon in the particular society under focus.

This paper argues that corruption, and indeed its tolerance in Nigeria has a history: colonialism. To understand and appreciate that history is the major focus of the paper. To achieve it, there may be some need to attain an understanding of the twomajor concepts and phenomena of the analysis: corruption and colonialism.

#### Corruption: Concept & Phenomenon

The New International Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language conceptualizes the noun, corruption from the adjective corrupt. It likens the adjective ‘corrupt’ to something that is in a state of decomposition, tainted, putrid, of a perveted character, depraved, dishonest, or given to bribery. It gives corruption such synonyms as ‘bad immoral’, and ‘rotten’. Following from this, the noun corruption is seen as the act of corrupting, or the state of being corrupted<sup>1</sup>.

In other words corruption signifies a tainted, putrid or decomposing state, characterized in human behaviour or disposition by dishonesty, depravity and apt to bribery. This state is generally conceived to be bad, immoral, and even rotten.

In a more scholastic and academic presentation, corruption has been conceived in various ways and dimensions. For Yusuf Bala Usman, it is the deliberate violations, for gainful ends, of standards of conduct legally, professionally or ethically established in private and public affairs.<sup>2</sup> Corruption has also been conceived as involving “the injection of additional but improper transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events and altering judgments and position of trust, a bad behavior exhibited in an effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means at public expense and/or the theft of public purse as well as political practices through which political elites and bureaucrats enrich themselves”.<sup>3</sup> In a rather succinct manner, Professor Abdulahi Smith sees corruption as “the diversion of reserves for the betterment of the community to the gain of individuals at the expense of the community”.<sup>4</sup> For Dan Agbase, corruption entails any act/thing done by a person(s) to influence another in order to take advantage of any situation<sup>5</sup>. H. G.Ofoeze goes ahead to conceive of corruption as “any act, action or inaction of any person or group (public or private) deliberately perpetrated to secure advantage (s) for one’s self, relation or associate or group(s) in a manner that detract from the accepted regulations, moral, and or

ethnical (sic) standard or code and hence constituting a traversery (sic) of justice, equity and fair play".<sup>6</sup>

Writing from the historical perspective, A. Ejovi, V. C. Mgbonyebi, and O. R. Akpokighe, opine that corruption in Nigeria begins with seeing it as a form of anti-social behaviour by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits on its perpetrators, is inconsistent with the established legal norms and prevailing moral ethos of the land and is likely to subvert ordiminish the capacity of the legitimate authorities to provide fully for the material and spiritual well-being of all members of society in a just and equitable manner.<sup>7</sup> While associating our analysis with these conceptions as capturing one aspect of the concept and phenomenon of corruption or the other, we are naturally more inclined to the last conception, for its historical bent. We are equally persuaded, that the various conceptions appear to have underscored the fact that the central meaning of corruption in Nigeria, as elsewhere, remains the misuse or abuse of public power or office for private or sectional gains. To what extent can we locate the origin, prognosis and perpetuation of these tendencies in Nigeria to the colonial enterprise remains the central aim of this paper. Meanwhile, we return to attempt a proper understanding of the concept of colonialism.

### **Colonialism**

Colonialism consists of the Latin root word 'colonus' or 'colonia'.<sup>8</sup> Originally, the Latin colonia meant a country estate, but it later acquired the meaning of any such estate deliberately settled among foreigners. It is probably in this light that the Latin 'colonus' meant 'farmer'. This reminds us that the practice of colonialism usually involved the transfer of population to a new territory, where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political allegiance to their country of origin. In other words, the settlers tended to maintain political control of the settled territory and its indigenous inhabitants ostensibly by maintaining allegiance to what later came to be referred to as 'mother country', or 'metropole'.

