

**Autobiography as Vehicle for Political Discourse: The Case of Ibrahim Badamasi
Babangida's *A Journey in Service: An Autobiography***

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Abstract

Attempt is made in this article to examine the imperative of the intersection of literature, military dictatorship and politics in Nigeria through a critical reading of IBB's *A Journey in Service*. The main objective is to investigate the extent to which military intervention in governance serves either as panacea or bane to the anomalies inherent in leadership in Nigeria. The models of New Historicism and qualitative research are used in the study. Located within the terrain of studies on autobiography, politics and leadership, this study is significant for improving on the dearth of knowledge on interdisciplinary discourses. The study argues that IBB's *A Journey in Service* functions as a narrative vehicle and political discourse with which the leadership attempts to justify its coup, decisions, tests its acceptability and popularity within the contexts of the Nigeria society. The study precedes on the premise that ideological and personal interests are indispensable and instrumental to leadership style and decisions. The study concludes that the text illustrates historical, literary and political archives wherein personal ambition, public service and governance are intertwined.

Key Words: Power, Military Regime, Ideological and Leadership.

1. Introduction

Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's *A Journey in Service* belongs to the autobiographical genre. The autobiography details the personal narrative of the narrator while also serving as a political discourse. Situated within the three imperatives of literature, politics and governance, the work provides deeper understanding into: the life experiences, political actions, decisions of the

author, the justifications for such actions and the political philosophies of governance. As a literary form, it shapes the political involvement of the author, accounts for the nation's political trajectory and serves as a historical document for deeper understanding and reflection of the Nigerian political phenomena and her relationship with the outside world. As a historical material, General Yakubu Gowon rightly captures the historical contexts of the text in the *Forward* stating that: "the book takes us through national history and general Babangida's life of challenges, obstacles, and triumphs...an account of service rendered to the nation and people...I can only hope that General Babangida has once again blazed a trail, challenging our leaders to find time and courage to record their experiences in office for the benefit of fellow Nigerians and prosperity. (2025: xiv)" Babangida, the author of the text, valorizes Gowon's position in the *Prologue* that: "the ultimate verdict of history" starts to materialize in their efforts towards nation-building in which he and his colleagues were engaged "more than thirty years ago" (2025: xvi). This position of the two former military leaders supports Aristotle's assertion that: "Art is an authentic representational and epistemic medium..." (cited in Tanimu, 2022; 63). Tanimu (2022:64) encapsulates the views thus: "the physical world is the real source of man's cognitive power and in reflecting it, Art becomes a credible source of projecting human experience, feelings and thought." The text outlines IBB's path through a life of normal childhood, school days, military training, and career in the military which he succinctly sums up as: "history compelled...me to the apex of national service as President and commander-in-Chief." He asserts that: "My Nigerian journey is like no other because it has been an odyssey of encounters with the unexpected (2025: xvi). This article analyzes the text from the point of governance: political ideas, administrative philosophies, policy trajectories, statecraft, and power dynamics.

2. Justification for the Study.

This research is situated within the broad domains of literature and political leadership with a particular focus on how leadership orientations shape the general social, economic and political progress in post-independence Nigeria. Nigeria's leadership roles have historically reflected its political evolution and transitions, exhibiting inconsistencies linked to leadership styles, governance capacity, public policy choices, and institutional performance. Since independence, governance in Nigeria has constituted a major barrier to economic diversification, industrialization, and overall national development. Roads, power supply, rail transport, housing, healthcare, and digital infrastructure have remained underdeveloped despite substantial resource

allocations. Scholars have argued that political leadership plays a decisive role in shaping development, employment, and per capital income given that leadership vision, policy direction, governance style, and institutional effectiveness determine the prioritization, financing, and implementation of infrastructural projects.

This research is justified on several grounds: First, despite extensive academic debate on political leadership in Nigeria, few studies have systematically examined how leadership orientation directly interacts with infrastructural policy-making in a specific administration. Second, the Babangida administration presents a unique case due to its initial explicit transition to democracy and individual, groups, ideological and foreign influences on the electoral processes and the eventual annulment or incredibility of the entire exercise. Third, understanding governance and leadership roles in this period has practical relevance for Nigeria's future politicians, leaders, the elite and the masses.

