Africa Development, Vol. XXVI, Nos. 1 & 2, 2001

Political Transitions, Crime and Insecurity in Nigeria*

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Introduction

Transitions from military to civilian rule have been a major feature of the post-independence political landscape in Nigeria since the 1970s. These transitions have always been supervised by the Military. The various instances included the Yakubu Gowon political transition programme, the Murtala Mohammed / Olusegun Obasanjo transition, the Ibrahim Babangida transition, the Sani Abacha transition, and the Abdulsalami Abubakar transition. These programmes illustrate attempts to institute a democratic system of government in the country. With the exception of the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, which was a baby of the Obasanjo transition, these transitions have become an on-going event. They show that military-supervised political transition programmes are inherently problematic and are perhaps, incapable of installing a fully democratic system in the Nigerian society.

In general, these transitional programmes (as will be shown below) had negative impact on the economic and socio-political stability of the country. Since the late 1980s especially, their adverse effects have become more intense in form and scope. Thus, since 1987, there has been an unprecedented degree of crime and insecurity associated with the nation's political transitions (this was when the Babangida Administration commenced its own transitional

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programme). The trend, therefore, seems to be the conceptualisation of a scenario in which political transitional programmes under military administrations should be considered as threats to national security and development.

This paper is based on the assumption that military-supervised political transitions in Nigeria have negative consequences for the economic development of the country. These consequences predispose the citizenry to illegal and criminal acts, as a result of which, violence and insecurity become pervasive in the Nigerian society. One reason for this is that military-supervised political transitions in Nigeria are normally undemocratic in nature; the degree to which they are undemocratic often determines the level of political and economic uncertainty, which, in turn, fosters crime and insecurity in the country. Furthermore, how crime and insecurity are perpetrated within the framework of political transitions also depends on the balance of forces between the military, the political 'entrepreneurs' and the civil society. There is no gainsaying that this balance has always been mostly in favour of the military rulers, followed by the political class, which has often had a significant proportion of jobbers. The civil society always had to evolve avenues, lawful and unlawful, whereby it placed itself in a position of 'continued relevance' within the framework of the national struggle for 'development'. These avenues are as much economic as political. The Nigerian experience corroborates Mkandawire's (1992:6) thesis:

> the economic conjuncture has fuelled the various struggles for a whole range of goals including some that are not necessarily directly linked to the economy, human rights, ethnic identity, etc.

The analysis in this paper investigates the probable connections between the nation's political transitions since 1987 and the trends of criminality and insecurity in the country. It explores a comparison between the Babangida transition (1987-1993) and Abacha's (1993-

1998), and it uses aspects of the Abubakar transition to corroborate its hypothesis. It identifies and analyses the predominant undemocratic features of these transitions and how they precipitated a higher rate of crime and insecurity in the country. It seeks to determine the dynamics of these transitional programmes in relation to the government's arbitrariness and the consequent increased criminality and insecurity, in terms not only of what has been described as the 'ties between economic dominants, civic leaders and community influentials' (Clelland and Form 1976:273), but also of the imperatives of genuine security, law and order for a truly progressive nation.

The paper is divided into three parts. The introduction is followed by a theoretical framework with a review of relevant literature on political transitions, crime and insecurity. The third part examines issues related to crime and insecurity in military-supervised political transitions, and their implications for national development.

Discourse on Concepts and Current Literature

Political Transitions and the Military

In this study, political transition means the movement from one form of government to another in a particular nation-state. In this case, it means the movement from a military, dictatorial and undemocratic system of government to a civil, representative and democratic one. In most African States, especially Nigeria, this form of transition is always programmed in terms of its content, quality, duration, and the level of participation by the State and civil society. It is most often supervised by the military government in power. To a large extent, therefore, political transition programmes are babies of the State. And the State is often represented by those who control its machinery, especially in the sphere of security (i.e. the Military). Thus the State and the Military are major factors determining not only the

course of a nation's political transition, but the post-transition political spectrum as well (Camilleri *et al*, 1995:3-19; Hutchful 1998:599-617).