This tendency perhaps provides one of the difficulties in defining colonialism: its affinity to imperialism. Like colonialism, imperialism also involves political and economic control over dependant territory. Imperialism thus comes from the Latin 'imperium' which means to command. Seen in this light, imperialism draws attention to the way that one country exercises power over another, whether through settlement, sovereignty or other indirect mechanisms of control. Further to this, colonialism appears more often thought of as an attribute of the late-nineteenth century imperialists who conquered large tracts of the globe, and found themselves ruling what Rudyard Kipling called "new-caught, sullen peoples, half-devil and half-child", the so-called "White Man's Burden". It is probably in this light that the charge of congenital infantilism' was leveled against the African, either to sustain the argument of a burden the West imposed on itself, or to justify colonialism on the prism of the so-called 'civilizing mission' or both.

In spite of this perception, it must be understood that colonialism involved some form of conquest of indigenous peoples by a foreign, often stronger people or power. In fact both colonialism and imperialism were forms of conquest that were expected to benefit Europe economically and strategically. The term thus came to be frequently used to describe the settlement of North America, Australia, New Zealand, Algeria, and Brazil.

These were places that subsequently came to be controlled by a large population of permanent European residents.

As one of the distinguishing features of both terminologies, imperialism came to refer to cases in which a foreign government administers a territory without significant foreign residents or settlers. This appeared to capture the case of Africa of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, typified by the so-called "scramble", including the American domination of the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. This may not be all there is in terms of distinguishing features between the two concepts. Some scholars distinguish between colonies for settlement – so called settler colonies, and colonies for economic exploitation. Yet others contrast dependencies that are directly governed by a foreign nation as colonialism, and those with indirect forms of domination, as imperialism.<sup>10</sup> In whichever way one looks at the matter, colonialism and imperialism involved some form of conquest motivated by the urge to exploit the resources of other people other than those of the conquerors. The attempt to justify them by such phraseology as the White Man's Burden 'civilizing mission' etc simply laid bare the lie inherent in the practice.

To buttress this point further, we proceed to consider the process of colonial implantation in Africa-treaty making. We focus on the Nigerian scenario.

### **Treaties and Origins of British Colonial Rule in Nigeria.**

We have noted that colonies were acquired by conquest. There were also other subtle means by which colonies were acquired : Treaty-making. Thus in Nigeria, or what was to become Nigeria, Britain gained control of the territory through both diplomatic (treaties) and military (gun-boat) means.<sup>11</sup> Using both means, Britain had by 1914 gained effective control of the entire area that was subsequently to be designated Nigeria.

British penetration and subsequent consolidation of a colonial territory in Nigeria could be said to have received a boost with the appointment of John Beecroft as the first consul for the Bights of Biafra and Benin in 1849.<sup>12</sup> The appointment of Beecroft became imperative due to representations made to the British government by British traders that a person be appointed to reside in that part of Africa as agent on the part of Britain. This, according to the traders, was mainly for regulating trade between British merchants and Old Calabar, Bonny, Bimba, the Cameroons and parts of the territories of the king of Dahomey.<sup>13</sup> About this general period also, the missionaries began lobbying the British government to abolish the slave trade in Lagos. As indicated by J. Burns and R. Collins, Samuel Ajayi Crowder was of the opinion that "the slave trade on that part of the African coast would come to an end if Lagos the strong hold of its greatest supporter was destroyed."<sup>14</sup>

These two developments heralded the introduction and use of treaties as a subterfuge by the British government in its quest to penetrate the hinter-land of Nigeria for colonial exploitation. Treaties thus became a basic instrument manipulated by Britain for the suppression of the slave trade. The preceding analysis would appear to indicate that the British government had intervened on humanitarian grounds of stamping out the slave trade by the adoption of the use of treaties with various indigenous rulers of the Nigerian hinterland. This does not appear to be borne out by the facts. It has been argued, with convincing evidence, that European interest in establishing commercial relations with the interior

of West Africa preceded the abolition of the slave trade and thus, was not imbued with humanitarian motives.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps, as we proceed to consider the background and features of the treaties, the above point may become more evident. It must be noted that colonial administration in Nigeria was a direct consequence of the various attempts to stamp out the slave trade and establish legitimate commerce, patterned at meeting the needs of industrial Britain, and the later, Europe. An effective suppression of the slave trade thus needed to start from the hinter-land, hence, the need to initiate treaties of protection with the indigenous rulers.