In addition, a closer examination of previous studies reveals critical gaps that necessitate this research. There is limited scholarly engagement with the political rationalities underpinning governance and literature. Existing studies fail to interrogate leadership decision-making processes, political priorities, bureaucratic negotiations and federal-state dynamics that shape the politics. Furthermore, autobiographical narratives occupy a significant place in Nigerian literature, not only as personal life histories but also as valuable socio-political testimonies that reflect the realities of leadership, public service, and statecraft. By analyzing *A Journey in Service*, this paper explores how personal experiences are transformed into literary expressions that illuminate Nigeria's political culture, administrative challenges and ethical dilemmas in governance. The study adopts a literary-political approach, focusing on themes such as leadership, accountability, nationalism, public service, and the tension between personal ideals and institutional constraints. It argues that the autobiography functions both as a historical record and as a tool for political commentary, offering insights into the workings of governance while shaping public perception of leadership in Nigeria. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that Nigerian autobiographical literature (the likes of IBB's text) serves as a vital medium through which governance is interrogated, documented, reinforcing the role of literature as an instrument of social reflection and political engagement.

3. Literature Review

Good governance and leadership are key to peace, harmony and economic tranquility in any society. Buhari, during his military takeover of power from Shagari lamented that: “the intervention of the armed forces was to arrest the imminent catastrophe which could have been the inevitable results of the course being charted by the politicians.” Ironically, in a coup from which IBB emerged as the military head of state, Brigadier Joshua Dogonyaro attributed the military takeover of power from another military thus: “the actions of a selected few members...the concept of collective leadership has been substituted by stubborn and ill-advised unilateral actions thereby destroying the principle upon which the government came to power” (cited in Mohammed 2008:76). This has been the nature of governance since the country’s independence in 1960. While this blame game among opponents has continued, the good intention towards good governance and democracy is shrouded by hatred and enmity. Unfortunately in Nigeria, good governance and leadership have always eluded both military and civilian leaders. People oriented participation in democracy among other factors is not only instrumental but also assumed to better leadership style, economic development and general progress. Scholars have argued that leadership influences national priorities, appropriates, utilizes scarce resources and shapes policy incentives that determine infrastructural outcomes (Adebayo, 2019; Gyimah-Boadi, 2020). Leadership capacity in Africa and Nigeria, in particular, is often assessed through accountability, policy coherence, institutional strength, and developmental vision (Ikelegbe, 2021). In Nigeria, leadership or good government policies are constrained by corruption, unstable policy regimes, limited political will, bureaucratic inefficiency, and fiscal leakages (Oviasuyi & Lawrence, 2020).

Existing literature conceptualizes infrastructure as the backbone of socio-economic development, essential for industrial growth, mobility, public welfare, and national competitiveness (World Bank, 2019). Studies emphasize that infrastructure strengthens productivity, stimulates investment, and enhances governance legitimacy when effectively implemented (Eberhard et al., 2019). Yet, Nigeria’s infrastructure deficit has been estimated at over \$3 trillion since independence, reflecting decades of neglect and inconsistent governance strategies (AfDB, 2020). Researches on political leadership in Nigeria point to a recurring pattern where development outcomes mirror the interests, competence, and ideological orientation of incumbent leaders (Olagunju, 2021). For instance, the Obasanjo administration prioritized debt relief and privatization, the Jonathan administration emphasized power sector reforms, while the

Buhari administration placed considerable emphasis on capital expenditure and infrastructure-led economic recovery (Aremu & Ahmed, 2022).

Literature on the Buhari era highlights key initiatives such as the completion of the Abuja–Kaduna, Lagos–Ibadan, and Warri–Itakpe rail lines; expansion of major highways; the Second Niger Bridge; and increased allocations to capital projects (Momoh, 2022; Ajao, 2023). Analysts note that Buhari’s leadership style was characterized by centralization, anti-corruption rhetoric, and infrastructural nationalism, though critiques observe bureaucratic delays, fiscal constraints, and issues of transparency (Ojo & Adeoye, 2023).

