

# Patrimonialism and Military Regimes in Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

*Military regimes in Nigeria exhibit patrimonial characteristics such as personal rule, absence of separation between the public and private realms, patron-client administrative networks, veneration of the ruler, massive corruption, ethnic/sectional-based support, and repression of opposition and violation of human rights. Most of the dangers posed by military rule to democracy is not really because of its intrinsic authoritarian posture, although it is the most perceptible. It is the patrimonial tendency in military rule that creates the most transcendent and pernicious effect on democracy because of unconcealed ethnic/sectional alignment of regimes. This generates inter-ethnic acrimony and rivalry, in effect, delegitimizes the state and state power, and consequently, engenders a hostile environment to the growth of democracy.*

## **Introduction**

Military rule in general is antithetical to democracy. There are numerous reasons for this. Firstly, the military structure and mode of operation are not consistent with democratic norms and procedure. Secondly, the frequent intervention of the military in civilian politics disrupts the democratic process and prevents the stabilization and institutionalization of democratic culture. But these and similar arguments against military rule focus only on the tangible aspects of military regimes and their direct impact on democratic rule. They do not consider the *derivational effects*. Derivational effects refer to the impact that military rule has in reinforcing other socio-political factors such as ethnicity, religion, regionalism, and so on, which have deleterious consequences for democratic rule. One factor that has combined consummately, yet unobtrusively, with military regime in Nigeria is patrimonialism. The effect of the

patrimonialization of the Nigerian army and military rule will be the major focus of this essay.

The argument of this paper is that Nigeria's military regimes operate a patrimonial system to a very large extent. Military rulers are personal rulers who depend, for support, on the distribution of state largesse to favourites and kinsmen. State offices are used to generate resources for the incumbent officers and their dependents and clients. As the Nigerian army is dominated by a particular group in the population, state patronage also favours elites of this group more than others. This produces three grave consequences for democracy. First, the pursuit of hegemonic politics by a section of the population engenders ethnonationalism and ethnic politics which is unhealthy for democracy. Second, the privatization of state offices and obliteration of the dividing line between private and public realms engender uncontrollable corruption. This is because the state becomes a viable source of private accumulation, and therefore political competition to occupy state offices, of necessity, becomes normless, ferocious and stormy. Under such conditions, democracy has a tenuous existence because compromise, the flavour of democracy, becomes impossible.

Third, there is a sharp decline in the legitimacy of the Nigerian state because sectional dominance through military regimes has generated a sense of injustice and alienation among other groups. Hence, many groups are today questioning the basis of a united Nigeria, and are calling for a sovereign national conference to discuss the future of the Nigerian state. Others see the major issue in the ongoing transition politics as the necessity of a power shift from the North to the South. These are the major consequences of the patrimonialization of state power by successive military regimes.

### **The Conceptual Framework**

Patrimonialism was developed by Max Weber to describe a system of personal rule in which the ruler dispenses offices and benefits to subordinates in return for loyalty, support and services (Weber, 1978: 1031). In its present form, patrimonialism refers to a political system in which state officers appropriate their offices for personal benefits and those of their supporters (Theobald, 1982: 248). Political offices are regarded as fiefdoms by the official and the exercise of public authority is utilised to serve their interest. However, in view of the numerous forms that personal rule in contemporary state, manifests itself, it appears that the Weberian conception of patrimonialism represents the ideal model. No existing state can exhibit the five Weberian characteristics of a patrimonial state in its pure forms:

1. government based on a personal ruler;
2. lack of separation between the public and private realms for state officials;
3. political offices are regarded as fiefdoms and patronage by state officials;

4. the system operates primarily through numerous patron-client networks; and
5. the exercise of public authority is utilized to serve the rulers and officials on which the offices are bestowed.

That some political systems exhibit some of these characteristics more than others and in different circumstances has led to sub-classifications of the patrimonial state in this category — such as clientelism, prebendalism and neo-patrimonialism.

