

A History of the Development of Makurdi during the Military Administrations of J. D. Gomwalk and Abdullahi Muhammed under Benue- Plateau State, 1967 - 1976

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ABSTRACT

The paper traces the history of the creation of Benue-Plateau State from the Northern Region of Nigeria as a solution to the disturbing issue of socio-economic marginalization which characterized the First Republic. It was a conglomeration of sub-units to provide functional competence in allocation of resources in the federal structure. This set up which was an outcome of British rule threw up contradictions especially, the challenges that ethnic minorities had to contend with as they struggled for participation to derive equal opportunities in the federation. The national structure was based on a

system with ethnicity as a platform for political competition as a rule rather than the exception. This created divisive tendencies and polarized the country along ethnic lines. The federal character principle was intended as a unifying factor to promote national unity but without definitive acceptable guidelines, it did not ensure fairness as it did not resolve the struggle amongst various ethnic groups to have a share of the national cake. There was disparity in development of certain areas against others as was the case of Makurdi and Jos. The city of Jos was the headquarters of Benue-Plateau State while Makurdi was a peripheral town in the new state. The qualitative research methodology was used to carry out the study using primary, secondary and tertiary sources and integrating the multi-disciplinary approach. It was found out that, due to political intrigues; Makurdi did not develop under the Gomwalk administration as was expected under Benue-Plateau State.

Keywords: Federal character, marginalization

Introduction

With the departure of the British from Nigeria culminating in her flag independence in 1960, the search for some form of self-rediscovery by various Nigerian nationalities was on the ascendance. Thus, it is interesting to note that most of the moves for self-re-awakening had come from minority groups in the country who felt that they had been politically marginalized and robbed of their economic wealth. This is what the Tiv people and other ethnic minorities had stood for in the colonial and post-colonial period. Our focus in this study is on how Makurdi town had evolved in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period to be where it is as the capital of Benue State. Much of this is captured in the entire work. Here in this paper, we are concerned with the progress Makurdi achieved in the post-colonial era and under the leadership of the former Military Administrators of Benue-Plateau State Police Commissioner Joseph Dechi Gomwalk and

Abdullahi Mohammed. They governed the state from 1967 to 1976. The Nigerian Governments both at the federal and state levels took measures to impact the lives of the ordinary citizens through projects in Jos such as the Jos-Buruku water project, Jos township roads, the Nigerian Standard Newspaper, the Benue-Plateau investment and properties company, the Benue-Plateau secretariat in Jos, the Assembly building in Jos, Government Lodges, Wild life park, Government Colleges, Plateau Hotel, Jos Main Market, Jos abattoir, University of Jos (collaboration with Federal Authorities), provision of Electricity through NESCO etc.¹ The politics of resource distribution affected Benue-Plateau state negatively. The state had crisis in basic economic issues and social conflict. The distribution of resources was not equitable. According to J. Isawa Elaigwu:

The allocation or distribution of resources among component units of a federation can extract high levels of emotional reactions from contending parties. This becomes even more apparent in the perception of equity and fairness by leaders of the component units. As Dankwart Rustow correctly observed the problem is that, "Equality is the most widely proclaimed political idea of the modern age, but it is one of the most imperfectly achieved."²

The lack of equitable distribution of socio-economic opportunities in Makurdi during the period 1967 to 1976 as compared to Jos had been the major issue that stood out in all the years Makurdi was part of the Benue-Plateau State. The Benue component of the state was neglected as well as Makurdi town which did not feature much in the development efforts of the Military Administration.

Theoretical Framework

There is an accumulated wealth of studies under the banner of the socialist communist scholars

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consolidated on the ideas of Neo-liberal thinker John Maynard Keynes³ who came up with the statist theory of development.⁴ The sum total of their celebrated argument was grounded in the ideas of State intervention, nationalization of private industries and increased public programmes.⁵

Fundamentally, the statist theory provides that, it is the responsibility of the government to intervene in the infrastructural development of her major towns and cities which can apply in the case of Makurdi. Therefore, the provision of infrastructural development and social amenities geared towards the development of Makurdi was considered on the basis of government intervention. This theory is considered worthy of adoption here because beginning from 1967 to 1976, Makurdi had witnessed lesser interventionists development projects and programmes as compared to Jos. Makurdi town had lesser infrastructural base and social amenities meant for the welfare of the generality of the population in the town.