Though political transitions of this nature imply the gradual withdrawal of the military from politics, where their transitional programmes succeed, this reinforces their role in the supposedly democratic State. As Robin Luckham (1998:1) puts it,

> Even in retreat they influence the composition and behaviour of in-coming regimes and are formidably equipped to destabilise or reintervene against them if their interests are threatened. Their failures have also been crucial in contributing to the political instability, armed conflict and warlordism, which prevail in much of the continent today.

An implication of this enormous influence wielded by the Military is that a failed political transition leads to an unstable polity, which in turn precipitates a coup d'état and brings in another military government with its own new political transition programme. This has been the case of Nigeria since she experienced her first military coup in January 1966.

Billy J. Dudley (1975:44) has thus described the Nigerian Army of the post-civil war period as a form of criminal organisation responsible for the crippling of Nigerian society. This immobilisation, according to him, meant 'maintaining the society as a pluralistic security community'. To Abiola Ojo (1975:47), the nation's experience with the military has turned governance into 'a hazardous exercise' with an overwhelming uncertainty pervading 'the field of law and government'. As the Nigerian society has deteriorated ever since, in virtually all aspects of national life, one can properly imagine not only incessant changes in laws and governments, but an almost complete break of law and order, with consequent widespread violence and insecurity across the country. The soldiers themselves, as a result of their diminishing real wages, have had to supplement their income with criminal activities.

This failure has grave consequences for the pursuit of a democratic order in society. Yet it has been occurring when political programmes seeking to move the nation to civilian democratic rule have pervaded the official statements of the nation's various administrations.

R.A. Joseph (1991) and Robin Luckham (1998) have identified various forms of political transitions. They stated that the Nigerian experience is a pacted exit (from power) by the Military on their own terms. Eboe Hutchful (1998:606-607) buttresses this argument thus:

> The transition to democracy was preceded by attempts at military reform, the military regime also retained tight control over the process, permitting no discussion or input by the civilians. The domain of military reform was seen as the exclusive preserve of the military hierarchy. This process of self-reform allowed the Military to retain the initiative, or at least to pre-empt unwelcome initiatives on the part of in-coming civilian governments, and to incorporate the interest of both regime and institution into the reform process. Uncontested control over the Military was also seen as necessary for keeping the democracy movement in check and preventing the possible unravelling of the carefully calculated transitions.

A major implication of this mode of political transition is its undemocratic nature. No military government that attains power through a coup rules by the Constitution. It governs by decrees, which are sometimes promulgated to protect the interests of particular persons within the military hierarchy or of their civilian cronies. These decrees are sometimes designed to provide quick material fortunes for a few citizens. This implies a material deprivation of the masses, many of whom are incapable of freely expressing their anger, because the military have muzzled the nation's intellectual market-place. Even in the context of political transitions, this led to the bastardisation and squandering of the economic and socio-

political infrastructure needed for a genuine democratisation process (Oyediran and Agbaje 1991; Ude 1992; and Amuwo 1995). As the field of governance becomes somewhat lawless, a segment of the civil society takes to anti-military and pro-democracy activism, while the other part seeks its survival through illegal and criminal acts. In their selfish bid for quick economic gains, they undermine the trust on which the society is founded. It is, therefore, logical to argue that military-supervised political transitions breed increased rates of crime and pose a threat to national survival, security and development.

It is also valid to argue that, in Africa, a military group that successfully seizes power is often reluctant to return the State to a democratic order in the shortest possible time. This sit-down-tight syndrome has pervaded Nigeria's experience of the military regime since January 1966. Samuel P. Huntington (1984) has stated:

> Once a military junta takes over (power), it will normally promise to return power to civilian rule. In due course, it does so if only to minimise divisiveness within the armed forces and to escape from its own inability to govern effectively. In a praetorian situation like this, neither authoritarian nor democratic *institutions* are effectively institutionalised. Once countries enter into this cyclical pattern, it appears to be extremely difficult for them to escape from it.

Huntington's description applies, however loosely, to all the political transitions in the country, including the highly lauded Olusegun Obasanjo and Abdulsalami Abubakar transitions.