For example, clientelism is used to describe a political system that displays patron-client relationships in the exercise of public authority and distribution of benefits. It is defined as a personalised relationship between actors (i.e. patrons and clients), or a set of actors commanding unequal wealth, status or influence, based on conditional loyalties and involving mutually beneficial transactions (Lemarchard, 1972: 69). In the political system, clientelism is a system in which state officers (patrons) distribute benefits to strategically placed individuals lower than themselves (clients) in return for support, service and loyalty, and to those higher than themselves (patrons), for the continuous protection of their positions and tenures. This means that a patron at one level may be a client to a superior other, and so on. This linkage could be at the individual or group level (Lemarchard, 1972; Sandbook, 1985).

But when state officials regard political offices as inherited estates to be used for their private accumulation and those of their supporters within a legal-formal, constitutional order, most especially in a pseudo-democratic regime, the system is referred to as prebendalism. Prebendalism is a hybrid of authority patterns:

(On) the one hand, there are legal rules stipulating the purview of offices, how they are to be staffed, the required technical training and material entitlements for office holders. On the other hand, however, personal loyalties and communal identities, the private appropriation of the means of administration and, finally, the transformation of office from their stipulated administrative purpose into a direct or indirect economic resource, are factors which have equal weight in determining the nature and exercise of public power (Joseph, 1987: 64-65).

The significant difference between prebendalism and patrimonialism, according to Richard Joseph, lies in the absence of the authority of the personal ruler. Or even when a personal ruler exists in a prebendal state, he/she does not last long enough compared with patrimonialism. Nevertheless, to say that both systems depend on “the treatment of state power as a congeries of office which can be competed for, appropriated, and then administered for the benefit of individual occupants and their support groups” (Joseph, 1987: 63).

Numerous African states exhibit some traits of the Weberian model of patrimonial state, and therefore attract the label of neo-patrimonialism or retain the patrimonial tag. For instance, Nigeria under Generals Babangida and Abacha, Togo under Eyadema, Omah Bongo's Gabon, Nguema's Equatorial Guinea, Gaddafi's Libya, and the archtypical patrimonial state, Zaire under the late Mobutu Sese Seko. In all these states, the patrimonial characteristics operate in spite of the constitution and are crucial in determining government decisions within the formal-legal administrative and political structure. The patrimonial characteristics are generally adapted to, and deeply embedded in a constitutional framework, yet their structures and consequences are clearly distinguishable, which suggests why some scholars prefer to use the term neo-patrimonialism to describe a wide range of regimes in Africa. In essence, neo-patrimonialism describes how patrimonialism operates in contemporary African context (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994; O'Donnell, 1996: 40-41). Like the ideal patrimonial model, neo-patrimonialism is also a composite of specifics with as "hierarchical particularistic (*sic*) exchanges, patronage, nepotism, and favours to action that, under the formal rules of the institutional package of polyarchy, would be considered corrupt" (O'Donnell, 1996: 42; see also Rose-Ackerman, 1996).

What we have done in the preceding section is to show that different concepts have been used to describe the regimes in which support is maintained or generated through the distribution of state resources such as offices, contracts, grants, licences and other means (Ergas, 1987: 1-17); Callaghy, 1987: 89; Theobald, 1990, 1982: 242-159). These concepts may differ but they refer to the same phenomenon—that is, the privatisation of state offices. It is for this reason that all such concepts will be subsumed under the umbrella of patrimonialism.

I would in this framework, describe most African states as having a patrimonial regime. I would further argue that military rule facilitates the establishment of patrimonial rule more than any other system of government. The hierarchical nature of the military command structure and the centralised control of instruments of physical violence are key factors which dispose military regimes to patrimonialism. According to Richard Sandbrook, patrimonial rule develops from a situation where the ruler lacks constitutional, charismatic – revolutionary or traditional legitimacy. A strong man emerges and rules on the basis of material incentives and personal control of his administration and armed forces. Under circumstances, that are devoid of traditional or modern constitutional limitations, fear and personal loyalty become the outstanding feature of the prevailing regime (Sandbrook, 1985: 89). A large number of African states are controlled by such authoritarian regimes that have emerged from military or one party dictatorships; each of them having a strong man who occupies the centre of political life.