The Declaration of Makurdi as an Administrative Division in 1970

After series of coup d'état in the Nigeria Federation, Yakubu Gowon assumed leadership as the Nigerian Head of State. His administration restructured the Nigerian polity with the creation of states which included Benue-Plateau state. Makurdi transited to a local government administration unit with headquarters in Makurdi. This is the focus of our work now, to assess the past endowments that gave rise to this development and assess what impact this status would shower on this burgeoning town.

By 1960, Makurdi had become a compact town with so many people who had immigrated into the area. The railway passage in the area gave rise to the springing up of many settlements especially at the Wailomayo area. The area comprised of the Plaza Hotel, the LGEA Primary School Wurukum, St Theresa s Primary School, Amokachi

Lane, behind Library Complex, Timber Shade, around Sato's Press, Padopas Harmony Secondary School, Uke Wende Street, Iember Lodge, Vandeikya Street. (Some of these names were not there by 1960 but should be understood as features of description). A number of factors were responsible for this growth as follows:

- i. Missionary activities especially Christianity
- ii. The role of government and private organisations

All these would be taken into consideration to assess how they contributed to making the town attain its status. The government projects in Makurdi became the major stimulants towards the urban growth of the area as they were meant to satisfy the employees of government.

Following the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, Nigeria was divided into four Regions namely the Western Region, Mid-west Region, Northern Region and Eastern Region. Makurdi was the headquarters of the Benue Province in the Northern Region. On the 5th of May, 1967 the structure of the federation of Nigeria was divided into twelve (12) Administrative States by the then General Yakubu Gowon military administration namely: North Western State, North Eastern State, Kano State, North Central State, Benue-Plateau State, Kwara State, Western State, Lagos State, Midwestern State, Rivers State, South Eastern State, and East Central State.

The status of Makurdi was that of an Administrative Divisional Headquarters. Nigeria had recorded three periods of state creation since independence in 1960 with the central idea of creating as many administrative and political divisions as needed to facilitate rapid socio-economic development of the country. The three periods were 1967, 1976 and 1991 during which some rural towns and villages that became state capitals experienced rapid growth owing to the influx of people to service public, private and industrial establishments. Often, the development represented a major shift in land use in favour of urban development in

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dominantly rural communities with an agricultural
economy.

In 1967, Makurdi was a very small town serving as a railway station and transit town between the north and the south of the country. Much of the floodplains of the river Benue and adjoining uplands were farmlands. The flood plains were used mainly for production of rice in the rainy season and for vegetables (edible leaves, tomatoes and onions) in the distinct dry season. The flood plains are narrowest in Makurdi environs, but became much wider (between 5km and 8km wide on the North and South banks of the river) east and west of the town.

By 1967, only a small portion of the land had been built up both on the southern and northern banks of the river, the main structures being the railway quarters, some small residential areas, the road network and the railway bridge. Not much expansion of the town had occurred and the main communication links between the north and south portions of the town remained the railway bridge and canoes. However, major changes began in 1976 when Makurdi became the capital of the newly created Benue State. From that year, a rapid urban development ensued, spurred by the intense public and private land development activities for residential, military and industrial purposes.⁶

Makurdi as Peripheral Town under the Administration of Joseph Dechi Gomwalk

Joseph Dechi Gomwalk was a Commissioner of the Nigerian Police Force and the first Military Governor of Benue-Plateau State after it was created from part of the Northern Region and lasted from 27th May, 1967 to 30th July, 1975. The colonial period had left vestiges of developments in security, Rail Roads, schools, hospitals, roads infrastructure, health, housing, education, modern sanitation, electricity, piped water, paved roads and medical services. All these infrastructures were scanty social services meant to only facilitate exploitation under

colonial rule. At independence, they needed to be modernized and focused to improve the quality of lives of the people. This was the essence of creation of more states and local governments so as to bring Governance closer to the people and ensure the improvement in social infrastructure for their wellbeing.

