

The Impact of Military Rule on Democracy in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The paper seeks to explain the rationale of the militarize dispositions of politicians in the current democracy. It adopts descriptive and case history perspective, asserting that the behavioral trend is an outcome of the long years of military governance. The military rulership affects the executive, legislature, the judiciary and the civil society. The values and norms imbibe manifests in the practice of the current democracy. This explicates the use of force rather than dialogue in the suppression of dissent in 'Odi', and 'Zaki-biam', disobedience of the court orders, closure of media houses, the arrest of journalists and militancy as in the Niger-Delta. Democracy should be based on its values; the actors should learn these from the Center for Democracy, to replace the military ethos, which they display with recklessness in the democratic environment. It is instructive to note that the era of military rule can only end with good governance.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of democracy in Nigeria in the last eight years has raised considerable issues, one of which is the overt display of 'militarized political culture' in the democratic space. Why is the political behavior of the supposed statesmen in a democratic setting essentially that of 'active-combative posture' rather than dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation as demanded by democratic tenets? Why should politicians, some of whom had never been in the military, act in the democratic space as garrison commanders? At the same time, why should politics be pursued as if it is warfare? The purpose of this paper is to offer both an explanation for the behavior of the political actors in the democratic era since 1999, and to set the conditions necessary for change if any. The evaluation of this phenomenon and its implication for democratic development is the concern of this paper.

However, it is also the contention of this paper that the current behavior by political leaders and that of the followers at the national, state, local governments' levels respectively, are accounted for by the militarization of the civic political culture through political osmotic processes. It is instructive that many children, who were born under the military regime and have become adult at eighteen, are only exposed to the command structure of the military in the civil culture. This position has been reinforced in several lit-

eratures. Bennet and Kirk Greene (1978) examined in their treatise the pervasiveness of the military in the socio-economic life of the state and remarked that there is no standing still. In three basic respects the Nigerian political system has been shaped, not by the prescription of the constitutional Assembly but through an historical evolution something which any future Constitutional Settlement can scarcely ignore. Professor Dent (1978) on the military as a corrective regime, submitted that Nigeria had twice as many soldiers as teachers who affected all aspect of the polity. He then warned that the politicians might begin to slip back into the old ways of corruption, if they begin to lose the gains of corrective regime. As Danjuma warned in 1974, if we (soldiers) continue to say that we are not politically inclined, we will be deceiving ourselves. That the soldier is no longer ruling does not mean that he is blind to whatever is happening about him (1978). These views to an extent, harmonizes with objective of this paper. It points to the fact that the military had considerable influence on all aspects of the lives of the people. Jemibewon (1998) submitted that the Nigeria military have had enormous influence in all aspects of the Nigerian state. Adekanye (2008) raised the issue of 'quota system' in the recruitment of the men of the Nigeria army. He stated that it makes the army organization very representative, and that this contributes to an army's organizational health. Today, 'federal character'

or 'quota system' derived from the military is a principle in the administration of public policy in Nigeria. Indeed the military have had impact in Nigeria.

Conceptualizations

In the context of this paper, the term militarism refers to the phenomenon in which the military elements have displaced the erstwhile civil authority in governance, and thereby conducted the affairs of the state in military fashion. Militarization on the other hand, relates to the processes in which the civil populace, who are being ruled by military elements, imbibe the principles and practices of military organization displayed in governance. These values and norms seeped through the permeable membrane between the barracks and the civic culture and diluted the latter, leading to the acculturation and manifestation of military posture in democratic settings.

The study examined the impact of military governance (militarism) in the Nigerian democratic setting, and explicated, that the undemocratic norms and values displayed in democratic space since 1999, is a dialectics of the values and norms obtained from military rules.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem, emanates from the statement and view of the previous Nigerian President that the days of "Military coup d'etat" were gone forever in Nigeria, that democracy has come to stay...it is now clear to all Nigerians that there is no substitute for democracy" said Obasanjo (2007). The nine years of democratic practice in Nigeria has been faced with considerable problems, reminiscences of militarism. We had witnessed incidences such as the order by President 'Yar Adua' to close Channels Television for allegedly informing the public that he was likely to resign on account of poor health, forceful closure of the previous Vice President ('Atiku Abubakar's') office by former President 'Obasanjo' and the Gestapo removal of the Mr. 'Audu Ogbe' as the Chairman of the ruling party all within a democratic setting. It is very instructive to state, that good governance is the only panacea against military intervention at the level of supplantment (complete substitution of civil authority by military rule and law) while bad

governance is an invitation to it. The fact remains that militarized psyche is a problem to democracy, more disturbing is the fact that other African countries such as Ghana had their share of militarism yet has become the democratic college for West Africans. This would guide the discourse herein.

Social environment has been known to condition the behavioral dispositions of the individuals. The social environment, which has had considerable impact on the psyche of Nigerians, has seen the long years of military rule, herein referred to as militarism. The militarized social culture being displayed in the democratic dispensation is not unconnected with this. The political behaviors currently displayed in the democratic space, is the dialectical phase of militarism. The analysis, which follows, evaluates this assertion.