Due to uncertain or fragile legitimacy, the patrimonial ruler demands extreme obedience and unqualified veneration.

He surrounds himself with followers who constantly, reaffirm their faith in his exceptional wisdom and generosity. All or the bulk of strategic positions in the political, bureaucratic, police and military hierarchies are filled with personal loyal individuals. These include relatives especially close ones such as brothers and cousins, friends and classmates, kinsmen and tribesmen. For these and other followers, the expectation of sharing in the spoils of office reinforces the personal link to the chief (Sandbrook, 1985: 90-91).

Every socio-political and economic activity in the state must be geared toward the strengthening of his power and economic position. This is why "in many African countries, welfare oriented development policies are discussed at great length, but development policies that augment state and ruler power are the primary focus of implementation efforts" (Callaghy, 1983: 83).

Patrimonialism, especially when seen from the perspective of clientelism as an analytic variable of Nigerian politics is important for two main reasons. First, it can operate expediently on both the individual and group levels simultaneously. Second, it combines easily with ethnicity, another important analytic variable, in a mutually reinforcing manner. This relationship has been lucidly and convincingly stated by Rene Lamarchard:

It is less obvious, however that clientelism and ethnicity (*sic*) have seldom operated independently of each other ... Just as ethnicity (*sic*) has sometimes been created with integrative properties that really belong to the realm of clientelism, so clientelism as an integrative mechanism has often developed out of the exigencies or ethnic fragmentation (Lemarchard, 1972: 69).

Furthermore, ethnonationalism and clientelism "may have overlapping memberships, with some individuals solidly anchored in the ethnic sub-structure, and others acting as intermediary links between this sub-structure and the higher reaches of the clientelist pyramid". Accordingly, "what may be taken for a clear example of ethnicity (*sic*) at one level may be nothing more than the lower reticulations of a more extensive clientelistic network" (Lemarchard, 1972: 69).

Ethnonationalism is a phenomenon which is produced by interrelationships between different ethnic groups within a political society comprising diverse ethnic groups (Nnoli, 1978: 6). It is very easy for ethnicity to be politicised in a multi-ethnic state because of the conflicting interest of ethnic-based elites as they engage in power struggles and as groups compete generally for scarce state resources and largesse such as employment, education, election, representation, and most of all, the control of state power (Rothchild, 1986; Osaghae, 1992: 49).

What makes ethnonationalism a dangerous factor is its nature. That is, it usually involves unequal contestants – some advanced, others backward, some dominant, others dominated. And because it is a zero-sum strategy in which the winner sweeps the stakes, conflict arising from it tends to be ferocious with the persistent danger of violence (Osaghae, 1992: 49). Thus, whether it is under a democratic or military regime, the political elite and their respective groups will always be involved in a power struggle and competition for scarce national resources. When the state is partial, because of being dominated by sectional interests, most especially under military regimes, the contest for resources will be regarded as unfair by other groups not favoured by the power balance, and this could create political instability.

Ethnic politics compared to patrimonialism, is atrociously debilitating to democracy and the democratization process. Many old and contemporary studies have shown that a stable democracy is very difficult to achieve in plural and most especially, ethnically divided societies because ethnicity becomes the primary basis of political relations and participation (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972; Lijphart, 1996: 106, Osaghae, 1992: 50). In such societies, ethnic identities, according to Donald Horowitz (1996: 184-186), provide clear lines for determining who will be included and who will be excluded, and since the lines appear unalterable, being in and being out may appear to many as a permanent prize. As such, ethnicity poses an obstacle at the threshold of democratization and an obstacle after this threshold has been crossed. Even the military, no matter how much it tries to be natural, cannot be insulated from the problem of ethnonationalism and the distribution of state largesse especially when there is the general feeling that the military leadership is ethnic-based.

