

# Babangida's Journey in Self-service: Pathetic Attempts to Rewrite History

By Owei Lakemfa

*“Babangida can be a gambler. After destroying the country and attempting to set it ablaze with the 1993 annulment, he tried to return to power by officially declaring in September 2010, his intention to run in the 2011 presidential election. The mass reaction of Nigerians forced him to retreat”.*

Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, the retired General and head of the 1985-93 military junta who styled himself 'President' has again intruded into our national consciousness. On Thursday, February 20, 2025, the General who was disgraced out of office 32 years ago, unleashed an unguided missile he called an autobiography. Titled: 'A Journey In Service', it was a failed attempt to rewrite the history of his misrule which included the de-industrialization of the country, unchecked corruption, religious sectarianism, annulment of a presidential election he certified as being free, fair and credible and, most painfully, the mass murder of Nigerians who protested his crippling economic policies and the annulment. The 420-page book published by Bookcraft has 13 chapters and an epilogue dripping with self-justification. It is disgraceful that a man who rose to be a General in the Nigerian Army did not have the courage to own up to his deeds. Rather, he blamed others, especially the dead who have no chance of defending themselves. Nigerians first encountered Babangida as a coup plotter in the mid-1970s. Then in December 1983, he was one of the main leaders of the coup that overthrew the elected Shagari administration. On August 27, 1985, he executed his own coup and announced himself 'President'. At this time, Nigerians were protesting against a proposed International Monetary Fund, IMF, loan because its conditionalities promised to be crippling and destructive. Babangida presented himself as a democrat and asked Nigerians to debate the issue. Nigerians overwhelmingly rejected the IMF and its conditionalities.

On December 13, 1985, Babangida announced that the rejection was “clearly the will of the majority of our people...”. He added that “the path of honour and the essence of democratic patriotism lies in discontinuing the negotiations with the IMF...”. Nigerians were ecstatic and praised him. Only to find out that they had been duped as Babangida fully implemented the IMF enslaving programme called the Structural Adjustment Programme, SAP. So, we knew by 1986 that we had a military regime which had no honour. More felonious was that the regime made criticism of SAP a criminal offence. For this, human rights lawyer, Gani Fawehinmi, and the two foremost labour leaders in our history, Michael Imoudu and Wahab



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Goodluck, were detained without trial for organising an 'Alternative To SAP Conference'. When in 1989 and 1992 Nigerians, led by students protested against the devastating SAP programme, the regime sent the police and soldiers to massacre protesters especially in Lagos and Benin. In his book, Babangida justified the mass killings thus: “In the military mind-set, there are only two types of people: enemies or friends. Our political opponents were, therefore, primarily 'enemy forces' before they were fellow Nigerians.” Babangida without consulting Nigerians, dragged Nigeria, a secular country, into the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, OIC. When Nigerians protested, he said we should “learn to tolerate each other”. Once the then Deputy Head of State, Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe, opposed Nigeria joining the OIC, he was sacked and retired from the military. In his book, Babangida said he was livid because the impression

was given “that Nigeria, under my watch, had become a full member of the OIC”. One of the dastardliest acts of Babangida was his execution of his childhood friend, General Mamman Vatsa, over an alleged coup plot. In his autobiography, Babangida wrote: “With the benefit of hindsight now, I recall that a constant part of our relationship as teenagers and young men was a continuous and recurrent peer jealousy on his part towards me. He was always envious of my achievements...”. Who says the jealousy was not on the part of Babangida as Vatsa was a celebrated poet and man of culture in contrast to the image of his fellow Generals like Babangida.

Nigerians viewed Babangida as a fox in sheep clothing who is untrustworthy and unreliable. So, they gave him the sobriquet, 'Maradona' because they thought he dribbled Nigerians as the Argentine footballer, Diego Maradona, dribbled people on the football field. Babangida demonstrated this duplicity in his book. For

that should exist amongst them. Apart from Abacha, Babangida also blamed Arthur Nzeribe, Justices Bassey Ikpeme and Dahiru Saleh and the office of his Vice President, Augustus Aikhomu for the annulment. He also accused then National Electoral Commission Chairman, Professor Humphrey Nwosu, of unilaterally stopping the election results. He equally blamed Abiola for not accepting to head an interim arrangement that would have led to a fifth postponement of the handover! Conveniently, those he accused are all dead!

The truth is that Babangida never planned to hand over power. This was why he postponed the handover date from 1990 to 1992. When he realised that Nigerians did not believe him, he made a nationwide address on August 27, 1990 titled, 'The Last Lap: Retrospect and Prospect'. In that short address, he mentioned five times that he and his military gang will hand over power in 1992. They were



instance, while he blamed retired General Yakubu Gowon for once shifting the 1976 military handover date, he was silent over his own shifting of the handover date on four occasions, and being resisted the fifth time he tried. He also blamed the Obasanjo regime which had a transition period of three years for allegedly being hasty in its handover of power to civilians, insinuating that was why the Second Republic collapsed. But he said nothing about his own seven-year transition programme that ended in disaster for the entire country.

In contrast to his failed transition programme, that of the Abubakar regime which gave birth to the current civil rule 25 years ago, lasted just nine months. There should be honour amongst professional coup plotters, so Babangida blaming the late General Sani Abacha for the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election won by Chief Mashood Kashimawo Abiola, defeated the esprit de corp

false promises as he later postponed the hand-over to January 2, 1993, then to August 27, 1993. After the presidential election, he tried to hang on to power with a fifth postponement. Babangida can be a gambler. After destroying the country and attempting to set it ablaze with the 1993 annulment, he tried to return to power by officially declaring in September 2010, his intention to run in the 2011 presidential election. The mass reaction of Nigerians forced him to retreat. In his autobiography which should be appropriately titled 'A Journey in Self-Service', Babangida tried to rewrite history. But history is already written, and even if he launches a hundred more autobiographies and biographies, he cannot re-write history. Let me admit that in his latest gambit, Babangida broke even as he raked in about N17 billion as donations. But as a popular saying goes: vanity upon vanity, all is vanity.