

THREE. OIL AND THE “ARMY ARRANGEMENT”

Corruption and the Petro-State, 1970–1999

The repeated accusation in Fela Kuti’s Afrobeat song “Army Arrangement” (1985) “Two-point-eight billion naira / Oil money is missing” might be taken at the leitmotif for Nigerian public affairs in the years since the start of the oil boom. “Army Arrangement” can be heard both as theme music and indictment of Nigeria’s politics toward the end of the twentieth century. Its repetition of “oil money is missing” suggests a structural feature of government. More than that, it develops a complex web of references with ever-shifting political salience, given the contexts in which it was released and rereleased. Its critique of Nigerian politics and its discussion, sometimes overt and sometimes implicit, of political figures goes beyond simple representation. It depicts but also participates in a nearly forty-year history of politics and political corruption. As such, “Army Arrangement” is a window onto the transformation of Nigerian political life in the years after the civil war. Two intertwined transformations in Nigeria’s economy and politics drove a change in the corruption-complex. The more obvious to external commentators was the economic transformation occasioned by the vast oil revenues beginning in 1970, which transformed the Nigerian state. Before oil became a significant source of income, governmental revenue was regionalized: it came primarily from taxes, the export of crops—cocoa in the west, palm oil in the east, and groundnuts in the north—and import duties. After the civil war, revenues from agriculture were dwarfed by

oil receipts, which poured directly into federal coffers. Oil wealth allowed the government to maintain the naira at an artificially high level, serving to subsidize imports at the expense of some indigenous sectors. The strategy had limited success, at least if industrialization were the goal: import substitution is difficult when imports are effectively subsidized. The economic basis of state institutions became more centralized with the shift to oil exports, and Nigeria's new status as an oil rentier caused other sectors of its economy to stagnate. Nigeria's transformation heightened the stakes for control at the center, since the federal government controlled the country's primary source of wealth.¹

The second transformation was equally significant. Even before the civil war broke out, Yakubu Gowon's military government had attempted to address the centrifugal tendency of Nigeria's previous federal arrangement. The twelve-state arrangement promulgated in 1967 was finally implemented in all parts of the country by 1970; it was more than a bureaucratic innovation. The politics of ethnic patronage that had bedeviled the First Republic emerged directly from the ethnic make-up of the three (and then four) regions. The twelve states created a new institutional calculus that government officials were forced to accommodate in distributing national resources, a logic that would extend to civilian politics when it restarted and aspirant politicians sought political constituencies. A federation of states constituted by ties of history and ethnicity offered new opportunities by underlining the possibility that yet more states might be created to accommodate disgruntled minorities within the existing arrangement. Lobbying for states was nothing new—it was a well-established feature of First Republic politics, as the creation of the Mid-Western Region and the lobbying for Kano state attested—but the new federal system demonstrated that lobbying for ethnic acknowledgment could succeed. It also established the form of arguments that might justify the creation of yet more states.

At the same time, the country implemented and standardized a third level of government, the Local Government Area (LGA); a similar logic emerged there. Affinity also justified claims to LGA status, as communities attempted to demonstrate their ties or lack of ties to one another. These institutional pressures had a further splintering effect on the identities that had political salience as aspirants to elite status at the top of a state lobbied for new states they might be better positioned to dominate. Nigerian politics has always been a politics of patronage; as Richard Joseph brilliantly demonstrates, the power of office and handing out offices has been at the center of Nigerian party politics, making the intersection between clientage and social ties like ethnicity of more enduring importance than ideology or policy. What made Nigeria's

“prebendal” politics distinct from other forms of patronage was that state offices themselves became a form of wealth.² The forms federalism took after the civil war made institutional questions central for the politically pressing issue of where government offices and other goods might be available.

Nigeria’s oil money supercharged this institutional conjuncture. The consequences went beyond a transformation in the country’s political economy. The politics of patronage was transformed by the infusion of oil money, but could not have taken the forms it did barring Gowon’s new version of federalism.³ The changes affected politics and government practice, but *malpractice* was transformed as well. The corruption-complex thus took on new forms from this moment. Further, by becoming overt and increasingly visible to international commentators, it opened new, bigger, and more intensive opportunities for the irregular acquisition of money for private interests. The final result was to bring the Nigerian corruption-complex into more or less the form it retains at the time of this writing.

“Army Arrangement” and its enduring significance capture these complexities. Before the song’s release in 1985, Fela was arrested and imprisoned on charges of currency smuggling. His imprisonment and declaration by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience gave the song an additional force as commentary on military governance.⁴ Fela Kuti’s son Seun, who took over his father’s band, Egypt 80, began performing the song live after the former’s death in 1997. The choice to perform “Army Arrangement” in the 2000s was provocative. Indeed, its performance in 2008 was especially fraught. The presidential election held in 2007 was the third under the Fourth Republic.⁵ Like previous elections, it was plagued by irregularities. Widely called Nigeria’s most fraudulent election ever—a real distinction given elections under the First and Second Republics—the candidate of the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP), Umaru Musa Yar’Adua, was declared winner of the contest to succeed retiring President Olusegun Obasanjo. One of the leading opposition candidates was Muhammadu Buhari, representing the All-Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP), as he had in 2003 as well. Buhari and another major candidate alleged President Yar’Adua had triumphed only through wide-scale vote fraud; many were inclined to believe these claims. The matter remained in litigation long after Yar’Adua took office. Like Obasanjo before him, Buhari was a former military head of state, and also like Obasanjo his record was the source of his political appeal. Both leaders had been imprisoned during the Abacha military regime in the 1990s, but where Obasanjo’s appeal was having led a government that had voluntarily given up power—cynics said it was more that he was a westerner acceptable to northern power brokers—Buhari’s appeal was

his reputation for honesty and combatting corruption. Claims for his honesty were more compelling than claims for a record of good governance. General Buhari's military regime had been toppled in a coup after becoming repressive and unpopular while not managing to sort out the country's economic mess. His government's War against Indiscipline and War against Women were occasions of considerable brutality. But while his government was unpopular when it was toppled in 1985, it is remembered as less profligate and less rampantly corrupt than the Second Republic he displaced or the Babangida and Abacha regimes that followed. Buhari has capitalized on this reputation for discipline and rectitude; his presidential candidacies in 2003 and 2007—and indeed his 2011 candidacy for the Congress for Progressive Change, and successful 2015 candidacy for the All-Progressives Congress (APC)—centered on his criticism of the PDP's rampant corruption. Buhari's long career in electoral politics depends on reputation.

That image is a prime target for "Army Arrangement." Buhari came to public prominence in 1975, when he was appointed governor of North-Eastern state. He later became petroleum minister and head of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. After Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1979, allegations emerged that ₦2.8 billion had disappeared from the NNPC. Some claimed it ended up in Buhari's personal bank account. At the time, ₦2.8 billion was a notable sum. Initially inclined to leave the matter alone, Nigeria's new civilian president, Shehu Shagari, eventually allowed an inquiry to take place, and a panel headed by Supreme Court Justice Ayo Irikefe was empaneled in 1980, while a committee of the Nigerian Senate also investigated the allegations. The inquiry found no wrongdoing, though the former head of state declined to testify before it. "Money no lost, them shout again / Inquiry come close o." By 1983 the country's mood was ugly. The economic situation was dire as a result of the crash in world oil prices. Unable to pass a workable austerity policy, the National Assembly allowed Nigeria to go deeply into debt. The elections were no help. Notably violent, they were also blatantly rigged and thus conferred no additional legitimacy on President Shagari's administration. In this context, the Senate's ongoing probe into General Buhari's finances was no help. The matter became entirely academic when the army toppled the government and appointed General Buhari as the new head of state.

In the coup's aftermath, the National Assembly was dissolved, and the Senate committee reported no evidence of wrongdoing on Buhari's part or that of anyone else. Soon after taking power, the new head of state gave a defensive interview in which he claimed the allegation about the missing money came about because of the irresponsibility of the press. Buhari asserted his status as

a simple army officer and claimed his regime sought only to rein in civilian corruption and to create the necessary conditions for real democratic accountability. Several months later, Buhari's government passed Decree No. 4, which severely curtailed press freedom and made it an offense to publish anything that "is calculated to bring the Federal Military Government . . . to ridicule or disrepute."⁶ But while the general's coming to power shut down investigations into the NNPC's missing ₦2.8 billion, Buhari's government did investigate wrongdoing among many Second Republic politicians. Notably, President Shagari himself was cleared of all charges. Whatever suspicions still lurk about Buhari's having profited from his political positions, and however authoritarian his regime was in practice, General Buhari's twenty months in power were not as profligate as the Second Republic. His current reputation emerges from this relative rectitude and survived his tenure as chairman of the Petroleum Trust Fund during the military regime of Sani Abacha, an interlude that also proved a source of allegations about missing money. Versions of the ₦2.8 billion story continue to circulate. In the most lurid version, the Irikefe panel was an attempt to cover up the damning conclusions of the Senate report, which had been leaked to a reporter from the Nigerian Television Authority who covered the story on air. The Senate chairman was subsequently pressured to rescind the conclusions, and the story was scrubbed from the Senate record and the television archive. The reporter, who refused to retract her story, was forced into exile.⁷

Accusations about the missing money rankled. The government's Decree No. 4 declared Buhari's anger in legislative language. In an interview thirty years later, Buhari declared the money "couldn't have been missing. Not even the King of Saudi Arabia had the authority to issue checks in that amount." He went on to claim that Nigeria did not have enough money at the time to embezzle so much: "'At that time, Nigeria was exporting about 1.82 million barrels a day. And the cost of a barrel . . . was about \$18. You work out ₦2.8 billion. How could ₦2.8 billion be missing and we still have money to run the country? So it was just a political.' He continued somewhat ominously, 'Well, later, Tai Solarin and Professor [Ayodele] Awojobi were confronted and Fela, the late Fela, to go and prove their case. They had no evidence, most of them took the newspaper cuttings of their allegations to the tribunal.'"⁸

"Army Arrangement" could hardly have been better calculated to defy Decree No. 4's ban on bringing officials into disrepute. It accused the head of state himself of stealing billions; the only fig leaf was that the song did not name General Buhari directly, simply relying on the 2.8 billion sum to make the connection. Given the regime's willingness to jail its critics, this was nonetheless a

very notable accusation to make publicly. Seun Kuti's performance of the song was less dangerously provocative; it addressed Buhari as a civilian politician—and one in opposition—trying to advance his career in a civilian regime many already regarded as illegitimate. In this capacity, and as a representative of an opposition party, Buhari did not have the ability to menace Seun that he had possessed against the father. On the other hand, when General Buhari was head of state, he had not yet consolidated the reputation for honesty he later would acquire, nor was that reputation the basis for his public authority. Seun's attack on Buhari was thus safer than his father's had been, and the satire was perhaps more dangerous to its object if it was taken seriously. Then again, part of Buhari's allure is comparative: not only was the Fourth Republic seen as corrupt; the Babangida and Abacha military regimes that preceded it also were perceived as flagrantly dishonest. Buhari stood nearly alone in the pantheon of Nigerian leaders who genuinely fought corruption. The only other head of state who retained an unblemished character was Murtala Muhammed, and he was dead. Thus, Seun Kuti's version of "Army Arrangement" attacked the central weapon in Buhari's political arsenal.