### **The Military and Patrimonial Politics in Nigeria**

The Nigerian army was politicized quite early in the country's history as an independent nation. As early as 1960, the Northern elite had demanded 50 percent of the officer corps to reflect the size of the region, which was said to be twice as large as the two Southern regions together (Luckham, 1971; Miners, 1971; Ademoyega, 1981). Consequently, being an officer, to a great extent, came to depend on one's ethnic identity. Today, the states are accorded equal quota in army recruitment. But rather than eliminate the feeling of ethnic domination in the army, the quota system has heightened it. In the first place, some ethnic groups have more states than others, which means that they would have a larger number of military officers compared to others. Second, while recruitment is equal for all states, only few officers of southern origin ever rise to become Army Chief of Staff (*Tempo*, October 8, 1998).<sup>1</sup> This means that ultimately the same northern ethnic combinations that dominate civil politics also dominate the military, and invariably military governments. But northern domination is usually more glaring under a military

than civilian rule. The reason is that, although ethnically dominated, the military can use brute force to secure compliance from all sections and groups, but any civilian rule whether ethnically dominated or not, must be in some form of alliance with other groups to secure adequate control.

The Nigerian military came to power for the first time January 15, 1966, in a coup that was widely described as Igbo master-minded (Dudley, 1973: 106-109), even though there are other contrary opinions (Ademoyega, 1981; Obasanjo, 1987). There is, however, little dispute about the high degree of corruption, ineptitude and repression in Sir Abubakar Tarfawa Balewa's government. Law and order had broken down in the country, especially in the Western Region, following the extensive rigging of the 1965 regional election of that region by the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) government. This political disorder precipitated this first military takeover of power.

The absence of northern officers in this putsch evoked the criticism of sectionalism and ethnic motivation. But then, one could understand why northern officers were not involved in the plan. They enjoyed reasonable material comfort in the army as most of them were beneficiaries of patronage from their political kinsmen in government. Above all, the military was part of Nigerian society, and, in a situation in which ethnic groups competed for power and national resources, and the North was dominant in this contest, northern officers were compelled to support their political elite in return for favours. The counter-coup of July 29, 1966, which was regarded as a retaliation by northern soldiers (clients), who were still emotionally deranged by the sudden loss of their political and military leaders (patrons) in the January 1966 coup (Dudley, 1973), was intended to restore this status quo.

How patrimonial was this and successive military regimes? The first military government of General Ironsi did not last long, but the traces of patrimonial politics were evident. General Ironsi was accused of surrounding himself with advisers who were his kinsmen. In addition to this, his policy of unification was a disaster as it was seen by the North as an attempt to promote Igbo/Southern ascendancy and domination in Nigerian politics. In fairness to the North, the General appeared insensitive to the fears of the Northern elites about prospects of Southern domination in the unitary system he had established by decree. The counter-coup of July 1966 was to restore Northern domination in Nigerian politics and to avenge the death of their civilian and military leaders. The crisis that followed this counter-coup led to the civil war between the Eastern Region and the rest of the Nigerian Federation.

It was after the civil war, when the Gowon-led military government settled down, that a pattern of patrimonialism became evident. Gowon was reluctant in disciplining state officers, and as such corruption became rampant (Joseph, 1987: 72). This was clearly demonstrated by the zeal with which General Gowon

defended Joseph Gomwalk, a state governor, who had been accused of extensive corruption. Despite the fact that his accuser, Aper Aku, had filed affidavits in the court to this effect, Gowon, rather than call for an investigation, ordered Aper Aku's detention followed by a public statement that Gomwalk was not guilty (Ojo, 1987: 507). In the case of his commissioner, Joseph Tarkar, though he (Tarkar) resigned after his corrupt activities were exposed, Gowon did not prosecute him. Meanwhile, in the states, governors used wanton force to silence public protests about the ways in which public officials appropriated public property or allowed others to do so. The governors "acted as if they were provincial chiefs in a decentralised patrimonial order". In fact, the entire administration condoned corruption as Gowon came to rely upon the disposition of offices, and distributed material rewards to obtain the support of people within and outside the military whom he thought he needed in order to stay in power (Ojo, 1987: 157).