There are thus at least two dimensions to political transitions in Nigeria. The first is the one described by Huntington. It applies closely to the Obasanjo and Abubakar Administrations. The second is where the military administrators have no intention of relinquishing power to a democratically elected government, and keep on postponing the terminal date of their regime. The Administrations of Yakubu Gowon, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha are illustrations of this phenomenon.

The first situation entrenches economic and political instability in the country, under either military or civilian rule. The second creates the same instability and adds to it a systematic undermining of national values. In the second, the military junta promises a return to democratic rule, but then spends large sums of the nation's resources to keep itself in office by crooked means. The uncertainty that follows its unpatriotic and unlawful actions encourages criminal acts among the citizens. This is because the leaders have no moral authority to oppose crime, since they themselves are perpetrating economic and political crimes against the nation. In fact, crime, violence, corruption and insecurity reached heights unprecedented in the entire history of Nigeria during the Babangida and Abacha years of political transition. This is part of what we intend to illustrate in this paper.

Crime and Insecurity: an Overview

Crime is any offence or unlawful activity punishable by law. It generally reflects the quality of life and development in society (UN 1992:3; Odekunle 1992:47). Criminal activities abound in all societies, developed and developing, but they tend to be more widespread in periods of national conflict and of military-supervised political transitions, when the community experiences a higher degree of economic and socio-political uncertainties. There are more cases of State terrorism against citizens, blatant misappropriation of public funds by government officials, impersonation, murder, extra-judicial killing, armed robbery, hard drug trafficking, theft, advance fee fraud, rape, etc. This increase in the rate of crime breeds general insecurity in the country and undermines any political transition process. It destroys the basis of trust in civil society as well as the credibility enjoyed by any military government.

Criminal activities are either violent or non-violent. Galtung (1990:10-12) has identified three forms of violent crime. The first is the physical form, which results, through force, in some form of physical injury or even death. The second is psychological: it includes propaganda, threats, lies, etc., and inflicts some form of mental disability on the victims. The third is structural. It relates to an oppressive economic and political system that inflicts hunger, ignorance, pollution, etc., on the citizenry. According to Galtung, a society becomes a victim of structural violence when social justice is absent. From these categories, one can see that both the State and civil society can be perpetrators and victims of criminal violence. This is the condition in which Nigeria has been since the beginning of Babangida's political transition in 1987. In fact, Mokwugo Okoye (1993:6), a nationalist, once lamented:

> Diplomats, newspaper reporters, politicians and administrators alike were all fascinated by the baffling ambivalence of Babangida's behaviour: the mixture of pretentious arrogance with the adroit exercise of imperial power, the commingling of callousness and compassion, the suggestion of famed wildness and brutal calmness. Impatient, arrogant and audacious, he was a great manipulator of power and (had) resources to achieve his ends... Babangida's tragedy is that, in time, he so outgrew his colleagues in guile and omnipotence and omniscience and, like Hitler, even began to believe his own propaganda lies.

State violence became the rule during the Babangida years. The Abacha Administration made State violence a dreary and crude business.

Although political instability promotes crime and insecurity, it is not their sole cause. It does, however, lie behind some of the other causes. Other conditions which may give rise to an increased crime rate include poverty, unemployment, and the collapse of traditional family values. The imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes

on several African countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as a condition of debt-relief and loans, has led to further economic hardship for the masses. This has worsened the crime situation in the continent since the 1980s.

These phenomena relate in various ways to the political instability, which usually precedes military intervention in governance and which characterises military-supervised political transitions. Political instability brings about economic recession and makes it difficult for people to achieve their legitimate aspirations through lawful means. This implies that the deprived citizens will tend to seek fulfilment through illegal means (Albert 1998). The State and civil society thus suffer as victims of crimes which, as we have seen, they themselves encourage in various ways. The instability in the system consequently deepens, and the democratisation process and hopes for a genuine and full democratic order are weakened.