There are different perspectives on autobiographical writings. Some of these perspectives include historical and political. The historical perspective considers autobiographies as products of historical raw materials and serving the same purpose. The political perspectives see autobiographies as means of accounting and justification for political actions, decision and policies of leadership and governance. Under this class fall the political life writings of past Nigerian political office holders like Olusegun Obasanjo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. While researches on Nigeria have explored Nigeria’s infrastructural challenges, corruption and maladministration, there is limited empirical work linking Babangida’s leadership dynamics to infrastructural outcomes, corruption, maladministration and leadership ineptitude using a systematic literary and political-leadership frameworks. Most studies lack analytical rigor or fail to integrate leadership and the politics of governance with literary texts. Given this context, Babangida’s *A Journey in Service* presents a fertile ground for examining how literature, leadership and politics interact with institutional constraints that shaped leadership, governance and policies in Nigeria.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative textual analytical approach. This method focuses on interpreting the text, its ideological as well as the political meaning embedded therein. By this, the study presents a dual analysis of both literary construction of the author and the social-cultural and political meanings inherent in the text. The primary text; *A Journey in Service* and secondary materials provide the basis for effective interpretation, succinct description and detailed analysis.

5. Theoretical Framework

New Historicism is applied as the tool for analysis in this study. New Historicism is a critical theory that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, largely associated with the work of American literary critic Stephen Greenblatt. The theory developed as a reaction against traditional formalist approaches that treated literary texts as self-contained and separates from historical realities. New Historicism insists that literature and history are deeply interconnected and that literary texts both shape and are shaped by the social, political, cultural, and ideological conditions of their time. At the core of New Historicism is the assumption that history is not a fixed or objective record of the past, but a constructed narrative influenced by power relations and dominant ideologies. Consequently, literary texts are viewed as cultural artifacts that participate in the production, circulation, and contestation of meaning within specific historical contexts. Rather than privileging literary texts over historical documents, New Historicism places them on the same analytical level, treating both as discursive texts that reflect competing voices and interests. Perhaps what is new about the procedures of New Historicism is its insistence, drawn from Foucault and post-structuralism, that “history” itself is a text, an interpretation, and that there is no single history. It also rejected any notion of historical progress or teleology, and broke away from any literary historiography based on the study of genres and figures. Hence, the “culture” in which New Historicism situated literary texts was itself regarded as a textual construct. As such, New Historicism refused to accord any kind of unity or homogeneity to history or culture, viewing both as harboring networks of contradictory, compelling, and un-reconciled forces and interests (Habib 2011:266). New Historicists tend “to view literature as one discourse among many cultural discourses, insisting on engaging with this entire maze or complexity in a localized manner, refusing to engage in categorical generalizations or to commit to any definite political stance (ibid). Like the Reader-Response theory, New Historicism questions the concept of authorship arguing that literary texts could not be restricted to the texts themselves or to their author’s psychology and background: rather, the larger contexts and cultural conventions in which texts were produced needed to be considered. The emphasis of New Historicists centers on the past as very much bound up with textuality but moves away from the formalist aspects of structuralism and poststructuralist.

New Historicism...has been especially productive in rethinking or deconstructing the kinds of assumptions made about the past and literature’s place in it...particularly with regard to ...period. (Webster 2016:117). The rejection of the absolute authority of the author in Criticism

partly because Literature is textualisation, a participant in the making of a dynamic and changeable culture as opposed to a reflection of a static, coherent tradition and culture (Tanimu 2022:83). The vibrancy of classical art and culture that: “Art is Mimesis (imitation, reflection, representation) ...ultimate reality resides in concepts ..., while the physical side is a reflection” is reflected there Tanimu (2022:63) No text is timeless...all texts are historically determined. The function of critical evaluation is ...the recuperation of the multiple histories of texts which previous conservative readings have obscured. (Tanimu 2022: 83). New Historicism views literature ‘as a stable event which can be used as “background of an era, or simply as a reflection that refers to a material condition... of particular epoch of literature. It views literary texts as “situated” and “negotiated” the oft-disregard fragmentary view lies beyond a work (Kaur 2022:228). New Historicism...provides needs on that fragmentary view instead of one ultimate interpretation which is an illusionary exploitation of the unitary work. This exploitation is considerably discriminations between literature and non-literary texts to be of one ultimate ideology of discursive formations. “The nature of representation is the most important issue in our understanding” of what history is (Kaur 2022:229). One of the central concerns of New Historicism is the relationship between power, ideology, and representation. Influenced by the ideas of Michel Foucault, New Historicists examine how power operates through institutions, language, and cultural practices. Literature, from this perspective, becomes a site where political authority is negotiated, legitimized, or subtly challenged. Texts may reinforce dominant ideologies while simultaneously revealing tensions, contradictions, and suppressed voices within the socio-political order. New Historicism proceeds on the premise that the literary text is a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourses that include: religious, political, economic and aesthetic which shaped it, and in their turn, were shaped by it.

