

1. SAD AND DARK STORIES

Immediately the Nigerian Coup Three of Nineteen Eighty-Three took place several political explanations were given by cocksure partisans who claimed to know why the coup took place. Those of us who did not know what the whole thing was about read the propagandists with bewilderment. We couldn't help asking, "what the hell is all this about?"

Those of us who harbour the natural hatred of authority, and of omniscience found ourselves being driven by some demon to compare and to contrast these contradictory; authorities and their claimed infallibilities. Hence this book.

The book cannot be classified. As on your side or on the other side. It is, by its very nature partly on your side. And partly on the other side. It exposes the lies. On both sides, and draws attention to some facts. Which should form the basis of impartial judgment.

As George Bernard Shaw puts it the way to get at the merits of a case. Is not to listen to the fool who imagines himself impartial. But to get it argued. With reckless bias for and against. To understand a saint You must hear the devil's advocate

The Nigerian Coup of Nineteen Eighty-Three has been such a major public event that only idiots or triflers dare ignore it.

Ex-President Shagari of the Republic of Nigeria Is a friend and benefactor of millions of persons Who have judged him and his regime under the deluding influence of friendship.

Many of us in East Africa have been unwilling to admit the truth of any disgraceful story About him and about his regime. We have refused to believe the stories about the alleged corruption of his regime and the alleged massive rigging of the ballot boxes that led to his re-election as President of Nigeria.

We have clung to the hope that the rumours against him and against his regime were without foundation.

We believed that the debt that Nigerians owe to him is incalculable he has guided them to democracy;

He has filled their minds with the noble values of democracy; his four years' rule had left so imperishable monuments that none doubts that democracy in Nigeria is a better form of government than any military oligarchy.

It is not thus strange that we treated the moral character of President Shagari with extraordinary tenderness. Our belief in him and in his regime had become a matter of faith and the domain of faith is seldom successfully invaded by reason.

Then came the Nigerian Coup of Nineteen Eighty-Three in a which we were told that neither President Shagari, nor his regime deserved to be regarded with either respect or affection: That no impartial judge of conduct could contemplate the actions and motives of Shagari and of his regime without opprobrium.

Several Nigerian writers and Nigerian Politicians have put before us the facts concerning the Shagari regime in full confidence that those facts will produce on our minds The same effect Which they have produced on their minds. They invited us to reason from facts to conclusions.

Instead of from assumed virtue of Shagari and his regime unbacked by a title of evidence to the conclusion that Neither Shagari nor his regime could have done anything wrong.

The Nigerians treated the comments on Shagari's government by the East Africans as the best praise ever heaped on a regime by people Who were profoundly ignorant of its operations. To them, the praises of the Shagari regime by the East Africans was like that of a schoolboy, not a very smart schoolboy, except that they were delivered with the skill of the most able and experienced men.

The dexterity in which each and every praise avoided The issue of corruption and concentrated on the issue of democracy was just amazing: "We are" said one Nigerian "At a loss as to whether to admire such talents and such praises, based as they are on ignorance. We had taken for granted That those who undertook to criticize us, would at least take the trouble to know a little about us: But we were mistaken."

Said one Nigerian girl, "We are convinced that very great indulgence is due to those persons who regarded the last Nigerian coup with unmixed horror and who saw in the coup victory only a form of criminal insanity.

Their judgement of Shagari's government resembled the criticism of a sepulcher from its exterior. We have no doubt that if these good critics had an opportunity to loof at the Shagari's government from inside Nigeria they would have seen reasons to allay their horror."

Thus, to the uncommitted, to the open-minded The opinion in favour of and against the Shagari regime Seemed to be in a state of anarchy: Sometimes the stubborn bigotry of the pro-Shagari. Appear advancing; - Then the impetuous onset of the anti-Shagari rebels Which had appeared to be receding Begins to gain ground and to carry all before it. Presently, the stubborn bigotry Of the pro-Shagari would seem likely to prevail and so on and so forth.

It is neither safe nor prudent to oppose the current opinion of the mass of people. Majority opinion Tends to claim to be the voice of God. But, the voice of God in Nigeria has this time paradoxically differed with the voice of God

In East Africa. this difference needs to be handled with tenderness and with the unmost deference to all persons concerned. The best way for an author to do this is to point out, without himself taking side, why each of the opposing sides see things the way it sees it.

It was in the midst of this ferment that, as an independent observer, decided to quote everything That has been said for the coup and to quote everything that has been said against it. this is thus, in one sense, not my book.

It's a book of quotation: A book produced by exasperation.

It was most exasperating to see Shagari treated as a soaring angel by many in East Africa while at the same time treated by many in Nigeria as a fallen demon.

Many who surveyed his character my who surveyed his character
From within 'Nigeria spoke of him with unmixed scorn. Many who surveyed his character from without Nigeria spoke of him with unmixed praise. After you have read this book, the book of quotations, You'll have no difficulty in understanding. How one and the same man and how one and the same regime should have been objects of so much contempt and of so much admiration.

My role as the author was mainly to piece the quotations. In a narrative sequence and thus are then with thee weapon of logic.

Secondly I had to adorn many of the quotations with the decorations of rhetoric. I have no doubt in my mind that the book excites a deep and painful interests in the sad and dark stories of militarism in Nigeria.

2. ULTIMATE VALUES

"Happy New Year and Happy New Government" That was Nigeria's New Year greeting on first January Nineteen Eighty-Four.

On thirty first December, Nineteen Hundred Eighty-Three sections of the army had quietly moved and effected a coup.

It was not a bloodless coup as planned by its leaders. When Brigadier Bako the son of Shagari's friend Assigned to arrest Shagari arrived with his detachment to arrest the President they were ambushed and arrested and in the skirmish that followed he himself and other soldiers were killed.

At 6.30 a.m. The voice of Brigadier Abacha commander of the 9th Brigade Based at Ikeja in Lagos announced on national radio that the armed forces of Nigeria had deposed President Shagari and suspended some sections of the constitution.

In the afternoon of the same day, a voice which sounded like that of General Babangida confirmed that the new head of state would be making an announcement, there would be a dusk to dawn curfew, and that the armed forces Chiefs, their deputies,

And the police inspector general has all relinquished their posts. Then at seven minutes after midnight On the first day of January Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Four, the new head of state Major General Buhari, addressed the nation. Muhammadu Buhari complained that Shagari's regime Had "been of no benefit at all to the Nigerian people." Shagari's men in power "Looted the treasury" he said

And left the economy in a shambles. He pointed out that "The canker worm of pervasive corruption" had eaten into the state apparatus. A coup became necessary "As a tourniquet to stop Severe economic bleeding."

Buhari's government promised to attempt to ensure the return to Nigeria of funds embezzled and banked abroad. When the announcement of the government takeover was heard over the radio, the enthusiasm of the populace Was beyond control. The Zeal of the populace seemed to have outrun those of the army.

The generous enthusiasm which pervaded the whole masses made light the task of the coup leaders. former government leaders who had flattered themselves that they were very popular found themselves, objects of abhorrence. For several days the coup leaders basked in the applause of the

multitude. Buhari was welcomed everywhere with transport of joy and, indeed, of affection. Men and women appeared in the streets in festive mood!

The roar of the obloquy Raised against the fallen and the howl Which the whole nation set up for prey and blood appalled the world. There were demonstrations of solidarity from various organizations Including labour unions students, traders and peasants. All of them pledged their cooperation to realize the objective of revamping the economy.

As *Africa* puts it. "The new military leaders have enormous public goodwill on their side which, if properly tapped can be the basis for a new patriotic sentiment with which many goals can be attained."

Commented a Nigerian paper, "The Drums are out, as they very well should be. All the sundry Are falling over each other In self-congratulation for their deliverance from the evil geniuses of the past four years."

People preferred to support an unknown polity. To be set up by unknown military men not yet named who promised the destruction of the corrupt system in the permanence of which they were deeply opposed.

"I never saw anything like it," Said a friend of mine Kufour

"I never saw a painful news Like a coup d'etat in a sister African country produce so much laughter before.

Yet when my sister in law Heard about the Nigerian coup of Nineteen Eighty-Three

She laughed herself lame. She laughed as if she had been bombed with a laughing gas. She fell down convulsed with laughter and tears streamed down her cheeks.

"For days she went everywhere earning and shaking hands and congratulating everybody and exhibiting A wild intoxication of pride and mirth. She claimed that the coup was a priceless new year gift given to the people of Nigeria by Providence."

A dark flush settled on his face, He gave a long sigh as he explained with a Dramatic intensity:

"We had been forced to hide our hatred and our contempt and our sorrow and we were forced to curse the corruption Under; our breath.

"Pledges, they had given us Upon their honour, up their sacred word, and upon their faith but they have never redeemed them!

"The work that the army Was therefore obliged to do Was the work of destruction. They had the duty to try to uproot abuses so horrible and so deeply rooted that attempts by the ballot to remove them were themselves perverted into abuse. A coup is a demolition and a demolition unlike construction is a vulgar task.

"But, as the Ecclesiastes points out, to everything there is a season; a time to be born and a time to die. So, there is a time to set up and a time to pull down."

But, was the coup that popular? In its editorial, The *Talking Drums* points out I hat just as victories at elections could be fraudulent so could enthusiastic support *I'm* coup d'etat be equally fraudulent. "If", it states, "on the morning of December 31st, A Her Brigadier Abacha I lad made his coup

announcement over Radio Nigeria, there had been another announcement at 3 p.m. telling Nigerians, that the coup attempt had been crushed, the messages of unflinching support would have been pouring in and overwhelmed President Shagari; The editorials and commentaries Would have been loud in condemning ambitious adventurers in uniform."

But it remains true that when people have failed to get what they want from one side, it is only natural that they expect to find it on the other side. Where there isn't hope of a remedy fresh adventures are always very much welcomed.

As one Nigerian puts it, "At the beginning of the Shagari regime, the rulers and us were like the two brothers

In the Fairy Queen who were given two equal portions of land.

"As time went on, however, we found ourselves in the situation of one of the two brothers who saw the soil of his inheritance daily washed away by the flood and joined to that of his competitor.

"Whereas the poor brother's portion Dwindled to nothing, the yield of the lucky brother's portion multiplied and increased a hundredfold. The situation called for a device for the restoration of the original equality.

"In the same way, As the Shagari regime continued in power We found the little we have taken away from us by our rulers. The situation called for a device for the restoration of the original equality.

That device was the coup d'etat." Said another Nigerian. "A coup is a rebellion and Africa Has much to rebel from. The *Uhuru* vistas Have ended in corruption, Fear, tyranny, decadence Amin, Bokassa, Nguema.

"We are not dreaming pedants. We do not waste time in endless discussion upon abstract subjects When we are being plundered or when our liberties are being trampled upon. We plan and effect."

He laughed with a low gurgle Like a man enjoying an intimate joke and he spoke with a quavering intonation. He explained the position briskly in measured words:

"A coup is a warning to a class of persons: To Ministers and their hirelings, who greatly need to be warned that the day of reckoning will come When those of them who have plundered and ruined The country will be called upon, to render the account of their stewardship.

"To preserve the society from the dangers resulting from incorrigible depravity of some wicked rulers Is thus the legitimate end of a coup d'etat."

That there is a degree of public danger which justifies a nation to take up arms against its rulers few people, can deny. Who would have dared denied the rights on the people of Central African Empire, and Equatorial Africa and of Uganda as well to take up arms against Bokassa regime and the Nguema regime as well as the Amin regime?

Said one Nigerian, "We believe that the contest in which the Nigerian army was engaged against the Shagari regime Was the contest for the security of national wealth. We hold that the cause of the contest Justified the taking of arms. A coup is no more a departure from the normal course of law Than a civil war. A cause which thus justifies

A civil war Equally justifies a coup."

Explained another Nigerian, "We can't accept to be masters of our fate in our home life and then lie down helpless and let major national events happen to us as the elements do.