The Military in Nigeria's Political Transition: Security Implications

The Clifford Constitution of 1922 introduced the elective principle into the recently amalgamated Nigerian State. It thus provided a foundation for some measure of participatory democracy, although highly regulated and limited. Owing to the use of military force by the British colonial government, the pre-independence period was, however, one of subjugation and repression of the nationals. Though criminal activities were still at a minimal level, the quest for security became imperative for succeeding colonial administrations, for fear of political insurrection within the country and infiltration by rival imperial powers. More importantly, however, the policy of squandering the nation's human and natural resources from the periphery to the metropoles was achieved only under a heavy security regime.

At independence, the security situation started to deteriorate. Political development in the First Republic was very volatile throughout the country, and there was a complete breakdown of law and order in the Western Region. This supposedly led to the military putsch of 15 January 1966. Since 1966, the Military have ruled Nigeria for about 29 out of 33 years and have produced eight dictatorships. The greater part of these years was spent in pursuit of several transitions from forced rule to a democratic one. Each successive regime assigned itself the messianic role of restoring socio-political sanity and enthroning a lasting democracy.

In his maiden broadcast to the nation in 1975, General Murtala Mohammed accused the Gowon Administration of lacking commitment to its transitional programme. He instituted his own programme, which was concluded by Obasanjo in 1979. After four years, however, the Buhari coup destroyed the temporary success of the Obasanjo transition. When Babangida staged his coup in August 1985, he accused the Buhari Administration of extreme despotism and non-commitment to returning the country to civilian rule.

The Babangida Years

Babangida himself, as subsequent events revealed, became the greatest defaulter with regard to Nigeria's wish for democracy. He announced in January 1985 that he would return the nation to civil rule by 1 October 1990. From the inception of his political transition programme in 1987, when he allowed public political activities to commence, the Nigerian political terrain was fraught with anxieties, arbitrary changes in the transitional programme and in the rules that governed it. The various crises together had very serious repercussions on the socio-political, legal, economic, intellectual, and moral development of the nation. The banning, un-banning and re-banning of many 'old-breed' politicians, for example, led to under-ground and clandestine

political activities. This eroded the whole basis of trust among the political class, and also between them and the Government, and between both groups and the civil population. Many of the 'new breed' politicians, as Babangida called them, saw the anathematisation both of their mentors and their opponents, as their own way of access to the political field, and also as a gold-mine for reaching new economic heights. Bribery and kickbacks became cardinal features of the Babangida transition. The euphemism for them, even among government officials, was 'settlement'. It served as the main means of resolving political and personal differences between the military rulers and their 'clients', who were mostly politicians.

In fact, the State (represented by the Military), political parties and politicians, as well as sections of the civil society, became protagonists of the corrupt activities necessitated by the nature of the transition. Oka Orewa (1997:88-89), who had been a consultant to the Federal Government on local government affairs, succinctly elaborated on the activities of government and party officials during the Babangida transition.

'What is disturbing is that government and local government political functionaries and other party leaders are claiming that they are sourcing funds for the operation of their parties from the following avenues:

1. 10% levy on prices of all contracts awarded at State and local government levels.
2. In some local governments, there is another 15% known as the executive distribution pool, which is shared by the chairmen and members of his executive. The chairman uses his own share to generate funds to recoup his own past election expenses.

3. In some local governments, legislators insist on getting another 5%-10% of the contract price to recoup their own election expenses.
4. The party executives at the local government level get fertilizers and sell them at 300% to 400% profit, claiming that a substantial proportion of this profit goes into the party funds.
5. There are allegations that prospective public servants now pay substantial sums as bribe to party executives in order to obtain sponsorship for appointment...
6. The same party executives, on the approach of general or local government elections, claim demand and receive from prospective candidates huge sums of money which they claim are for the whispering campaign. Usually, a very small percentage of such funds gets into the hands of the voters'.

Government officials and members of civil society, especially the elites, who could not benefit sufficiently from the new forms of settlement, resorted to other forms of economic illegality. By these means, they often raised sufficient funds to satisfy their extravagant desires and meet the demands of their clandestine activities. For the first time in Nigeria's history, there was a dreadful awareness of the notorious and highly organised advanced fee fraud scheme (commonly known as 419), which involved senior government officials and big names in the private sector, as well as actors in the political process. There were widespread cases of drug-trafficking, petroleum bunkering, ritual murders (including the highly publicised Otokoto saga), increased banditry and outright assassinations for economic and political advantages. These crimes were quite often perpetrated by key players in the transitional process. Not only did they pose a major threat to the nation's security, they very often enjoyed the collaboration of the country's top security agents, thus bringing about the collapse of law and order at the upper echelons of society.