One of the main influences of New Historicism was Michel Foucault, who saw knowledge as a form of power and analyzed it as highly diffused and as not distinctly assignable to a given set of political or ideological agencies (Habib 2011:264). Among the poetics of New Historicism used for analysis in this study include: (a) insistence that all systems of thought, all phenomena, all institutions, all works of arts, and all literary texts must be situated within a historical perspective. They cannot be somehow torn from history and analyzed in isolation since they are determined in both their forms and contents by their specific historical circumstances, their specific situation in time and place (Habib 2011: 265). (b) History is sometimes held as by Hegel

and Marx argued to operate according to certain identifiable laws, yielding a certain predictability and explanatory power. (c) Another concern of Historicism arises from the recognition that societies and cultures separated in time have differing values and beliefs.

6 Brief Historical Perspectives of Autobiographical Works on Africa

Autobiography in African society is as ancient as the people's culture itself because autobiographical narratives existed in oral forms during the pre-colonial era. These narratives were preserved through traditional oral literature, especially in the form of praise poetry and panegyrics. However, this method of preserving personal histories changed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Griffiths (2000:7) explains that "the earliest forms of writing in English by black Africans were the narratives of the slaves captured and transported by the European slave-traders who thronged to the West African coast in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries." Examples of such narratives include the works of Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. Du Bois. According to Griffiths (2000:11), many of these narratives were written to expose the brutality of slavery and support the campaign for emancipation. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, autobiographical writings by politicians, businessmen, and other prominent individuals increased significantly. Such autobiographies are often shaped by the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions from which they emerge. This idea reinforces Griffiths' assertion that Equiano, although admired by religious emancipationists who viewed missionary activities as a means of civilizing Africa, considered Christianity problematic in practice, if not in theory (2000:26). Griffiths also describes *Ethiopia Unbound* as an autobiographical work intended to address major concerns of the period, particularly the demand for Africans to govern their own affairs. Thus, from its oral manifestation and African-American slave narratives to contemporary autobiographies, it becomes evident that literature reflects social realities rather than presenting absolute truth. As cited in Nkosi (1981:41), "no writer is a true realist – or even a truly good writer" if he manipulates events and characters entirely at will. Consequently, autobiographical and novelistic works, including *A Journey in Service: An Autobiography*, attempt to portray reality as accurately as possible while revealing the responses, beliefs, and experiences shaped by a writer's class, historical period, ideology, and social background (Chase 1983:157).

7 Autobiography as Vehicle for Political Discourse: The Case of IBB's *A Journey in Service*

A Journey in Service reflects trends of political dimensions in both civilian and military regimes in Nigeria. It alludes to previous democratic political practices as well as gives details of military interventions especially in the forms of coup and counter-coups in Nigeria. The first-person narrative voice and the author's authoritative tone give the work a verisimilitude of actual occurrences in the annals of the country's political history. The narrator, as a former military head of state, presents his journey in the military career, his experiences, the manifestations of the ethos of his military trainings and involvement in leadership positions at various points within and outside the country. Using the first-person narrative technique, the author asserts that: "I STARTED MY military career at the Nigerian Military Training College on Monday, December 10, 1962" (2025:28). The words "I STARTED MY" are rendered emphatically in upper case, showing the beginning of the narrator's journey into the Nigerian military. In the section titled *A Young Officer and a Gentleman*, IBB gives the details of the several official military trainings and engagements within Nigeria and abroad. Still in this section, he gives firsthand information of his involvement in the 1966 coup and counter-coup and the resultant tragedies of the coups in Nigeria. IBB summarily describes that period as:

...a dark phase in our history as a nation. The first coup attempt, which led to the counter-coup, should never have occurred. The young, idealistic officers bit more than they could chew. Without question, both events,...deepened the distrust among ethnic groups in the country, distrust that continues to plague us to this day....Those coups led to one of the bloodiest fratricidal conflicts in modern Africa, the...Nigerian civil war...with devastating consequences that we have never fully recovered from as a country (2025:45).