The context of that earlier moment lessened the ad hominem implications of Fela's version. The song implied a fundamental quality of Nigerian governance: the alternation of civilian and military regimes continually invoked reformist ideals. Military regimes promised to restore a governmental integrity squandered by civilian politicians, while elected governments promised democratic accountability—and inevitably betrayed them. Neither brand of leadership, "Army Arrangement" suggests, ever seriously attempts to address the other's excesses. The absence of General Buhari's name made Fela's version as much an attack on all Nigerian governments as on the head of state himself. While Buhari obviously was targeted by the figure 2.8 billion and the specification of *oil* money, the central critique addresses a system that continually promises reform but never delivers it. The named villain is "Supervisor Obasanjo," the military head of state who had presided over the transition back to civilian rule. "Obasanjo plan am very well," in that the new civilian government elected "old politicians / Wey spoil Nigeria before." Earlier in the song, Fela describes civilians who had been sentenced to prison for illegal foreign exchange trades but were then released by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) government. The "army arrangement" of alternation between military and civilian regimes meant that all government crackdowns on corruption were mere entertainment: "Obasanjo turn vocalist / Yar'Adua [Obasanjo's deputy head of state, brother to the future president] road manager." The military government had

publicly arrested the currency traders, but the incoming Second Republic government released them after only a year in jail:

Them start to arrest everybody o
E no finish, e no finish . . .
Doctor, lawyer, hustlers
Engineer, photographers . . .
All of them Kirikiri [a Lagos prison]
Ten to fifteen years in jail
After one year inside jail
Civilian government take over
Them release all of dem
Them say dem be innocent o

Civilians ignored the sins of the military; military regimes forgave the civilians. Military rectitude was an elaborate show, without substance.

The inquiry into Buhari ended when the military came back to power. Fela's conclusion is that both the military and civilians loot the government, while attempts to investigate corruption and punish its perpetrators ultimately are inevitably stymied. By resurrecting "Army Arrangement" as Buhari tried to succeed Obasanjo for a second time, Seun not only undermined Buhari's reputation for honesty but questioned any possibility for political reforms driven by the Nigerian elite, civilian or military. By then, the alternation of civilian and military governments had receded somewhat as a possibility, but the inevitability of corruption in government loomed larger than ever. No one seriously proposed an "army arrangement" would benefit the country. The irony doubled in 2011, when the figure of 2.8 billion again made the news. This time, the release of Wikileaks cables publicized a set of accusations Obasanjo's Vice President Atiku Abubakar made to the U.S. ambassador to Nigeria. The vice president, whose relationship to the president had become strained, alleged the president had diverted U.S. \$2.8 billion from the NNPC budget to buy arms in order to pacify militants in the Niger delta. The meeting took place on 8 February 2007, but the newspaper coverage began with the release of the cables in 2011.

The Kutis' continuing cynicism was more than understandable. In response to *Zombie*, an earlier album attacking the army, the military government sent more than a thousand soldiers to Fela's home in 1977. During the course of the raid, the singer's mother was thrown from a second-story window. Funmi-layo Ransome-Kuti was herself a distinguished figure, an NCNC politician and

reputedly the first Nigerian woman to drive a car, and the Kutis blamed her death the following year on the injuries sustained in this episode. Nor was Fela the only member of the family jailed under the military; one of his brothers was imprisoned at the same time as Fela's detention, though slightly later a second brother would serve as the federal minister of health.⁹ Seun does not run such risks in the relatively more open environment of the Fourth Republic.¹⁰ Even so, it is not clear what will be accomplished by critique alone: "The young Africans them get two ears for head / Them get two eyes too / Them dey see the things wey dey happen," which is all very well, but "Few people dey fat with big money / And the rest dey hungry."

"Army Arrangement" and its rehearsal of the allegations against General Buhari are notable for the song's portrait of how oil revenue began to inflect Nigerian politics across the 1970s and 1980s. During this period a novel set of political processes began to create a new national culture. Just as the inauguration of political competition at the center in the late-colonial period made possibilities for government malpractice because of the new salience of power at the center for determining the distribution of national goods, changes in this period also transformed the basic logic of political life. The consequence was a new politics of corruption. "Army Arrangement" is important not for documenting allegations against Buhari, which were (and still are) widely known—muckraking is not the point—but for underlining a complex dynamic of scandal and rehabilitation, fiercely brought up by the general's detractors, and even more fiercely denied by his supporters. The Kutis' taunt to General Buhari points to the ultimate meaning of corruption as a moral discourse. Seun's iteration posits the culpability of the entire political elite in the disappearance of oil revenue. Where Fela undermined what was by then an established narrative of Nigerian political life—civilian politicians reflected the popular will but also were rampantly dishonest; military rulers were authoritarian but reined in corruption—Seun's version is yet more dispiriting: both military and civilian administrations steal, and both systematically conspire to cover up their own culpability. Twenty-first century Nigeria is a sadder place than Nigeria in the 1980s.

"No Victors, No Vanquished": The Transformation of Corruption

The popular rage the missing ₦2.8 billion catalyzed presents a considerable contrast to the hope that characterized much of the 1970s. That decade was framed by two transitions: 1970 and 1979 were momentous years, marking the end of the civil war and then the return of civilian government after fourteen

years of military rule. The earlier transition was the more extraordinary, marking the end of the civil war and of the escalating ethnic tensions and violence that had preceded it. Pogroms against Igbo people across the federation, their retreat to the Eastern Region, and Biafra's secession were neither a discrete regional dispute nor an instance of long-term and inevitable tension between implacably opposed cultural rivals. As the last chapter demonstrated, political competition that emerged at the start of national-level political competition under the Richards constitution in 1948 transformed an already-established dynamic in which politicians' diversion of state resources undergirded their political potency, which intersected with politicians' regionalized bases of support. In this process, accusations of corruption had become an integral part of this regionalized competition, while the overall dynamic helped to politicize regional rivalries as *ethnic* rivalries, as politicians negotiated the politics of patronage in culturalized and ethnicized terms. Although the coups of January and July 1966 ended that pattern of political competition, the wholesale politics of ethnicity and regional politics proved more enduring, and deadly. Subsequent events did not eliminate this quality to Nigerian politics, but they did alter the ways it played out in national politics. At the same time, the advent of military government and its persistence for the subsequent twelve years had the effect of shifting the impetus of ethnicized corruption from the practices of civilian politics to that of military rule as well.

The civil war ended on 15 January 1970, when a delegation of Biafran army officers led by the breakaway republic's vice president surrendered to Nigeria's military head of state, Yakubu Gowon. The military leader's response was conciliatory: he famously declared the civil war would have "no victor, no vanquished." In a subsequent radio address he announced that a reunited Nigeria would pursue a policy he termed Reconciliation, Reconstruction, Rehabilitation. His stated goal was a process of conciliation and rapprochement rather than an explicit attempt to punish Biafra's secessionist leaders.¹¹ Biafran leaders (aside from Colonel Ojukwu himself, who had gone into exile in Côte d'Ivoire) were welcomed back: "My Government has directed that former civil servants and public corporation officials should be promptly reinstated as they come out of hiding." Gowon emphasized the importance of equal Nigerian citizenship and the right of all Nigerians to live and work anywhere in the country. This may have reassured Biafrans, but it left unspecified how the ethnic cleavages causing the civil war would be addressed.

Ironically and ominously, the most immediate direct consequence of the federal victory was the full implementation of the twelve-state structure Gowon had proclaimed in 1967. Gowon's initial decree of the twelve-state structure

in May 1967 had come in the aftermath of the anti-Igbo violence across the federation, the exodus of Igbos to the Eastern Region, and the coup against Ironsi's regime, which resulted in the deaths of the head of state and many of his Igbo subordinates. Gowon's new federal structure might have curbed the ratcheting up of tensions that led to such violence, while it also had the effect of potentially undercutting the position of Colonel Ojukwu, the Eastern Region's military governor, who would have become governor of the new East-Central state, vastly smaller than the old Eastern Region. It proposed a loss of territory and a concomitant loss of power for Ojukwu personally and was unacceptable for the largely Igbo elite that had dominated the region precipitating Biafra's secession. In ethnic terms, the structure could be justified in that the other two states carved out of the old Eastern Region were dominated by members of "minority" ethnic groups, while the Igbo now had a state of their own. However, Igbo partisans could not have helped noticing that the region's oil deposits were largely in Rivers and South-Eastern states and thus passed out from under Igbo control. *Both* the ethnic riots and the federal structure meant to accommodate ethnic diversity were easily understood as anti-Igbo, and both were tightly tied to questions of political control and who would have access to state resources. The end of the civil war, therefore, resulted in precisely the regional breakup Ojukwu was attempting to prevent, though by 1970 Biafra's military losses had long since removed the coastal areas from Enugu's control. Few truly mourned the end of the old regional structure, even if Ironsi's unitary state and Gowon's federal reorganization had each proven so costly, leading directly to countercoup and civil war.

Despite the contrast between abolishing federalism and increasing the number of states, both reforms achieved much the same centralizing end; the unitary state had devolved administrative responsibility from the regions to provinces while centralizing the civil service. The twelve-state system had a similar effect, with a devolution to states instead of provinces.¹² The unitary state prompted suspicion, particularly in the north. Already leery of Igbo advancement within the central civil service, a group of well-educated, relatively young men had attained high office within the Northern Regional government, and they were not inclined to trust the recruitment decisions of a regime perceived to be dominated by Igbos. Without a regional government dominated by a patronage network in which they were comfortably ensconced, this group faced bleak prospects for future advancement. Perhaps locked out of the federal civil service run by Igbo superiors, they would be forced to operate within the narrow confines of a provincial service. The twelve-state system was not necessarily more promising: military governors were appointed by the center,

and they might hire subordinates from their areas of origin. Nonetheless, for northerners whatever shortcomings Gowon's government might have had, it was not dominated by Igbos.

The twelve-state structure addressed grievances that had festered within the old regions in part by opening up the possibility that more states would be created in the future. The superficial equality of the old north and old south each divided into six states broke down with a more detailed ethnic calculus. However, the justification for making these precise splits enshrined in Nigerian federalism a logic of ethnic sovereignty, which simultaneously reified ethnic groups and indicated the manner in which ethnic claims might translate into administrative recognition. It also moved Nigeria away from a federal structure that magnified the power of the three "majority" ethnic groups. Kwara, North-Eastern, and Benue-Plateau states were emphatically non-Hausa areas emerging from the old north; Mid-Western, Rivers, and South-Eastern states were southern but neither Yoruba nor Igbo.¹³ Officially acknowledging that ethnic groups had the right to representation at the level of state government could signal reconciliation at a moment in which Igbo secession was the dominant political issue bedeviling Nigerian political life. Previously favored by the Eastern Region's government, in 1970 the Igbo inhabitants of East-Central state were the main audience for Gowon's "no victors" rhetoric. Devastated by the war, landlocked, and less fertile than many other areas, East-Central state desperately needed federal assistance, though at least Igbos wary of violence elsewhere knew they had a secure, Igbo-dominated home to which they could retreat. Meanwhile, the other areas of the federation enjoyed new benefits from the novel federal scheme. In addition to the minorities, the north's major city of Kano received its own state, and eastern Hausas also got a state autonomous from Sokoto domination. Lagos became its own state, but Yorubas who still smarted from having had the Mid-West carved out from their region managed to retain their territorial integrity otherwise intact. Such boundaries could thus equally be considered fair and unfair. The Igbos got one state of their own, the southern Yorubas two (if one took Lagos state to be a prize awarded to the Yoruba), and the Hausas three. Nonetheless, the new federal arrangements could be construed as providing benefits to all. Even if the Igbo were not economically advantaged by the new arrangement, they did have territory to call their own. The new federal structure blunted the poisonous system in which the big three ethnic groups dominated their own regions and competed in the center.

Civilian politics had been an inextricable part of that dynamic. The logic in which civilian politicians became entrepreneurs of ethnic conflict through their own need to cultivate territorial political constituencies had already been

made irrelevant by military rule, but even before 1970 Gowon demonstrated himself a master of conciliation and inclusion in government. Reconciliation was easier when politicians were not maneuvering to win elections and prevent their enemies from doing so. Neither did it hurt that Gowon himself was a member of a minority ethnic group from the Middle Belt, and though he was a northerner he was a Christian. The redoubtable western leader Obafemi Awolowo had been freed by the military government in 1966 and made commissioner for finance the following year. As the war ended, some Biafran secessionists also were appointed to high office. As the political elite began to perceive all sectors might enjoy a certain degree of governmental enfranchisement, ethnic tension subsided across the country more generally. Without electoral politics driving maneuvers for local (and therefore ethnic) constituencies, the centrifugal politics that had haunted the First Republic were somewhat calmed, even as ethnicity continued to serve as a lens for interpreting political positioning. Gowon underlined his disinterested motives by announcing Nigeria would begin a transition to civilian government, which would be complete by 1976.