These criminal activities also permeated various sectors of the Nigerian society. For instance, as a result of a deliberate attempt by the Babangida Administration to pauperise the universities, in order to check their anti-dictatorship activism, many universities and the teaching and non-teaching staff had to resort to corrupt practices in order to make ends meet. They sold admission letters to the least qualified; they sold grades to students who did not deserve ordinary passes; and they awarded honorary doctorates to notorious criminals and to the highest bidders, in order to raise funds to run their institutions. *The Guardian* noted in its editorial of 21 March 1994:

> The decay in the university system is pervasive: It runs deep in the academic sphere as well as in social life. No strata of the university community — students, teachers, workers or administrators — stand above the rot. Professors can no longer inspire either their junior colleagues or their students. Discipline has broken down not only among the students but also among their teachers. The educators are in dire need of education.
>
> In the area of corruption, immorality and debasement of social values, the university is as bankrupt as the society. University administrators can no longer maintain law and order...

In fact, student unions, which have often been perceived as one of the pro-democracy elements, have become an avenue for hooligans to extort money from 'somewhat defenceless' students. The widespread insecurity in the university and in society at large is such that many students have been driven to establish their own forms of self-protection: secret cults. These cults often became laws unto themselves, thereby worsening the state of insecurity both on the campuses and in the country at large. This has led to the unprecedented presence of police and military personnel on the campuses.

In the last decade of transition, the Judiciary was discredited by the 'settlement' culture, the most typical example being the Mercedes Benz cars that General Babangida offered as gifts to the Supreme Court Judges. The judges were also discredited by their failure to address the challenges posed by laws with 'ouster' clauses. These became a defining characteristic of the legal process in Nigeria's transition process. To a large extent, the Judiciary under Babangida became an arm of the Military. In terms of political transition, the judges were always perceived as executing the wishes of the Military, or else regretting that they had no power to look into some cases, especially cases involving political or security issues. The media witnessed much recklessness in its professional practice. Junk journalism became the rule rather than the exception, as both Government and independent media engaged in excessive propaganda and falsehood for political ends and often for the sake of immediate material gain. The psychological violence unleashed on the masses left them as abused victims. Consequently, the Nigerian public was woefully deceived over many issues that should have been common knowledge in a democratic order. The Government never took kindly to the security threat posed by some independent media houses. There were incessant proscriptions of media houses in the last decade. The result was that some of them went underground and their activities became clandestine and this situation further worsened the state of security in the country. Many of their stories drummed up the imminence of civil war in the country. This reached a climax after the annulment of the 12 June 1993 Presidential Election.

The war-song heralded by General Babangida's Information Minister, Mr. Uche Chukwumerije, and the muzzled so-called 'pro-democracy press' created a state of frenzy. Many fled from places like Lagos and Kano, where they ordinarily resided and did business, to their home-towns (mostly in the Eastern part of the country). There were several accidents in the confusion that followed, and hundreds of people lost their lives and properties.

Several forms of criminality involved military institutions as well as various arms of the civil society: trade unions, ethnic minority organisations and even pro-democracy non-governmental organisations. In several ways, these groups promoted forms of organised physical and economic banditry. Outright physical brutalisation, vandalisation of properties, armed robbery, hostage-taking and large-scale deceit and fraud in the name of human rights activism characterised some of these groups.

Bank frauds became a major economic problem during the Babangida transition. Many of those involved were serving and retired generals, as well as politicians, who sat on the boards of some of the banks. These people used their position to obtain large loans without the required collaterals. By 1993-1994, over 50 of the nation's banks were in financial distress. Some of them were eventually liquidated. Thousands of depositors lost their money. The deteriorating situation posed a major threat to the nation's economic security, hence, the establishment of the Failed Banks Tribunal by the Abacha Administration.