J.D. Gomwalk's administration was in place in Benue-Plateau for eight years (1967 – 1975). Before Benue-Plateau State was created and governed by J.D. Gomwalk, the area had infrastructure laid though scantily, in the areas of education, health, urban development, establishment of markets, roads infrastructure, transportation, sanitation and social development right from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. The pre-cursor to the creation of states was the Northern region which had increased and relatively expanded much of these infrastructures. The Roman Catholic Mission and the Dutch Reformed Church Mission-Sudan United Mission (DRCM-SUM) instituted *Nongo u Kristu ken Sudan hen Tiv (NKST)* which may be translated as 'Church of Christ in the Sudan Among the Tiv', the Anglican and Methodist Churches had established schools and health facilities, which were functional and providing educational and health services as well as other social obligations to the people.

The Christian Missionaries had arrived in the Benue area during the early part of the twentieth century and established schools in towns like Sai, Zaki-Biam, Sevav, Mkar-Gboko, Wannune, Udei, , Adikpo, Mbaakon and Awajir among others. The famous Mt. St. Michael's Secondary School Aliade, the Mkar Teachers College, the WM Bristow Secondary School are some of the several institutions of higher learning established by Missionaries to promote education and also helped in the propagation of the Christian religion. It was these missionaries who established the earliest schools and produced an educated elite which gave the Benue people a human resource edge, in the manpower profile of the old Northern region and

the Benue-Plateau state. The Northern Region and Benue-Plateau State also had established public schools along with other interventions as governments. It was within this context that circumstances gave rise to the creation of Benue-Plateau State and J.D. Gomwalk became the military Governor of the State. S Governor Gomwalk did not only encourage private participation in the sectors of education and health but also promoted the cause of education by funding the establishment of public primary and secondary schools in Benue –Plateau State. He also established General hospitals in some local administration areas of the state. The Gboko General hospital and that of Katsina-Ala were established during his administration.

J.D. Gomwalk was also known to have established the University of Ibadan (Jos campus) and the Benue-Plateau Television during his tenure as Military Governor. These establishments had tremendous social effects on the people of the state and these indirectly impacted on the growth of Makurdi town. The Jos campus of the University of Ibadan eventually became the University of Jos. The people of the Makurdi area became the catchment area for the admission of students into the university, majority of whom would in later years occupy topmost positions when Makurdi became the capital of Benue State.

J.D. Gomwalk's administration sponsored several people of the state to foreign institutions of higher learning. The Governor thus widened the educational Horizons of people like Patrick Ityohegh who became a very respectable Television personality in Africa. He was the most senior indigene of Benue-Plateau State at the Benue-Plateau Television. He enjoyed the confidence of the military Governor of the State, Police Commissioner Joseph Dechi Gomwalk who was not happy that with the impressive conduct of Patrick Ityohegh on his job at the BPTV, he was not yet a university graduate. The Governor therefore requested Patrick Ityohegh to proceed for a university program in the USA in the interest of the manpower development of the BPTV.⁷ Patrick Ityohegh

moved on to acquire his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees and returned to his work. He became the Director-General of the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) having previously served Northern Nigerian Broadcasting Company and Benue-Plateau Television.

As an indigene of Benue State, he settled in Makurdi, creating the Patrick Ityohegh Boulevard, beautified along the lines of Boulevards in cities in the United States of America. He consequently imbued in Makurdi residents the need for beautification of their environments and the need for the scenic beauty of Makurdi metropolis.

We have so far tried to highlight the achievements of the J.D. Gomwalk administration in Benue-Plateau State and more so as it impacted Makurdi. It is on record that Governor Gomwalk left substantial legacies. It would be noted that, at this time in the evolution of the Nigerian state, the main socio-economic and political activities were centred around the state capitals just as it was during the Nigerian capitals of Kaduna for the North, Ibadan for the West and Enugu for the East. This priority had not changed and still applied when states were created. Much of the development of the state was in the capital city of Jos and only a few efforts under the J.D. Gomwalk administration were aimed at developing the rural areas. Makurdi town therefore had not witnessed much development beyond what was obtained during the Northern Nigeria Government but had at this time become the headquarters of the Makurdi Local Administration in the State.