But even at this earliest and most hopeful moment of Nigeria's oil boom, accusations of corruption troubled the body politic, initially in forms similar to those established through the colonial period and the First Republic. These demonstrated potential fault lines and impeded the smooth functioning of state institutions. Too-slow and inadequate federal responses to the humanitarian crisis in the former Biafra were regularly attributed to corruption, but at this moment they reflected tendencies already well established. Thus, in the words of a rehabilitation commissioner, Samuel Ikoku, "deepening corruption and organized fraud" had led to a situation in which entire vehicles transporting relief supplies had disappeared in transit.¹⁴ International concern at the humanitarian crisis in East-Central state segued into discussions of the use of development assistance, and resulted ultimately in a tendency to view corruption as having two manifestations:

Two kinds of corruption thrive in Nigeria. The first comes from the traditional "dash" system of West Africa, where people expect or seek a tip, which they call a "dash," for their services. Many Nigerians fail to see why this system should cease just because they have become civil servants. If a government clerk hands a businessman some applications for a license, the clerk wants to be "dashed." The second kind is more Western and probably more harmful to a developing country like Nigeria. Men at the top expect a lucrative cut when they award a government

contract to a private businessman. It is difficult, of course, to document such bribery, but most Nigerians believe it happens all the time.¹⁵

This description nodded to the well-established technocratic paradigm of corruption as being a problem all countries had experienced during the course of modernization, and it tied into descriptions of Nigeria that had suffused international commentary during the First Republic: Nigeria was uncomfortably between tradition and modernity. Old practices persisted, but the country was more deeply troubled by the reaction of powerful officials to the demands of modern state structures. Nigerians were fully able to adopt this stance, but as the cases of Emir Sanusi and Chief Obafemi Awolowo demonstrated, the focus of attention was on particular officials. “Corruption” was a charge one leveled at opponents and enemies and overlooked among friends.

That dynamic persisted into the oil boom and has been particularly powerful in affecting how First Republic politics are remembered. Consider, for example, the enduring reputation of the First Republic’s minister of finance, Festus Okotie-Eboh. Despite the great publicity his dealings had received in the domestic press during the 1960s, for the most part the minister had been discussed internationally primarily as a technocratic financial decision maker—in the words of the distinguished development economist Wolfgang Stolper, “despite his greed and corruption . . . a darn good finance minister.”¹⁶ His flamboyant corruption was not an issue for more than incidental international comment, and that mostly euphemized by references to his colorful African customs. The *Observer* commented just before independence that

he is one of that group of new African leaders . . . who combine power with brilliant clowning. They seem to support the new adage: “All power is delightful; absolute power is absolutely delightful.” . . . He is tall, fat, jovial, and obviously rich. His followers in the mid-west of Nigeria welcome him with a joyful shout, which means roughly “extravagant man!” He arrives in the Federal Parliament, accompanied by roars of laughter, wearing a straw boater, a huge brass pendant and a robe trailing several feet behind him. The robe, like that of his wife and followers, was designed by himself; it consists of several large, round portraits of Chief Festus.¹⁷

Coverage shifted after Okotie-Eboh’s death, emphasizing the malpractice itself. Thus, the *New York Times* cited a “visiting foreigner” who described a meeting with Okotie-Eboh:

“Excuse me a moment,” said the genial Minister after the two had shaken hands. Chief Festus reached into his desk drawer. He withdrew 20 stacks

of £5 notes worth about \$14,000. Then he buzzed his private secretary and told her: “Let’s put this in my safe.” His opening maneuver completed, he turned to his guest and said without batting an eye: “And now then, shall we talk business?” The late Minister was best known as the King of “Dash”—vernacular for bribery. And it was this odious reputation that prompted Nigeria’s young army majors to put him high on their death list when they staged their lightning coup three weeks ago.¹⁸

Once he was safely out of power, it was a relatively minor change to recast Okotie-Eboh as “bad” or “corrupt” while still being a modern actor. What had been previously indicated by acknowledgments of his wealth or references to his flamboyance now was bluntly replaced by descriptions of bribes and ill-gotten gains. The implicit sociology behind the transition was more constant; during the first several years of the 1970s, technocratic discussions of corruption centered on the problems of an underdeveloped political culture and how that disrupted the urgent need to get resources for reconstruction and development.

In Nigeria, the complaints were somewhat more sophisticated, used for claim making. Accusations of corruption were politically performative; they placed the speaker in particular political locations, and they performed political work. Within such an optic, Okotie-Eboh was not simply a Westernized bad apple; he was tied into the social logic of his home area and his political base, of NCNC politics, and to the government of the First Republic. One’s standing on the precise nature of his crimes depended on one’s position relative to other political actors, and to the political networks he operated within. Thus, an influential leader from Okotie-Eboh’s locality—who objected to his favoritism of one local ethnic group over another—recounted this scandal:

Okotie-Eboh had acquired some new property in Sapele. He wanted the tenants to be moved out quickly, much more quickly than the law permitted. An Urhobo tenant by the name of Mr. Machine Orhorhoro, an Eku native, resisted hurried evacuation. Okotie-Eboh sent Itsekiri thugs to rough him up and to throw him and his family, along with their property, into the street. This matter was dragged into the courts and Okotie-Eboh was consistently found guilty by all courts all the way up to the Privy Council in London for the rough and violent treatment of Mr. Machine Orhorhoro.¹⁹

The criticism here was not for abuse of office per se, nor the diversion of public resources to private ends. Instead, it was of how someone with relatively little

political influence was treated. Okotie-Eboh systematically favored members of his own Itsekiri group over those of Urhobos (this despite the fact that he was half Urhobo himself). Conversely, a fellow indigene of Warri recently called Okotie-Eboh “a jolly good fellow locked in the throes of splendiferous flamboyance and the theatrics of brummagem,” protesting that he “was never found guilty of corruption by any court of competent jurisdiction and by any interventionist body on graft.”²⁰ One should not fetishize technocratic and ethno-political frames of reference as purely “international” or “domestic.” For example, the self-published memoir of Harold Smith, a British Labour Department official, excoriated Okotie-Eboh in personalistic terms, calling him “a cynical party hack intent on becoming rich very quickly. Already in the late 1950’s he was a byword for corruption. Okotie Eboh was not a nationalist and in no sense an idealist. He was a large, fat, cheerful crook and he was much loved by . . . the Governor General, perhaps because he conformed to a stereotype which confirmed their low opinion of Africans in general.”²¹ Smith, like other colonial officers, tended to describe leaders’ corruption or lack of it in terms of their personal qualities rather than as a consequence of the political and cultural systems in which they lived. In his account, Awolowo was not corrupt but was “extremely intelligent, wrote first class books, and taunted the British for their stupidity. At the same time he betrayed a love of democracy and touching faith in British fair play that was to lead to his downfall.” Azikiwe was not corrupt but “an enigma. A charismatic and the first Nigerian national leader of note. He was seen as an egotistical, temperamental and flawed character by his political enemies, but revered by his Igbo followers.”²²

Even if the two ways of imagining and deploying the accusation of corruption intermingled, taken together they did create a coherent description and explanation of Nigerian politics. This took on new valences as a result of Nigeria’s oil wealth. The new federal system changed the politics of resource distribution as a matter of region and ethnicity; oil revenue itself transformed the material underpinnings of corrupt actions; and Nigeria’s burgeoning reputation for corruption created new constellations of corrupt possibility. The corruption-complex would never be the same. Its upward trajectory was stunning. Already in 1969 (when the civil war was still raging) Nigeria was exporting 540,000 barrels per day, but in 1970 that nearly doubled to 1,085,000 barrels per day.²³ In the years since, Nigerian production has fluctuated but always stayed substantially above that level. And while production increased to a level between 1 and 2 million barrels per day, the price of oil rose substantially with the oil shock of 1973, quadrupling by 1974, which further increased Nigerian revenues. Oil became increasingly important in funding the government:

in 1969 it was 16.6 percent of federal revenue, which increased to 25.9 percent in 1970. By 1974 it was 80.8 percent.²⁴ This change in government finances was stunning, more than a tenfold increase from 1970 to 1974. The quantitative change was profound to the point of becoming qualitative: financial shortages did not play the same role they had in earlier years. Oil made it possible to quiet sectional tension simply by paying off elites or aspirant elites across the country.

From the time of its final amalgamation in 1914, Nigeria's role in the international economy was as an exporter of agricultural goods. State revenue came from taxation, import and export fees, and from the marketing boards. Revenue allocation was a key political question, as indeed it has remained ever since. Commissions of inquiry met regularly to adjust the allocation of government revenues, in 1946, 1950, 1953, 1958, 1964, and 1969.²⁵ The issue was politically dicey because the products grown in different regions of the country were not equally lucrative, and the regions already had received quite different levels of infrastructural investment. The key difficulty was that palm oil and cocoa fetched much higher prices on world markets than groundnuts did. Southern Nigeria produced much more revenue than Northern Nigeria did. To compound the difficulty, the political accommodation between northern emirs and the British that had limited missionization and had maintained the aristocracy's economic influence also served to retard the region's access to education, Western health care, roads, and other forms of investment. As politicians took control—and as the country increasingly was dominated by northern politicians—the government was inclined to address the north's relative deprivation. However, because the south continued to produce more revenue, this involved a net transfer of resources. A “principle of derivation” (meaning that regions were supposed to retain revenues partly in proportion to their having provided them) was used to balance the competing concerns of allowing regions to retain their own revenues and of achieving equal development across the federation. Applying the principle caused controversy, and thus the recurrent commissions addressing the allocation formula. On one hand, the southern two (and then three) regions produced the more lucrative exports. On the other, the north also (at least according to the census) had the larger population and had been relatively disadvantaged in social spending up until independence. Both northerners and southerners could justifiably claim ill use. Compounding this difficulty, in common with many African states the Nigerian government had suffered from a tendency to redistribute resources from rural to urban areas. Until 1970, peasants were the producers of Nigeria's wealth, but infrastructural investment disproportionately benefited cities,

which led cash crop production to stagnate across the 1960s—particularly the more lucrative cocoa and palm oil crops.

This recurrent problem took on a different political meaning as oil revenues transformed the government's revenue base, and it became a very different beast.²⁶ However, the issues of revenue distribution remained potent. As agriculture and import/export duties gave way to oil as the primary source of government revenue, the issue of the origin of revenue was diluted.²⁷ Oil revenues were paid into a federal account, and revenues were then transferred to the states. Across the 1970s, then, oil revenue became the primary funding source for government activity at both the federal and state levels. This transformation intersected with Gowon's ethnically generous approach to reconciliation, making it possible for elites across the federation to benefit directly from federal largesse. Moreover, the concentration of export revenue from oil rents resulted in a system in which the state was even more central to the economy than it had been previously, when it was superintending cash crop and other mineral exports. Unlike these earlier export regimes, a relatively small percentage of the Nigerian population was involved in oil production and therefore directly benefited from it. Nonetheless, at this early period, the net result of this prosperity was felt widely.