Another major area that needs examination is the Nigerian Police Force. It is a paramilitary arm of government, which has played a role that may be considered ambivalent in the nation's political transitions since 1987. The Police is the primary order in the establishment of any criminal justice system in any country (Alemika 1993; Robert 1997; Albert 1998). Though it had been caught several times in controversial political webs, it was often perceived as performing a role within the citizen's average expectations. Its role in the nation's political transition since the Babangida years, however, gave it the image of the people's enemy and a threat to national security. In the last decade, the Nigerian Police has found itself on illegal missions assigned to it by the Government. While some of these missions were preventive measures against anticipated pro-

democracy civil disobedience, others were openly violent. Both denied sections of civil society their right of free speech, movement and association, which gave them cause to embark on actions that could breach the peace. The Police became so used to such actions that it became a law unto itself and an evident threat to national security. The situation got so bad that the *Daily Champion* reported on 9 April 1994 that General Sani Abacha had called for a 'Surgical Operation' for the police, because its 'ethics' had become 'inimical to the requirement of public safety and good order'. The report quoted the General as saying that 'the slogan, 'the policeman is your friend' now appears to hold true only for the outlaw'. Unfortunately, however, during his tenure as Head of State, the General helped the Police to reach its most corrupt state, as will be shown later.

The Babangida transition was characterised by criminal activities within the State and civil society. There were more cases of politically motivated violence in the country. The peak came with the riots that followed the annulment of the 12 June 1993 Presidential Election, and the spate of assassinations, arrests and imprisonment that followed. The annulment and the consequent crisis obliged the Government to pass laws to give legitimacy to the Interim National Government of Chief Ernest Shonekan. However, the enabling law was annulled by the Lagos High Court about two months later. This gave an excuse for General Sani Abacha to seize power. Ironically, the Abacha Administration passed a decree making the Shonekan 'whirlwind' a fully recognised and legitimate administration of the past.

The Abacha Years

The Abacha Administration, which came to power on 17 November 1993, wasted no time in launching its own political transition programme. It immediately dismantled all the political structures, including the National Assembly, which were already in place, and

set up a Constitutional Conference Commission, to organise a National Constitutional Conference (NCC). The Government then passed an enabling law for the NCC, as best suited its own unknown political agenda. As opposition mounted from pro-democracy groups, workers' unions, university teachers, students and other sections of the Nigerian society, the Government used the combined weapons of military force, 'settlements', and 'ouster clauses' in newly promulgated decrees, to suppress the people and maintain itself in power. The initial bid of the NCC to make the Administration quit in January 1996 was changed and the deadline was extended to 1 October 1998.

The Government registered five political parties, all well disposed to its own agenda. These parties eventually accommodated some of the old-breed politicians, against whom the Government executed the politics of exclusion. Gradually, the parties became a major platform for the orchestration of a self-succession agenda for the Administration. Many old-breed politicians, who showed active interest in becoming the nation's President, turned into active members of the Abacha self-succession choir. A new notorious business, which flourished in the country at that time, was the emergence of several pro-government organisations. The most notorious of them was called 'YEAA' (meaning Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha), led by one Daniel Kanu. They allegedly drew their enormous income from the Presidency in Abuja, and their main agenda was to promote, through whatever means, the General Abacha self-succession plan. In fact, some of them vowed publicly that if General Abacha did not become a civilian president on 1 October 1998, they would cripple the Nigerian economy and unleash unprecedented violence to make the country ungovernable. The Government made no public statement on these threats; neither did it arrest any of those involved, thus confirming the speculation that the detractors of the nation's democratic aspirations had the support of the State.