From the quotation above, it is clear that whatever reasons are adduced for the justification of coups, they are not often the best panaceas to social, economic and political menaces of the country. This view corroborates Dudley's (1982:75), that:

... there is no logic and there can be no logic of military interventions. All there can be, and all there can be expected to be, is a logic, a set of explanatory schemas of military coups, some more plausible than the others, or some more coherent than the others. But this requires some amplification before which we must consider the statement that there can be no logic of military coups.

In furtherance of the argument, Dudley asserts that:

for logic of coups to be possible, we would have complete information on the motives of those involved in the coup and this is patently not

possible. Were it even to be possible, we could still be faced with the epiphenomenalistic problem that there could be an incongruence between a man's description of his motives and an observer's account of that man's motives as inferred from his behavior, a real enough problem since it is not inconceivable that the man himself may be mistaken in his account of his motives.

Thus, from the first coup in 1966 to the more recent coups in Nigeria and the explanations for the justification of military takeover, two reasons could be adduced for military intervention in politics. These are; the country's low political culture and the custodian theory which concerns the notion that "the military is the custodian of the nation's constitution and as such feels compelled to intervene when the "constitutional prosperity is being flouted" Dudley (1982:78). With IBB's experiences and involvement in leadership and governance, his intimacy with the military profession and skilful use of military parlance reveal the narrator's confessional tone and body nuances that dictate his decisions.

In chapter six titled "Mounting the Saddle, Defining a Military Presidency" IBB argues that the change in leadership is a swift "response to the worsening mood of the nation and growing concern about our future as a people." In the same chapter, the author attributes his involvement in leadership as an attempt to curb or prevent the glaring division in the military, described thus: "Division of opinion within the armed forces had come to replace the unanimity of purpose that informed the December 1983 change of government" (2025:118). From the excerpts above, several accusations and counter accusations are often presented as justifiably the reason for military takeover of leadership from civilian government and military leadership. For example, IBB justifies his coup, stating that his predecessor Major General Muhammadu Buhari and his deputy, Brigadier Tunde Idiagbon, "have separated themselves from the mainstream of the armed forces by personalizing what was initially a collective leadership" (2025:118). Added to this is the worsening economic hardship and social conditions that have become the normal life of the people during the period. Unfortunately, as the Chief of Army Staff, IBB is not consulted even in issues that "concern the careers of personnel under my command" (2025:119). This deliberate subjugation, "arbitrariness and disregard for due process" by the Buhari military led government was a slap on IBB - an insult that he could only bear for a very short period. As such, the "tense atmosphere culminated in the unanimous decision of a broad spectrum of senior and middle-level officers" including IBB "to change the nation's leadership on 26th August, 1985." To IBB, the change is crucial as it aims to "re-humanise the polity and free the society"

(2025:122), while letting the public always remember that “we were fundamentally still a military dispensation necessitated by the misdeeds of past political leaders and military head of states” (ibid).

Historically, Nigeria has a quantum of strong labour force which has not been fully utilized. The endowed natural resources base of the country too faces similar untapped phenomena. IBB’s regime attempts to tap into this at the realization that “Nigeria’s most important strategic asset was perhaps our rich heritage of intellectual resources lodged mainly in the universities (2025:126). True as this declaration and realization of labour production and prowess in the country’s tertiary institution could be, it is accompanied by antagonism and threat to the intellectuals in the institutions. IBB’s regime is also convinced that the nation possessed the resources and human capital to chart a new path of reform. He asserts that: “We needed to harness those resources for national rebirth and future growth” (2025:126). This, the regime believes, could make the economy breathe healthier, rescue or bring the economy from the brink of an abyss and forestall the blame game which has historically constituted the common characteristic of one regime against another. IBB’s belief in the “free spirit of the Nigerian... unity, diverse strength, and multiculturalism of Nigeria...” represents a formidable pathway to equal access to available opportunities for all citizens of Nigeria, “free from sectionalism, sectarian divisions, and ethnic and other divisions.” However, this optimism as well as the regime’s preparedness to change the tide is undermined by the pessimism that has historically shaped the Nigerian politics.