Oil revenues enabled a favorable exchange rate for the naira; imports became cheap. Even today, people reminisce about the standard of living that was possible during the 1970s. Those of relatively modest means were able to afford imported textiles and foodstuffs. Many were able to afford to buy cars or motorcycles, televisions, electric generators. My discussions of the 1970s with friends who were adult at the time were punctuated with the lists of consumer goods they had been able to afford. People doing the youth service required of university graduates could routinely buy bottles of imported wine. Ordinary families acquired expensive appliances. In the cities, there was a replacement of the indigenous *gari*, a dish made from locally grown cassava, in favor of bread made from imported wheat. Millet and sorghum were replaced by rice, which is much easier to prepare. Beyond the arena of consumer goods, oil money enabled an ambitious, even grandiose set of development initiatives, many aspects of which were poorly planned. All was not well, because agricultural production stagnated, and as a result ordinary farmers were cut out from much of this new prosperity. Buying cheap imports still required cash, and the flip side of a strong naira was that cash crops did not command high prices. As a consequence, therefore, having access to flows of government money became increasingly important to anyone's ambitions for material advancement.

The oil economy shifted the politics of resource distribution, providing funds to pay off enough groups to ensure a degree of relative communal quiet. The country embarked on a program of public works, all the more necessary in the aftermath of the civil war. The eastern states (and indeed, the Midwest as well) had sustained considerable damage. The advent of oil did not end officials' needs for illicit access to state resources. Military or civilian, Nigeria's governors were big men, and they needed access to money in order to take care of their followers. But there was enough money to keep revenues flowing to public works, even as substantial proportions were siphoned off to the demands of local politics. Oil revenues had another effect; they were made available for public consumption in the form of development investment. Oil revenue enabled development and other infrastructural projects, and these were contracted through the distribution of contracts. The process made Nigeria notorious. The massive resources newly available to the government, coupled with the popular demand for an investment in development infrastructure, resulted in what Bala Usman has called a "contractocracy,"²⁸ in which public works were contracted out to private organizations. The contract has become a primary means through which private individuals get access to state revenues, though it has proven an extremely inefficient way to run government affairs.

Although the civilian elite was relatively content with Gowon's approach to dividing the federal spoils, there was unanimity about the need eventually to return to civilian rule. In 1973 the Federal Military Government attempted to conduct a new census that would replace the one from 1952, which was still being used to shape government policy after the fiasco of the exercise in 1963, when large-scale fraud had forced the government to cancel the results of that census. To the country's horror, however, 1973 saw a replay of events from the previous decade: census returns demonstrated vast and entirely implausible population growth, a consequence of attempts by local officials who were maneuvering to claim aid on the basis of such growth. The sins of the First Republic persisted. A National Census Board conducted a national enumeration from 25 November to 2 December, but reports quickly leaked out that totals were being inflated in a number of states. Worse, as the board prepared its final evaluations, charges and countercharges proliferated of deliberate fraud among enumerators. Press coverage and rumors caused matters to go from bad to worse as the board attempted to complete its work: plots and counterplots across the country had a ratchet effect, as officials increased their totals ever higher to compensate for fraud being conducted elsewhere. One difficulty was in reconciling the new population totals with those projected from the results of the census of 1963, which required assuming a negative rate of

population growth in some areas.²⁹ In the new enumeration, the six northern states were all in the top eight most populous. Popular reaction was furious, particularly in the southern states. The census's basic finding of more people in the north than in the south could be defended; more careful enumeration methods probably would tend to find more people in the north, given the suspicion with which people in the region received government agents. So returning to northern towns and counting more carefully probably would have discovered more genuine Nigerian citizens. The civil war would have tended to depress fertility in the south, disproportionately in the east, giving demographic stagnancy plausibility. Nonetheless, the overall findings were politically explosive.³⁰ Given the politics of revenue allocation and the fact that states that increased their share of the national population would receive a greater proportion of federal oil income, the north's smart rate of population growth was poorly received in the south. In his convocation address to the University of Ife, Obafemi Awolowo announced he was "irresistibly impelled to the conclusion that the so-called PROVISIONAL FIGURES are absolutely unreliable and should be totally rejected." More seriously, he complained that in the censuses of 1952 and 1963, the northern provinces had been claimed to have 55 and 54 percent of Nigeria's population. In the new census, that increased to 65 percent. He calculated that his home base in Western state would have had a population growth rate of .62 percent, while North-Eastern state would have had more than 7 percent population growth. "THIS JUST CANNOT BE TRUE," he thundered.³¹ Before matters could get out of hand, the federal military government canceled the results of the census, and the country proceeded to rely on the results of the (also-discredited, but by now less controversial) census of 1963. The prospects of transition to civilian rule were not aided by such scandals. If nothing else, it was an extremely ominous sign that civilians were so obviously maneuvering for political position in such overtly unscrupulous ways. The First Republic seemed to be more a model for future behavior than a cautionary tale.

Increasing scandal plagued many of the officials of the Gowon regime, which intensified popular pressure for moving back toward civilian rule. One locus of discontent was the state governors, most of whom became notorious for stealing money. In October 1974 Gowon announced he would replace all military governors, but soon thereafter backtracked, explaining he could not deny them the pleasure of shaking Queen Elizabeth's hand when she came to Nigeria in October 1975.³² With a year's grace, a number of the military governors proceeded to award many irregular contracts. At the same time, commissioners running federal ministries were also becoming the subject of scandals.

Taken together, these factors undermined the military government's ability to claim itself as a force for moderating political corruption. The lucrative possibilities of government provided the military with motives for postponing the transition to civilian rule. Having political power was profitable. Officers who held political positions such as governorships or commissionerships became anxious to retain them. Their comrades whose duties remained purely military began to hope for transfer to political office so they could hope to reap these rewards for themselves. At the same time, the vastly increased financial resources controlled by the government suggested that civilian politicians would be attracted by precisely the same logic. Given the unfortunate history of the First Republic, this suggested a new civilian administration would be even more corrupt than its disgraced predecessor. The behavior of civilians in power, the fiasco of the census, continual bickering among civilians, all suggested a Second Republic would be troubled. Disquiet over the prospects for a future civilian government was widespread. Indeed, in a famous speech at the University of Lagos in 1972 former president Nnamdi Azikiwe had suggested that "diarchy" might be a potential long-term solution to Nigeria's political woes, by which he meant that future Nigerian governments should formally institutionalize a role for the military and that power should be shared between soldiers and civilians.³³ While Dr. Azikiwe garnered a furious response—especially since the military government had not acquitted itself well in the administration of the census or in its ability to handle state governors—the diarchy proposal found supporters. And Gowon himself announced the indefinite postponement of the transition to civilian rule on Independence Day in 1974: "In spite of the existence of a state of emergency which has so far precluded political activity there has already emerged a high degree of sectional politicking, intemperate utterances and writings which were deliberately designed to whip up ill feelings within the country to the benefit of the political aspirations of a few."³⁴ Ten months later, a military coup occurred while Gowon was out of the country. Brigadier Murtala Muhammed emerged as the new military head of state and proposed to attack the scandals that had festered under Gowon in order to achieve a transition to civilian rule in relatively short order. Immediately, he replaced the twelve military governors and instigated a probe into their conduct in office. Only two were found innocent of any malpractice. Both the military governors and commissioners were investigated for corrupt practices, and most had considerable amounts stripped from them. General Ibrahim Babangida would subsequently return some of this wealth in 1993.

The probes were not restricted to the top levels of government. All in all, ten thousand officials were replaced—not all for corruption, some ostensi-

bly for age or inefficiency. The new government announced that civilian rule would be inaugurated on 1 October 1979. To prepare for that, a civilian constituent assembly was announced, which would draft a new constitution, and seven new states were created. The earlier calculations about state creation as reflecting and driven by considerations of ethnicity were redoubled in this new exercise, and the same dynamic persisted in the creation of new local government areas as well. The Yoruba-dominated Western state was split into three. Igbo East-Central state was divided in two, as were Middle Belt Benue-Plateau state and Hausa North-West state. North-Eastern state, which was ethnically complex, was divided in three. The material basis of these ethnic and political decisions was clear. In Nigeria's new economic reality, in which oil money dwarfed all other sources of national income, public office became more important than ever, since oil money flowed directly into government coffers. With the prospect of a transition to civilian rule, the old principle that political success could be attained only through being able to channel monies to one's constituency gained a renewed vigor. This situation was to confirm corruption as a national-level political problem in Nigeria, rather than one negotiated primarily in terms of local political culture. At the same time, Nigeria also became inserted into international discourse as a quintessentially corrupt locale, a status it had not had so unequivocally before.

As this drama played itself out, a new political crisis rocked Nigeria. Murtala Muhammed had become extremely popular as a result of his widely publicized moves against corruption and his promise to leave power quickly, and because he had very effectively established a no-nonsense, unpretentious persona that played well across the country. Overestimating his ability to impose his will, he passed over for promotion a group of military officers who included a number with ethnic links to Gowon. These officers became a nucleus of discontent and began plotting a coup. The head of state also had dispatched with Gowon's practice of maintaining an elaborate security apparatus, and he was well known for making surprise appearances all over Lagos.³⁵ The lack of security proved fatal. On 13 February 1976, a group of officers ambushed his car as he drove to the office, killing him, his aide-de-camp, and his driver. Meanwhile, other plotters attempted to capture or kill other key officials, with limited success. Despite Murtala Muhammed's death, the coup failed, and he was replaced as head of state by his deputy, Lieutenant General Olusegun Obasanjo.

The failed coup attempt was dealt with savagely. The government tried and executed a number of Middle Belt officers suspected of complicity. The government suspected Gowon himself was involved in the plot—one suspicion was that the plotters intended to recall him as head of state—but he was in

the UK studying at Warwick University and declined to return to Nigeria for trial. Despite the death of Murtala Mohammed the regime continued on its reformist way. The fraction of the army dominating the military government was based in the north, even though the new head of state himself was a Yoruba from the southwest. The government's preparations for the transition to civilian government continued as well. These involved convening a constituent assembly to write a new constitution. The constituent assembly ultimately decided on a presidential model of government, a federal system that bore a resemblance to that of the United States. At the same time, the military government overtly displayed its commitment to reforming instances of corruption, though rumors persisted of ongoing failures and the persistence of corruption. It was during this period that the army raided Fela Kuti's house, and when Buhari became the petroleum minister.

The Cement Armada

The multiplex transformations in Nigeria's political economy made the 1970s a watershed in the history of the Nigerian corruption-complex. The "cement armada" of 1974 is an apt example of its new forms. The incident was a turning point in the country's new reputation for extraordinary corruption, which has been a central part of how corruption has functioned subsequently. With its five-year Third National Development plan starting in 1975, the Gowon administration embarked on a massive program of road building and the construction of public buildings. Domestic supplies of cement were minimal, and in March 1974 the government supply agency ordered 2 million metric tons, which was then supplemented by an additional request from the defense ministry for military buildings. The armed forces had proposed projects estimated to require 2.9 million tons of cement, but the ministry eventually ordered more than 16 million metric tons. Teams of government officials negotiated contracts for Romanian, Greek, Spanish, and American cement; with world prices of approximately \$40 per ton, the Nigerian contracts ran more toward \$115 per ton.³⁶ An oversupply of overpriced cement became the least of the government's worries as half the world's supply of cement was diverted toward Nigeria. When the cement arrived, the cargo vastly outstripped the Port of Lagos's ability to offload it. For a year, the port was choked by the cement armada, forcing it to pay millions in demurrage fees as well, which could run to \$4,100 per ship per day. Some ship owners sent partially laden ships in order to collect multiple demurrage fees, or they diverted their cargoes elsewhere but continued to collect fees as if their ships remained in the Lagos port. A poorly

thought-through plan to solve the crisis by buying cranes for the port compounded the difficulty, since the cranes also had to be landed, and once they were in the port there were no personnel trained to operate them. Part of the consignment waited for more than a year. By the time all cement shipments were unloaded, large quantities were unusable. The scandal did not unravel fully until after the coup in July 1975 brought Murtala Mohammed's reformist regime to power. The new government appointed a commission of inquiry under Justice Alfa Belgore of the Supreme Court.