This self-succession bid constituted the greatest security threat to the Nigerian State during the era of the Abacha Administration. Ironically, it was perpetrated by the Government of the day. It was such a threat, because it left citizens more impoverished than ever, as billions of naira were used from the public treasury to pursue the selfish political agenda of self-perpetuation in office, while reinforcing the State security network in anticipation of mass revolts. It also ended the principle of power rotation between the North and the South. This had been recommended by the NCC as a means of achieving national unity and equality among the various geo-political units of the country, and as a means of frustrating what had for several decades constituted 'deep and basic cleavages' for the Nigerian people (Akinyemi 1975:68-76). Furthermore, it perpetuated the political instability that set in after the annulment of the 12 June 1993 Presidential Election. The Abacha Administration was the main beneficiary of the annulment. It was, therefore, consistently opposed, in every possible way, by all those who were sympathetic to the annulled election. The political instability created further economic woes, and these were worsened by the loss of support from friendly nations and the consequent flight of foreign investments from the country. All this contributed to a complete breach of law and order. The Government pitched itself against the masses of the country. It found itself totally perplexed by the state of national anarchy.

The situation got so bad that the Government had to resort to street gangsters (these are hoodlums generally known as 'Area Boys') for its 'rent-a-crowd' pro-Abacha demonstrations. They expressed gratitude to Abacha for 'saving the nation' from the post-12 June 1993 precipice. They demonstrated for Abacha against the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), the arch-opposition group during the Abacha years. They demonstrated for Abacha against the Commonwealth and the European Union sanctions imposed on Nigeria after the judicial murder of Ogoni minority rights activists.

They paid several solidarity visits to Abacha and his cronies in Abuja. They enjoyed elaborate coverage in the Government media. These are the boys who had no respect whatsoever for law and order or the law enforcement agencies (cf. Omitoogun 1994). The reports at the end of their outings were normally tainted by chaos and confusion, following disagreements on how their leaders shared the largesse they received from the government. On a few occasions, they were on a collision course with the anti-Abacha demonstrators and the collapse of law and order was always imminent. However, the Government's security agents always protected them.

The politics of ethnic marginalisation during the transition to civilian rule reached unprecedented heights during the Abacha years. The struggles of the Ogoni people, the Ijaw youths' episode and the Ife-Modakeke War together indicated how resources from these areas had been mismanaged. The mismanaged transitional programme sowed the seeds of enmity between various ethnic nationalities and the Nigerian State, which they regarded as aggressor and robber. There was persistent clamour, especially in the Southern States, for the restructuring of the country into either a true federation or confederation.

All the criminal activities that had been encouraged by the Babangida Administration and by the nature of his political transition, pervaded the country during the Abacha Regime. The greatest threat to the nation's peace and security, however, was his political transition programme. This was completely channelled towards his ambition to succeed himself. There was no rule of law in the country. Rather, the Government unleashed a reign of terror against the citizens. In fact, apart from the years of Nigeria's civil war (1967-1970), the Abacha years were the darkest and most horrible that the nation had ever witnessed. There were incessant politically-motivated assassinations, bombings, torture, acid attacks and detention of opponents. There was speculation through those years that the

Government was directly behind most of these acts, although the Government increasingly condemned NADECO leaders as the cause of the calamity that had befallen the country. After the sudden death of General Abacha on 8 June 1998, however, the truth of how the Government had become the chief executor of terror against the nation started to emerge.

Under probing by the Special Investigation Panel, set up by the General Abdulsalami Abubakar's Administration, the hatchetmen of Abacha's reign of terror confessed to their evils. Those who made confessions included Major Hamza Al-Mustapha (Abacha's former Chief Security Officer), Brigadier-General Ibrahim Sabo (the former Director of the Directorate of Military Intelligence), Colonel Frank Omenka (Head of the Security Unit of the Military Intelligence), and Alhaji Mohammed Gwarzo, the former National Security Adviser to Abacha.

According to these former aides of Abacha, (cf. *Tell Magazine*, 19 December 1998), Abacha gave them a blank cheque to eliminate any persons who they considered to be serious threats to his self-succession bid. In Al-Mustapha's words, 'we had the licence to kill'. Responsible for executing their wish was a special terror unit called the Strike Force. These were responsible for the assassination of Chief Alfred Rewane, a major financier of NADECO, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, the activist-wife of the undeclared winner of the 12 June 1993 presidential election (Chief Moshood Abiola) and several other political opponents of the regime.