The Geography of Military Coups

A remarkable fact about the distribution of military coups in post-colonial Africa so far is that they are overwhelmingly north of the equator. The continent is divided almost in half by the equator...Is there an explanation at hand for this imbalance in distribution so far? On the whole, the approximately thirty countries north of the equator attained their independence earlier than the approximately twenty south of the equator. Therefore, the northerners have had more time to experience military interventions in politics. On the other hand, Angola and Mozambique attained their independence in 1975 and Zimbabwe in 1980.

We have to examine other variables if we are to understand why the distribution of military intervention has been so disproportionately in the north (Mazuri 1991: 243-244). It is instructive to note that the geography of coups as shown below illustrated that there was rapidity of coups in West Africa, while the military regimes in the north were relatively stable. It is also discernible that the most stable military regimes in Africa north of the Sahara were in predominantly one party state. The stability of regimes south of the equator could be attributed to (i) they transformed from liberation forces to national armies (ii) They still had a common enemy in Apartheid- this accounts for their cohesion and submissiveness to civil authority.

MILITARY RULE IN AFRICA

At the end of the colonialism in Africa, it was natural, that the political culture of the colonialist had been imbibed. The political institutions that were developed or borrowed were democratic ones. However, Africans were learning the operations of these institutions across the continent when suddenly in 1952, the Egyptians military overthrew King Farouk. This singular phenomenon unleashed a 'bush-fire' effect in Africa, for Sudan followed in 1958, Algeria, 1965, Congo (Brazzaville), 1963, Zaire (Congo-Kinshasa) 1965, Central African Republic, 1966; in West Africa, Togo, 1963, Ghana 1966, Benin (Dahomey) 1963. The contagious effect of the coup d'etat continued with Nigeria taking her twice in January 1966, 1975-1979 1983, and 1993. This phenomenon continued in Nigeria until 1999. The military had ruled for thirty (34) years out of 49 years of Independence at this time. Quantitatively many Nigerians especially the youths had lived military than civilian rule. The implications of these extensive years of military rule on democratic practices, is of course the display of military tendencies in a democratic arena. These tendencies are enunciated in the subsequent section of the paper but how did the military come to dominate the Nigeria socio-political environment for so long a period? An examination of the some causal variables is imperative at this point.

The causes of military intrusion into the Nigerian polity could be grouped into Ecological and Societal factors, Extra-Societal and Contagious factors, Intra-military or Socio-Military and Miscellaneous variables. The African armies have been described as tending to be the most detribalized, westernized, modernized, integrated, and cohesive institutions in their respective states. The army is usually the most disciplined agency in the state. It often enjoys greater sense of national identity than other institutions. Its technical skill, including the capacity to coerce and to communicate, is the most effective agency in the country and a more vivid symbol of sovereignty than the flag, the constitution, or the parliament... (Lefever 1970). This is perhaps because they come from different cultural backgrounds and are wielded together in the army with symbol to look up to.

It is instructive to note that these categories overlap and relate to military intervention at the

level of supplantment. After supplantment or coming into office of the military, the norms affect the society and values of the military governance. This is transmitted through a number of channels. These are examined below.

Military Values and Norms

The military as an organization has its values and norms, which has made it a unique organization. These values and norms are transferred to the larger society during military governance. The adoption of these values and norms within a democratic setup is hereby refereed to the dialectics of military governance. In the exposition of the military values and norms, it was observed that the military is a puritanical organization, and that the training which men receive in this institution and subsequent military experience imbues them with austere attitudes and a high sense of discipline and responsibility (Huntington 1962). The universalistic character of achievement orientation in the award of honors and promotion is said to be endemic in the military. Thus, the values of Puritanism, discipline, rationality and achievement orientation of the military are assumed to be much more directly relevant to change and development (Odetola 1982) as against the ascriptive value orientation of the rest of social organizations in African society. It is perhaps these values, which enabled the military in Nigeria to be able to execute the various National Development Plans in Nigeria. It is no news that the best National Development Plans in Nigeria were conceived and executed by the military. They gave birth to the most enduring infrastructures in Nigeria today.

It has been said that the education and training, which soldiers receive, make them professional men. It is also assumed that such acquired values or attributes are transferable into situations or occupational roles, which may not be entirely military. The third assumption is that in the process of governing a civilian society, these military values are transmitted to the rest of the society in a way that regulates societal behavior and consequently changes such societies (Odetola 1982). The point here is that, the long years of military rule, made the boundaries between the barracks and the civil society so permeable that the ethos of the military affected the entire society. The outcomes were that, at the entry of the civil government, politicians had adapted to

the command system of the military, which they have been subjected to considerably. In the next section of the paper, we evaluate the outcomes of the association between the military and the civil society.