The tribunal's report was released at the end of 1976. Its conclusions were carefully measured and ultimately received relatively little publicity. Its topline conclusions were unsurprising: the prices paid for the cement were far higher than world market prices, and much more had been ordered than was necessary for all projected building works. The commission's terms of reference had been somewhat constricted: it focused on the reasons so much cement was ordered, the logistics of procurement, the issue of whether any government officials had benefited personally from the orders, and the dark suspicion that "any public officer either by design or in collusion with some foreign interests not only defrauded the Federal Government but also intended to sabotage [it]."³⁷ The conclusions were unflattering to a considerable number of officials but found only a handful were guilty of actual dishonesty. Most notably, then-head of state Olusegun Obasanjo had served as inspector of engineers for the military, but the report noted that he had moved to other responsibilities before the first cement contract was signed (27). His successor as inspector of engineers, Colonel A. H. Hananiya, was found to have had improper contact with aspirant cement contractors and appeared to have advocated for friends and acquaintances (27–28). More seriously, the report concluded the defense ministry's principal accountant, J. A. Ilori, had made many unusual alterations in contractual terms and had done so "induced by improper enrichment" (37–38). Ilori's immediate subordinate, Simon Enebechi, gave "cunning and untruthful" testimony and was determined to have acted improperly in order to receive bribes. The tribunal was particularly unhappy about the fact Enebechi had arranged for a "partner's wife" to lobby one of his superiors for a cement contract. "Using a female to obtain gain from a colleague" was "abominable" (40–41). Two diplomats came in for suspicion. The ambassador to Turkey, Brigadier George Kurubo, had improperly approved a contract, but he had left government; therefore the tribunal did not pursue the matter. The ambassador to the Netherlands, Alhaji Osman Ahmadu Suka, had a much more extensive record of lobbying for contracts and seemed to have received considerably more money (43–45).

The villain of the piece was Simon Enebechi's apparently lascivious superior. Charles Guernsey Lakin-Smith was a retired lieutenant colonel from the British army who had come to Nigeria in 1958 and continued in the civil service after independence. In 1974 he was the defense ministry's deputy secretary for development projects. He oversaw all of the projects for which cement was ordered, and he was found to have circumvented his superiors in getting contracts approved. Despite all this (and presumably despite special pleading from female visitors), the tribunal found no evidence he had "gained any financial benefit" from the fiasco (39–40). Rather, the tribunal darkly noted:

Such action of Mr Lakin-Smith as came out during evidence before us can only be that of either a block-head or a man with a design. Mr Lakin-Smith certainly is not a block-head. He was apparently not acting to enrich himself improperly or to defraud the Government. We gave robust allowance for his education and his age which may tend to make him senile and blur his perspective. We take into consideration the pressure of work but all taken into account we find it hard not to come to the conclusion that his devoted service might be a mere insidious devise, buying time to gain confidence of the people he was working with but looking for an opportunity to release his sinister motive. We have strong belief that his integrity is debatable and his loyalty suspect. He had motive, a strong motive for his action, the exact nature of which is not easy to ascertain but we are unanimous that the motive cannot be genuine or in the best interest of the government or this country. (68–69)

The military government's white paper in response emphasized the fact that the report had cleared General Obasanjo, at that time the deputy head of state.³⁸ The extraordinary aspect of both the report and the white paper is how completely they worked around the relationship between the objectionable aspects of the cement armada and the elements of Nigerian political society that had given rise to it. A few Nigerians were guilty of improper conduct because of greed and a desire for material advancement. A somewhat larger group contributed to the problem because they were incompetent or, at least to some extent, derelict in their duties. However, the real mastermind was a British man, comfortably removed from the Nigerian political and social scene. The official explanation for the catastrophe was that the cement armada had been caused by factors beyond—and beyond the control of—Nigeria. While a certain amount of administrative reform could prevent a repetition of some of what had happened, the Belgore tribunal did not hint at any real structural problems with the federal military government's underlying logic. The official

response to the debacle was not in itself terribly different from the responses to cases during the First Republic or late-colonial period. The scale was something new, as was the response it garnered internationally.

The cement armada was the first Nigerian corruption story to attract huge international attention. This was in part because of how it became newsworthy and in part as a result of lurid stories about the cement contracts behind the incident, which were both colorful and involved non-Nigerians. It had a gossipy appeal from the moment it broke in the press; in western Europe, eyebrows were raised even before congestion in Lagos gave the story a slapstick quality. The first rumblings of trouble had emerged as part of a British domestic scandal involving the business dealings of a British government minister, John Stonehouse. A spy for the Czech government,³⁹ Stonehouse was a privy councilor who had been a member of the Labour government until the Conservatives won the election of 1970. Not appointed to the shadow cabinet, he proceeded to engage in questionable business dealings, including an attempt to obtain a contract to supply Romanian cement (controlled at that point by Princess Jeanne of Romania)⁴⁰ to Nigeria. The contract went instead to a Nigerian named Sylvester Okereke, who mysteriously drowned in the Thames on 18 November 1974, before the contract was finalized.⁴¹ Stonehouse faked his own suicide two days later and went to Australia under a false identity—he had evidently been planning this for some time and had arranged to meet his mistress there—but he was arrested on Christmas Eve on the suspicion of being Lord Lucan, the murder suspect who had famously disappeared earlier that year. The inquest over Okereke's death was held in February 1975. It brought these sharp dealings over cement into international consciousness at roughly the time the Lagos port began to run into trouble. At this point, however, the story was one of international wheeling and dealing rather than one of baroque misgovernance in Nigeria. Nonetheless, the story had appeal, with its scandal-plagued privy councilor/spy, shady Balkan princess, and drowned businessman.

The full extent of the scandal attracted international attention that autumn, after the new military government began to investigate the affair. The fiasco in Lagos's port was well established at that point. Murtala's government was already inclined to investigate malfeasance under Gowon—it had the simultaneous benefits of assisting the cause of good governance and bolstering domestic political support—and the regime was also attempting to divert further shipments of cement away from Lagos. For international commentators the cement armada was initially a piece of business news: the Nigerian government was attempting to renegotiate and reschedule supply contracts, to the outrage

of international shipping firms and cement contractors.⁴² The government's inquiry into the possibility corruption had played a role in allocating the contracts provided additional leverage against contract holders by suggesting the contracts themselves were of questionable legality.⁴³

The staggering extent of the problem soon became the main story. Nigeria sent a delegation to the London freight market to ask the world industry to divert incoming ships. The delegation's leader reported 400 ships awaiting berths in Lagos, 250 of which were carrying cement.⁴⁴ Over the course of a few days, the coverage became increasingly derisive:

It seemed a good idea at the time, although now . . . it's a little difficult getting anyone to admit it was actually their brainwave. There was this plan for a black cultural Olympics you see, which meant constructing a sort of cultural Olympic village. And of course Nigeria needs more roads and schools. So someone ordered a few million tons of cement. Then there were these army men with big ideas. No one at the moment seems quite sure what the big ideas actually were, but they called for a lot of cement. So let's see, that's four million tons of cement ordered by civilians in Nigeria and an incredible 16 million tons ordered by the military, with delivery of the entire 20 million tons within the year. No one noticed the flaw in the grand design until cement ships started arriving at the Apapa port in Lagos early this year and formed an order queue; and more arrived and more until today the queue was 400 ships long, and some of them have been waiting eight months.⁴⁵

Writers quickly developed broader metaphors: "Like the greedy little boy whose eyes were bigger than his stomach," *Time* magazine reported, "oil-rich Nigeria, thanks to a colossal spending binge, is in one dreadful financial mess."⁴⁶ Not all coverage depended so completely on derision; nonetheless, a consensus emerged that the situation was the consequence of Nigeria's state of development. The *New York Times* quoted a Danish "shipping expert," who declared, "The Nigerians are the first and foremost to blame. . . . They bought the whole lot. But the developed countries should not have sold them all that cement. They knew better."⁴⁷ Less overtly pejorative than *Time* comparing Nigeria to a child, the *New York Times* story nonetheless framed the issue as one of Nigeria versus "developed countries" rather than particular officials and particular suppliers. The Nigerian government, meanwhile, proposed an approach different from handwringing about corruption and the difference between developed and underdeveloped countries. The problem was "'unscrupulous' and 'militant' suppliers who had ignored earlier orders to delay new shipments

until the congestion could be cleared and the contracts investigated.” In response the government planned to “suspend loading payments to all shippers who defied its instructions and would also suspend demurrage payments in Lagos ‘to enable the Government to distinguish between fraudulent claims.’”⁴⁸ The threat was carried out, and subsequent international coverage was divided between bemused stories on individual prosecutions (as when Nigeria’s newly appointed high commissioner to the UK, the luckless Osman Ahmadu Suka, was dismissed for having improper business dealings when he negotiated cement contracts while ambassador to the Netherlands⁴⁹) and reports of shippers complaining of dishonored contracts.⁵⁰

The history of the cement armada by itself would be a footnote, an early instance of what has become an established genre of stories of spectacular corruption and misgovernance. It is more important than that. It demonstrates a transformation in the Nigerian corruption-complex as profound as the changes in the distributional politics of region caused by Gowon’s new federalism and his policy of reconciliation. The international attention to the cement armada helped to establish Nigeria as a country almost uniquely corrupt. It had the money necessary to order vast quantities of cement, and it suffered from problems of governance serious enough to cause such quantities to be ordered. The cement armada became internationally significant because it served as a demonstration of the possibilities available to Westerners of Nigerian corruption: the government was so handicapped by incomplete records it could not tell genuine contracts from spurious ones. Businesses around the world thus learned powerful lessons about Nigerian governance. The cement armada thus catalyzed illicit contacts between Nigerian officials and foreigners. Nigeria’s reputation for corruption would ultimately enable the scammers of the 1980s and after to lure gullible foreigners with the prospect of illicit rewards.

The diversion of immense resources (literally hundreds of millions of naira) into building materials that were unneeded and eventually became unusable illustrates pointless expenditure going far beyond the “squandermania” for which Ahmadu Bello was excoriated. The point of government spending became only incidentally about the construction of buildings and roads. Rather, it became about the negotiation of contracts and the percentages of those contracts that could be diverted to the officials negotiating them.⁵¹ But this transformation was more productive than it might initially appear. Even if oil revenues were spent on projects like the cement armada, they were having an integrative function. It will be many years yet before one can disentangle precisely who profited from the episode (and in truth, the identities of the direct beneficiaries are a question of somewhat limited interest). As the Gowon

government moved to incorporate notables from around the federation into the governing elite, a wider spectrum of people gained access to the resources available through office. The oil wealth that had become available increased the lucrativeness of the contracts being parceled out. It also made it possible to divert huge percentages of government spending into these somewhat convoluted channels without bringing public business to an absolute standstill. The cement armada was embarrassing, and it was disruptive—not only were port facilities at Lagos overwhelmed; there was a substantial knock-on effect at Port Harcourt as well. At the same time, the cement negotiators' access to illicit resources achieved a sort of reconciliation by making it possible to pay off leaders who might otherwise be disenfranchised and therefore not supportive of national unity or of the regime in power. Rehabilitation (in the form of giving erstwhile opponents access to office) enabled reconciliation (in the form of loyalty to the federal government), even if the literal reconstruction was somewhat attenuated.

The postwar military governments thus presided over a substantial transformation of the corruption-complex. While the charge of corruption retained its performative power and thus was sustained only against officials who were already marginal or vulnerable, this long-term continuity persisted within a system whose constitutive logic became ever more dependent on the distribution and circulation of irregular revenues. An intensification of the scope of corrupt material practices fostered an international reputation for corruption, which might have been useful to some actors. Just as Weber argued for Protestantism that church membership in the nineteenth-century United States functioned to bolster some people's reputations, making them seem reliable business partners, Nigeria's reputation for corruption gave Nigerians a reputation for potentially having access to ill-gotten gains. That reputation by itself could be a source of opportunity.