It was in Gowon's regime that the state started expanding into the economic and social sectors. This expansion was aided by abundant revenue from petroleum. There were numerous post-war contracts for which local and foreign businessmen contested, with huge kickbacks to the strategically placed elite. It was the Gowon regime that initiated the indigenization policy which blossomed under the Obasanjo regime. This policy gave power to the state to determine who would own shares in the numerous enterprises that had been acquired in the process, and who would serve as directors and board members in these state enterprises. For state leaders, this increased the avenues for rewarding loyal supporters, patronizing kinsmen, personal accumulation of wealth and buying support from potential opponents. Corruption blossomed, enabling officers of his administration to effectively pursue their private, ethnic and communal interests, especially in respect of the location of government projects and award of contracts. In those circumstances, "Any dividing line between public and private had disappeared, the very best of prebendalism was stretched by the excesses, since they obliterated the notion of a public office subject to personal and communal manipulations by office-holders" (Joseph, 1987: 83). State officers were seen by their communities as their representative in government, and government projects in such communities were somehow attributed to their efforts. Following this, communities without such representatives complained of government neglect.

Gowon's rule terminated on July 29, 1975 in a bloodless coup led by Murtala Muhammad. Muhammad himself was a product of the political patronage of the First Republic and Gowon's regime. In fact, he was one of the principal executors of the July 1966 coup/aimed at restoring Northern dominance in Nigerian politics; and the initial intention of Muhammad in the 1966 coup was to withdraw the North from the Nigerian federation (Kurfi, A., 1983: 38). In the early days of Gowon's rule, he was the power behind the throne, but the loss of this position and privilege after the civil war estranged him from Gowon. It was even widely known that, as



a Division Commander during the civil war, Muhammad was involved in some corrupt practices to accumulate private wealth. These notwithstanding, Murtala Muhammad came to power as a crusading reformer and patriot, who led an anti-corruption crusade. However, his rule lasted for only six months, so his sincerity and capacity to sustain the momentum of his crusade could not be ascertained. But his close association with such business tycoons as Chief M.K.O Abiola and the scandalous ITT contract, as well as the tainted contracts for the Abuja Federal Capital Projects, make it highly probable that it would not have been long before the forces of patrimonialism and their characteristic effects caught up with his administration. The appointment of his friend, Alhaji Adamu Ciroma, a historian, as the Governor of the Central Bank is a pointer to this suspicion. Besides, Murtala Muhammad was more or less a charismatic leader, and such leaders are extremely susceptible to patrimonial forms of administration (Callaghy, 1987: 110).

His successor, General Olusegun Obasanjo continued with the policies of the Murtala Muhammad regime and for this reason the administration came to be known as "Muhammad-Obasanjo regime". This regime continued the expansion of the state into the economic arena and brought the state more intimately into contact with society. While the various economic activities were presented in the context of national development, they in reality expanded the patrimonial privileges of the state by opening up more avenues for patronage. For instance, the federal government initiated the Universal Primary Education (UPE) which meant funding of primary school education, including the construction of several thousands of classroom blocks, training of teachers and providing books and other learning materials. This policy entailed the expenditure of huge sums of money and the award of several contracts to favourites, supporters and kinsmen by state officials. There was state patronage in the award of other projects such as the Festival of Black and African Arts (FESTAC 77); the first Lagos International Trade Fair; the construction of permanent barracks for thousands of soldiers; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), which involved the procurement of farmlands, machines and other farming equipment, fertilizer and seedlings; and the building of the new Federal Capital at Abuja. All these projects meant the award of several billion naira contracts. The momentum for private accumulation was further increased with the enactment of the Land Use Decree. This decree permitted state officers to acquire lands and houses anywhere in the country without hindrance. Furthermore, there were several projects pertaining to the transition programme, especially those related to the electoral process – namely, the procurement of voters cards, ballot papers and boxes, registration of voters and compilation of voters register, construction of polling stations and recruitment of electoral officers. As observed by Joseph (1987: 75) while the "Muhammad-Obasanjo" regime was seeking to lay down the basic infrastructure of a stable political order, it was at the same time adding more fuel to prebendal politics in Nigeria. Political

power was used to appropriate material benefits in the public domain for private benefit, including one's acknowledged communal and ethnic friends and supporters.