Political leaders in Nigeria, without exception, are not unaware of the potentials of the manpower “asset” in the universities. However, the assumed “radicalism” of these assets lodged in the university left it less desirable to particular military regimes. This, among other reasons, has made the intellectuals in the universities often victims of government policies. This is reflected in IBB’s caution or threat against the workforce in the Nigerian tertiary institutions who mistake their roles as teachers for overt political roles “as well as diversionary political posturing and undue messianic posturing” (2025:127). The members of the academia are sometimes threatened because of their “unnecessary ideological confrontations” on campuses. This was the basis of the IBB’s led regime’s pronouncement that: “we would frown at university teachers who were teaching what they were not paid to teach” (2025:166). The above validates public perceptions that the IBB regime was intolerant of opponents or oppositions. In fact, the regime over-reacts to

every perceived threat it discerned from individuals, groups and associations. This influence is succinctly captured below:

the extent to which societal and extra-societal factors could influence military behaviour: the extent to which military communication channels were independent of societal communication media; the institutional complexity, that is the extent to which there were countervailing forces - forces which on the one hand complement each other and on the other balance each other-in the society; and, of course, the coercive power of the military Dudley (1982:78).

While the IBB's regime depends on public reactions and opinions from powerful individuals, groups and associations to survive, other elements or aggrieved factions in the military also feed on this, to take power from the regime that they have earlier collectively constituted. Hence, each coup or change of government is, in a significant sense, dependent on perceived public opinion, be it correct or wrong. Thus, the IBB led regime was assumed to be connected with assassinations, the imprisonment of political opponents, involvement in various maneuverings and its blatant jettison of the rule of law climaxed in the June 12 elections. According to Mohammed (2008:93), the abortion of the June 12, 1993 presidential election was "brought about by the actions of significant members of the political class which amounted to supporting or at least acquiescing to a further elongation of military rule." The IBB led regime in totality, fails to realize Foucault's (1976) assertion "that New method of power operates not by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control. Power is not a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. Nor is it a "mode of subjugation" or a "general system of domination exerted by one group over another" (cited in Habib 2011:267).

Chapter 12 of the text being examined titled "Transition to Civil Rule and the June 12 Saga" reflects the two party structures: Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) introduced by IBB. While the party structure shows that Babangida was firmly in control of party formation, leadership and funding, each of the two parties was: "a little to the right and the other a little to the left of the ideological spectrum" (Mohammed 2008:94). Additionally, it reflects total failure of the Political Bureau which Mohammed (2008:84) refers to as: "a conscious attempt at opening up the political space" towards a democratic space after "the repressive experience" of the ousted Buhari military regime. The autonomous influence of the

military on the June 12 starts from the two-party system. This was criticized bitterly. Some refers to it as “two manufactured Government corporations created in the military government’s image” (2025:261). The general atmosphere of the transition from the beginning to the end represents a “...pessimist of governance in Nigeria”. It is such that despite the chunk of national wealth invested by the federal government and private institutions for the purpose of re-establishing a system of government, it has failed far more often than it has succeeded. By this, the Political Bureau only serves as a toothless bulldog for failing to address the persistent failures and the collapse of democratic experiments in Nigeria. Transitions to civil rule by both military and democratically elected leaders in Nigeria are poorly handled and this shows clearly that classical tenets of democracy are inapplicable to the basic facts of political life in Nigeria. This is why politicians “appreciate democratic phraseology even while crushing opponents in the name of the people” (Joseph 1991:19). The abuse of governmental power, corruption, falsification of voting results and political violence make it difficult to pin an abiding faith in the democratic process in Nigeria.