The slave trade treaties provided the legal and diplomatic basis for putting a stop to a trade that was no longer profitable to the commercial and industrial needs of Britain. The treaties were drafted in such a way that every clause was to be upheld. Any breach of any clause by the indigenous peoples was to attract instant response – a re-enactment of the time-tested gun-boat diplomacy. This meant increased involvement of Britain with the political and social life of the hinterland. For instance, after the fall of Lagos in 1861, the British made their way slowly into the Yoruba hinterland. The first major impetus to this was the British intervention to end the arduous Ekitipara powar between Ibadan and her allies of Ekiti, Ijesa, Ijebu, Egba and Ife forces in 1886. As T. Falola and M.M.Heaton noted, the British intervention was welcomed by the combatants for a much needed respite from a continuous fifteen year struggle.<sup>16</sup> But while bringing an end to the war, and creating the much needed respite, as indicated above, the incident opened the way for a full-scale colonization of the entire Yoruba country. This was achieved through the instrumentality of the treaty that ended the war. The treaty designed in a standard British format declared that all signatory combatants would direct future disputes with each other to the British governor in Lagos for resolution. Furthermore, all parties agreed to the promotion of free trade, which ostensibly meant greater access for British commercial interests into the interior markets of the Yoruba country.

It would be recalled that the Ijebu had maintained an attitude of suspicion of British/European motives in their country-missionary, commercial or political. For most of the nineteenth century, they had outlawed them. When however, the Ijebu king refused to discuss trade terms with the acting governor of Lagos, on a trip to Ijebuland in 1891, the British used it as a pretense to forcibly occupy the Ijebu territory. But this was actually in furtherance of the treaty that ended the Ekiti parapowar, alluded to earlier. As A.F.C Ryder noted, this forceful occupation sent the message to the rest of the Yoruba country that the British were now the new supreme power in their region<sup>17</sup>, and that they were willing to use their superior military machinery to get their way.

This message was not lost on the natives. This was evident by the fact that when British Officials circulated a new treaty of protection to Yoruba states in 1893, most Yoruba rulers read the correct hand writing on the wall, and signed away their sovereignty, subsequently joining what later became known as Colony and Protectorate Southern Nigeria.

Perhaps, we may need to take a close look at a typically treaty to understand the seeds of corruption inherent them. A background to one of the treaties we wish to consider may suffice. The 1860's and 70's saw a gradual push of European traders into the Niger Valley and the Delta hinterland. Macgregor Laird had established trading stations at Aboh, Onitsha and Lokoja by the 1850's.

Within the 1860's, the West African company, Messrs Millers Brothers and Co., the Central African Trading Company, James Pinnock and Co had all pushed their way into Akasa, Aboh, Ndoni, Onitsha, and other areas of the Niger Valley.<sup>18</sup> By reason of this multiplicity of trading firms and other factors, a lot of turbulence was built into the Delta trade, such that by the first half of the nineteenth century, it was marked by so much cost and tension. This tension led to the signing of the Aboh treaty to prevent attacks on British commerce. It will be recalled that around this period, the Obi of Onitsha had organized the looting of Macgregor Laird's Stores, precipitating a naval bombardment in response.<sup>19</sup> Further conflicts between Onitsha and the United African Company resulted to a bombardment of the town in 1879, while Akasa, Patani, Asaba and Idah suffered similar fate in 1882.

It was in an attempt to overcome the situation of increased competition and tension that characterized the relationship not only among European trading firms, but also with various Nigerian groups, that made Taubman Goldie, who arrived the Niger Delta in the late 1870s, to begin to seek a gradual amalgamation of the various Europeans firms into what by 1879, had become one huge concern. This was the United African Company, which later became the National African Company. Within the next two years, Goldie had succeeded in buying off all the French companies operating in the Delta and the Niger Valley, bringing the entire area into effective British control.