The next military regime of relevance to this study is the Babangida regime. This regime can be described aptly as patrimonialism *par excellence*. Babangida came to power in 1985 following a palace coup. Typically of such coups, the interest of members of the incumbent regime is a key causal factor. It was particularly easy for Babangida to mobilize the support of the army for very flimsy reasons because he was the Chief of Army Staff in the ousted regime. He capitalised on the grave violations of human rights by the Buhari's government to win public sympathy. Like all military regimes that want to buy time, Babangida embarked on a transition programme which he never intended to complete. In the process, he set up several agencies such as the Political Bureau, Constitution Drafting Committee, the Centre for Democratic Studies (CDS), Directorate for Mass Mobilization (MAMSER), and two political parties, namely, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). As the people began to participate in these agencies, direct attention was shifted from the government, and the regime dug in gradually.

When Babangida felt secured enough, he began to undermine and destabilize the transition programme which he had extravagantly planned. It was obvious that he had a hidden agenda, which was to perpetuate himself in power through dexterous manipulations. His most favourite strategy was dispensing largesse to powerful groups and individuals to buy their support. In the local parlance, this came to be known as "settlement". The politics of settlement was a combination of patrimonialism and incorporation. The rationale for this strategy was the conviction that the average Nigerian has an insatiable appetite for material aggrandisement and is under pressure to accumulate wealth. As such he/she was ready to support any regime that offers attractive patronage. In pursuit of personal power therefore many groups and individuals were settled in exchange for political support.

For Babangida, the incorporation process started with his primary constituency, the army, which was transformed into what Joseph would have aptly described as "a 'prebendalized army'". The first act was to retire all officers of doubtful loyalty. These were usually those who were senior to him, and capable of questioning the credentials of his government. This was followed by the appointment of his favourites to political and command positions, and a complex network of patron-client relationships came to dominate the army. Loyalty and sychophancy were the criteria, not efficiency and proficiency. Field commanders were given huge sums of money disguised as security votes, which they were not required to account for. And all military officers from the rank of captain were given a new car which cost the nation several millions of naira.

As he was still suspicious of the army, Babangida attempted to establish the National Guard as an elite force that would be under his direct command. Indeed, any arm of the military that the President could not control was subjected to severe deprivation. This was the plight of the Air Force, especially after many of its officers were involved in a coup plot against his regime. The Air Force was starved of funds for the purchase of new aircraft, equipment, spare parts and general maintenance (*The African Guardian*, October 12, 1992).

The President and some members of his family and top military officers also embarked on unbridled private accumulation at the expense of the nation. His wife, Miriam is said to be worth about 8 billion US dollars (Dapo, 1993) while Babangida himself is reported to be worth 30 million French francs (*L'Evenement du Jeudi*, May 1997). This excludes the money and numerous properties he is reported to have accumulated in Nigeria (Useh, 1993: 7-13; Adekanmbi, 1998: 14). Some top officers of the regime were involved in corrupt practices, and illegal business deals, most especially, large scale smuggling of petroleum products into neighbouring countries. These are in addition to numerous licences given to the President's clients to export crude oil (Mumuni, 1995: 16; Abimboye, 1993: 14).

Babangida was simply munificent, responsible for the infrastructural transformation of his home state, Niger State. With a population of less than two million and of almost no economic importance to the nation. Niger State became a model in terms of infrastructural development during the regime of Babangida. And the people of Niger State showed their appreciation by giving him a heroic reception on his retirement which was aptly described by *Tell* magazine as "Babangida's triumphant entry into Minna". To date, the people of Niger State regard Babangida as their grand patron (*The Guardian*, November 5, 1998).