"Before therefore, we can talk of a good government we have to eliminate corruption and we are determined to do so whether it takes. One hundred coups to do it. We are duty bound to replace the corrupt elements in the government

With incorruptible elements. We will never resign to a corrupt future. We will always fight for a better future.

A better future is, part of our patriotism. In this way we are superior to those states which have resigned to be governed by corrupt people.

"The energy that moulds The future of Nigeria Springs from our pride as the foremost nation in Africa which always accepts and even parades Its weaknesses and always fights for the ultimate values."

3. THE DEVIL OF CORRUPTION

The feelings which people Kintertain towards the power which they hope to obtain some advantages are naturally warmer than the feelings with which they regard a fallen power which can neither bribe nor bite.

Every successful coup therefore guarantees to the coup leaders the enjoyment of profound respect and eloquent flattery from innumerable place hunters and several job seekers.

The caste of Senator Francis Nzeribe is everywhere. Some three months before the coup, Senator Francis Nzeribe vigorously pressed his services upon President Shehu Shagari. But immediately after the coup he was full of praise and congratulations for President Buhari upon whom he pressed his services as it were a matter of life and death.

Such kind of behavior must continue to be expected as long as Nigeria is passing through the period of insurrections and; prescriptions which are, historically necessary labour pains. for the delivery of good government. When you watch western films and study the American Civil War You see a nation refusing

The rule of crime and waging systematic wars Against crime in the same way insurrections and proscriptions preceded the Westminster's mode of government. How can it be otherwise? To defend the contrary is to say that corruption Must reign! and election rigging must become the way of life!

"By tolerating corruption, said a Nigerian student "We shall never have A clean government. - by tolerating rigging of the Shagari magnitude, we shall never have democracy."

He seemed carried off his feet by a sudden anger. His face was contorted with the extremity of emotion as he made a long harangue about corruption in Nigeria. He then ended

"The victims of corruption in Nigeria who awaited a deliverer who would right the wrong done unto them and give Nigeria the respect due to her saw the coup at least As a distraction even if only for a day or two, from the former distress that had weighed them down.

"All they ask is that they be not grudging happiness for the length of time, however fleeting, That the distraction lasts.

" Military coups have thus become a natural check and effectual limitation on the powers of government. The knowledge that if the patience of the nation Was severely tried by the excesses of the rulers There would be

No presentation of requisitions, or signing of petitions, or passing of resolutions there would only be the taking of guns by some army units followed by the fall of the government in a matter of a few hours. Is very sobering. And the knowledge that the nation will support the coup Is very disturbing.

"Eh man," Said a Nigerian Market woman: "A coup is no conjecture for a neutral. It is a conjecture When those who are not with you Must be treated as against you." The *Nigerian Tribune* ordered all persons against the coup to shut up and keep quiet: 'finally all foreigners" stated the *Nigerian Tribune* "should please shut up and leave us alone. The people who matter in this regard are Nigerians and since they welcome the coup the rest is nobody's business."

The order was mistaken. Nigeria is a sister state. We cannot leave her alone. Nor can she leave us alone. Sister states should pray For each other. Console each other and above all. Take the liberty- To reprove each other. They are worth to each other More than the sachets of the great Ranoud Which were alleged to cure apoplexy.

To pray, to console, to reprove is different from to teach. It would be most impertinent for one sister state to dare to teach the other. Nigeria needs no lesson of another state to implant sound principles of government in it.

A Nigerian priest too Advised those who opposed the coup on the ground that guns were used to remember their Bible lessons: "When Christians and Muslims" Stated the priest, "In sister African States Complain about our coup

As essentially evil On account of its violent nature We wonder whether they remember, How God himself delivered the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage.

"Did not the Lord God turn the waters in the rivers, In the streams, and in the ponds into blood and did the blood not kill the fish in the waters

And made the water stink, and made the Egyptians thirsty?

"Did not the Lord God bring forth frogs abundantly which went up and came into the houses of the Egyptians, and into their bedchambers, and upon their beds, and into the houses of their servants, and upon their people, and into their ovens, and into their kneading troughs?

"Did not Lord God cause dust of the earth to be smitten and it became lice upon man, and upon beast throughout all the land of Egypt?"

His voice betrayed a tragic depth of emotion as if the burden of corruption sat on his shoulders. But the most startling thing about Him was the expression of intolerable anguish in his eyes. He went on speaking:

"Did not the Lord God cause boil to break forth with blains throughout the land of Egypt causing grievous murrain

upon the cattle, Upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep?

"Did not the Lord God Rain grievous hail and fire mingled with hail throughout the land of Egypt and did not hail smite throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; both herb and tree; and both flax and barley;

"Did not the Lord God bring swarms of locusts which covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened, and one could not see What was on earth, and did the locusts not eat every herb of the field, every fruit of the tree, and did they not fill the houses of the Egyptians and the houses of their servants?

"Did not the Lord God Cause a thick darkness to envelope Egypt for three days? He seemed to be deliberately working himself up into a fury. He cleared his throat and said: "Did not the Lord God Smite, at midnight all the firstborn in the land of Egypt from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, the firstborn of the maidservant

That was in the mill, the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon unto the firstborn of cattle and of other beasts and was there not a cry the like of which was never heard throughout the land of Egypt?

"The Nigerian Coup, consisting as it did, of a few shots in the air, and the loss of a few lives, seems to us a more humane method of national deliverance than the monstrous means employed by the Almighty and merciful God to deliver his people."

The coup is indeed an admission that a great deluge, like the forty days and forty-night deluge, has passed over Nigeria and overwhelmed and destroyed all the good things.

But it's also an admission that the deluge can be abated and be made to give birth to a political paradise. This is the crux of the matter: When the devil of corruption Has entered the body politic, He cannot be expected to depart without struggles and without convulsions and without foaming. But because he struggles and convulses and, must he be left to vex The body politics forever? Must he be exorcised and forced out if need be my coup d'etat?

4. SWORD OF DAMOCLES

How my friend George Sekasi associated, Abu Hassan's broken wind with the Nigerian coup puzzled me very much the reader is aware, when Abu Hassan was summoned to his bridal chamber. On the night of his marriage to a bride as beautiful as a goddess, He rose slowly from his divan, watched by the envious assembly, and as he started to move forward being bloated - with meat and drink, he let out What became a historic fart. **Mortified** with shame, Me saddled his horse and rode off into the dark night Never to touch his bride Mid never to return home.

Now, how can you associate hut historic fart with the Nigerian Coup? yet, when George Sekasi heard of the Nigerian Coup. He exclaimed, "Horror of horrors! The name if the Nigerian Army Has become as infamous. As Abu Hassan's long resounding fart!" In that one pithy sentence Sekasi had expressed A cross-section of views of people of East Africa.

The Nigerians seem to us to form their governments the way children build card-houses: No sooner started then completed, and no sooner completed then blown away and no sooner blown away Then replaced and no sooner replaced then forgotten.

Mr. Hilary Ngweni of the weekly review compared democracy in Africa to a baby who is learning to walk. It makes no sense whatsoever to chop a baby's head off because the baby is incapable of running or doing other things expected of an adult.

Yet this is more or less what military coups are doing to infant democracies in Africa every time they topple what they consider to be corrupt and ineffectual elected civilian government.

"As the case of growing babies, the challenge to Africa is to ensure that young democracies grow up strong and upright. This may at times require chastisement or other stiff educative measures to keep young democracies on the straight and narrow path. but, it certainly does not call for decapitation.

Prime Minister Robert Mugabe said that his government Was not in favour of coups which was an improper way to bring about a change, especially in a country That has an elaborate machinery for changing the government.

The Zimbabwe papers Echoed the Prime Minister. The Bulawayo Chronicle said the gun had once more Replaced the ballot box and Nigeria and Africa were the losers in all that. The herald only hoped that The resourceful Nigeria "will not be plunged into another bloody internal conflict." A Senegalese newspaper pointed out that If Nigeria wants to set itself up as a leader in Africa, First, it has to start behaving like one.

Senegalese official newspaper Le Soleil stated that, the army takeover in Nigeria was a great shame for the whole African Continent because Nigeria herself has been in a position to re-enforce the credibility of democracy in Africa.

The Times of Zambia wrote: "Africa has been put to shame by the events in Nigeria. "and one leading Zambian said: "after the coup we wonder if Nigeria has any moral authority anymore."

"Uhuru", the ruling party paper of Tanzania doubted if military rule would be able to achieve their aims to bring about justice, end corruption, and maladministration and solve economic problems. "In many countries That have experienced the coups" So stated Uhuru "These problems have only been on the increase."

According to Enahoro corruption does not justify a coup d'etat. If culpable misdeed, argued Peter Enahoro, "Are sufficient grounds for overthrowing a constitution. then the mind boggles as to how many of the world democracies

Deserve to be Under military rule.

"There is in India The world's largest democracy Where starvation daily claims The living corpses Who inhabit the hovels of Calcutta and where the squalor That fills the acrid Madias air contrasts with the privileged, scented grace of Nepotic Gandhi family currently grooming a new scion to succeed mother Indira.

"And then, there is venerable Britain, land of Fleet Street left-overs periodically plucked from obscurity to report a continent which their superiors have never cared to understand. England, Self-righteous and world-wise where the same family Has continuously supplied the Head of State

for generations, not to mention the profligacy of generous maintenance for relations of the monarch Who strain themselves planting memorial trees and unveiling stone plaques. England, where such is the justice of the parliamentary system that a political party with less than forty percent of the popular vote may return two-thirds of the seats in parliament and the government is deemed to have been "Overwhelmingly elected by the majority of the British people."

"As any strutting young Brasshat with political ideas storming his brain like a bad fever Will tell you, In Africa, these are more than sufficient grounds

To stage a military coup."

The fact of the matter is, stated Peter Enahoro, that there is no perfect government, not-even a near perfect political system Anywhere in the world. The best of them are perforated with infuriating imperfections. But the people have learnt that in an imperfect world Leaders may come and go but systems should endure.

Where we Africans quickly lose our heads they have learnt that "no condition is permanent" as indeed the slogans on Nigerian buses proclaim.

When, therefore, their leaders fail them they change those leaders. They do not destroy the system altogether. This is not so in Africa where we blame the system and proceed to wreck it although our avowed objective is the dethronement of those We judge to be bad leaders.

"Just when it seems that a country is settling down into a-system Something goes "Bang" And it all comes crashing down."

We cannot conceive, indeed, anything more likely to demoralize any government Than the knowledge that If it disagreed

With a couple of army officers About Corruption Within the government Then it would be toppled with every circumstance of shame.

A president ruling with the army sword of Damocles Hanging over his head Is in a similar position as the physicians

In the Arabian Tale Who were ordered by a king to cure his daughter or have their heads chopped off; Such warnings produce overwhelming fear Which is more likely to produce what they should prevent.

5. TREMBLING EXPECTATION

It seems to us, in general, that to take over A democratically elected government on the ground that it's corrupt, is to portray democracy in a hateful light. It is to depict every minister who serves in that government as corrupt. It is to attribute to all elected ministers what applies to some of them.

Such an attribution is fallacious and a vilification of democracy. It is more wound to scandalize than to edify. If power corrupts those who are elected by the people to govern, how much more could it corrupt those who shot their way to power in breach of their oath. of allegiance?

Hilary Ngweno holds that the great tragedy of military coups in Africa Is that they are utterly unnecessary as the armies, without taking over the reins of power, can easily impose their will Upon any civilian authority that persists in conducting Its business in a manner prejudicial to the national interests. He therefore called upon 'African armies, "to accept the challenge-that they are guardians not only of the territory of their respective nations, but also of the infant democracies that were born as a result of Africa's long and bitter struggle for freedom. Guardians at times have

to use Tough measures to keep their wards On the straight and narrow path, but no guardian in his right senses Resorts to decapitation as a means of teaching an infant a lesson."