The Impact of Gomwalk's Administration on Makurdi

The military by creating twelve states in Nigeria including Benue-Plateau State out of the Northern Region did what the colonial authorities and the first republic politicians could not do despite the real need for such a geo-political restructuring since the 1950s. The military creation of states in 1967 meant that, the struggle for

statehood and the relevance of the minorities in Nigerian politics to having more impact on their environment and communities was on its way. The Tarka led UMBC agitations had indeed paid off with the creation of more states. Benue-Plateau and later Benue State placed the Tiv, Idoma and other minority groups in a position where they could more or less determine their own destinies when the military exited the scene.

Tarka, having contributed in achieving state creation for minorities in Nigeria, logically and in the spirit of the new Nigeria which the military created, turned from being a minority rights activist to aspiring to being a national leader from the North.⁸ This was at a time that the Tiv intelligentsia was growing in number and with statehood achieved, many of them such as Paul Unongo and Chia Surma felt that the Tiv were not getting a fair share of the national resources due to them by virtue of their contributions to the nation during the civil war, and then, their high population relative to other groups. Having achieved state creation, the intelligentsia felt that, the Tiv who were more populous than any other group in Benue-Plateau State by virtue of their population be entitled to more divisions than the single giant Tiv division, which was one of the biggest in the country.

The search for the creation of more Tiv divisions in Benue-Plateau State was argued along the lines that, since allocations were made on the basis of divisions the Tiv had relative to their population, the more divisions they had, the more resources they would attract nationally through the state for development. The defining achievement of the Gomwalk administration was that the Benue-Plateau State Government created more divisions. Makurdi, Gboko and Katsina-Ala local administration areas were therefore created by the administration of CP Joseph Dechi Gomwalk as the Military Governor of Benue-Plateau State.

This opportunity thus further brought more people into Makurdi from the different areas of the country. More indigenes of Makurdi returned into

Makurdi to further contribute to her development. Makurdi was no doubt, the most important town after Jos in the former Benue-Plateau State, yet apart from the scanty educational and a few health institutions that were established, there was virtually no basic physical infrastructure development in Makurdi under the J.D. Gomwalk administration.⁹ This was contrary to expectations of state creation which paramount reason was to ease political tension and to quicken the pace of socio-economic development. It is important to note that the creation of Benue-Plateau State did not ease political tension as the Benue parts of the state still lamented the deliberate policy of underdevelopment.¹⁰ The Benue area of the state complained of marginalization and underdevelopment. Such complaints arose due to the fact that, the then Military Governor of Benue-Plateau State, J.D. Gomwalk, hailed from the Plateau part of the state and was seen to favour his own area in terms of allocation of resources. His attention was more focused on the state capital to the detriment of other parts of the state.

We have tried to explore the general pattern of Makurdi's neglect during the immediate post-colonial period. However, the underlying factors responsible for such neglect and for the poor development of social facilities in Makurdi had to do with the nature of Makurdi relations with towns like Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Ilorin and Jos that were elevated to become capital cities to the newly created states of North Central, North Western, North Eastern, Kwara and Plateau states respectively. It will be recalled that Kaduna was the capital of the former Northern region, then of North central state and now of Kaduna State. The present capital of Kano State was seat of the emirate of Kano. The regional government based at Kaduna and more particularly the military administration headed by J.D. Gomwalk, were vested with authority and jurisdiction over Makurdi town, the latter was deliberately made to remain underdeveloped, being as it were a peripheral town to the

capital cities of Kaduna and Jos respectively. Apart from the twin issues of authority and jurisdiction, which no doubt, undermined the development of social institutions and facilities in Makurdi, the holy Ghost Missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church had embarked on an aggressive evangelization of the populace – creating in its wake the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi in 1960 with its cathedral conspicuously positioned at the Holy Ghost Church built since 1931.¹¹ The implication of this was that, the Catholic Church was in a better position to impact on Tiv culture than was the case with Islam and this was sublimely abhorred by the Northern regional powers.