The regime also embarked on extensive incorporation of influential civil society beginning with individuals and groups capable of enhancing the public image and credibility of his regime. For instance, academics and intellectuals were offered lucrative political appointments. These included persons like Wole Soyinka, Eme Awa, Humphray Nwosu, Adele Jinadu, Sam Oyovbaire, Omo Omoruyi, John Ayoade, and a host of others (Kunle Amuwo, 1990). As Julius Ihonvbere has suggested, the numerous directorates and agencies created by the Babangida regime were actually meant for "settling" people of this category (Ihonvbere, 1991: 120).

Similarly, labour unions were infiltrated, so enticed and balkanized that union leaders openly solicited government patronage. In fact, the then president of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) Mr. Paschal Bafyau, vociferously campaigned for the extension of Babangida's tenure from 1993 to 1996. Even more clamorous were traditional rulers, who because of declining relevance in the modern state always support military regimes in exchange for status and material income. Even the newly elected members of the National Assembly fell for Babangida's

patrimonial politics when they supported the annulment of the June 12 presidential election.

Although Babangida recruited clients and supporters all over Nigeria, his primary support came from the North. This is because he was such an ardent believer in Northern dominance of Nigerian politics and government that he actually used his regime to foster this project. His annulment of the June 12 Presidential election which gave Chief M.K.O. Abiola of the SDP, a Southerner, an undisputed lead, forcefully demonstrates this commitment. Every available evidence indicate that any power shift from the North to the South was unacceptable to the Northern military ... by Babangida, and political elites who have dominated power since 1960.<sup>2</sup>

Abacha came to power after overthrowing the Interim Government set up by Babangida before his exit. The Abacha regime could be said to have been more patrimonial than Babangida's. His regime closely fitted Sandbrooks description of a typical patrimonial rule (*op. cit.*). He surrounded himself with only very trusted loyalists and clients. Very few of his ministers could meet with him face to face to discuss state policies while a host of others had to approach the President through favourite ministers and Abacha's own close business partners. His major project as head of state was the accumulation of wealth for himself and for members of his immediate family and closest associates. Several major state contracts were awarded to his children and other relatives who reaped huge incomes when, in most cases, they did not execute the contracts (Adekanmbi, 1998: 14-24). He indiscriminately transferred state funds into private accounts (Muhammad, 1998), acquired extensive property, and had business interests in virtually all the states of the federation (*Fraud Incorporated*, 1998: 3-7, *Tempo*, Oct. 15, 1998). His close friends were not left out of this game of looting public coffers. The most notable are General Jerry Useni, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, who is allegedly worth more than 3 billion US dollars in cash with several billion naira worth of property in the country. Another close ally is Alhaji Ismaili Gwarzo, Abacha's Security Adviser whose fortune is valued at more than 4 billion US dollars (*Fraud Incorporated*, 1998: 13-14; Dare, S., 1998: 16-21). Millions of dollars were recovered from some of such associates after the death of Abacha. Very large sums of money were also discovered at the presidential villa, Aso Rock. Abacha's wife, Maryam was also caught trying to flee the country with huge sums of money in various foreign currencies (*Post Express*, August 2, 1998; *Tempo*, October 15, 1998).

Like a typical patrimonial ruler, Abacha did not tolerate any manner of opposition to his regime including activities that could affect the regular inflow of revenue into the state coffers (Arinze, 1995: 10). His instrument of terror was controlled by major Hamza El Mustapha, the Chief Security Officer. According to *Fraud Incorporated*, Mustapha set up several security outfits to protect Abacha.