They were also responsible for the spate of bombings during the Abacha years. Most of the bombings were aimed at military men and installations, as part of the junta's divide-and-rule tactic. NADECO leaders were, however, held responsible, and many of them were thrown into prison. Top functionaries of the Administration were also targeted, in order to convince the public that the bombings were

the handiwork of NADECO. Attempts were made on the lives of two State Administrators, Colonel Buba Marwa of Lagos and Colonel Mohammed Bawa of Ekiti. The former had to cry out that he was the target of 'highly placed Nigerians'. It was a real terrorist situation created by the State. It led many of those in the opposition, including Chief Anthony Enahoro, an elder statesman of about 80 years old, who had recently suffered incarceration, Professor Wole Soyinka, a Nobel laureate, and others, to flee into exile. There was no security anywhere in the country even for the common people, many of whom not only witnessed these acts of terror but themselves became victims of lawless soldiers, who brutalised and extorted money from them.

The Abacha Administration also cooked up coup stories, as a means of settling its scores with those it considered to be threats to its political programme. The Lawan Gwadabe coup of 1995 and the Oladipo Diya coup of 1997 showed how the Government was bent on ruthlessly eliminating every form of perceived opposition, even within the Administration itself. According to Al-Mustapha, the Diya Coup had been framed long before the 'suspects' were rounded up, but was 'unravelled' only after the failed attempt to bomb Diya, who was the second in command to Abacha. The Abacha years were a period of political transition, characterised by unparalleled treasury-looting, gross lawlessness, disorder and insecurity across the country. The Government was the chief executioner.

The Abubakar Transition: A Conclusion

Two major problems that affected the Babangida and Abacha transitional programmes were insincerity and lack of patriotism. These two leaders had hidden agendas. Thus, while they presented the nation with the dream of a 'home-grown democracy', as they called it, they pursued different programmes. These were centred on

enhancing their own status. Such a situation, especially in a country like Nigeria, had negative security implications for a civil society, which was extremely politically conscious, vibrant and resilient in its pro-democracy struggles.

After Abacha's sudden demise on 8 June 1998, General Abubakar came onto the stage with a new transitional programme. This programme was laudable in some respects: an 'acclaimed independent' Electoral Commission and a seeming non-interference by Government in the political process. These two factors encouraged nation-wide civilian participation in the transition. There was, however, a crisis of confidence regarding the real intentions of the Government and the Military towards the future political dispensation. It was widely alleged, for instance, that the Government and the Military, both of which should be non-partisan, were in fact working for the triumph of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) over the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) (cf. *The Guardian* of 7 December 1998). There were over 40 retired Army generals in the PDP. It was hardly a wild guess that many of them still had their supporters in active military service. The security implications of this situation were not healthy for the nation's democratisation process after the transition to civilian rule. It was widely alleged that one of the generals, Olusegun Obasanjo, who was already in the presidential race, had been anointed by the military institution to succeed Abubakar. With the Local Government Council and State Assembly and Governorship elections held so far, the PDP controlled about 20 of the 36 States in the country. If the party of the generals eventually controlled the central government, there might have to be an intellectual re-definition of the nature of the Abubakar political transition and of the peculiar brand of democracy it produced. Whether the implications of such a transition would be similar to the Babangida and Abacha formats would also have to be investigated. It is, however, to be expected that if the retired military men share

some things in common with their colleagues and supporters, who are still in active service (and there is no doubt that they do), then the nation's experience of the military in politics may continue to be a current phenomenon, even in a novel form, in the next millennium.

With strong attempts to militarise the next civilian democratic order, the future does not seem to promise a clean break from the militarised past. On the other hand, it cannot be certain that even if the politicians were left alone to play their game, there would then be a clean break with the past. However, there is a reasonable amount of hope. Should the Abubakar Administration succeed in ushering in 'a democratically-elected government' characterised by a fair degree of credibility and representative politics, the nation might eventually find the path to a full and genuine bid for democratisation. In essence, the best that the nation might glean from the Abubakar transition may be the structural capacity to embark on a democratic transition to a democratic order in the Nigerian society.

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