When all is said and done, Commented Hilary Ngweno, it is worth remembering Winston Churchill's dictum That democracy is the worst form of government Except for all the others That man has ever tried.

To many of us in East Africa, the most recent coup in Nigeria Deserved nothing but booes. It looked to us very much like rebellion of the schoolgirls at St. Catherine at Boroboro against their headmaster. We would have very much wished that it should have ended in the same way, by the rebels being whipped. General Buhari appeared to us

Like a rebel without a cause, An intriguer for the sake of intrigue, a factious leader with no object Save his own elevation.

Said a Ugandan boy, "Oh God! protect Shagari and forgive Buhari for he knows not what, he says."

Said Okumu Wengi, "we thought Buhari would come out with a new pretext for a coup. We were deceived. He came out with the usual Rigmorole about corruption and the same gospel as had been preached by many generals: **teneral** Ironsi, General Gowon General Murtal Mohammed and General Obasanjo.

"What is the use of saying Nigeria needs a clean government? What matter is that not many of the people Nigeria has put in power Have resisted corruption.

"If the society is corrupt Where will the incorruptible come from!

Can darkness produce light?"

Said Peter Enahoro in his magazine, *Africa Now*: Beginning with Black Africa's first military takeover in Togo in Sixty-three through the subsequent dozens of violent seizures of government In the intervening years, to the more recent events of the same ilk in Nigeria, Liberia, Ghana, Upper Volta and now again Nigeria the refrain of charges of corruption, Economic mismanagement, Degenerate self-interest among the politicians, criminal neglect of the underprivileged and massive electoral fraud has become as original as an overworked cliché in a word, We have heard it all before. We have heard it when soldiers overthrow civilians: We have heard it when soldiers have overthrown soldiers We have heard it when civilians

Have attempted to overthrow civilian So, what's new? Hilary N'gweno point-out That decimation is always an abominable mode of punishment and that the army in Nigeria Has made it a practice to deal out to democracy a true Zedwood justice: first, they execute then, they investigate and last of all they accuse.

It seems to Augustine Matovu that the soldiers have turned the Nigerians into those pliant Indian boats which yield to the force of every wave. The populace has to yield to the impact of every coup. They have to suffer things to take the course the army has willed. they have to give way to the violence of a coup and then give way to the corresponding violence of the coup rebound in the form of yet another coup.

"They appear to us these military 'saviours' as powerful and maleficent rulers who do not care, as long as they snatch the rein of power, that it costs several men their lives. and make many others Drag out their days in jail and in tears." .

Said a brother of mine, "corruption in Nigeria Belongs to the age and not to a regime. That the Shagari regime was partially tainted with it is beyond dispute. That the partial taint was a great blemish cannot be denied.

"But that the taint amounted to a general depravity warranting the removal of the elected government whose term of office. Was scheduled to end in four years, that it warranted the replacement of Shagari's regime with a regime of gunmen whose term of office Is indefinite is mere sophism."

Shehu Shagari's errors are explained by reference to the age, by reference to the circumstances in which Nigeria now finds itself. They are errors strewn in the way of every Nigerian government. They can scarcely be avoided

As long as the government must be run by the people in that country at this time. They were not errors

Which Shehu Shagari went out of his way to seek. On the contrary,

An advocate of Tanzania High Court Hon. Osinde Wangor said "In our opinion the coup was greeted in Nigeria with a violent and unreasonable feeling. We do not doubt that the Shagari Government might have done some most reprehensible things. But we don't believe that those reprehensible things make it undeserving of respect and honour.

"We believe That a political trial Is different from a criminal trial. We believe that in a political trial an accused person should be allowed to set off his good deeds against his bad deeds.

"We have read all the magazines on Africa Such as New African Africa, South, Africa Now, AFRICASIA, and so on.

"We have not seen one mention of the good deed done by the Shagari Government! did it not do one good deed? If so why has Buhari's government adopted Shagari's budget?

"We believe that as the euphoria that greeted the coup evaporates, and people begin to look at the Shagari's government not as a scarecrow but as an administration

With its good deeds and bad deeds, the violent excitement against Shagari's regime will be followed by remission

And by a great reaction in its favour. Such is the fickleness of the multitude.

"On our own part, however, when we consider the temptations to which Shagari was exposed and the environment

In which he lived and ruled We are more inclined to give him credit as an upright man with respect to public money

than to blame him For a few transactions which were rather irregular. A corrupt man, he certainly wasn't. His crimes if any

Have no origin in cupidity but in inordinate zeal for the commonwealth."

It is a pity

That abundant accusations of corruption are bound to follow the most upright Nigerian ruler who is under the frown of power. It is a pity that all Nigerian rulers deserted by fortune are equally deserted by their' sycophants who rush to purchase the favour of the successful usurper by accusing their former patron.

Wise men must look with suspicion on the demons of the masses and the several circumstances Surrounding the Nigerian Coup Would lead. Any superficial observer to question the execrations now being heaped on Shagari regime.

A politician in Africa Needs therefore to develop A sixth sense for detecting Swarms of political lies Which buzz about the heads of the citizenry like migratory bees.

Said a Ugandan secretary, "We look upon the corruption accusations not as the cause but as the effects of the coup.

We look upon them as loathsome slanders Advanced by abject libellers. We look upon them as obtaining credence from the persons eager to believe anything Which justifies their hatred of the Government."

Her face gave the impression of extreme alertness and she spoke with a dramatic eagerness. Her words tumbled over one another. her voice was sincere, affectionate and touching. her figure, so joked a friend, melts into harmony all that is harsh and dissonant in life. "These upstarts who have shot their way to power" she said as the fireflies flitted brightly and the frogs croaked loudly, "think that by some mystery, the gun has conferred upon them the right to judge and to condemn What they least understand. The result is that they have been so imbecile and so despicable as to condemn to jail outstanding citizens Who-have committed no other crime than to be victims of rumormongers! to add insult to injury

These upstart judges Who deliver such verdicts, consider themselves superior to the inquisitors! concluded my young nephew, "Uncle, it is not good to be a Nigerian President. You have to bear the odium', not only for your bad acts, but for all the bad acts of all the people in your government. Now, who can control all the people-In his government? Why should the president be blamed for acts committed Without his knowledge, or for acts which he opposed and punished?"

"Yes my dear nephew" I flew off at a tangent, 'A coup, in any African state must be strenuously opposed because it tends to set The neighbouring African states in trembling expectation that the same storm may burst upon them."

6. NUMBERED ACCOUNTS

Isiyaku Ibrahim, one of the most wanted men in Nigeria confessed in the talking drums from his exile in London. Judging from his confession, the extent of corruption in Nigeria was just staggering. He himself became a millionaire by merely introducing Mr. Risser to the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Defence! in his own words:

"As a mark of appreciation and as encouragement to a young man whom he deemed a promising businessman

Mr. Risser gave me on my birthday in sixty-eight the sum of a quarter million dollars which was the initial capital with which I began business on my return home.

"In addition to this gift, Mr Risser promised to support me the tune of one million dollars in any business venture undertook."

He then concluded proudly, "I was at the age of thirty a millionaire."

He argued that he and the permanent secretary to the Ministry of defence received substantial rewards from a foreigner but that they were neither wages of corruption, nor an indirect plunder of the nation extorted

Through over-invoiced purchases. They were simply free gifts and there was no legislation preventing receipts of gifts.

This reasoning is faulty nothing is more clear that a civil servant, a permanent secretary, ought to be a good servant of his government and nothing is more certain that when a civil servant receives kingly-fortunes from some foreigners dealing with his government he can find himself in a position of trying to serve both God and demon. There is no need at all for a specific legislation to prevent such dual service.

Major C.K. Njeogwu and his group of radical majors who overthrew Balewa regime in Nineteen Sixty-Six with loss "of several lives did not mince words about such type of conduct: "Our enemies" he said "Are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent."

Corrupt leaders are like dogs which are well caressed and fed. The starving workers who, enviously watch these corrupt leaders Are like dogs being slowly killed by a dissecting surgeon. Just as the caressed dog and the dissected dog cannot be expected to share the same feeling, so a corrupt leader and a starving worker do experience quite opposite feelings.

The extent of corruption - is becoming alarming throughout black Africa. Shiv Naipaul in his North of South describes corruption in an East African country where bribery embezzlement, Extortion and corruption Was of such a proportion That signaled "A collapse of self-control Verging On collective derangement."

He quotes a Dutch expatriate who exclaimed, "My God! You have to experience it. to believe it. These people are extra ordinarily greedy I've never seen anything like it they say West Africa is even worse. But I find it hard to imagine how anything could be worse than this the corruption is incredible-

It is a disease, an illness, you know, I go to meetings all the time. I try to talk about technical problems. They couldn't Give a damn about those. not a damn.

"They fall asleep! I could sell them tinned sunshine If I wanted to. They only wake up when you mention money. The only thing they care about is their cut."

So many of these parasites relying on the strength of blackmailing the security forces and government officials by the wealth corruptly obtained turn persecutors to those who point accusing fingers at their criminal deed. Because of their moral debasement they give orders to destroy a family with – indifferences to moral considerations. There have been persons pursued through the length and breadth of a district and were forced to flee to other districts bitterly complaining about the long succession of hardship that had dogged them.

These orders are carried out with all the severity by hirelings whose only desire Is to please their boss.

The liberty of a countryman hangs on the sort of evidence on which you cannot deny a dog a bone. It makes you cry out, "Why should such monsters be born into the world."

Said a colleague of mine: "We in Uganda have a minor official who is corrupt. When we look at him we begin to have some ideas of what corruption can do to a man.

You have only to look at that official: Look at the way he walks! Contemplate the proud wretch as he orders officers around! Look at the way the workers watch him poisoning their pleasures and the means of their income with such an appalling tyranny!

"Everything about him seems to contradict and outrage those below him: He tramples them underfoot; He despoils them of their heritage. By bribery and corruption to the most perfidious measures such as ordering arrests and dismissals of his enemies, the wretch always succeeds to silence all oppositions to "his illegal deals.

"The people of the district where Mr. Corruption works have for long observed his machinations camouflaged by his gentle pretensions for far too long to be deceived by them."

As Africa now points out the Nineteen Seventies saw the beginning of institutionalization of corruption on the economic front. No matter how the former leaders of successive military governments protest against this interpretation of the result of their stewardship.

It is a fact that kickbacks and sharing of profits from inflated invoices on the enormous contracts generated by the availability of the oil billions became an integral part of official transactions under the Gowon regime; And instead of being reduced or eliminated, And economic formulas of their predecessors.

According to New African General Murtala Mohammed became a legend not because he had seized "power from an increasingly corrupt and unpopular military regime" But because of "the speed, Drama and ruthless relentlessness" with which he went about cleaning "the human debris" That littered "Gowon's Aegean stable."

When General Murtala Mohammed ended Gowon's nine-year-rule in Nineteen Seventy-Five in a bloodless coup d'etat,

He said, "Allegations of graft, Misuse of public funds, and nepotism Gave the impression that the states were being run as private estates."

General Murtala Mohammed the Nigerian President who said, "When I contemplate the evils of apartheid my heart bleeds" "has," according to Africa, "almost been elevated to sainthood status for the no-nonsense manner in which he instilled discipline into Nigeria.

During his whirlwind of, two hundred and one-day rule "His unprecedented massive purge of corrupt employees

Have a profound national psyche." They actually became more entrenched; And subsequent regimes Simply inherited The habit Murtala Mohammed Nicknamed "Man Hurricane" Is still very much the Nigerian hero.

His pictures are still seen in many houses and in public transports. Before he was gunned down Only six months After he had seized power, He had won the hearts of Nigerians by his, as Africa Now puts it, "No-nonsense unorthodox approach to government particularly

The wholesale dismissals of thousands of civil servants in Nineteen Seventy-Five In a move designed -To purge Nigeria of corruption following the overthrow of government of Gowon.