Nigerian adoptions of western models or international best practices in all facets of her society have always been smokescreens. For instance, Macpherson’s notion of democratic government in Western societies results from the historical fact that it was preceded by the entrenchment of the competitive or market economy. The process by which democracy was “liberalized” is a key one, for it ties together notions of capitalist development, class formation and class conflict, as well as such essentials of liberal democracy as competitive parties and majority rule, Joseph (1991:20)” All these were lacking in the Nigerian model of democracy since independence to date. The reason being that, democracy is made to shrink into a two-party systems or rendered undemocratic processes. Also, government or its representatives are more powerful than the electorates, no complete party system, irresponsive government and the masses are deprived of their fair place within the democratic institutions. Thus, the choice by the leading elements in the Nigerian society to re-establish a liberal democratic system, therefore, has specific implications for the structure of Nigeria’s political economy. Hence, the whole process of return to democracy is “manipulated, distorted and eventually incorporated into the strategies of members ...of the dominant class...” (Joseph 1991:21).

Babangida’s criticism of the Murtala Muhammed’s regime in part three titled: *Governance and Military Rule* that, “officers expressed their displeasure at the ostentatious lifestyle of some of

the military state governors and wanted them redeployed...because, during those years, military governors doubled as Supreme Military Council (SMC) members and became too powerful and difficult to rein in” (2025:81), ironically this reflects the venality more prevalent during his (IBB’s) regime. This is the nature of the criticism of IBB’s regime within and outside the country. However, he (IBB) assumes or appears not to be aware of this fact during his reign, or so it seems.

Also, the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election which Mohammed (2008:94) describes as the “most controversial political decision of the IBB” paved the way for interim government and eventually the Abacha led military regime. The annulment was in itself a ploy by the regime to pave way for the continuity of military regime. However, the final outcome of the military regime to succeed itself in power was “shaped by major internal and external actors, state institutions and the security agencies” Mohammed (2008:75). By this, IBB deliberately or inadvertently relinquished authoritarian control to Abacha who has been one of his bosom friends.. IBB’s inability to stand the truth and adhere to the most vital ethics of democratic principles even while in the affirmative that Abiola won the 1993 presidential election, by allowing himself to be dissuaded by undemocratic forces is constitutive of his Achilles heel preventing him from history when he had the power to do so. Despite his personal as well as political strength, he became a puppet to the Achilles heel- a weakness that limits his ability to have a democratically elected successor. In his words: “unfortunately, our position as the government was not helped by the anti-democratic antics and intra-party conflicts of politicians” (2025:265).

This display of loyalty to perhaps an individual, one dominant political, economic group, class or ethnic group, supports political science theorizing that “democracy is not a viable option, especially in the large and socially heterogeneous developing countries” Joseph (1991:21). To M.G Smith, “cultural diversity or pluralism automatically imposes the structural necessity for domination by one of the cultural sections. It...necessitates nondemocratic regulation of group relationships” (cited in Joseph 1991:21).

From the foregoing, there is need for “depoliticization” or elimination of unhealthy political practices because of the high level of political antagonism, hostility, conflict and corruption which even military interventions are guilty of and they are often woeful failure as political

organizers. This demonstrates that democratic atmosphere in Nigeria runs contrary to classical democratic practices. Therefore, the liberal or classical notion of democracy is not a “realistic” model for Nigeria. The “principle of majority rule” is illusory and often difficult to practice within the institutions and political culture of democratic practices in Nigeria. As such, the level of antagonism and political conflicts might decline if “politics and government were to become less salient, less important as a source of advantages and disadvantages” (Joseph, 1991:22). According to Dudley (1982:77), “the correlation between political culture and military intervention turns out to be nothing but circular.” Inherent in the view above is that politicians and security agencies like the military in Nigeria have failed to holistically apply the classical tenets of democracy both in theory and even in contradiction to the basic facts of political life of the citizen. Though one cannot equate the standard practice of democracy in the West with a relatively low political culture in Nigeria, the IBB coup and similar other coups particularly in Nigeria, often follow the custodian theory which in Dudley’s (1982:78) words centers on “a justification than an explanation, for the theory simply says the military intervenes when they want to intervene, the military by self-arrogation claiming the right to determine when the constitution is being flouted.” IBB’S decision and the tension concerning the June 12 elections are indicative of what O’Connell (1967:131) describes as

Nigeria is notoriously a precarious lumping together of people whose separate identity is at least as real a matter as their acceptance of national unity. The problem is that while the state is concerned with issues as important as social justice and economic growth, there are groups within the state whose particular collective identity has roots much more deeply in the past, shares with its members a deeper fellowship embodied in social structures and language, and draws on more primordial loyalties than the state. In this sense each one of the Nigerian people is a nation. And Nigeria is best a ‘multi-national state’.