In 1886, Goldie obtained a Royal Charter for the National African Company, which then became the Royal Niger Company. What this meant was that the company ceased to be just a trading firm. The Charter conferred upon it certain powers of government and law – making, as well as powers to raise and maintain an armed force for the effective pursuit of its trade as well as for the maintenance of law and order.<sup>20</sup> Four years before the National African Company obtained its Charter, a British Official, Hewett-who had replaced Beecroft as consul, had traversed the length and breadth of the Niger Delta, signing treaties of protection with various rulers and peoples, from the Cameroons in the east to the River Forcados in the west. Here is an aspect of the treaty of protection entered into by the Emir and Chiefs of Boussa (Borgu) with the Royal Niger Company:

We the Emir and Chiefs of Boussa (or Borgu), in Council assembled (representing our country, its dependencies, and tributaries on both banks of the River Niger, and as far back as our dominion extends, in accordance with our law and custom), do hereby agree, on behalf of ourselves and our successors “forever” to grant the company full and absolute jurisdiction over all foreigners to our territories, that is to say over all persons within the territories who are not native – born subjects. Such jurisdictions shall include right of protection of such foreigner, of taxation of such foreigners, and of political, criminal and civil jurisdiction over such foreigners. The treaty continues:

We will not at any time whatever cede any of our territories to any other person or state or enter into any agreement, treaty or arrangement with any foreign Government, except through and the consent of the company and to place our territories, if and when called upon to do so by the company, under the protection of the flag of Great Britain.<sup>21</sup>

The emphasis is on the phrase 'forever', as indicated, and the fact that this so-called treaty of protection was ostensibly made with the intension of expropriating the territories mentioned for the absolute and perpetual exploitation of the company on behalf of the British Government.

It may be necessary to highlight another treaty entered into by the Niger Delta people with the National African Company. The background of this treaty was the fact that by the early 1880's, the Niger Delta states had become extremely pre-occupied with securing their middlemen position given the push by Europeans into the Niger Valley. This concern was connected with that over the labour supply needed to make the trade profitable. These treaties were meant to address these concerns in ways that met European needs, not that of the natives. An example of such treaty signed and entered into in 1885, read:

We, the undersigned Kings and Chiefs...with the view to the bettering of the condition of our country and people, do this day cede to the National African Company (limited), their heirs and assigns, "forever", the whole of our territory. We also give the said National African Company (Limited) full power to settle all native disputes arising from any cause whatever, and we pledge ourselves not to enter into any war with other tribes without the sanction of the said National African Company (Limited). We also understand that the said National African Company (Limited) have full power to mine, farm, and build in any portion of our territory. We bind ourselves not to have any intercourse with any stranger or foreigners except through the said National African Company (Limited), and we give the said National African Company (Limited) full power to exclude all other strangers and foreigners from their territory at their discretion.<sup>22</sup>

Once again, we see "forever", but in addition, this treaty confers on the company and by extension the British Government, the right to mine, farm and build on any portion of the territory covered by the treaty, by inference also, "forever". We also see that every effort is made to execute any other power or state from participating in the enterprise of exploitation, save the British.

It is necessary to mention that at this point, most of the chiefs with whom the British agents signed the so-called treaties of protection, were illiterate in the English Language. So the British relied on interpreters who in most case were indigenes of the locality who had a smattering knowledge of English Language. It is however submitted that in most cases, these interpreters dared not tell the chiefs and rulers, irrespective of what was contained in the printed treaties, that they were relinquishing political control of the territories by signing the treaties.<sup>23</sup> This tended to a diametrically opposed interpretation of the treaties by the parties who signed them. It is significant to note that while a number of states raised objections to the clauses of the treaties which they understood to affect trade and the labour supply, it was only Jaja of Opobo that raised an issue of political significance, to wit, the meaning of the word "protection" Consul Hewett assured Jaja that what that meant was that he (Jaja) was not to enter into treaties with other European powers without the permission of Britain.<sup>24</sup> As for internal affairs, Jaja was assured that he was to continue to rule his people as before, and that Britain had no intention of taking the land from him.<sup>25</sup> This response from Hewett apparently gave Jaja the assurance that he needed, but it was to mark a major plank of Euro- Nigeria colonial relations – duplicity.