We cannot and should not face corruption with insensibility that is the lot of animals. When age or sickness makes us the equal of animals through loss of moral sense then and only then should

we **become** Through no fault of-ours, Insensible to corruption. Before that time arrives, we must be on tins **earth** Like a policeman on duty.

In what way are we otherwise different from a pig? Is it not in ideals and morality? How then can we, like pig?

Is it not in ideals and morality? How then can we, like pigs,

Tolerate corruption?

"Once upon a time said an Indian merchant narrating a story by Joseph Addison *Jupiter* made a proclamation that every mortal should bring in his griefs and calamities and throw them together in a heap and be rid of them forever. There was a large plain appointed for the purpose.

"To that plain, the whole human species marched one after another and threw down their several loads, which immediately grew into a prodigious mountain.

"One person threw into the heap a very carefully concealed parcel Which turned out to be poverty. Another person threw down his luggage which upon examination was found to be his wife. multitudes of old women

Threw down their wrinkles and several young women stripped themselves of a tawny skin. There were very great heaps of red noses, large lips and rusty teeth.

"The greatest part of the mountain Was made up of bodily deformities. There was not a single vice and not a single folly thrown onto the heap. No drunkenness, No gambling, no drug addiction. No moral laxity, And no corruption.

"The moral of it is: That corruption is a disease Which has to be exorcised Not by the patient himself but by an external force. Hence the inevitability of a coup."

One priest said, "A leader Is the light of the nation. If therefore, a leader is good, the whole nation shall be full of light: If therefore, the leader is bad the whole nation shall be full of darkness.

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, that if thy right hand offends thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee: For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members Should perish, and not thy whole body Should be cast into hell.

"In the same way I say unto you that if your chosen leader offends you, pluck him out, and cast him from you: -for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish and not the whole nation."

As burke put it, "but when this submission is urged to us in a contest between the representatives and ourselves,

And where nothing can be put into their scale Which is not taken from ours, they fancy us to be children

When they tell us that they are our representatives, our own flesh and blood, and that all the stripes they give us are for our good."

Said yet another priest: "Shagari's government had become a mammon. We could not serve two masters. We could not serve God and shagari's government.

"It is necessary for the welfare of society that massive corruption should not go unchecked. It is completely childish to demand unlimited toleration of outrageous corruption such as the Nigerian one. It follows therefore that in the interest of the society. If the government itself fails to curb

obnoxious corruption, another force within the state; be it the army, should have the privilege to step in and clean up the mess.

"This licence is accordable only on the assumption that the alternative force will succeed to clean the mess, its failure to clean the mess does not call for the removal of the licence but it calls for the removal of the failures

Hence the reason for the four successful coups in Nigeria

And for one attempted coup. It is to be noted that the attempted coup that failed was brought against the government of Murtala Mohammed who fought corruption more than any other President. Hence the failure of the coup attempt. Hence the lesson that Nigerian leaders must aim at distinguishing themselves in fighting corruption."

"The coup in Nigeria is a-manifestation of the genuine desire of Nigerians for a clean government. They have never had one yet. But that is the more reason for trying hard to have one. Coups in Nigeria therefore Remain practically inevitable and the sooner Nigerian leaders acknowledge this, the sooner will they set to bring about a clean government.

"How can we help to ask ourselves with indignation whether a nation should be ruined corruption with no more than a lizard loses its tail? What is so abnormal about feeling an anguish of hatred against those who threaten us with mortal harm?"

When one politician was asked by Kofi Akumanyi Why corruption was so high in Nigeria as compared to other African states, his reply was: "It is because corruption operates more efficiently in oil, than say cocoa, coffee or copper."

Said a friend of mine, "I have had a stroke of inspiration which summed up instantaneously what seemed the most absurd difference between the way the people of Nigeria and the people of East Africa have received the news of the Nigerian Coup. In the blinding light of my inspiration Everything fell into line. The problem of Nigeria Presented itself to my mind as over-abundance of material resources in a few hands.

"Over-abundance of material resources is an evil. It discourages thought, it takes away feeling, it turns a man into a beast. I have hated all Mr. Corruptions in Uganda, why should i love those in Nigeria."

The fable of the donkey, the ox, and the farmer *from* the Arabian Tales illustrates the *justice of toppling the corrupt leaders* by a-coup. In that story, the *down* which ate well-shifted rested in comfort and lacked *nothing at* the toil advised the ox *which* was worn out and whose life Was a perpetual drudged at the plough to rest from toil by pretending to be ill. The ox did so. To avoid losing production the farmer took the *do* and used it at the plough all day.

In the same way, When the corrupt leaded Who eat quite well, rest in comfort, and lack no necessities? obtain,' corruptly, money belonging to the masses who are worn out by and whose life Is a perpetual drudgery? then it is fair, In the interests of production, to reverse roles by making the *rulers*, to become the ruled and by making part to become the rulers.

In that way, money *be* obtained, and banked in *numbered* accounts in Switzerland are ultimately Withdrawn and used *for production*.

7. THE GOLDEN EGG

It is obvious to us That the great objects of a nation can be attained only by mutual co-operation. It is equally obvious That efficient co-operation cannot take place If leaders act on the principle that they cannot co-operate unless they have a ten per cent cut in the subject-matter.

When a reward becomes the sole reason for co-operation or the sole determinant of the nature of decision to be made Justice is blown to the wind and that is what happened in Nigeria.

It was said that the first object of Shagari's ministers When they became ministers Was to become millionaires and that they over succeeded in gaining that great object: They became billionaires! they were insatiably eager for ostentations and profusions. The ambitious upstarts would be satisfied with nothing less than the style of American millionaires. They had to own private jets. To an ordinary Nigerian Such eccentricities were seldom to be seen outside a madhouse. They made ridiculous figures Resembling Emperor Bokassa Acting Napoleon Bonaparte. As the nation withered as the workers and peasants Starved and despaired, As the national treasury Became empty and as the national debts became immense their numbered overseas accounts flourished; their immeasurable palaces employed innumerable household; their unwholesome excrescences Were fed on imported delicacies; their wives bought inestimable jewels; and the persons of their dear ones were surrounded with the prodigies of luxury and magnificence. Government seemed to exist for the benefit of the rulers. The many seemed to have been created for the benefit of the few. The tyranny of the ruling caste became insupportable.

It was said that the state had been given as a prey to Shagari and clique. It was said that to the rulers, political virtue was a mere coquetry of political prostitution. It was said that the Shagari regime belonged to the political school which believed that government could only be carried on by means of corruption.

In its editorial *South* commented, "The multinational were happy, and so were the banks. They were getting all they wanted out of the country and if the rulers were willing to convert their own wealth into commission and bribe money, who were they to object?"

Listed, amongst top looters: -Adisa 'Adisco' Akinloye, Chairman of NPN, Umaru Dikko, Minister of Transport, Joseph Wayes, President of the Senate. Words like squandermania Plundermania and lootocracy Were associated with their names.

Alhaji Dikko

The second most powerful man in Shagari's Government who was in charge of the election campaign for Shagari's party Is, according to the *observer*, believed to be worth About one billion pounds! few contracts could be approved in Shagari's Nigeria without his tacit approval.

These corrupt elements of society have somehow altered the course of man: man was not born to be a hyena, but they have become hyena. Their thieving Is destroying society. The more private misfortune they cause The more well off they become.

Corruption has eaten The very heart of public morality. the public treasury Has been ravaged and pillaged in order to aggrandize Private bank accounts abroad.

The architects. of the Nigerian Constitution Had provided for a watchdog against corruption in the form of CCB (Code of Conduct Bureau). Yet, four years after the Constitution had been in

operation Code of Conduct Bureau Had not commenced its work. Its chairman was asked, "why?" He threw up his arms and cried, "Only God can save Nigeria!" It was a cry of resignation, of helplessness and impotence.

To take up arms against a Sea of corruption and end it by opposing it was unimaginable. corruption; known by many names, "lootocracy" "you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back" "Kickbacks" or "Finders' fee." had become invincible.

Colossal office buildings such as NET building, Ministry of Education Building, Accounts Offices at Abuja, (For Capital Development Authorities) were all gutted down by fire at a staggering cost to the nation in order to destroy evidence of corruption.

"Only God could save Nigeria!" and God did, indeed, Grant Nigeria's prayer: He removed Shagari and sent her Buhari. Though Shagari had pledged to deal with corrupt officials and, in compliance with the adage of setting a thief to catch a thief he created a whole ministry of National Guidance to fight corruption yet, not a single thief of any status was caught! The ministry, Like the code of Conduct Bureau was rendered inoperative.

In the hey-day of obasanjo's military regime, a special court presided over by Justice Orojo Tried and imposed stiff sentences on Nigerians found guilty of foreign exchange offences. Foreign Exchange Offences Decree became the most dreaded decree second only to the Armed Robbery Decree which imposed death by firing squad.

But when Shagari took over Foreign exchange offences Decree Became obsolete "and it was no longer a taboo, "Stated Eddie Iroh, "To knowledge that as much a sixteen billion in pounds sterling Is owned by Nigerian Citizens in overseas banks."

The-situation became so bad that General Obasanjo himself suggested that Nigerians with foreign bank accounts be persuaded to repatriate their huge sums in foreign banks as a means of helping the government Solve its enormous Foreign exchange problems.

Senator Francis Nzeribe Who once advocated a federal cabinet Made up exclusively of millionaires said that he was embarrassed that Nigeria should go borrowing one billion pounds sterling When its citizens have-over sixteen billion pounds in overseas banks.

He supported Obasanjo's call. He advised Shagari's regime to set up a consortium of Nigel 1:111 millionaires

Whom he believed 1 mild could raise no less than three billion dollars toward wiping mil the government deficit of four point seven billion dollars. He offered "to set the ball rolling with my own direct loan of ten million dollars. To the federal government."

It has thus been said that Nigel 1a Is a poor country full of rich people Eddie Iroh gives an example: "A good proof that gold is thicker than blood," he said, is the public-confidential tale of one Ibadan based political chieftain who could not help his London bound sister with a loan of a thousand pounds because, according to him, I am stark broke." He, however, offered

His sister the use of his posh apartment in London. While she was there an envelope addressed to her brother arrived from his bank. Overcome by curiosity, she opened the envelope and was jolted by a bank statement showing three million pounds in the black!

Another example is Mr. Uba Ahmed The powerful secretary of the ruling NPN Who spent Christmas season "buying a private jet, "The ultimate symbol" as south puts it, "of the Nigerian loqtocratt"

Private jets were bought from money received by over-invoicing of imports and kickbacks on foreign loans and contracts. But not from money legitimately transferred through the Central Bank. At the time of the coup there were twenty-two ministers who owned private jets!

While the coup was in progress, Ahmed was on his way home on a Nigerian Airways flight. The flight was denied permission to land in Nigeria and advised to fly to a neighbouring country. The pilot relayed the message to his passengers.

"Impossible! Impossible!" Shouted Uba Ahmed. He orderd the pilot to command the control tower to allow the plane to land as he was a VIP. Unknown to him His fellow "lootocrats" were busy fleeing the country.

When the army learnt that the VIP was none other than secretary Uba Ahmed they were greatly tickled, tnd allowing the plane to land. But when Uba Ahmed Met soldiers welcoming him Instead of his police escorts, "He lost his nerve collapsed into their hands" and was rushed to custody but he has managed to "vanish".

"Party chieftains or their agents in the Shagari government had been given licences and government funds to import goods.

And they had done so at highly inflated prices which enabled them to divert Into private accounts abroad billions of dollars of scarce foreign exchange. The result was calamitous.

"Every Nigerian is aware," Said General Buhari, "of the disgraceful state of our hospitals, for example. There are no drugs in the hospitals. And the laboratories are without equipment. And of course, There is an acute shortage of spare parts and essential raw materials for the basic industries

According to New African, Nigerian Mountain of debt is estimated to be twenty billion dollars!
They just had to be stopped from killing the goose 'that laid the golden egg.