Political Transition and the Maturation of the Corruption-Complex

Ruth First's famous contention that military coups cannot be explained by looking at broader trends in society or economy but rather occur for "army reasons" is neatly illustrated by the aftermath of the coup that toppled General Gowon.⁵² The figures behind the coup were the same plotters who had brought Gowon's government to power in 1966, but this time they assumed office directly and retired the major figures in the previous government. The new head of state declared that his government intended to correct Nigeria's continuing problems with corruption and misgovernance to prepare for a transition to

civilian rule, though the concrete details of how this would occur were a bit more elusive. In a secret cable, analysts in the American embassy commented:

How hard new leadership will hit corruption issue not clear. It does not appear at this time that members former administration will be investigated or have their assets questioned. This would be politically dangerous for new leaders. At same time, they must somehow cultivate image of honesty among Nigerian public, who by now are extremely cynical on this point. Big loser in change of faces are civilians. New FMG [Federal Military Government] is completely military (if one includes police); no civilians named to any post as yet, although commissionerships have not yet been filled. There always has been some friction between military and civilians here, but move toward more completely military control after last several years' agitation for return civilian rule could lead to deepening cleavage between military establishment and other elements.⁵³

The Americans' assessment was wrong; the government did probe outgoing commissioners and governors for fiscal improprieties, and most lost assets in the process. The broader point was accurate. The coup served primarily to change the incumbents in state offices and to underline a commitment to honest government without changing any underlying pattern. Nor is it clear the "army reasons" ultimately involved a more direct commitment to a transition to civilian rule. By pegging the date for the inauguration of a civilian regime on Independence Day in 1979, the Muhammed government postponed disengagement. And as "Army Arrangement" documents, the reforms the new government achieved did little to change the overall dynamics of political society.

The longest-lasting legacy to Nigerian political society lay in the innovations the military regime made as it planned the constitution of the Second Republic. Retaining and extending the federal system established under Gowon, the civilian constitution moved from the parliamentary system of Nigeria's First Republic to a presidential system with some resemblance to that of the United States, with a separation of powers between a bicameral national assembly, independently elected president, and judiciary.⁵⁴ Given the challenges of ethnicity and sectional politics, the critical aspect was in how federalism and officeholding were handled. A novel aspect of the new constitution was the stipulations for the election of the presidency, which required the winning candidate to demonstrate substantial support from more than one region by receiving more than a quarter of the vote in two-thirds of the states in the federation.⁵⁵ If no candidate both won a plurality and demonstrated support across Nigeria, a run-off would be held between the two top vote getters.

In this way, the constitutional drafters would preclude the sectional divisions party politics had created for the First Republic.

A disquieting development occurred as the ban on political organizing was lifted in September 1978 and political parties began to prepare for the start of party registration toward the end of that year.⁵⁶ More than fifty political associations attempted to register, but only five received final certification by the federal electoral commission. The process was arduous and required demonstrable national scope. As vetting took place and new parties emerged, many familiar faces regained prominence; most new parties bore a distinct resemblance to earlier organizations. Far from representing a complete break from the centrifugal politics of the First Republic, the emergent parties of the Second Republic seemed likely to recapitulate the same problems.

Obafemi Awolowo emerged immediately as a potential presidential candidate, and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) grew around him. Its political base was in the southwest, and its political platform bore a great resemblance to that of the Action Group in the First Republic. Aminu Kano led the new People's Redemption Party (PRP), which bore a great resemblance to the old Northern Elements Progressive Union. In the southeast, a somewhat more complicated process played out, in part because of the region's most prominent political son, Nnamdi Azikiwe. Other southeastern politicians negotiated with one another and progressives from other regions in order to build the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) as an organization with national support, an attempt that paralleled the trajectory of the old NCNC. Azikiwe himself flirted with representatives from a political party with its base in the north. However, when it became clear that party would not anoint a southerner as its presidential candidate, Azikiwe turned back to the party organized by his natural constituency and became the NPP's presidential candidate. This process also created another national party. During the period in which the leaders of regional associations were negotiating the emergence of what would become the NPP, one of the most significant actors outside the southeast was a group around Waziri Ibrahim, a son-in-law of the former governor of the Northern Region and former minister in the NPC government of the First Republic. As the NPP became more firmly a southeastern organization and it became clear it would be Azikiwe's vehicle for contesting the presidential election, Ibrahim and his supporters split off from the NPP to form the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP). Ultimately, GNPP candidates achieved victories only in the northeastern states of Borno (Waziri's home) and Gongola, but it contested elections more broadly than the UPN, PRP, or NPP.

While the novelty of the GNPP did not translate into great success, the other major innovation came from the party that would emerge to dominate the Second Republic. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was the party of the northern establishment. In its personnel and its policies it strongly resembled the old Northern People's Congress, but its leadership included younger technocrats with a higher average level of Western education. This group, termed the "Kaduna mafia," has been influential in Nigerian politics ever since its emergence during the Gowon regime. A younger and more cosmopolitan leadership enabled the NPN to adopt what may have been its most long-lasting innovation, a scheme of "zoning" in which it distributed major party offices and nominations for office across the federation. Dividing the country into a set of geographic zones, party elders agreed that each zone would be represented in the party's senior offices: the party chairmanship would go to the west, the presidency to the north, the vice presidency to the east, and the presidency of the Senate to "minority" groups. By guaranteeing all regions would have representatives in powerful party positions, the NPN might appeal to constituencies across Nigeria. Zoning ensured the NPN would not remain limited to the NPC's concentration on the north, in part by integrating other regions and ethnicities into structures of party patronage. In this way, the NPN inaugurated a mechanism for reflecting the basic political logic of prebendalism: the party required distributing the spoils of office across the federation through the process of nomination and appointment. Although the NPN followed the NPC as the conservative party of the northern establishment, it also established a genuinely national following. This has had a long legacy. Constituent Assemblies charged with drafting later constitutions considered making regional distribution of offices a formal constitutional requirement, and recently the Nigerian House of Representatives held public meetings to consider adding a zoning requirement as an amendment to the Fourth Republic's constitution. Regardless, the party that has dominated the Fourth Republic has made a somewhat more elaborate system of zoning central to its own distribution of offices.⁵⁷ This is evident in the party's initial flirtation with Dr. Azikiwe as a presidential candidate, though it is difficult to imagine circumstances under which the NPN would actually have nominated an Igbo president, no matter how distinguished his resume. As it turned out, the question of the presidential nomination was decided from among northern candidates; the choice was Shehu Shagari, who had been an NPC minister in the First Republic.

The NPN's regional strength proved decisive. It won the presidency and a plurality in the National Assembly, as well as a plurality of governorships and

seats in state assemblies. For the presidency, the UPN's Obafemi Awolowo was the only candidate to come close to Shagari in percentage terms. However, he achieved this by running up massive margins in the Yoruba southwest, while President Shagari's support was more evenly distributed. Beyond the presidency, electoral results bore a dispiriting resemblance to earlier patterns. The UPN dominated state elections and National Assembly seats in the western states, the NPP the Igbo heartland. The PRP won Kano state and the governorship of Kaduna state (whose legislature had an NPN majority), and the GNPP won its northeastern base. As the National Assembly convened, its members applied their experience from the parliamentary First Republic, and the NPN (which fell far short of an overall majority) announced a coalition with the NPP, recapitulating the old NPC/NCNC coalition.

The military returned to the barracks with the inauguration of the new president. Whatever shortcomings had been perceived in the reforms the Mohammed/Obasanjo regime claimed as its purpose, the civilians quickly demonstrated that the NPN's innovations in zoning gave the corruption-complex new force. Scandals abounded and rebounded. By its nature, corruption is difficult to quantify. Its quality of being an *accusation* as much as a concrete *practice* opens up the possibility that the change was less an overall increase in actual practices than it was a shift in the utilities of making claims in the idiom of corruption. But that there was an increase in the claims is undeniable.

The career of Umaru Dikko provides a useful illustration of the transformations in the corruption-complex that took place across the ensuing decade as these were driven by civilian politics, military coups, and the transformations in the oil economy. Dikko came originally from Zaria. First prominent in the 1960s, he held cabinet appointments in the state government of North-Central state (later Kaduna state) under the military government. Dikko became a prominent member of the "Kaduna mafia" of relatively technocratic northern politicians from a generation younger than that of Ahmadu Bello and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Dikko rose to the center of national politics through the role he played in attaining the NPN presidential nomination for his brother-in-law, Shehu Shagari, who had been a minister under the First Republic but who was not known for either charisma or political competence. Dikko's prominence was cemented by his political acumen in building the NPN through its zonal distribution of offices and thus ensuring relatively widespread popular support.

It is appropriate that such a measure should be Dikko's lasting legacy, since the entire logic of zoning was a perfect instance of "prebendal politics." A strategy billed as ensuring national integration and political appeal built spoils-

based patronage into the very logic of government, ensuring that national resources were parceled out across the country. By dividing constitutional offices among indigenes of different regions, the zoning party guaranteed every region a powerful patron—if not the president, then the vice president or chairman of the party.⁵⁸ In addition to being a key supporter of the party's presidential nominee and an architect of its winning strategy, Dikko himself stood as a senatorial candidate from Kaduna state. He lost that election to a PRP rival, which was a mixed curse. Dikko received what was probably a more advantageous and powerful appointment when he became Shagari's minister of transport. This was potentially lucrative given the government's continued investments in infrastructure. The cement armada publicly demonstrated the principle that even the most ludicrous schemes to siphon money from the government in the guise of national development would have few repercussions. Dikko was in a position to enrich himself and to apportion largesse to allies. Dikko's execution of his official responsibilities is vividly described in the memoir of Gerald Funk, an American political consultant. The incident took place after Funk had been hired as a consultant for President Shagari's reelection campaign in 1983:

I explained that, per the contract we had signed with Shehu Musa, Assistant to President Shagari . . . he, Dikko, was to provide . . . a large furnished house for our people, who would be coming and going for the next several months; to provide, in kind, 3 or 4 cars; to arrange for international telephone calls to be paid by him; to make lump-sum monthly payments of per diem expenses; to arrange for local and international transport on the national airline. . . . I knew that if we tried to get into the procurement business with those Yoruba sharks in Lagos, we would be bankrupt within a week. Dikko had read the document, he said, and he listened patiently. And he watched me intently. Then he said something to the effect that we could make it easier for us all, and more profitable for me, personally, if we just did it a little differently. He then went into another room, and brought forth a very large suitcase, full of large Naira . . . notes, more or less the equivalent of perhaps half a million US dollars. He said that should take care of housing and cars and per diem and local travel and telephones . . . all local costs . . . for all of my present and future crews . . . for now. And if I needed more, I should return.⁵⁹

In addition to his ministerial office and party role, Dikko enjoyed another source of power and patronage; he chaired the president's task force on rice. That commodity was in short supply in 1979, after a decade of oil wealth had

led to a neglect of agriculture and declining yields of indigenous crops. Readily available rice at affordable prices had thus become important for a considerable portion of the population, particularly city dwellers. Rice imports were crucial because the grain had quickly achieved vast popularity; its preparation was relatively easy, not requiring the laborious pounding of many of its rivals. The new civilian administration thus contracted to import major quantities of rice and to offer it for sale at subsidized prices. Dikko oversaw the effort. Somehow, however, relatively little rice actually reached market; dark rumors circulated that he had diverted it to his own warehouses, from which he and his cronies sold it onto the black market. Such rumors received confirmation after the coup, when vast warehouses were discovered around Lagos.⁶⁰