The view above paints the scene in which not only the military but also civilian regimes or policies are rooted. This view is supported by O’Connell that, the problem facing Nigeria and as manifest in contemporary military regimes from the terminal colonial period as the elite groups take over power from the British in the name of the Nigerian people and begin a struggle among themselves over the sharing out of power-political authority, posts and promotions, economic benefits, community amenities - that changes radically in character in the years following independence. He concludes that even if Nigerian sentiments after break-up from the colonial

master did not reach the massive bitterness of Indian-Pakistani relations, there would still be ill feeling great enough to damage co-operation considerably.” O’Connell (1967: (1967:131-183)

The strong tendency for division of the country after the annulment of the June 12 elections is only salvaged on one hand by the might or invisible power of the supreme and on another by individuals, particularly the elite group who strongly identify themselves with the Nigerian state and who have been important beyond their numbers in preserving its unity. Thus, looking backward to periods of independence, coups and counter-coups and the Nigerian civil war, what has preserved Nigerian political integration has been an alliance among concerned citizens from all religions, ethnic and regions of the country. This may be attributed to the fact that though the regions are strong enough to weaken the political identity of the center, no one region, ethnic or religious group is formidable enough or has been homogeneous enough, to unilaterally control governance in the country even though voting patterns of the people, venal and “godfatherism” factors were dominant in the support that each party often receives. This for instance, reveals that tribalism, or the politics of “competitive modernization” forms an essential part of the June 12 electoral crisis. Thus, to explain Nigerian politics in merely ethnic or tribal terms is excessively simple and misleading. This is not to rule out the communal identities of party formation or their choices of candidates for the June 12 elections. It was of course glaring that each of the two parties had a powerbase in the regions that produced the leaders or where they are originally formed. However, the success or failure of any party constituted under this dynamic atmosphere is mostly determined by the power that be.

8 Conclusion

From January 1966 when the first military intervention occurred, Nigeria has witnessed several other coups. Such coups always erode legitimacy and are often accompanied by breakdown of law and order, anarchy and violence in all parts of the country. During the IBB military regime, the head of state, governors, commissioners and those closely associated with the regime were not only believed to have amassed huge fortunes, they in fact flaunted their wealth in manner which most people found extremely distasteful. IBB’S regime was not only accused of corruption, its management of administrative affairs was also inept. This maladministration is captured by the author himself thus: “there was no question that mistakes were made in the handling of the June 12 elections and their aftermath, for which I take full responsibility as

President and Commander-in-Chief.” To the above catalogue of abuse of power and gross economic mismanagement is the frustration of dashed hopes of a return to civil rule with the outcome and manipulation that followed the June 12, 1993 elections.

This study has examined IBB’s *A Journey in Service* using the poetics of New Historicism. New Historicism enables a reading of Babangida’s *A Journey in Service* as both a literary and political document situated within Nigeria’s military and post-military epochs. The text is analyzed in relation to specific national and international historical events, governance structures, and power dynamics, revealing how personal, individual, class and group interests intersect with national history. Through this approach, the autobiography is understood not only as a record of lived experience but also as a discourse that participates in shaping interpretations of leadership, governance, and political legitimacy in Nigeria. Through a New Historicist lens, the autobiography reveals the interplay between individual experience and the broader socio-political realities of Nigeria, highlighting how historical events, institutional challenges, and political decisions are narrated and interpreted through first person and omniscient narrative technique of the author. Through New Historicism, IBB’s personal narrative is analyzed as a political document that reflects, justifies, and negotiates historical realities as they relate to leadership and the potency of autobiographical literature on governance in Nigeria. The assertive nature of the text presents it as both a defense of controversial leadership decisions and a record of Nigeria’s political history, illustrating the capacity of autobiographical literature and its influence. The article underscores that IBB’s *A Journey in Service* serves as a critical tool for understanding governance, leadership ethics, national development and international relations. By blending personal experience with reflections on public service, IBB’s narrative exemplifies the power of history to literature and how literary critique shapes the consciousness of leaders, elites and the political landscape of Nigeria.

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