8. KANGAROO COURTS

Corruption is a plague It has been reduced to u system in Nigeria. Yet, if the five coups Nigeria teaches any lesson at all,

It is tins it is not there is a natural limit Which corrupt means can produce. That there is one thing Which the most corrupt man will never sell out and that is the power to transform himself.

UBA AHMED

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GOWON: HIMSELF CLEAN BUT NOT HIS GOVERNMENT

It is a fact kickbacks and sharing of profits from inflated invoices on 'the enormous contracts Generated by the availability of the oil billions became an integral part 1 of official transactions! hider the gowon regime; and instead of being reduced or eliminated they actually became more

entrenched Abacha subsequent regimes simply inherited the habit and the economic formulas of their predecessors.

SHAGARI AT HIS 2nd INAUGURATION CEREMONY

The army had handed over the reign of government to Shagari's regime and went away to the barracks. When the election time approached the army sent the voters to Shagari's regime to render the accounts of the wealth. But when Shagari's regime saw the voters, they killed them and failed to render the accounts.

Therefore, when the army returned what else could it do to Shagari? It did the only sensible thing: It threw Shagari's regime out and trampled upon it.

THE ARMY AT 23rd INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY PARADE

The Nigerian Army Appears to us to consist of men who do not hesitate to put their heads to hazard in order to win in the game of politics. After five coups in Nigeria the 'army does seem to us to have acquired a desperate turn of mind from its habit of playing for so deep a stake.

From being corrupted to become the corrupter; from being a receiver of bribes to become a giver of bribes; From being the patronized to become a patron.

Shagari's men were too greedy to know when to stop acquisition for the sake of acquisition. They were like a dog with bone in the Aesop's fable Who saw its reflection in the river and jumped into the water to snatch the bone from its own reflection which it mistook for another dog.

As it jumped into the river the bone in its mouth fell and was lost. Its greed for more had lost for it the only bone that it had. In the same way the greed of Shagari's men sparked off a coup that lost for them all the power to plunder.

"The taint of squandermania and insensitivity to public suffering" stated *south* "finally touched Shagari himself. Just before presenting his budget, He had obtained from the legislature, a contingency fund of two hundred and ten million United States dollars, for which he was not accountable. Many saw that as simply putting scarce public funds straight into Shagari's pocket."

On Twenty Ninth December Nineteen Hundred Eighty-Three Buhari listened

To the Shagari budget speech and, according to *south*, exploded, "this is hopeless "these people are going nowhere."

It was one more nail in the coffin of the civilian government as one person puts it, "not content with the corruptions by his ministers,

Shagari went himself in the birthplace and sanctuary of virtue, in our parliament itself, and there he sat watching members of parliament,

As a cat watches rats, to see if any dare to oppose the money for his corrupt use which was being voted for him!

"Parliament, filled with people who had rigged their way into the house appeared not to be responsible to the nation. Many of its committees were under the absolute control of individuals and many of the committees were not loathe to high bidders."

"Oh outrage of outrage," commented one journalist, "when the nation witnessed this spectacle of legalized corruption ingratitude vanquished it and in exactly two days' time the army burst out of the barrack and Shagari became a prisoner."

"To make matters worse, stated south "The President had acquired a thirty-seven million dollars Luxury jet to add to a fleet of presidential crafts. So, the illusion that Shagari, was a Mr. Clean surrounded by corrupt advisers was finally shattered."

According to one newspaper the President's national costumes all of them hand-embroidered cost at least two thousand five hundred dollars each. Nothing did more to tarnish ' his character than the alleged massive acquisition of wealth. "If only he had maintained his dignified frugality," said one of his friends, "The history of Nigeria might have been different."

Commented a friend of mine: "of course Shagari had his virtue: In pleasure he is temperate: In friendship he is constant: In conversation he is considerate; but, because he is temperate, constant and considerate, should he be exempt to extort and plunder all day?"

In all reminds one of what. Dr. Caius, said in the Merry wives of Windsor "What shall de honest man do in my closet?

Dere is no honest man dat shall come in my closet." In the same way we say, there is no honest man who plunders the nation. Why should Shagari be exempt from punishment? He had the greatest power to harm. Why shouldn't there be a greater power to restrain him from causing more harm? The power to restrain is inherent in the primal compact of society itself. It is not sealed with wax or written on stones but engraven by God in all our hearts. As the Americans put it: We believe that all men are created equal; That they were endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that amongst these are rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness; that when governments become destructive to these ends then it is the right of the people to remove it. And Shagari was so removed.

The bank accounts of detainees and of some refugees have been frozen by Buhari who said that his government Is not interested in the politicians as such but in their ill-gotten gain. He promised to release all the detainees who "cough out The money they had looted but those who fail to cough out Will be detained for as long as with the Buhari regime for not punishing former politicians and purging the civil service of corrupt elements

The national press cried out for action and urged General Buhari to follow the footsteps of his mentor Murtala by a systematic purging of corrupt elements in the government.

The government took the cue and overnight some 10,000 civil servants were dismissed. Amongst the axed were seventeen permanent secretaries twenty-three air force officers, seventeen naval officers, thirty-four police officers, sixty-six intelligence officers, two forty custom officers. The purge is continuing and spreading to parastatal bodies.

Prominent amongst the detainees is ex-President Shagari who is under house arrest but former Vice-President Mr. Alex Ekwueme and seventeen state governors

Are amongst the seventy-one men, being held at Kirikiri Maximum Security Prison.

The victims of the purge have complained of the witch-hunting' but General Buhari assured Nigerians that only the corrupted will be punished. To be better than the filling of prisons with men guilty of no other crime than that of rumours spread against them. "It is just to punish a man

because he has committed a crime it is unjust to punish a man because it is believed that he has committed a crime."

The military regime has established

Three kangaroo courts in Nigeria.: they are: The recovery of Public Property Tribunal, The exchange control (Anti-Sabotage) tribunal, The Public Officers (Protection against False Accusations) Tribunal. The decisions of the Tribunals are not the subject of any appeal. Nor are their trials public! The Nigerian Bar Association is boycotting their Secret Trials.

Commented the *Talking Drums*: How are the Nigerians to be convinced that a person accused of embezzling millions of naira

(As indeed, Brigadier Idiagbon had accused Chief Bole Ige and Chief Adukunle Ajasin) who ends up being acquitted (As indeed, the two chiefs were) is really innocent of the accusation, but not that some of those millions have changed hands?

How is the public to be convinced that the trials are being held in secret so that some of the SMC (Supreme Military Council) members with some blots on their names from involvement in the previous military regime will not have their "sins" exposed?

How can we convince the public to accept the verdicts of, the trial of a tribunal chaired by Brigadier Paul Omu a member of the SMC which is the same government which overthrew these politicians and which is prosecuting them? Isn't this a classic case of a person being a judge in his "own cause"?

The Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusations) Tribunal Began its work with the trial of two journalists whose only crime was to print a scoop on ambassadorial appointments! they are Mr. Tunde Thompson Diplomatic Correspondent and Mr. Nduka Irabor Assistant News Editor both of the Guardian newspaper.

Former Governor Sam Mbakwe of Imo State Was the first victim of the Exchange Control (Anti-Sabotage) Tribunal Which found him guilty of foreign exchange racketeering and sentenced him to ten years' imprisonment and ordered him to pay Fifty thousand naira to the Federal Government. The Exchange Tribunal told him: "It is regrettable for a man of your standing, a former Chief Executive of a State, and a man of the Bar, to have been involved in this type of act — Particularly, When other Nigerians Were crying out for lack of funds for overseas students That you sent fifty thousand naira for your daughter alone! much an amount makes nonsense of money and makes a daughter spoiled and undisciplined. We will therefore be shirking our responsibilities If, we do not impose Severe punishment on you Just to serve as a deterrent to others in public offices."

The Recovery of Public Property Tribunal sentenced its first victim, Chief Onabanjo Ex-Governor of Ogun to twenty-two "calendar years" in jail. The Chairman of the Tribunal described the former Governor as the nerve of the deal that enriched UPN illegally.

When asked to say something in mitigation, Chief Onabanjo pointed out that the Tribunal knew not the law it was enforcing and that it was nothing but a kangaroo court.

He told the tribunal: "I have looked at the law: It does not allow for any mitigation." He then went on point out, First, that none would expect him to accept the verdict oi'cuiliy. Secondly, that if the evidence had been given in an upon aunt

The verdict would, have been different and that the trial in camera had proved unsatisfactory. Thirdly, that the charge was retrospective which was against the law of natural justice. Fourthly, that though not a lawyer, yet, he had to represent himself; that had he been represented by a learned

counsel the verdict might have been different. Lastly, that history and God were yet to give their own verdict.

9. RIGGED ELECTION

Nigerian leading playwright and novelist Professor Wole Soyinka wrote four months before the coup that the discrepancies in the election figures ran into millions and yet, even those figures did not tell the entire story: Where all the other measures had failed, the secretaries to the States Electoral Commission simply announced the wrong figures. Soyinka's conclusion was that a ghost population of millions had been invented, "to defy the political will of several millions flesh-and-blood, who braved unbelievable brutalities to cast their votes for a change.

"It is obvious that Shagari is living in a world peopled by ghosts; The sad prospect is that He is equally bent on transforming the nation into a land of ghosts, a ghost of itself, a ghost of its potential and logical expectation.

"A civil war has been set in motion by Shehu Shagari and the hierarchy of the NPN the preliminary skirmishes should be recognized for what they are - Mere skirmishes. The responsibility for bloodshed is unambiguously that of a rejected misfit who bungled his chance to make a positive contribution to Nigeria's history, and who abused the state machinery to re-entrench himself and his unpatriotic party in office."

The Nigerian novelist, Mr. Chinua Achebe writing some months before the coup remarked that Nigeria had become "one huge, helpless electoral dupe in the hands of the politicians."

Just before the Nigerian Coup, Professor Larry Diamond described the rigging process in **Africa Report** thus: "The people who could not vote because their names were missing from the register even though they had with them their proof of registration;

"The students who were given ten to twenty registration cards and a wad of cash to hop all over town voting for a certain party;

"The young man who saw his brother accept thousands of Naira to change the result of a senatorial election;

"The businessman who stumbled on a beehive of ballot thumb printing in the home of a top government official on election eve;

"All these people know that the Eighty-Three election were extensively and imaginatively rigged."

As South puts it people who were deeply frustrated with Shagari's government realized that any vote they cast against it would not be counted. It was then that they abandoned hope of changing the government through any democratic process. That was the political climate in which the army moved and deposed a government

which the people had failed to vote out of office.

The police force was turned into a partisan outfit to intimidate

the opposition and protect the vote-riggers.

"The Federal Election Commission," stated South "which was supposed to organise and conduct the elections impartially, was used to rig them."

Said Bola Adedaja, President of Nigerian Union of Journalists "The return of the military to power resulted from the blatant desecration of electoral processes and other democratic institutions by the Shagari administration."

One priest narrated this parable: There was a landowner, he said, who planted a vineyard then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his son to the tenants to collect his fruit.

But when the tenants saw the son they said to each other, "This is the heir come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." so they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

The priest then explained that the landlord is the army his son is the voters, the vineyard is Nigeria, the vine fruit is national wealth, the farmer is Shagari's regime, the harvest time is election time. the army had handed over the government to Shagari's regime and went away to the barrack. When the election time approached the army sent the voters to Shagari's regime to render the accounts of the wealth.

But when Shagari's regime saw the voters, they killed them and failed to render the account.

Therefore, when the army returned what else could it do to Shagari? It did the only sensible thing: It threw Shagari's regime out and trampled upon it.

More than two hundred people lost their lives in election violence in Oyo and Ondo states where the parties in opposition to Shagari's NPN (National Party of Nigeria) were driven mad by blatant rigging of the polls.