One of them was the strike force commandos made up of 3,000 members. They were drawn mainly from the ranks of sergeant and below. Their education did not exceed secondary school. The force patrolled the streets of Abuja and its environs. The second special task force was headed by a special police officer. Its duty was to frame people for detention and subject them to intensive torture. Journalists, campaigners for democracy and supporters of the annulled June 12 Presidential election were the major target. The third group was the killer squad, headed by one Jabila whose code name was Pharaoh. The work of this group was to exterminate tough opposition members whose detention might cause vehement condemnation worldwide. Their victims, included Kudirat Abiola, wife of the winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, and Pa Alfred Rewane, a democracy activist (*Tell*, Oct. 5, 1998: 10-15; *Fraud Incorporated* 1998: 14).

Like Babangida, Abacha was an avid supporter of Northern domination during the July 1966 coup. He was responsible for the killing of officers of Igbo origin in Kaduna and Zaria during the July 1966 coup (Obasanjo in *Africa*, September 1998: 12). His closest advisers were mostly Northerners and at the time of his death, the first six senior military officers in the line of succession were all Northerners. Most of the eligible Southern officers, such as General Diya, Abacha's lieutenant, were detained for an alleged coup plot. In summing up Abacha's rule, General Olusegun Obasanjo said:

Abacha used everything against the Nigerian interest, against the Nigerian people, and only for himself, his family and his cohort. Not just the security apparatus, even the political system, the economic system, everything that was there was used for him, his family and accomplices (Obasanjo, 1998: 10).

### **Conclusion: Patrimonialism and Democratic Society**

Patrimonialism when combined with military regimes in Nigeria amplify the anti-democratic characteristic of military dictatorship. Patrimonialism itself is perilous to democratic stability but its dialect effect is adumbrated by the unconcealed antagonism between democracy and military dictatorship. Thus, the effects of patrimonialism on democracy within the parameters of military rule are secondary, derivational and covert. However, when the characteristics of patrimonialism are extracted from military regimes, its (patrimonialism's) damaging effects are glaring and momentous. For instance, personal rule, ethnic – based loyalty and support, state-society relations based on patron-client networks, absence of separation between public and private realms, unrestricted accumulation of private wealth from state resources, repression of opposition and human rights abuses, and inveterate corruption, are all detrimental to democratic stability. The relationship between military, regime and patrimonialism is symbiotic and congruous. This

explains why both patterns can easily fuse together. The prevalence of patrimonialism as a form of rule by military regimes in Nigeria has hindered the latter's capacity to legitimize and institutionalize state authority which is a necessary condition for democratic stability and consolidation. In this regard, therefore, the impact of patrimonialism on democracy is tremendous. Military despots and their juntas in Nigeria are usually sectionally constituted and dominated in which the national aspect is only a façade. Consequently, the structure of military regimes promote ethnic rivalry and acrimony rather than national integration. Military despots such as Babangida, Abacha and others who see themselves primarily as ethnic patrons cannot create stable polities necessary for democracy out of a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.

### Notes

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1. Apart from the six months (January 1966-July 1966) rule by General Ironsi and the three and a half years (February 1976 – October 1979) rule by General Olusegun Obasanjo between 1960 and present day (1998), only the Northern civilian or military Heads of State have ruled Nigeria, and there have been eight (8) of them. All but two of Army Chiefs of Staff have been Northerners (*Tell*, July 15, 1995).
  2. After falling from power, Babangida openly admitted that he was under pressure from Northern military and political elite to annul the June 12 Presidential election. Sani Kontagora, a frontline publisher in the North in interviews presents what can be described as a typical Northern position "Southerners can't rule us", *Tell*, July 8, 1996 No. 28, "The North would go to war if Abiola becomes President," *Tell*, July 5, 1993. Alhaji Uman Dikko, a prominent member of Northern political elite – minister in the 1st and 2nd republics, just before the 1993 election said "The North will never allow a Southerner to rule Nigeria," furthermore, "The North will never allow the future of their children to be determined by the Southerners" (Quoted by Wole Soyinka in *The Punch*, October 21, 1998). Babangida's Chief of Intelligence and Security, Brigadier Halilu Akilu said after the June 12, 1993 election, "Abiola would be President over my dead body" (*African Concord*, July 5, 1993, Quoting from the *Guardian* of London).

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