Or how else can one explain a situation where Jaja was to continue to rule his people as before when, he was, by the treaty, denied jurisdiction over Europeans in his own territories? Will it be ruling as before, if Jaja was bound to act only on advice of British Consular Officials (Article v of the treaty) in matters relating to administration of justice, the development of the resources of the country, in the interest of commerce, or in any other matter in relation to peace, order and good government, and the general progress of civilization? Such was the duplicity of the colonial administration of the company, and subsequently, of British Government in Nigeria. The basis of corruption in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

### **Corruption in Colonial Nigeria, 1900 – 1960**

Classical colonial rule that lasted in Nigeria from around 1900 to 1960, but more generally until about the end of World War II was essentially the unrestrained, autocratic and authoritarian rule of a small band of British colonial officials aided and abetted by their compatriots and the European Christian Missions and monopoly trading firms. As B.J Dudley noted, this international bourgeoisie of usurpers of the Nigerian peoples sovereign power and authority established a kind of praetorian or military rule underpinned by a mode of capital production, appropriation and accumulation that was dominated by the monopolistic and oligopolistic practices of major European trading firms.<sup>26</sup> It was thus evident that the colonial authorities and their collaborators presided over a fraudulent and corrupt accumulation system which provided surpluses for shipment to the metropolis from Nigerian peasant farmers and other petty producers through unequal terms of trade. The surpluses were also raised in a rather deliberate and cynical manner from Nigerian workers who were paid meager, and often below subsistence wages, but were subjected to primitive and exorbitant taxation. It is also worthy of note, as indicated in the so-called treaty of protection, referred to earlier, that the entire population, including generations yet unborn were deprived of natural endowments and patrimony through exclusive monopoly rights of exploitation granted to British and other European firms over mineral and other resources, "forever".

This mode of colonial authoritarianism generated a crisis of accumulation, such that in a rather Fanonian sense, "to be white was to be rich and to be black was to be poor".<sup>27</sup> This was because the only role available to most Nigerians in the colonial period were such menial ones like peasant farming, petty trading, petty clerical and subordinate jobs in the bureaucracy and trading firms. Through these scenario, what we earlier described as "fraudulent and corrupt" accumulation system by the British in Nigeria had resulted by the end of World War II into such a sharpening of the contradiction between the British colonial rulers, and an ambitions up-and-coming Nigeria elite and bourgeoisie challenging the power monopoly of the former; and forcing a change in the colonial project. This was however, not a real change.

It resulted only to a cosmetic transformation of both the mode of capital accumulation and the structure of governance described by historians as both a policy and period of "decolonization", manifest about the last decade of colonial rule in Nigeria. The corruption of colonial ruled did not end in this, period, instead it continued in a different guise.

### **The Decolonization Period and Corruption, 1951 – 1960.**

Perhaps, to give vent to the treaty provision for dominance and exploitation “forever”, a most striking feature of the politics of colonization in so-called decolonization period was manifest in the way and manner through which the Colonialists arranged to perpetuate themselves in a dominant position over the wealth of Nigeria and its accumulation process. They did this by putting in place a spurious power-sharing arrangement or partnership between themselves and their monopoly enterprises on the one hand and the fledgling Nigerian bourgeoisie on the other.<sup>28</sup>