Professor Larry Diamond prophetically observed, "It was this kind of violence in these very areas following a rigged regional election in Nineteen Sixty-Five that precipitated Nigeria's first military coup." It again precipitated The Nineteen Eighty-three coup. Major General Muhammadu

complained that Shagari's regime had "been of no benefit at all to the Nigerian people." Shagari's men in power employed, he said, all sorts of tactics to perpetuate themselves in office. The last General Election, he said, only eroded what little confidence the Nigerian voter had in the system of effecting a change of leadership through the ballot box.

"The elections were anything but free and fair." the ability to rig the election, stated General Buhari, was relative to resources available to different political parties and only those that did not have the resources to rig complained of rigging. Complained a Nigerian soldier, "They denied us the right to change the government by the ballot and then they complain that we brought about a change by the bullet. They divided the society between the have and they have not and then they complain that we are not united."

After winning the election in the way he won Shagari's lofty eloquence started to fall dead on the nation. The effect of his oratory had depended too much on the virtuous character that the publicity had attributed to him. The way the election was conducted exposed him as an upstart drunk with power and so pervaded by pride that he treated the nation as insensible stones.

The mythical Shagari resembled the genuine Shagari as a Pharisee resembles a saint. men of note were first to rebel. The masses followed. They said that nothing could be more absurd or mischievous than to waste Shagari in the State House when he has demonstrated by his insensitive to cruelties and to injustices that he would be best employed in weighing, out grocery or in measuring out textiles. Shagari had been deceived: He had been made to believe that popularity

Really did not matter. All he had to do was to announce false figures and everybody will believe it.

Yet he himself might still have won the election without the false figures to rescue his many darlings. But the false figures not only lost for him many honest citizens but turned them into enemies. His delusion, if delusion it was, that he was elected to second term of office resembled that of Abu Hassan, in the Arabian tale whose brain was turned by his short and fleeting caliphate.

Shagari's second elevation could not, by any stretch, of imagination. Be attributed to his merit: Some people thus represented him as a lackey of his evil angels

Who rigged the election. Shagari's cabinet first fault is that they came to power by rigging the election. Their second fault is that in their estimation, they as rulers, were everything and the nation that they ruled was nothing at all.

The nation replied by refusing to be treated as property of any rulers and by refusing to accept rulers Who cheated their way to power. The nation said in effect That by the plainest common sense and by the simplest principle of common law no man can forfeit any power except those which he legally had. Since the rigged election conferred on Shagari regime no legally cognizable power it followed that the coup legally deprived the regime of no legal power.

If the election was not so rigged, Ben Mensah's complaint that the seizure of power in Nigeria was an insult to the integrity of the vast majority of Nigerians

Who, only four months earlier, had waded and sweated through rain and sun to register and cast their votes for Shagari's party would have been valid.

10. GOD'S MEANS OF CONFUSION

According to Habibu Shagari, a nephew of ex-President Shagari the coup that toppled Shagari was, "an act of God no one could have changed.

— It was God who gave Shehu power and it was he who took it away from him."

Inevitable fate so linked his rise to power and his fall from power that neither the rise nor the fall could have been prevented. Shagari came to power at the moment in which he had come to power — the moment the army chose to relinquish power. He fell from power

At the moment in which he had to fall — the moment the army seized power.

This belief in fatality must of necessity appeal to the helpless. It is blaming it all on God, on our destiny. African Business stated, "the new government was greeted, In spite of complete absence of predictions, with a sense of the inevitable."

To express resentment of Shagari's regime had become perilous and yet not to show resentment Was to invite more riggings; a coup thus became Inevitable.

Rev. Dr. S.T. Ola Akande said that the 31st December coup Was a demonstration of God's anger On the evil men who had ruled Nigeria Since Nineteen Seventy-Nine and who should be made to pay dearly for their sins. All those of them on the run, according to Dr. Akande, should be fished out and treated like Adolf Eichman who was responsible for the death of millions of Jews during World War Two.

Agreed a Catholic priest: "Rulers are the salt of the earth and if the salt loses its saltiness, in this case by corruption, how can it be made salty again?"

It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men and that is what the army has done: Shagari regime was thrown out and trampled by men.

One thing is thus clear to us that any marriage between the people of Nigeria and the government of Nigeria which tends to exclude the majority of Nigerians from the benefit of power inevitably Gives birth to a divorce by a coup.

It had happened before; It has happened now.

Commented a lady, "For four whole years' things have been steadily tending to just such a consummation. For four whole years Nigeria has been Just one vast mass of combustible material. The wonder is that Such a vast combustible matter did not spark earlier." Her colleague agreed, "Yes" he said, "For four whole years The storm gathered. For four whole years The discontent of the nation Has been steadily increasing. For four whole years We watched the discontent attain Its maturity.

"The discerning warned throughout That the storm might soon burst and it ultimately burst with a fury which justly swept away Shagari and his cronies as well." 0771488516

"It is a simple story." Resumed the lady, "They were like cats; We were like mice. we had to stop them exploiting us. But who was to bell the cat? that was the only question. senior officers offered to do so. If they had not so offered, junior officers would have still done the job; It was an inevitable coup."

"It was an act of God" answered her companion "for it avoided the horrors of a civil war and, without any violation of law, with hardly a bloodshed, it effected immediately the change that the ballot box was denied the chance."

The picturesque vulgarity of his language always tickled his audience and the exuberant vitality That he irradiated commanded attention he beamed at her and said there is no nation of presidents for the simple reason that not everybody can be president any more than everybody can be a chemist.

We thought Shehu Shagari

Was presidential material. It turned out that he was not and that was that. Just as the proof of the pudding is in the eating and of the monarch is on the throne so the proof of the presidency is in the State House.

"The implacable resentment" He proceeded, "with which the opposition persecuted The Government for rigging the election baited the government into such savageness. Which in its turn, Ulcerated with hatred the hearts of the governed against the governors. Terror began to spread fast. Had there not been a coup, there would have been a civil war."

He paused for a minute and stared at her face he caught my eye over her shoulder and he said with graceful gentleness and childlike ease,

"The fact that there are on earth crimes which cannot be punished and virtues which can't be rewarded Presuppose in many minds That there is another place or there are other places in which the unpunished crimes and the unrewarded virtues Would be punished and rewarded.

“Again the supposition that some of our virtues may be rewarded and some of our crimes may after death be punished in a place or places other than the earth presupposes immortality of our soul. There is nothing more useful and more consoling to men in trouble than this belief in divine justice.

"We knew that Shagari's regime was due for punishment It was inevitable. The only question was where? We are glad it took place here.", A spasm passed over his face. His lips twitched in a bitter smile. He thrust both his hands in his trousers pockets as he said uneasily.

"The name Lagos is associated in my mind with the literal and metaphorical meanings of the word Babel. Literally Babel means the city of God. "Ba" means father and "Bel" means God. Lagos is certainly a city loved by God who made it the capital of the most prosperous. The most populated and the most resourceful nation in Africa.

"Metaphorically, Babel means confusion as is stated in the book of Genesis, the Lord had said: "If is one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they won't understand each other." and God succeeded to do so

And these coups are partly God's means of confusion for without them, believe me, Nigeria would become as the United States of America."

11. ILLUSTRIOUS CRIMINALS

What stirred the princes of Greece to raise mighty armies and for years to dream of nothing but the battles and sieges of Troy? Why were the coffers filled with infinite treasures emptied to raise a mighty fleet and an invincible army? Why was the whole machinery of the Greek states directed to burn, massacre, plunder, lay waste and dragoon? was it because of corruption?

Is it not amazing that the wars were fought for no more concern than the return of a female who had become the greatest ornament to the Greek society?

Would another Ellen or Cleopatra in Nigeria not justify the army picking up guns to make her a first lady? "What is the cause of the Nigerian Coup?" According to my friend. It was not a Cleopatra. "As far as I am concerned," Said my friend, "When General Buhari With General Murtala Topped the Gowon Government he found himself a mad man; h could be smiled at but never laughed at; he could be despised but not in his face; He could be joked about but with reverence; He couldn't be passed without notice; He couldn't say anything that wasn't taken up and quoted; he couldn't appear in public without the whispers of: "That's General Buhari; "There goes General Buhari;" he found himself, in short, Just basking in glory and he did not dislike it.

"From thence onward, he began to fasten his desiring eyes on the presidential stool. His whole body craved for it.

Bur every time he made a move to snatch it, some suspicious eyes detected his purpose and he was forced to pretend that he hadn't been thinking about toppling the government.

"Ultimately he got desperate: He could hardly keep his wits together; The craze for the presidency almost overpowered him; so, he braved all the shame and he seized it. That's the only explanation that makes sense to me."

Whether you agree with or not you will agree that the Nigerian army appears to us to consist of men who do not hesitate to put their heads to hazard in order to win in the game of politics. After five coups in Nigeria, the army does seem to us to have acquired a desperate turn of mind

From its habit of playing for so deep a stake.

The consequence is that many men of gentle natures are beginning to have a second thought about meddling in such contests in which you could only engage at the risk of your life or of your liberty to meddle commented one journalist "in Nigerian politics Is to take your life in your hands."

Abba Dabo, the editor of the Sunday New Nigerian and former press secretary to President Shagari has disclosed that no less than eight coups were attempted against Shagari.

Retired Army Chief of Staff General Dan Juma, a member of the armed rulers that handed over power to Shagari's government

In Nineteen seventy-nine had long anticipated a military takeover. Commenting on Shagari Landslide electoral victory he said:

"After the landslide, I know, there will be a gunslide." and lo! there, indeed was.

Plato once said that the best stomach is not those that reject all food. By the same logic we can equally affirm that the best nations are not those that reject all their leaders.

Nigeria has so far rejected all their leaders. There seems to be perpetual strife amongst the Nigerian politicians and the Nigerian army. According to the politicians, the army rules by the gun not by consent and therefore the army rule is against the people.

According to the army The rule by politicians Is marked by corruption and against the interest of the people. Everywhere, the arguments against the rule by the army or by the politicians Is carried on with revolting amplifications of the same theme or with the expression of wild frenzy full of crude talk and turgid common places.

Army rule supporters would say that politicians in Nigeria have always been false, thieving, greedy, cozening, inconstant, ambitious and envious.

The supporters of democratic rule would respond that the army rulers have always been faithless, mean-spirited, slenderous, oppressive, bloody and stupid.

You become tired of such flood of detestable arguments which so deluge you everywhere that you are sickened to death.

The fact is that the Nigerian army and the Nigerian civilian have their problems. Who indeed has no problem? But the Nigerian army feels its calamity with a different sort of sensibility from the way it feels the calamity of the whole nation.

It may salute and praise those persons in power but it neither believes in its praise nor does it act on its praise. It is ever ready to reconsider its opinion and nothing more disposes it to reconsider its opinion than the opportunity to overturn the government.

Whenever an opportunity to overturn the government has presented itself, it has always acted on it. The army thus consisted of men whom it is not safe to take at their own word.

As the army sees it, if you choose A proper conjuncture, lift a gun and fire it, then from thence on you become a hero and you are called a president and saviour of the nation! but if you choose a wrong time and the attempted coup fails you earn the brand of a traitor -as a perpetual reproach upon your memory.

According to the Bible it was Saturn, the viceroy of God Himself, who first reduced ambition into an art and grafted it on politics by seducing the creatures of God from their obedience.

The relationship between The elected government and the army in Nigeria is no different than that between the kite and the chick. A kite has always snatched the chick whenever it has the chance; in the same way the Nigerian army has always seized the reign of government whenever it has the chance.

Asked an embittered observer, "If the kite has always had the same character why must you expect the Nigerian army to change its character?"

Abraham Cowley compared the army to some devils easily raised but not easily laid in so much that, if a magician called them up, he should be forced to find for them always some employment; for though they would do all his bidding, yet if he left them but for one moment without some work of evil to perform, they would turn their claws against himself.