Just as Makurdi could not attract social facilities and institutions at the administrative bureaucratic level, so was it, not placed at a vantage level on the development of Islamic/Arabic social institutions and facilities. This perhaps explains the wide applause that greeted the creation of Benue State in 1976 with capital at Makurdi. The decision to carve out Benue State from Benue-Plateau state and create a capital city at Makurdi was a victory to the agitators for the creation of middle belt region – prominent among who was J. S. Tarka. Other benefits further anticipated by the creation of Benue State had to do with the manner in which power would be distributed and social institutional facilities developed for the benefit of Benue people.

Not only was Makurdi town insulated from the bitter and sometimes acrimonious religious politics of the Northern Region power brokers, it was hoped that Makurdi being a capital city would create its own new political elite, namely, the military and police officers, senior administrative officers and captains of commerce and industry. It was also hoped that the kind of infrastructures provided in Jos by the Gomwalk administration like the Jos/Bukuru water project, Jos township roads, the Nigeria Standard Newspapers, Plateau Investment Company, PIC building, NTA Jos, Plateau State Secretariat, the State House of Assembly,

Tudun Wada Government Lodge, Wildlife Park, Government Colleges, Plateau Hotel, General Hospital Pankshin, School of Health Technology Pankshin low Cost Houses, Jos Main Market, Jos Abattoir, the University of Jos (in collaboration with the Federal Government) provision of electricity through NESCO etc.¹² The Gomwalk administration did provide Jos with most of the socio-economic amenities it is enjoying today with disregard to other towns like Makurdi. It was hoped that with the choice of Makurdi as the capital city of Benue State, similar infrastructures would also be provided in Makurdi. Between 1967 to 1976 Benue-Plateau State under the Gomwalk administration witnessed the emergence of a group of local entrepreneurs in the building industry who undertook the construction of major projects mentioned above. The desire to see such development and opportunities upon creation of the State prompted the people of Benue State to celebrate the creation of the state in 1976.

The Challenges faced by the J.D. Gomwalk Administration

From the foregoing, it is clear without doubt that the administration of J.D. Gomwalk from 1967 – 1976 had serious challenges. The administration came into being after series of historical experiences ranging from colonial establishment, which set a chain of evolutionary contradictions which generated thesis, antithesis and synthesis and further set more and more dynamic thesis that needed to be synthesized. Another historical experience was that prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960, the colonial administration divided Nigeria into regions which coalesced people of diverse backgrounds into the regions with the majority populations taking administrative controls and subjugating other ethnic nationalities, the nation witnessed the military overthrow of the Regional Government, counter coups took place on the basis of ethnic divisions, the country witnessed a civil

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war between 1967 – 1970 led by General Yakubu Gowon who created the first twelve state structure out of which Benue-Plateau State was created with the capital in Jos and police commissioner J.D. Gomwalk as the Military Governor of the State.

One basic challenge of the Benue-Plateau State under the J.D. Gomwalk administration was that of the post-civil war need for integration and the need for unity of purpose for the development of the state. The name, Benue-Plateau, indicated two areas brought together under one entity unlike the states of Kano, Kaduna, Western State, Rivers State, South Eastern State, North Western State, Lagos State, Bendel State, East Central State, Kwara State, North Eastern State, the Benue-Plateau State was the only state with a clear indication of two territories being made a state and this created a challenge of two conspicuous areas carved into one state. Even the national endowments of the two areas were different whereas some parts of the state were generally flat with fairly large hills intervals, extremely fertile and well cultivated, the Plateau area was geographically unique due to its elevations. Hills surround Jos, the state capital and the entire Plateau province. This state had a challenge of unity. The Benue part of the state to a large extent was not comfortable as they still needed to move from the lower area to far away Jos to be an effective part of the state.

The other challenge was that of the appointment of the first Military Governor of the state, Police Commissioner J.D. Gomwalk. The appointment was seen as deliberate. J.D. Gomwalk was educated at the University of Ibadan. He was in the federal civil service but had to quickly transfer his appointment into the Nigeria police to get the appointment of a Military Governor. Most of the Military Governors were army officers. The Tiv who were the majority in the new state felt they should have been the ones to be appointed to this position. This created a challenge of suspicion, criticisms and difficulty in uniting the state for common development efforts.