Through the rather stage-managed constitutional projects, starting from the 1946 Richards to the 1960 Independent constitutions, the British International Bourgeoisie remained senior in the power-sharing arrangement, earlier refereed to. By a pretentious but progressive transfer of formal authority to rule to the Nigerian surrogate bourgeoisie during this period, the departing British colonialists succeeded in securing their acquiescence in the retention, even consolidation of the existing structures of accumulation under which foreign monopoly capital dominated all other sectors of the economy: import – Export, extractive and manufacturing industries, banking, insurance, shipping etc. This unequal partnership was further concretized by the admission of several politically influential members of the ruling elite and bourgeoisie from the various regions and political units into which the country has been divided, into a lucrative but essentially honorific and powerless partnership as directors, agents, distributors and representatives in major foreign enterprises. In addition, new opportunities were created for private accumulation for the political influentials and members of the Nigerian bourgeoisie to become Ministers, Chairmen and Members of Public Cooperations and Parastatals. With their powers limited only by the veto of the ultimate colonial authority, this petty bourgeoisie retained the power to award contracts for public projects, issue commodity buying agents’ licenses, award scholarships to children of cash-strapped indigenous contractors and businessmen.

These new roles in the public domain opened the way to new forms of corruption and substantial capital accumulation for many members of the new Nigerian ruling elite, as opposed to the pre-decolonization period, when because of their marginal position in the scheme of things, they had limited access to corrupt accumulation. It may be instructive to note that it was during the decolonization period that the phenomenon of ten percent and kick-back, which became pervasive in the immediate independent period, started. From this period, executors of a whole array of public policies and functions began to insist on a prepayment of at least 10 percent of the value of the favour being sought by members of the public-contracts, licenses, scholarships, employment etc.

### **Independent Period & the Immediate Aftermath, 1960 – 1966**

A dominant characteristics and feature of the colonial state and economy in Nigeria was the marginalization of the indigenous population, and virtual monopoly of the political economy by White Colonial Officials and their entrepreneurial counterparts. This created a situation of scarcity of capital for investment in commerce, industry and agriculture, and also in personal and social development, like higher and professional education for the natives.

This cash crunch appeared much more felt among members of the up and coming Nigerian elite who were in a position, and desirous of accessing funds to fund personal businesses, and provide some solid financial background to support their nationalist activities.

It would also need to be understood and appreciated that it was this class that eventually participated in the nationalist struggle and subsequently acceded to supreme political power at independence. It was therefore no surprise that despite their patriotic and nationalistic credentials and rhetorics, these early nationalist-turned early independent indigenous political elite abused their offices by funneling state funds into personal business enterprises.<sup>29</sup>

This practice and tendency appeared so pervasive over the entire country in the pre-independent, and in the First Republic, but more discernible in the Eastern and Western Regions due to the political skirmishes among the elite of the regions. The Nnamdi Azikiwe/Eyo Eta crisis (1955-56) and Awolowo Akintola distrust (1961-2) in the Eastern and Western regions respectively. In the North, due to the monolithic solidarity of the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) government, and the Emirate Council of the Sokoto Caliphate system, serving as a cementing factor, no discernible split was evident, and so there was no insider revelations, or challenge of the going ons as in the other regions mentioned. But graft was nonetheless prevalent among the political elite of the region.

It is thus safe to assert that the succession of the Nigerian political elite at independence to sovereign political authority meant that they could now attempt, and indeed, did attempt to solve their central problem of dearth of private capital by broadening their accumulative base through maximum exploitation of the public wealth of the state which was previously unavailable to them. They subsequently began to diversify their activities into new, often dubious and fraudulent forms of primitive private accumulation at public expense. These included the fraudulent award, and at times inflation of government contract values and the subsequent enlargement of payable ten percent and kickbacks to themselves – started in the pre-independent era as we had seen, sale of unsecured government loans, award of produce buying and import and export licenses to their cronies and a straight-forward looting of the treasury by its major political groupings. The need to monopolize, (in much the same way that the colonial masters had monopolized the fraudulent exploitation of the wealth of the country), or at least have the lion share of the loot from this systemic plundering of the wealth of the nation was a major factor in intensifying and embittering the contest for political power along ethno-region lines.

It was this process that marked the high points of the Action Group’s Crises in 1962, Census Crises (1962-69), Federal Election Crises (1965). These crises made the country virtually ungovernable and ultimately paved the way for the Major Kaduna Nzeogwu -military coup d’etat of January 1966, and the tragic and disastrous intrusion of the Nigerian Armed Forces into the political life of the nation through the counter coup of July 1966.