As Dikko enriched himself through infrastructure contracts and rice imports, he retained his influential role as an NPN political tactician. The party's campaign of 1983 was less restrained than it had been in the election of 1979. The country was tense in the period leading up to it and the electoral process itself was violent: politicians and parties employed mobs of young men to intimidate their opponents, a tactic already familiar in Nigerian politics. Allegations of vote rigging, stuffed ballot boxes, and the substitution of filled boxes for authentic ones were rampant. When the results were announced, it was clear Dikko had done his work well, perhaps too well. The NPN won elections in areas that had previously been strongholds of opposition parties. It increased its seats in the National Assembly, nearly doubled the governorships it controlled, and consolidated its grip on state assemblies even in areas that had been strongholds of other parties.⁶¹ Opposition political parties were horrified, and the population was taken aback at the landslide victory of a party whose popular support was at best shaky. The violence and thuggery that had been obvious across the electoral period had been such that it was difficult to maintain the elections had been free or fair. As with the election of 1964 in the First Republic, the country's rulers had consolidated their electoral position, but at the cost of any semblance of democracy. The election had manifestly been rigged. This accomplishment did little for Umaru Dikko's national reputation, and the man himself credits his electoral role as being behind his lack of popularity. When he testified in 1999 before the Oputa Commission on human rights violations, Dikko admitted that he, "being [Shagari's] campaign-director general, had to step on the toes of his political rivals and even his enemies who would like to see him destroyed. Naturally, there was no way those who contested against him and lost could like him or me." Calling the accusations of corruption in the Second Republic "imaginary," he insisted he was guilty of nothing other than working very hard while a government minister.⁶²

Had the NPN not engaged in such tactics, it might have faced defeat. The government's political standing had started to erode in 1981, when the world price of oil crashed. The government's dependence on oil receipts made this an immediate crisis only compounded by the economy's dependence on subsidized imports of basic consumer goods. To compound the trouble, the government's ambitious development program had required loans. This national debt invited considerably more scrutiny as it became clear a number of Latin American countries were likely to default on their own (much greater) debt obligations. As a result, the government came under considerable pressure from international lenders, Western governments, and institutions like the International Monetary Fund.

The government's response had been feckless before the election. The National Assembly was reluctant to pass the austerity budget demanded by Nigeria's lenders. Despite its increased majorities after the election, the ruling party continued to do little to lift the malaise, and the fitful inquiry into General Buhari's finances was not calculated to win support from anyone. In the years since then, many military figures have alleged a coup had been plotted for a considerable period and that the former military head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo, had been asked whether he would return to power at a junta's head. This he refused. The military's current leadership was less reluctant. When the military took power on New Year's Day in 1984, Dikko fled the country, crossing incognito into Benin Republic and then flying to Europe. The military government's inquiry into his affairs suggested he was directly responsible for pocketing ₦1 billion (at the time the naira was worth approximately U.S. \$1.50 at official rates), and it was determined to return him Nigeria to face trial. Part of the impetus may have been that Dikko very quickly appointed himself a spokesman for the civilian government displaced by the coup, telling the *Observer* that he was declaring war on the new military government, which could claim no superiority over its civilian predecessor:

Everyone can be trained to use a gun. The junta in Lagos is made up of politicians in uniform who turned their guns on the elected Government they had sworn to defend under the constitution. The true professionals in the Nigerian Army will make the distinction between soldiers and politicians in uniform. Nigerians cherish liberty and democracy above everything else and will fight to restore them before long. . . . Whatever money a politician makes goes back to the people because he wants their votes. The military are talking about money because they can only think of their own bank accounts.⁶³

This public stance as a democrat was made against the backdrop of the lurid stories emerging from the military's investigations of the scandals of the civilian administration. Dikko was personally implicated. Investigators in Lagos discovered warehouses filled with rice and other imported consumer goods that had been under Dikko's authority. Although these stores were supposed to have been distributed for sale at subsidized prices, they had been kept back in private hands and were being sold, the military claimed, at inflated prices. The chairman of the special task force has profited handsomely from his charge of making rice available to all Nigerians; in doing so, he had guaranteed most could not afford to eat it.

Dikko was not the only Second Republic official who had escaped Nigeria and persisted in making statements to the press, but he was probably the most flamboyant. Billing himself as an advocate for Nigeria's legitimate civilian government, the former minister's "jihad" against the military was little direct danger to the military government. The man himself had little domestic constituency to rouse from afar. Nonetheless, the new head of state was thin-skinned, and the military government's response was robust. On 5 July 1984 Dikko left his Bayswater flat for a walk. A party including both Nigerian and Mossad agents bundled him into a van and drugged him. Dikko was transported to Stansted Airport and kept continuously under sedation as he was loaded into a crate that also contained an Israeli doctor charged with monitoring his physical well-being. The crate was loaded aboard a Nigeria Airways plane bound for Lagos. Though the plane's cargo was under diplomatic immunity, a customs official asked to inspect Dikko's crate minutes before takeoff. When Nigerian officials protested the inspection, the official called in antiterrorism police, and the minister was discovered. A major diplomatic row ensued.

Nigeria persisted in demanding his extradition, but Dikko was granted limited political asylum in Britain. The British government's consideration of his case, however, was an occasion for scrutiny of Second Republic politics and of the military regime's conduct in office. The "minister in a crate" news hook made Dikko an attractive story to the international press in much the way the clogged port of Lagos had a decade previously. Nigeria's international profile was deepened and confirmed: the minister's florid corruption—a billion stolen personally! One instance among many of official corruption!—now was juxtaposed with a story about military brutality. The story reflected well on no one. Despite his being victimized by a military regime, Dikko was an unsympathetic protagonist. And while the military government pledged to look into its civilian predecessor's corruption and economic malpractice, both its brutality and continuing criticisms by Nigerians with an international audi-

ence prevented the military government from successfully claiming a reformist mantle. “Army Arrangement” became internationally famous, and this also was the time when the celebrated author and dramatist Wole Soyinka released an album entitled *Unlimited Liability Company* also dramatizing the country’s corruption. While the natural audience for such efforts was Nigerian, they reached international ears and helped to make vivid the picture incidents like the cement armada had begun to paint. It is little wonder the 419 genre emerged at this time.

Dikko himself remained in Britain until the early 1990s, when he returned to Nigeria. At that point he tried to establish himself as a politician in the political transition then being orchestrated by General Sani Abacha’s military government. Dikko’s attempt at a political career was unsuccessful, though the issue at the time became moot: that transition effort came to nothing. Dikko did testify before a truth commission impaneled at the start of the Fourth Republic, where his main concern was that the officials who had orchestrated his kidnapping attempt had never apologized to him personally. General Buhari had declined to testify before the commission, but the then–minister of defense, General Theophilus Danjuma (who Dikko claimed had the links with Israel that brought the Mossad agents in on the plot),⁶⁴ did testify. The general disclaimed knowledge of the case, and the commission directed the two men to shake hands. At that point, it declared the issue resolved.⁶⁵ With the passage of another decade, Dikko achieved something of a rehabilitation, becoming the head of the disciplinary committee for the ruling party until his death in 2014.⁶⁶ He continues to have relatively little independent constituency but nonetheless to enjoy a proximity to the centers of power.

Dikko’s fame eclipses the manner in which his career epitomizes the evolution of the Nigerian corruption-complex across the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Rising to power and prominence as the civilian elite maneuvered to take power across the Gowon and Muhammed/Obasanjo military governments, Dikko was most effective at inventing a mode of retail politics that brought together the demands of a vast, heterogeneous country whose one universal political principle was patronage and which had the economic potential of an oil rentier state. Dikko’s innovation, his durable political legacy, was the principle of zoning, enshrining in party politics the principle that office and power should be distributed around the federation. The logic of patronage long predated the emergence of the NPN, but the innovation has persisted. It is no coincidence that Dikko reemerged as a figure in the party that dominated the Fourth Republic until 2015, whose time in power depended on its ability to maintain support across the federation. Alongside this historical role, however, was also Dikko’s

florid corruption: suitcases full of naira notes, a preference for backroom deals, diverted warehouses of rice, scandalous infrastructure projects. Although the man himself denied them, the stories of Dikko's conduct in office outline a pattern of wholesale financial malpractice that would seem to apply to vast numbers of politicians before him and since. The formal parceling out of political office as a means of personal (and thereby, to some extent regional) enrichment was a major innovation within the corruption-complex, as was the emergence of the "army arrangement" in which successive regimes probed their predecessors while, in the main, finding them innocent or at least impossible to convict.

Military Centralization, Violence, and the Confirmation of the Corruption-Complex

General Buhari's government faced terrible economic challenges. The debt crisis remained, and pressures from Nigeria's debtors increased even as economic crisis made its need for continued international credit ever more pressing. General Buhari's regime quickly squandered the goodwill it had received simply from displacing the discredited Second Republic. But while it showed a robust ability to crack down on dissent and a willingness to flout international norms, the regime did not manage to institute the savage austerity policies the international community sought. Instead, it undertook probes, many of which were largely ineffectual, although it did imprison a number of Second Republic politicians—the vice president was sentenced to prison, while the president was placed under house arrest. At the same time, the government attempted to discipline the unruly Nigerian population. The War against Indiscipline attempted to modify aspects of public behavior, enforcing norms like lining up for buses and taxis, and not engaging in petty crime. The government also declared it would enforce Nigeria's drug laws rigidly, imposing the death penalty for drug smuggling. Such initiatives helped to lead to a second campaign, which was dubbed the War against Women. Initially inspired by several high-profile instances of women caught smuggling drugs in their "womanly parts," women became a major target for street harassment. These endeavors succeeded mainly in alienating the populace; a high-level coup toppled General Buhari in mid-1985, bringing General Ibrahim Babangida to power in his place. Babangida proved more politically adroit than Buhari. One of his triumphs—which earned him the nickname "Maradona" after the Argentinian footballer whose adept fielding paralleled Babangida's political agility—was to engage the country in a "national conversation" about whether to adopt a

structural adjustment policy as the International Monetary Fund demanded. Although the national consensus clearly came out against it, Babangida proceeded to institute an austerity policy that deviated somewhat from international demands but that nonetheless placated debt holders. The naira declined, and imports became increasingly unaffordable. Rice quickly moved from being a staple to being a luxury again. As *West Africa* noted,

When importation was banned, there was loud protest from the Nigerian public which gave the impression that it couldn't live another day without rice. As the price rose (partly artificial) many people decided to cut down on rice, and some gave it up completely even after prices fell. The same has happened to bread. When the flour mills shut down during their confrontation with government, prices of bread went up scandalously, to ₦3 and ₦5 a loaf. Nigerians this time did not waste their time complaining, many remembered that they had not grown up on a bread diet. According to one Lagosian, "I passed a decree banning bread from my house with immediate effect. The children missed it for a few days, but now they are satisfied with indigenous foods for breakfast."⁶⁷

A similar adroitness allowed the regime to finesse the issue of what to do with Second Republic officials, a number of whom remained detained under Buhari's Decree No. 3. The government white paper declared an intention to "put behind us this unfortunate episode in [Nigeria's] history and move ahead with determination, and resolve that never again would these sordid events be permitted to occur."⁶⁸ Although rage remained against the excesses of the democratic regime, the tricky business of determining which officials to prosecute and which to clear proved too much, and a line was drawn under the whole episode. Fela Kuti's "Army Arrangement" was confirmed; the military ultimately acted to euphemize the corruption of the civilian era, even as the civilians had declined to look too carefully at problems that had emerged under the Muhammed/Obasanjo regime.