There was the other challenge of the J. D. Gomwalk administration's utter neglect of the other parts of the state. Most of the development was concentrated around Jos the state capital. The Benue leaders in the state became agitated by the magnitude of the disparity in the development or sharing of economic amenities. There was serious clamour for the provision of health facilities like the popular request of Hemen Tyungu a popular Tiv Commissioner who Atoo Kulugh a journalist quoted as saying "if you Pankshin yo, pan shin Gboko kpaa..."¹³ The leaders desired equal provision of socio-economic development of the Benue area.

The period of the existence of the Benue-Plateau State was a period of economic boom. The then Head of State was widely quoted as saying, money was not the problem of the state, the problem was that of providing the people with capital and socio-economic benefits that would improve the living standards of the people. This challenge of development efforts actually affected the rural people as they remained in abject poverty, maintaining their traditional farming methods to produce food and other cash crops for industrial development and manufactures which were all concentrated far away from them.

Corruption was also a challenge in the administration of the state under J. D. Gomwalk. The state enjoyed federal allocations of funds just as other states in the federation, but there were cases of diversion and misappropriation of funds. Cost Projects was inflated and the projects abandoned, while kickbacks became the order of the day with dictatorial tendencies from the government. This situation left the other parts of the state to be alienated from the development activities of the state. This was the situation in which Aper Aku, a Tiv elite and leader wrote a petition against J.D. Gomwalk to the federal authorities for financial recklessness and maladministration.

The Petition of Aper Aku against Gomwalk

In 1974, the ethnic conflict among major ethnic groups in the old Benue-Plateau State began to heat up. This was generated by the perceived nepotism that characterized the administration of Police Commissioner J.D. Gomwalk. There was complete distrust amongst the tribes that made up old Benue against their fellow Plateau indigenes. Allegations of lopsidedness in Gomwalk's government fuelled this conflict the more. This mistrust had to do with the way Gomwalk did his appointments and even sited key Government institutions.

This created the platform that gave rise to the open confrontation against him. In September 1974, Aper Aku, who was then a businessman in Gboko, Benue part of the Benue-Plateau State, swore to 26-point affidavit alleging corrupt use of power against Gomwalk. Aku had alleged in his petition acts of impropriety against J. D. Gomwalk. Prominent among them were: -

- i. That, the Benue-Plateau State Military Administrator had awarded a contract to the tune of five million, three hundred and twenty thousand naira (N5,320,000.00) to a company without going through the tenders board, because of the interest of the Governor's relations in the company.
- ii. Aku also alleged that Gomwalk had an improper association with Voteniski a construction company based in Jos and also an insurance firm.
- iii. Aper Aku also accused Gomwalk of tribalism and illegal acquisition of wealth.¹⁴

Gomwalk on his part put up a stout defence against these allegations. In response through his private secretary, Alhaji I.B. Abubakar, Gomwalk claimed that he and his relations, like every other Nigerian, had a right to "legitimate ownership of property". He denied other acts of impropriety leveled against him. He regretted that, in spite of substantial progress made in the state, through his efforts, Aku painted him in bad light through the affidavits. Gomwalk described the allegations contained in the

affidavit as malicious, a distortion of facts and untrue. He insisted that he had at no time associated himself with Voteniski (Nigeria) Limited or any other company, and that he had at no time, misused his position to amass wealth for himself or for any of his relations.

Gomwalk's response fuelled a flurry of editorials in major national dailies. In the Sunday times of September 8, 1974, the paper wrote: "The question was not one of legitimacy to acquire ownership of property but the propriety of the acquisitions".¹⁵ As the Aku-Gomwalk saga raged, there was public outcry that the Head of State, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, who hailed from the same ethnic group as Gomwalk who was seen more as his protégé, should clear his position on the matter. General Gowon invited Gomwalk to Dodan Barracks in Lagos where he held closed door meeting with the Head of State. Shortly after the meeting, General Gowon acquitted Gomwalk of all the allegations. He told the nation that his confidence in Gomwalk was unshaken. In his words