"Such a friend" said Cowley "is an army. They who evoke it cannot dismiss it. They are at once its masters and its slaves. Let them not fail to find for it Task after task of blood and rapine. Let them not leave it for a moment in repose Lest it tears them in pieces."

Said another person: "What do you expect from a standing army Which fight no battle? The army is like a wild beast. You either let them loose on your neighbours, or it devours you.

Rome let them loose on her neighbours and she became the master of the world. Nigeria confined them at home and they devoured her presidents."

To many people Nigeria's armies appear as the old Man of the Sea, a monster which once it crouched upon your shoulders You became its captive slave and you never escape alive from its clutches.

There is an Arab proverb which states that: all men envy the strong envy openly; The weak envy secretly. A coup is generally an expression of the open envy by the strong.

Just as a dog uses its teeth to chew its food and to bite its enemies so does envy use lies to gain power as well as to revenge itself against those persons who stand on its way to power

The stings of political lies are not exactly unknown in the Republic of Nigeria where- political lies are calculated to make a patriot, a traitor and to make a traitor, a patriot.

They are like cyclone which flies swiftly scattering dirt in the eyes of the people and thus causing confusion.

There is a mistaken impression that the truth compared with lies Is like Moses' serpent that immediately swallowed up and devoured the Egyptian serpents. On the contrary lies, especially those propagated by the state, generally swallows up the truth.

"Corruption preached by bonzes?" Said my brother Herbert "As a reason for a coup d'etat is a rationalization to beguile the people in order to rule them. These bonzes seek to govern by the modification of others. They seek to punish before proof of guilt. Natural law requires assumption of innocence until guilt is proven. Under that law soldiers, like other professionals, have no right to kill a ruler because they suspect him of corruption. But 'Alas' the natural law no longer applies to Nigeria: now, they shoot first, accuse second and convict last."

Said one Nigerian, "What do you expect from foreigners such as the South Africans or the South Americans to think of us when we brand as corrupt such leaders as Balewa and Shehu Shagari elected by our own people? or such leaders as Gowon and Murtala Muhamed who shot their way to power for the express purpose of ridding the nation of corruption?"

"What do you expect them to think of a nation which has the impudence to stigmatize with the infamy of corruption each and every leader that has ever wielded power in the nation? What else must they think If we ourselves call our presidents, as the illustrious criminals?"

12. THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE

According to South, all conversation in Lagos Began or ended with the phrase, "The trouble with Nigeria" and according to Chinua Achebe the trouble with Nigeria was "simply and squarely a failure of leadership." Shagari found himself in a position in which his talents for administration

Did not appear in the best light. The decision which pre-eminently fitted him for the direction of school pupils was out of place in national affairs. The presidency became The ruin of Shagari. during the closing days of his presidency,

He was odious to the opposition and yet was not exactly the darling of his party supporters.

Shagari was no Friday who lived alone on an island and was thus constrained to follow none. A person living in a society cannot help being influenced to some extent by the circle in which he operates. But where the influence extends to doing things incompatible with your honour then a line should be drawn somewhere. Shagari's fault was that he failed to draw that vital line. He appeared more feign to indulge the corruption of his cronies than to restrain it.

Unless he possesses an outstanding character and an independent source of reliable information a president can easily become a helpless puppet of his ministers by repeating as a parrot Whatever words they put into his mouth and endorsing as a rubber stamp whatever documents

To Shagari, the government was like his mistress. You don't point out to a man the flaws of his betrothed and so you just did not dare

To point out to Shagari the flaws in his government. Since he preferred to traffic in flatteries and in lies, how else could he expect to escape their consequences!

The swinish intemperance and the woffish avarice of his cronies made them requite the nation with poverty and imprisonment. Chief Awolowo predicted dire consequences for the nation as a result of NPN rule.

Nigeria had expected Shagari to be like Murtala who towered high above his ministers, who actually led the nation, and whose superior mind was the spring of direction to all ministries. instead, President Shagari appeared to them to be violently pushed by those close to him, to do all sorts of things. During his first four years of office he seemed to have resisted the push. He appeared conspicuously to be holding back. But during and after the "second election," He yielded

to the current. then, his misfortune began. It was said that great as Shagari's abilities were, yet! in the hands of some of his cronies, he was a mere driveller.

His cronies formed a set which was so much cemented by common interests that it was much easier to describe them collectively than separately: They held high posts in society, they belonged to the same epicurean school of thought, they belonged to the same sect of word management, and to one administration: They resembled each other so much in their ostentatious display of wealth and influence,

And in their guiding the politics of the nation with a side glance at their numbered accounts in Switzerland their creed was the belief in the omnipotence of Shehu Shagari: They believed in Shagari, they believed that no intrigue, no parliament and no combination of plotters could deprive them of his confidence.

Said Professor Wole Soyinka: "There is no Nigerian child living today' who does not know that Shehu Shagari has presided for four years over the most unscrupulous and insatiable consortium that the nation has ever known." Shagari, he stated, must be judged by the company he gathered around him.

They were not known as Shagari's friends and his friends they were certainly not. They were known as Shagari's favourites. They were his privates. The Romans had a better name for them. they were participles curium: They were that which ties the knot. They would lift Shagari gently by his arm, out of his chair, telling him that they hoped he would do this and would not do that the way Decius Brutus did to Julius Caesar and Shagari, like Caesar, would comply.

They were adept at discovering the inclinations of the president and of accommodating their counsel 'to it. They thus succeeded marvelously to ingratiate themselves with the president as well as to promote the causes for his downfall.

If there were schools for leaders, the first lesson taught in them would possibly be "beware of counsellors whose advices to you is to do all actions your heart is set upon and to do all action your cronies heart is set upon."

The custom in many African countries is for everybody to repeat the eulogies for the government in power. Unable to find the words of praise, all who wanted to do so were reduced to succumb to the same worn out phrases of "under the wise leadership of President Shagari" wise leadership, my foot! even folly becomes wisdom.

In the days of inquisition, the priests would accuse you of blasphemy If you did not share their point of view. In the days of monarchy, the courtiers would accuse you of insulting the crown If you laughed at them. recently, ministers would accuse you of being anti-government if you despised them. And Shagari's ministers were no exception, they attributed the worst motive to those who criticized them.

It was said that some of them Behaved toward their political oppositions in the way the judge in the pilgrim's progress behaved towards an accused person namely Mr. Faithful

"Thou runigate heretic and traitor," Said the biased judge "Hast thou heard What these honest gentlemen

Have witnessed against thee? - thou deservest to live no longer, but to be slain immediately upon the place;

Yet, that all men may see our gentleness towards thee, let us hear what thou, Vile, runigate, hast to say."

The Shjagari gang, as they were secretly called professed to be led by Shagari himself but in matters affecting their interests they led him wherever they chose and often where he would not have gone without their persuasion.

Had he not been very much Under their sway, or had he been fortunate in choosing better company, his many good qualities buoyed by his image builders in Western Press — detribalized, meek and unassuming — would possibly have shone brightly.

But, things being as it was, it is the light of the qualities of his companions that were reflected upon him and made him to be associated with mastery of electoral rigging shameless corruption, and dexterous intrigues.

The Shagari regime remarkably waved away the accusation of corruption. Shagari's right-hand man Umaru Dikko would say: "no Nigerian has been found scavenging in dustbins." government economic adviser Professor Emmanuel Edozien was quoted as saying, "the economy is buoyant; There is no cause for alarm." Chief Awolowo's warning about corruption was dismissed as "high-level mischief."

A month before the coup, however, Shagari himself admitted that there was; "A mountain of corruption to be fought" but as African business puts it, "Dissident voices were silenced and specific examples of corrupt practice ignored."

"Our history is replete of bad actions" said one Nigerian in London, "by such extraordinary men whose high intelligence had the misfortune of being married to their low desires."

Some demagogues constitute the most loathsome specimens of human nature. The understanding and conscience of President Shagari was in the keeping of such unprincipled and brainsick specimens

Said the Daily Sketch of Nigeria, 'In Nigeria, no one is very keen in enforcing our laws. This is because those charged with the responsibility Are themselves the guiltiest."

They set their hearts to obtain things which no sensible man ought to suffer to be necessary to his happiness and which none of them could obtain without loss of integrity.

The coup brought to the test the worth of the fortune for which they had sullied their integrity, had violated the most sacred obligation of nationalism.

They had been so proud and so boastful. That they were like the proverbial fir tree which boasted to the bramble bush that it was strong and beautiful whereas the bramble bush was small and ugly. because of its strength and beauty, some people chopped it down to build a house with it.

As it fell down it cried out, "oh dear! I wish I were a bramble bush! then these men would not have cut me down." In the same way, if these proud and boastful former rulers were honest, they would now cry out, "we wish our pride and our boast had not prevented us

From heeding all criticisms." Shagari was in his own way a great man, but then, great men do make mistakes like the common herd.

Said one Nigerian "God is great: just yesterday, In the obscurity of our parish We were miserably praying God' to protect the leaders that we wanted overthrown."

A terrible reverse had taken place. After four years of corruption the voice of conscience was to be heard again.

13. A VAGUE PRESENTIMENT

A friend of the former president General Yakubu Gowon is reported to have said, "Shagari is not to blame. Buhari will find out the futility inherent in the Nigerian presidency. A Nigerian president appears the leading actor in the political scene. But in fact he is a puppet pushed to and fro by his cronies who shield themselves with, "the people." he must not disappoint "the people." he is supposed to do what "the people" expect of him and that in practical terms means what his cronies expect of him.

A president must act as a president, that is to say. in the eyes of his cronies who determine and praise the resolute way a president is supposed to act. In that way the cronies think that they are kidding the people. you ask, how long can they go on kidding the people?

Then one day they wake up and find that all along they had not kidded the people they had only kidded the president and themselves! as Mahatma Gandhi ably put it; in the end deceivers, deceive only themselves.

According to the talking Drums during the tenure in office of the present junta leader, General Buhari as commissioner for petroleum in the military regime, crude oil contracts varying from fifty thousand to one million barrels per day were awarded to some of the retiring military leaders, "The better to settle them in their retirement."

Said one of Buhari's aides, "that Buhari Is uncorrupted, nay, that he thought himself as incorruptible many intelligent men found it hard to believe."

Ibrahim Isiyaku argues in the talking drums that contrary to the litany of corruption that accompanies all African military takeovers, the fact remains that corruption is not a monopoly of civilian rulers. "General Buhari" he said, "Constructed His personal residence in Kaduna at a cost of seven hundred thousand naira."

According to the talking drums Buhari's period of office as petroleum boss was the "period of the missing two point Eight-Billion-naira scandal."

Said one journalist, "Judging by their past, they were equally ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing. by their fruits, we have known them we mustn't expect a corrupt tree to bring forth good fruit. grapes are not gathered of thorns nor figs gathered of thistles."

Said one of Shagari's Ministers, "— Buhari beholds the mote that is in Shagari's eye, but considers not the beam that is in his own eye."

It is well known that Shagari regime had appointed a ministerial commission to investigate the excessively high costs of the contracts during the military regime that preceded it.

The finding was That the average cost of contracts under army rule Was higher than in all other countries at similar stages of development.

Asked one Nigerian politician "after they have been declaiming ten years of the civilian rule have the thirteen years of army rule Made Nigeria better? Instead of a progressive improvement promised by the army have we not had A progressive degeneracy? "Can it be doubted that the army team which has taken over has all the vices of the civilian team that it has dismissed with a further additional vice of hypocrisy?

"Is it not hypocrisy to talk of extinguishing cupidity? are promises of impossibilities not worse than the promises of limited attainable ends?

A tablet which would make a man suffering from toothache feel very happy Is much better than an aspirin i which only assuages pain.

"But would it be reasonable to support a ruler who promises you Such a non-existent tablet in place of an aspirin? "Buhari is promising us the moon. It is charming but it's only a myth. Children believe it. We are adults. We prefer reality. We prefer the earth.