Even as Nigeria moved toward an era of greater political accommodation, unrest grew. A coup attempt in 1990 came very close to succeeding. It had progressed to such a point that its leader, Major Gideon Orkar, was able to broadcast an address over the Federal Radio Corporation, which among other things accused General Babangida of corruption, economic mismanagement, and homosexuality.⁶⁹ Unrest in the army was mirrored by tensions in other parts of the country. Riots had broken out toward the end of May 1989. The first one was at the Lagos State College of Education on 22 May, touched off by a student dispute with the administration. The next day students at Lagos State

demonstrated in solidarity, and at the same time students at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka demonstrated in response to the shooting of a student who had been protesting living conditions. Protests about internal university matters were one thing. More troubling to the regime was an incident on 25 May, when students at the University of Benin set motor vehicles ablaze and tore apart government offices. Their grievances were less local: they were protesting the national Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP), which was supposed to be over. Joined by market women and jobless youth, the students marched to the prison, freed six hundred prisoners, and set it on fire. Four days later, a riot at the University of Ibadan resulted in at least one death and injured at least four police officers.⁷⁰ The riots spread further: not only did protests take place at colleges of education in Ondo and Bendel states, but the riots spread to villages near the universities as well. While these student riots paralleled self-limiting student riots over the price of gasoline in 1988, involvement by farmers, market women, and urban youth portended a much more volatile possibility, that student riots might extend beyond the universities. Many southern universities were closed.⁷¹

The situation continued to deteriorate. In early July, students at the Federal College of Education (FCE) in Warri led a protest march singing songs against SAP. This turned into a riot and spread to other towns. Student leaders announced they were also protesting the university closures. At the same time, the Nigerian Labour Congress condemned the university closures and called for the release of detained students, while the Ondo state congress of farmers did the same.⁷² The government's response was two pronged: it created a committee to consider relief measures to address suffering caused by SAP. Jobs programs were created, food production was increased (in largely cosmetic ways), drug imports were subsidized, and the import duty on commercial vehicles was lifted for the rest of 1989. At the same time, there was a clampdown on dissent. The universities remained closed, and the government engaged in its own publicity campaign against the "sophisticated process of disinformation and destabilization [that] was behind the disturbances."⁷³

Even as the population at large became disenchanted with a government whose relative poverty meant that the welfare initiatives inaugurated under the Gowon regime came to an end, the military elite (and its civilian collaborators) continued to do relatively well. Oil revenues were insufficient to raise all ships, but they could support a wealthy elite. While the Babangida regime would survive for another three years, ceding power in the aftermath of the aborted inauguration of the Third Republic, it would both clamp down considerably on dissent (intensifying a dynamic that was already well established: as early

as 1986 the editor of the muckraking dissident *Newswatch* was assassinated by a bomb delivered to his office) and work ever more assiduously to pay off potentially dissident segments of military and civilian elites. The Babangida regime engaged in two rounds of state creation—an expansion to twenty-one states in 1987 and to thirty in 1991. This would be followed under Abacha by an expansion to the current thirty-six states in 1996. State creation was the logical outgrowth of an ethnic politics dating from the First Republic, in which areas that were not strongly represented in the group governing a state agitated for the creation of a new state they would dominate. The criteria for state creation were historical and cultural; what that meant in practice was that states could only be created to accommodate already-existing ethnic groups whose separate historical existence could be documented. The same process was at play in Local Government Area creation.

Where the federal politics of revenue distribution continued to play out in well-established patterns, the military government insisted on centralizing control of state resources ever more completely. This innovation is illustrated by the travails of one of its officials, who would then become a critic. This section concludes, therefore, with a discussion of the corruption trial of Tam David-West, who is now remembered to have been convicted and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment for receiving the gift of a watch. Tamunoemi David-West had attained distinction as a professor of virology at the University of Ibadan by the time of his appointment as education commissioner in Rivers state during the Muhammed/Obasanjo regime. He returned to government under Buhari, as the military government's petroleum minister. Despite rumors that he might be replaced, General Babangida retained him when he came to power but moved him to the mines and power ministry in 1986 before dropping him from the cabinet altogether later that year.⁷⁴ During his time as oil minister, David-West was a notable economic nationalist and became internationally known for his role in pressing for an increase in Nigeria's OPEC quota.⁷⁵ After his departure from government, he became a critic of the regime and indeed in October 1989 he was detained under Decree No. 2, which allowed for the arrest of people who posed a threat to state security or the national economic well-being.⁷⁶

Matters became more serious the following year, however, when he was arrested and tried in connection to a set of negotiations he oversaw with an American corporation called Stinnes Interoil. Stinnes had negotiated a contract with the civilian Shagari administration to extract Nigerian oil and reimport refined petroleum products. The contract ran through the end of 1983, and as that date neared the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation signaled

its willingness to extend the contract to 1984. The company attempted to negotiate some provisions of the contract, and in the interim the company did not make its fourth-quarter payment.⁷⁷ The details of the debts and payments are somewhat involved, but the basic issue was that Stinnes owed Nigeria approximately U.S. \$157 million. Professor David-West chaired negotiations with Stinnes over its debts and eventually secured an agreement that it would pay approximately \$100 million. Professor David-West insisted on leading the negotiations personally, against the advice of the chairman of the NNPC among others. He did not refer his decision to the Council of Ministers or to President Babangida.⁷⁸ In the course of the negotiations, Professor David-West was given a gold wristwatch and attended a dinner party hosted by a Stinnes official. Testimony from other NNPC officials present at the negotiations suggested that David-West had been friendly with Stinnes executives—most particularly the dinner-party host and the corporation’s president—and that his decisions emerged from his private meetings with them. The crimes for which he was convicted required proving that the minister had improperly used his office and his discretion, to the benefit of Stinnes and the detriment of Nigeria, and that he had improperly benefited from this misuse of his power. Professor David-West was unable to demonstrate that he had President Babangida’s blessing for the write-off of \$57 million, and the testimony of the other officials demonstrated that the patterns of decision making violated established NNPC guidelines. The wristwatch and the dinner party constituted the other element of the minister’s conviction, since they were the only direct benefits he could be demonstrated to have received.⁷⁹

The conviction was greeted with considerable derision in the opposition press, as when the *Guardian* complained “where the tribunal saw criminal corruption . . . we see no more than naivete” and pointed to the ludicrous disproportion of a twenty-year sentence meted out for receiving the gift of a watch. The *New Nigerian* retorted, “It beats one hollow how a whopping 57 million dollars loss to the national treasury can be described as ‘naively,’ ‘imprudence,’ and ‘excessive enthusiasm.’”⁸⁰ The unfortunate ex-minister was imprisoned for almost a year while his appeal was considered by an appellate tribunal and eventually overturned. The higher court noted that the connection between the wristwatch and the decision was “speculative.”⁸¹ In the long term, the position of the opposition press has won the day, and Professor David-West is remembered for having been convicted of receiving a ludicrously small bribe. Nonetheless, the prosecution, the defense, and popular memory all focus their attention on a side issue. While the question of Professor David-West’s criminal culpability may have hung on the connection between the watch and the

\$57 million, the more urgent question had to do with whether the minister had acted of his own accord. In his testimony at trial, David-West not only claimed to have attempted to telephone President Babangida and to have written memos on the issue but noted the *Concord* had covered the agreement as a “\$100 million windfall for Nigeria.” More to the point, he recounted regularly having seen the president for the next nine months while serving as minister of mines but never to have been queried on the issue, despite his memos and the newspaper coverage.⁸² Ultimately, then, the question of David-West’s vulnerability stemmed less from the goods he received from Stinnes than in how decision making was conducted within the Babangida government, and who might be blamed for multimillion-dollar losses. The question of culpability traced a more general process of centralization, and the accusation of corruption, more fully than ever before, traced the workings of an inner elite.

Military Government and Corruption

The Babangida regime ended as abruptly as it began. The transition the government had charted to civilian rule considerably resembled the path inaugurated by the Muhammed/Obasanjo regime more than a decade previously. The process of registering political groups came to an end when the government announced it would not certify any of the political groups but rather would create two competing political parties, one left of center and one right of center. The parties were duly created, and they elected candidates to the local government councils, state assemblies, governorships, and to the National Assembly. After preliminary returns showed the presidential election held 12 June 1993 had been won by the Social Democratic Party’s Chief Moshood Abiola, the military government nullified the results. After several months of escalating unrest and international sanctions, Babangida stood down as head of state at the end of August, and the civilian leader of government business, Chief Ernest Shonkan, was sworn in as interim president. However, that November, the army chief of staff and defense minister, General Sani Abacha, led a military coup. His tenure as head of state would last five years, and the military regime would go on for another year before giving way to the civilian Fourth Republic.

While the twenty years between Abacha’s coming to power and the time of this writing have been eventful—and while some aspects of that time have already been discussed or will come up in part II of this book—the basic contours of the corruption-complex remain largely intact. The Buhari and Babangida regimes are noteworthy in several respects. First, they completed a process of politicizing the military that was already well under way during

the military regimes of the 1970s. While diarchy was never formally installed, and while the “army arrangement” has given way to a resigned consensus that neither civilian nor military regimes can correct the sins of their predecessors, a prebendelist logic of clientelism became much more deeply entrenched in military hierarchies. While the military was never free from the politics of region, ethnicity, or religion, the regional origins of particular military officers have become even more salient than in the past. While it is difficult with any accuracy to chart material changes in the levels of corruption, it seems inarguable that more money was diverted from the country by the Babangida and Abacha regimes than had been diverted under their military predecessors. Civilians were not necessarily the only profligate rulers Nigeria had—even if now people contend the military was not as wildly spendthrift as the politicians of the Fourth Republic.

The brutality the Buhari regime meted out under its War against Indiscipline and War against Women remained a feature of its military successors, as the crackdowns on the riots discussed above suggest. While this took place, governmental austerity also defunded schools, hospitals, and universities, while the country’s infrastructure crumbled. At the same time, the devaluation of the naira made many consumer goods increasingly unaffordable for the bulk of the population. As Andrew Apter has argued, the decline in world oil prices caused a hollowing out of the naira: rampant inflation and a state that was a shell of its former self was the result. The years of the beginning of structural adjustment were also the time when Nigeria’s 419 messages first became famous. Apter suggests this is because of a change in regimes of value themselves. Nigerian politics became a politics of illusion; the Nigerian money form similarly was demonstrated to be an illusion. For that reason, 419 became a prototypical business form. I would suggest that is only a part of the story, and that it is necessary to place these developments in much longer-term historical trajectories.

The Nigerian corruption-complex emerged from sets of local political strategies and accommodations that first took shape under British colonialism and under the system of indirect rule. They took on a recognizable form as those of a “corrupt African government” as the country achieved internal self-rule a decade before independence. And they came to fruition as Nigeria became an oil state, in both flush times and lean ones. Part I of this book has not been a history of Nigeria, or of Nigerian corruption. Rather, it has been an attempt to trace the career of the corruption-complex, and to point to critical conjunctures in its history. Even today, there is not one language of corruption, or one set of principles by which it can be judged. While all commentators can agree that corruption is wrong, the problem is identifying who is guilty of it. When

the accused are able to assert they have done nothing wrong—as when Umaru Dikko claimed his only sin was working faithfully for President Shagari and staying at the office until three a.m.—they may not be believed. But a key element to domestic Nigerian stories about corruption, even when they accept basic distinctions between the public and the private, and bureaucratic notions of officeholding, is their lack of consensus over who is actually guilty of such things. Warri people tend to be much more forgiving of Festus Okotie-Eboh's failings than Abeokuta people. And this negotiable, open-ended, strategic quality to corruption discourse is not just some Machiavellian element of Nigerian politics. It also enables concrete material practices that then might be labeled “corrupt.”

The intertwined logics of the oil economy and Nigeria's own emergent prebendalite federalism intersected with increasingly powerful international stories about Nigerian corruption. The cement armada and the government minister in a crate were powerful proof to foreigners that Nigeria was a country in which illicit government money was easily available. Although scholars have convincingly argued 419 e-mails are effective in part through their unconvincing quality—only the truly gullible will respond to them, which makes them an effective tool for identifying easy marks—the intensification of Nigerian corruption would not have been possible without an international context that allowed it to take place. And Nigeria's international image was the consequence of the scandals that bedeviled it across the 1970s and after.