I am now satisfied after listening to explanations and having had time to check all relevant references provided by Gomwalk that he had not been guilty of any wrongdoings as alleged by Mr. Aku in his affidavit (Daily Times September 9, 1974)

The public reaction against Gowon's defense of Gomwalk continued to build up. It was a serious embarrassment to his government. Gowon began to suspect that, there were forces behind the rising waves of sworn affidavits against officials in his government. It was indeed an orchestrated strategy to pressurize the head of State to change some of his Governors and officials. Gowon was under pressure to deal with the issue but his insistence that Gomwalk was innocent increased the anger of the people. On December 17, 1975, he told journalists at Ikeja Airport that, "no amount of press or putting pressure will stampede the Federal Military Government into any precipitable action over the detained Gboko businessman, Mr. Aper Aku or

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any other citizen for that matter.” He said Aku was being detained for security reasons.

Aku was however released on Friday, September 6, 1974 after spending six (6) days in detention. He had before the press stated that as a patriotic Nigerian, he insisted that the Benue-Plateau State Military Administrator had compromised his office by allegedly getting involved in the wrongdoings contained in the affidavit. From the events that followed, General Gowon was toppled on July 19, 1975 by General Murtala Mohammed while attending the organization of Africa unity summit in Uganda, thus proving the substance of Aku’s charges against Gomwalk.

In general, except for a few Tiv elites, the late Gomwalk had incurred the greatest disapproval of Tiv people by his biased acts aimed at balkanizing Tiv land including Makurdi which was the biggest settlement in the Benue-Plateau State after Jos. The Government of J.D. Gomwalk neglected Makurdi and the rest of the Tiv area during his administration from 1967 to 1975. This actually gave credence to the agitations among the politically enlightened individuals from the area that constituted Benue province and particularly Tivland. The lopsided manner Police commissioner Joseph Gomwalk awarded contracts was worrisome. Aku was particularly worried that the Tiv area was backward and neglected. The siting of Jos as the state capital instead of Makurdi had affected the Benue area which was larger in size and resources. He felt that the area he came from if given a sound policy strategy, economic activities within this area would spring up that could generate development.

Makurdi under the Administration of Abdullahi Mohammed

Abdullahi Mohammed was the Military Governor of Benue-Plateau State from 1975 to February 1976 for an effective period of five months. He had been appointed to succeed Mr. J.D. Gomwalk after the coup d’état of General

Murtala Mohammed. He was the last Military Governor of the former Benue-Plateau State. The preceding activities of the Gowon administration and that of J.D. Gomwalk in Benue-Plateau State were not lost on the new appointee. He was appointed at a time the people of the state had clamoured for real change and from the backwardness and nepotistic, corrupt practices of the J.D. Gomwalk administration in Benue-Plateau State.

The new Military Governor, Abdullahi Mohammed, on the 2nd of September, 1975 appointed a panel under the chairmanship of Justice Alfa Balgore and two other members, A. M. Elabi, a Chief Irrigation Engineer and Mr. V. K. Dangin, Commercial Controller, Nigeria Merchants Limited to investigate among other things the disposal of Benue-Plateau houses in Kaduna and Jos and the procedure used in the state since 1970. Mr. B. A. Bur served as secretary to the panel.

By December 1975, when Justice Belgore turned in the report of the panel, a damning verdict was passed on the administration of Police commissioner J.D. Gomwalk. The panel found that Gomwalk was indeed guilty of corruption, nepotism and favouritism. The panel also found out that the former Governor's record was an 'ignoble arrangement to waste government money and therefore gain from such wastage himself, his cronies and family'.¹⁶ According to the panel's report, Gomwalk's behaviour while in office was a disgrace to the Nigeria Police, the reputation of the Nigerian Administrative Service and integrity of educated people. It further declared that it was a tragedy of unequalled proportion to find out that a graduate, former administrative officer, clothed in the uniform of the police and functioning as a military governor with all the powers of the legislative and executive in his hands acted as a common criminal. Belgore further noted that even when the former Governor was challenged by Aper Aku, the allegations against him were summarily dismissed by the former head of state, Yakubu Gowon, who never allowed a fair hearing

Ukeyima Adugu Gbileve, Toryina Ayati Varvar & Saawua Gabriel Nyityo of the whole affair, although these allegations were grave enough to justify his removal from office.