As weekly review puts it, "The kind of problems which the country faces are not going to disappear merely at the waving of the soldier's guns. If anything, things are likely to get a little stickier on the economic front before they get better.

"It is also possible, as often happens in such situations that someone else in the armed forces may think he has better answers to the problems of Nigeria than Buhari has. after all, two previous military regimes in Nigeria were overthrown by army men!" ever since the Nigerian Army first shot its way to power and toppled Nigeria's first president Dr. Azikiwe,

The Nigerian Presidents have not exactly been objects of affection of any sizeable part of their people with the exception of General Murtala Who Unfortunately Was slain in an attempted coup.

Successive presidents Seemed to have neither Charismatic personal qualities Which often compensate for absence of title nor democratic right Which compensate for absence of merit.

A democratically elected president. Though he lacks capacity may yet be popular because of his popular party. But, a usurper cannot expect to be popular without displaying some popular merit beneficial to the nation.

It is therefore not surprising that ever since Nigeria's first coup, every time the army lifted up an arm against the president he collapsed without a struggle amidst universal derision. The exception as pointed out, was Murtala Mohammed whose Genius was doing much for the nation. It may therefore be strange If the sentiment of affection and loyalty which has been out of date as the belief in witches Was to revive of a sudden.

In the opinion of many, General Buhari has chewed off more than he can swallow. How can the hoe hope to cut what has defeated the axe? how can General Buhari hope to curb corruption That defeated Murtala?

It is said that ever since General Murtala's death, every successive Nigerian leader has behaved like the Queen in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. They keep on asking their magic mirror about the fairest Nigerian president meaning Nigeria's most honest and honourable president as distinguished from the most handsome president.

They always ask the mirror "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, among the rulers in this land who is the fairest of them all?" The mirror always replies: "Mr. Murtala Mohammed is the fairest of them all." It is doubtful whether the mirrors reply to Bihari's question, will be any different.

General Buhari possesses the qualities which raise men to greatness rapidly but not the qualities which enable them to retain greatness long. His daring courage and impetuous activity

Fitted him admirably for a coup activity but his lack of caution and his lack of patience disqualifies him from the conduct of an administration whose entrenched economic problems can only be surmounted gradually.

Let the lamentable truth therefore be told that though General Buhari be accomplished, yet he is in no sense a statesman.

Said General Buhari, "People were saying we were slow to form a government, we are slow to bring the detainees to justice, we are slow to flood the market with essential raw materials. this blame could only come from mediocres

In a now notorious interview with the *National Concord* General Buhari was asked whether he was prepared to temper with the press freedom. Replied General Buhari: "I'm going to temper with that!" and he promulgated the notorious decree No. 4 which empowers the government to close any newspaper Radio or television station and imprison journalists for a period not exceeding two years for inaccurate reporting. we have already begun to perceive signs of unquiet times: The restless of those turbid hopes which are not being realized, a vague presentment of all not being well and the rulers daily stunned with complaints they cannot solve and daily besieged by petitioners whom all their patronage cannot satisfy.

14. THE NIGERIAN ARMY

Peter Enahoro points out that the image of the military as a kind of police action which comes only when the civilians (Or when the army in power for that matter) Seem to be careering towards derailment needs to be revised. The army has become a political bloc wielding political power not merely standing by as a watchdog. Kojo Smith agrees and points out that, "It is very easy for Nigeria to go the way of Ghana where the junior rank have almost done away with the officer's corps except a handful of officers who are prepared to be subservient to their ruling juniors in order to survive. It is not impossible that a few power drunk Nigerian soldiers

In the lower ranks are already lurking in the dark and only waiting for the opportune time to impose their brand of politics on the people. ambition is thus arbitrary in its ways. It treats some men of quality as useless and dangerous merely because they do not promote its object. It rewards good services to the nation with ill usage. It elevates some people of no quality at all to positions of trust merely because they promote Its object.

Why should the Supreme Military Council of Nigeria Consist of Nineteen people all of them from the forces save the Attorney General Mr. Chike of fodile? to make matters worse, there are nineteen state governors all of them from the forces too.

Now, what about lawyers, doctor's farmers, teachers, and so on? have they no qualities to rule?
We do not think that an army man is special. We do not agree that he was born a saviour
He is born like a politician and, like a politician, He is a mixture of good and bad.
Love of self is as much ingrained in him as in a politician.

We believe that he who ascends by the gun maintains his ascendancy by the gun Is doomed to fall by the gun.

African Business has correctly pointed out that at the time of the coup by senior officers, there was widespread belief that the action by senior officers only forestalled a bloodier and left wing revolution by junior officers.

"Buhari must therefore be aware" said one Nigerian elder, "that the shameless insincerity of our people Illustrated by the enthusiastic support they gave the Shagari regime down to the moment of general desertion Indicates a loose moral most disgraceful to the age. Buhari musn't thus expect to fare any better."

The characteristic of flexibility of principle May be serviceable to him but can never be relied upon and can never be respectable.

Then there are the Shagari's men. They are not men without talents. They reached where they reached because of their talents. Now the rain of blows has made them stoop. But for how long will the blows stop them? They may yet crawl forward on their hands and knees and surprise Buhari and Buhari has given them ammunitions for doing so.

Neither the economic problems nor the proposed economic remedies have actually changed. although Shagari is out, yet his budget goes marching on. The military regime is engaged in what has been termed as corrective measures rather than innovative measures.

Then there are priests who are preaching "We tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in by some other way Is a thief and a robber.

"In the same way, we tell you the truth the man Who does not enter the Presidency by the gate of the ballot boxes but climbs in by some other way such as through a rigged *election* or through the barrel of the gun Is a thief and a robber."

For how long can Buhari in the face of such opposition run a government without an election?

As Peter Enahoro points out in *Africa now* you can run a government forever without elected representation and you can do so far more cheaply. but, a government which relies upon the creative talents of civil servants will lose its innovative drive. civil servants are poor innovators; they are good plodders. the people soon get fed up with it: for we Africans look upon government rather as a father-figure. When things go wrong we are immediately at our wits end ready to follow the latest Messiah to the end of the earth. His promises are new so we think they are different. We swear they will work. The journey has often been a very short one.

"The bone of corruption which is the most emotive of all the stated causes of coups in Africa will live with Nigeria longer than screaming newspaper headlines would suggest. What this means is that for years to come any soldier with the will, the rank and the means to mount a *coup d'etat* will always find a ready ally in charges of corruption. No great and stable nation can be built on the slippery slopes of this permanent uncertainty.

The one attempted and the four successful Military coups d'etats subjected Nigeria to Military rule for thirteen years out of twenty-three years of her independence. For thirteen years Nigeria has been in a state of revolution. Such is the outcome of violent changes of government: The spell of prescription is broken; the habit of obedience is blown to the wind.

The government rules by force of arms. Moral force it has none. It conquers by the gun, Rules by the gun and falls by the gun.

The very existence of a military regime which has shot its way to power is proof that rebellion pays. During the twenty-three years of her independence Nigeria has grown accustomed to resist the constituted authorities and to see the constituted authorities yield to those resistances.

Buhari's government will be no exception Unless it voluntarily. Hands over power to civilians in a free election.

An army which has had a taste of power, and has experienced the pleasures of governing in which obedience is paid to them, in which they are regarded not as servants but as masters, such an army is not easy to keep in the barrack.

To such an army the civilian population is like beasts of burden which can easily be managed by any, new master.

To the civilian population, such an army is like the wild ass which submits to no bonds or like the rhinoceros which holds not its nose to the hook or like the unicorn which abides not by the crib. Such a wild ass, such a rhinoceros and such a unicorn is the Nigerian army. Let Buhari not forget it.

EPILOGUE

15. MISCHIEF IS AFOOT

"I must caution" Said Mr. Segun Osoba, Managing Director of the sketch "that the honeymoon with the new government is over difficult days are ahead of us."

With the advantages of hindsight New African commented, "Even at the heady height of the media-military honeymoon, it was not hard to detect a certain undercurrent of distrust. — within the first weeks of the coup, Press euphoria had given way to doubt, even to suspicion in some quarters that there had not been a change of government but a change of uniform. — It was the military wing of the outlawed National Party of Nigeria that took over power."

The love affair between the army and the populace on the one hand, and the army and the media came to an abrupt end much faster than predicted. What then, was to be the solution to the impasse? As was to be expected Buhari provided a military solution. He gagged the press. In addition

To the Official Secrets Act, The Newspapers Amendment Act, The Public Officers Protection Act, and the law of sedition

Which curb the excesses of the press and provide redresses thereto, Buhari again imposed on the nation a decree, aimed at insuring that the press only publish the truth.

Said he, the Nigerian press is a "weakness" not strength! he was particularly stung by the false press allegation That when he was minister for petroleum, some two point eight billion Naira were found missing from the accounts of the petroleum corporation which allegation was a subject of a judicial probe which found it to be a gigantic hoax.

This press gang has caused even a greater disaffection. Commented Ibadan — based *tribune*: "the military administration seems to be saying: We will do all the talking and make all the statements which the press should print and nobody else should be heard."

The other journalists who tried to be heard were subjected to third degree treatment. Mr. Banji Ogundele, the editor of the *tribune* was ordered to keep on reporting to the provost Marshall of the Nigerian Army in Lagos. The editor of the *Nigerian Statesman* Mr. Pip Iwuagwu and two of his top journalists were dismissed by State Military Governor Mr. Mike Nwachukwa. The Governor dispersed all the staff of the newspaper complaining that the newspaper, "Did not appear to realize that there has been a change of government."

A lorry filled with soldiers drove to the home of the *tribune's* Sunday editor to threaten that they would "shut down the press." commented a Nigerian journalist:

"As Aesop puts it: 'poor men generally find that a change of government simply means exchange of one master for another — a truth which is illustrated in the following little anecdote:

"A timid old man was grazing his donkey in a meadow when all of a sudden lie by the shouting of some enemy soldiers. 'run for it', he cried, 'so that they don't catch us! "

But the donkey was in no hurry. "tell me," said the donkey, "If I fall into the conqueror's hands, do you think he will make me carry a double load?"

"I shouldn't think so" Was the old man's answer. "then, it doesn't matter to me," said the intelligent donkey "what master I serve as long as I only have to bear my ordinary burden."

Continued 'the journalist, "It is the same with Nigerians: It does not matter to us now what master we serve as long as we only have to bear our ordinary burden less the gagging of the press."

Then he concluded with these ominous words, "Mischief, thou art afoot, take thou what course thou wilt."

And mischief is indeed afoot: the students are boycotting lectures in protest against the introduction by the government of payment and fees in schools and colleges. The government has declared the boycott to be illegal. It has closed five universities. It has arrested a number of university lecturers

Including controversial defist

Dr. Ola Oni, Nigerian students who are a powerful pressure group have been supported by other pressure groups especially, the Nigerian Labour Congress and journalist generally.

And what is the government response? As usual muzzling, Boycott of classes have been included in the general ban of strikes and demonstration.

Mischief is indeed afoot. According to the Talking Drums even among the top Nigerian Military clique the panacea of muzzling is creating a rift. "The situation," stated Talking Drums is now tense among members of the supreme military council as they now regard each other with suspicion and distrust, about five of the members, are said to belong to a notorious secret society that is noted over the years with the smooth planning and executions of coups.

Again in the council of states which comprises all the military governors, the same atmosphere of fear and distrust is rife....

“As the wrangling continue, there are strong indications that sooner or later the nonsensical purge that has engulfed all spheres of the Nigerian life. Might eventually find its way to the top brass” the only question seems to be who is to reshuffle who?

According to the Talking Drums “already, there are rumours of a conflict between head of state General Buhari and Briugadier Idiagbon over the preferential treatment given to ex-president Shagari and ex-vice president Dr. Alex Ekwueme, the former being under house arrest the later in Kirikiri Prison.” Mischief is indeed a foot and it is taking the course it wilts.