### **Military Rule and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria, 1966 - 1997.**

The abortive Nzeogwu - led coup of January 1966 exposed the 10 percent kickback scenario to the rest of the world. It also failed to end the misrule, ineptitude and above all, the corruption of both the pre-independent and the post

independent Nigeria. In spite of its failures however, it set the agenda for military rule in Nigeria as a corrective intervention in governance committed against corruption. It is disheartening that all other subsequent military regimes in Nigeria adopted rather opportunistically, but fraudulently, the supposedly revolutionary and patriotic agenda of Nzeogwu, at least in their rhetoric at seizure of power. But the reverse had always been the case.

Right from the Yakubu Gowon administration up to the Sani Abacha junta and the salvaging Abdulsalam Abubakar contraption, Nigeria descended into what the famous West Indies Scholar Richard Joseph, referred to as prebendal politics. This is a situation where state officials deliberately prey on the resources of the state, seeing such resources as legitimate war booty to be looted by those who have captured the state by gaining political power. It appears that commentators such as William Reno, Mark Duffield and Mats Berdati had this scenario in mind when they proceeded to distinguish between what they called criminal states from highly corrupt ones. According to them, a corrupt state has been derailed from the long term goal of benefiting the whole in favour of short term benefits for a few individuals. But a criminal state on the other hand can be seen as having a whole separate purpose, and operates in a different economic reality. This reality is criminalized because the government exists mainly to extract surplus for the enrichment of the few, by keeping the opposition divided and offering different fiefdoms to different groups.<sup>30</sup> There is little doubt that this was the state of Nigeria throughout the military era that started in 1966 and terminated in 1999.

Space constraints may not allow a detail analysis of the malaise that attended the state during this period nor could that be necessary, since the same scenario seem to still be playing out ever since despite the so-called 'war against corruption' by the present regime. Perhaps, there may be need to highlight a few instances to buttress the assertion made. The Gowon administration that resulted from the Northern-sponsored counter-coup of July 1966 had ample opportunity as the first substantive military regime, to fashion the Nigerian state in the puritan and disciplined image and disposition of the military. That was not to be. Instead, apart from the initial effort made in continuing with the work of the Ironsi regime, in exposing the corrupt activities of the First Republic Politicians and through the various investigative panels of public officers, the regime subsequently and quickly settled down to its own project of prebendal primitive and fraudulent accumulation. In addition to all the pre-existing forms of unlawful enrichment for public officers, as we had seen, the ensuing civil war (1967-1970) provided yet another sensational opportunity for unlawful enrichment. Few instances of this could be counted in the misappropriation of the salaries and allowances of soldiers killed in action, for several months by their commanders, the gross inflation of military procurement contracts, the payment of inflated contract fees several times for the same goods and services or none at all, the looting of public and private properties in occupied territories by both Nigerian and British soldiers, a case in point being the looting of millions of pounds sterling from the Central Bank in Benin in 1968.<sup>31</sup>

The immediate post-civil era coincided with a petroleum boom occasioned by the Yom Kippur war of 1973. This witnessed a quadrupled increase in petroleum prices for Nigeria.

It is reported that Nigeria was so awash with petrodollars that "Gowon's Governor of the Central Bank declared publicly that money was not Nigeria's problem, but how to spend it."<sup>30</sup> Given this scenario, it was no surprise that there was a dramatic escalation in the incidence of corruption.

An important factor in the Gowon regime and subsequently, all military regimes after him, was the total lack of budgetary discipline and financial accountability. This appeared to have reached its zenith during the Babangida- Abacha administrations. There was no single year of its nine-year dictatorship that the ministry of defense, (which translated to the Armed Forces) did not over-shoot its approved estimate of expenditure, by several million Pounds Sterling or Naira. It was observed that the Ministry of Defence, with the connivance, if not indeed active encouragement of the government, did consistently ignore the Auditor General's queries concerning the unauthorized and illegal expenditures.