The Abdullahi Mohammed panel report was not to be challenged. His Military Government issued an edict in 1975, published in an extraordinary gazette that said where such a suit had been filed, it was to be declared null and void. The edict stated:

No proceedings whether civil or criminal, shall lie or be instituted in any court for or on account of or in connection with any statement issued or made or purported to be issued or made by a panel where any such proceeding has been instituted before, on or after the commencement of this edict, the proceedings shall abate and be discharged and be void. The provisions of the edict applied to every white paper or any publication whatsoever that was issued or purported to be issued by the state government.¹⁷

The former Military Governor was recommended to the Supreme Military Council for necessary punitive measures. Gomwalk and other Military Governors and Federal Commissioners in General Gowon's regime were sent on compulsory retirement for various degrees of complicity in corruption while in office.

The Achievements of Mohammed's Administration

The Abdullahi Mohammed administration had only lasted for six months from July 1975 to February 6, 1976 when Benue State was created. The administration was short lived and had only an indirect effect on Makurdi township. There is no doubt that the local administration was doing its best with the resources shared from the Federation Account and was able to maintain the basic infrastructure inherited from the colonial and post-colonial/military regimes. It has already been emphasized that the Government took over from J.D. Gomwalk whose

government concentrated its development efforts at the capital of the state Jos. The panel set up by the Abdullahi Mohammed administration succeeded in confirming that the Gomwalk administration skewed its development activities in and around Jos. Most of the housing projects undertaken by Gomwalk administration which became a subject matter for probe had findings that never mentioned housing in Makurdi or any other area in the Benue part of the State. The General panel report had indicted him of massive corruption and lopsidedness.

The Challenges Faced by the Administration of Abdullahi Mohammed

The administration had come in after a coup d'état led by Gen. Murtala Mohammed that had a focus to redeem the government from corruption and lopsidedness. His administration was very decisive as such his state Governors followed the same characteristics of with immediate effect. An attempted coup led by Col. Buka Suka Dimka eliminated him on the 13th of February, 1976. This was a week after he had created additional states in the country including Benue State. He was succeeded by the chief of staff supreme headquarters, Olusegun Obasanjo who reassigned Abdulahi Mohammed from Benue State as Military Governor.

The challenges of the administration were in of trying to restore the confidence of the people in the government, and ensuring that other parts of the Benue-Plateau were unified towards the new administration for its development initiatives. The administration's greatest challenge was the coup d'état which ousted Murtala Mohammed from Government consequently terminating the tenure of Abdullahi Mohammed who was re-assigned to the Army Headquarters.

Conclusion

Before the creation of Benue State in 1976, Makurdi's infrastructural development had commenced in

the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence period. The colonial period however serves as a background to the development of Makurdi town. Colonialism as well as the activities of post-colonial regimes in Makurdi led to the setting up of social and economic structures that facilitated human, material and urban growth in the area. Makurdi as it is today passed through several stages. During the precolonial period, it was a collection of homesteads or villages, by the colonial period, Makurdi grew beyond the stage of a village and assumed the status of a mini town. Colonial exploits and activities indeed stimulated growth. In the post-colonial period Makurdi first became a local government headquarter and basic infrastructural facilities were provided, however the Government of J.D. Gomwalk could not cater for the much-desired development of Makurdi under the Benue-Plateau State. His efforts were concentrated in Jos, the headquarters of the state, at that time. This situation necessitated agitations from the elites particularly the allegations leveled against J.D. Gomwalk over his lopsidedness and corruption which were confirmed by the Justice Belgore Commission of inquiry which had indicted the J.D. Gomwalk administration. The Aku-Gomwalk scenario and other situations under the Gowon administration necessitated the military coup after which General Murtala Mohammed became the Head of State and further created additional states including Benue State. Thus, with the creation of Benue State in 1976, a stage was set for the rapid development of Makurdi as the state capital by the successive administrations.

Endnotes

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