It is axiomatic that not much will be gained in itemizing the incidents of corruption in the military as well as civilian administrations in Nigeria, even up till date. This is because the very essence of governance in Nigeria has been how best a ruling clique or cabal can amass as much wealth as possible at the expense of the state. The question here is how did that mentality come to be ingrained in the psyche of the average Nigerian, especially the ruling class.

It is submitted that the colonial enterprise must bear full responsibility for this. As we have seen, the Colonial Masters came as rulers, not compatriots/ leaders. Every one of its action, including the treaties were meant to exploit the resources that was to be found in the society, to the exclusive aggrandizement of the ruling caste- the colonialists. The so-called treaties of protection conferred on the Colonialists exclusive preserve to trade, mine and exploit resources of the indigenous colonial territories "forever", as we have seen. Every effort made by local leaders to change the states-quo was resisted. This resistance tended to confer legitimacy on them, and subsequent rulers, to exploit.

Since it must be understood that all rulers of Nigeria- from pre-independent to independent, and contemporary times, still see themselves as having succeeded the Colonial Masters, the ingrained social ethos of that dispensation, kleptocracy must still largely apply. It is also submitted that for that mindset to change, there must be a fundamental re-orientation of the average Nigerian. The average Nigerian must be made to see and appreciate the state as belonging to him. Presently, the average Nigerian sees the state exactly as the Colonial Masters saw it- a female war captive, in the mould of 'Chibok Girls' in contemporary Nigeria, to be raped, sold, married off to men old enough to be their grand fathers or otherwise exploited in sundry ways.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

The most definitive statement to be made about corruption in the traditional societies in Nigeria is that it was an exception, not the rule. Every traditional society in Nigeria evolved measures to discourage, if not totally eliminate corrupt tendencies of any sort. In their social structures, pre-colonial societies in Nigeria valued honesty and probity in social relations. In most places, leadership was expected, and indeed entrusted with men of integrity and high moral standing. These were mostly found among people of certain age bracket but certainly not of youthful age.

This was because it was felt that at such an age, the tendency for graft and dishonesty will be greatly reduced, if not totally eliminated.

Besides, every society had a definite idea of its geographic extent, and did all within its power to protect and preserve it from intruders or outsiders. In other words, societies saw their common institutions and their very society as precious, and so it needed to be protected from defilement or pollution. We are persuaded that this was equally the mindset and disposition of the European foreigner who came here as colonial official, regarding his own indigenous society. Hence, in European societies from where the colonial officials came, corruption or corrupt tendencies still remain largely minimal and strongly frowned at as a social absurdity. Whereas here in Nigeria and other erstwhile colonial territories, corruption is either tolerated or accepted as a social imperative. The reason being that the colonial social ethos glorified corruption and dishonesty and bequeathed same to the successor colonial society.

Thus, when a Colonial Official or would be colonial official was telling Jaja of Opobo that things will remain pretty well as they have been after he had signed the treaty of protection, he knew he was being dishonest, but had no qualms since his interest was to exact colonial political gains at the expense of the traditional political institution. Besides, the society was not his, to be protected and preserved but rather to be exploited.

It is in much the same way that postcolonial political leaders in Nigeria see the Nigerian state. The state is not theirs, and so it does not merit their protection and or preservation. If anything, it is to be exploited for personal gains. Unlike the traditional society, political leaders have no obligation in their consciousness to protect the state. No amount of 'war against corruption' will make the average political leader or indeed the average Nigerian to begin to see the post-colonial state as his own property, to deserve his protection. He must be made to see the state as belonging to him for it to deserve his protection.

As no 'war' was waged before he began to see the indigenous society as his own, he does not need that 'war' be waged for him to transfer the same feeling to the state. The cultural ethos of sincerity, transparency and probity towards the indigenous society was inherently acquired by the indigenes. It is transferable to the state should the citizens be made begin to consider it as belonging to them.

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