Effects of Military Rule on the Society

Consequent upon the long years of military governance, the obvious outcome would be militarized political culture, manifested in the political behaviors of the dramatis personae in the democratic arena. The Nigerian civic culture was eroded and militarized culture imbibed. Thus, the rule of operation became that of order, combat rather than dialogue, disregard of court orders and violation of human rights became the tenets of militarized civic culture in a democratic dispensation. These values and norms are unknown to democracy. Democratic values include; spiritual or moral principles, ideals or qualities of life that people favor for their own sake. Democracy is rooted in several key values, or norms. These values supply democracy's moral content and give its institutions and procedures their normative purpose, as Sodaro (2008) said, these include; freedom, inclusion, equality, equity, welfare, negotiation and compromise. The absence of these values in the Nigerian democracy was captured in the cases discussed in the next section of the paper.

The Dialectics of Militarism: Manifestations

It is instructive to recall that the researchers had pursued the argument that the militarization of governance engenders a militarized civic culture the outcome of which is militarized psyche. It is herein stated that there is a significant incongruence between the internalized military culture, character, and the demands of democratic process. As a result, the democratic arena is seen as an extension of the barrack. This point is given credence to with the dominance of ex-military men as politicians who are yet to be recivilianized. This explicates the behavior of politicians since 1999. The behaviors are the direct correlates of the dialectics of military governance. The discussions of the manifestations of these behavioral dispositions are illustrated below;

- i) Sometimes between April and July 2002, the President amended the capital provisions of the 2002 Appropriation Act by

reducing the capital budget to 44% without forwarding the said amendments to the national Assembly for passage in violation of section 80(4) of the 1999, constitution that act amounts to gross misconduct.

- ii) About the month of July 2002 a Presidential order was issued purporting same to constitute an amendment to the revenue allocation Act which action amounted to the violation of section 162(1) and (2) section 315 of 1999 constitution, which is equal to a gross misconduct, and a violation of the constitution as amended.
- iii) From 1999-2002 the government had consistently indulged in extra budgetary expenses contrary to section 80(2), (3) and (4) of the 1999 constitution which is a clear violation of the constitution which going through the due process; with the expenditure on the national stadium in excess of appropriated sum, excess expenditure on the national identity card from N5.9 billion to N9.5 billion above the sum approved in the 2001 and 2002 Appropriation Acts respectively. The authorization of the purchase of 63 houses and their furnishing for Ministers in the year 2002 to the tune of N3, 019,153,178.06 without any budgetary provisions in the 2002 appropriation Act. This was when the National Assembly was not on recess.
- iv) In the year 2000, he authorized the deployment of military troops to 'Odi' Bayelsa State to massacre innocent citizens without recourse to the National Assembly contrary to section 217 (2) C of the 1999 constitution which requires first for some conditions to be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly for the use of the military in that regard.
- v) In the year 2001, the President without lawful 'authority authorized the deployment of military troops to 'Zaki Biam' (Benue State) which occasioned the murder of innocent citizens and the destruction of properties, contrary to section 217(2) C of the 1999 constitution as amended which requires firstly for some conditions to be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly for the use of military in this regard' (Djeba 2002).

- vi) The development of military social classes: Military rule inadvertently leads to the formations of military social classes (military and civilian). As the military become the dormant social groups in the society, they allocate economic advantages derived in Nigeria from contracts and allocation of oil blocks to themselves/colleagues. In and out of the military, this social group possesses enormous wealth from these sources to influence the course of politics in democratic dispensation. The military acquire their prejudices and ideas ingrained in the minds of the dominant social classes, the civil servant and the business classes. A class is thereby formed to hold on, for them to drop the military uniform. The implication is that in the nearest future the ex-military men will continue to be those with enormous resources in politics than their civilian counterpart. This is the 'embourgeoisment' of the military class courtesy of Professor Ali Mazrui (1977) writing on the Ugandan military. This political culture is as well dialectic of militarism in democracy.

Critical Overview

In the wake of the attack which was unleashed on 'Odi' community in 'Bayelsa State' by a detachment of the Nigerian troops in November 1999, the National Assembly failed to call the President to order, but kept mute in cold complicity. The invasion of 'Zaki Biam' in Benue state took place shortly afterwards, both houses of the national assembly also kept mute on the issue. This was one of the outcomes of militarized psyche which cherished obedience without complain. Thus, Nigerian parliament in violation of democratic principles did and said nothing of these warrior traditions in civil dispensation.

The principles of extra budgetary expenditure, a dominant phase of the democratic setting is but a legacy of profligacy bequeathed to the civilian regime by former military government. In a democratic dispensation, such must give way to budgets that seriously addresses the crisis of grinding poverty in the midst of plenty.

The politicians have serious contempt for the principle of separation of power. This ex-

plains why from the President to least of the politicians, they basked in the adaptation of authoritarian measure to the resolution of issues, which requires democratic dialogue and negotiations. This explains why they see politics as 'War which is a continuation of politics' in the words of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung.

Another dimension of the militarized culture appeared in the making of the Constitution, where all the wide, arbitrary and dictatorial powers hitherto exercised by the former military officers are conferred on the President, Governors. These are not only subject to abuse but are subversive of the people's will.

An illustration of the militarized civic culture was ably demonstrated during the cases of impeachments recently. The Federal government raised the allegations, substantiated and adjudicated it. It consisted in the main of: raise the allegations, pretend not to know what the constitution prescribed in such matters, invite the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) to substantiate the allegation no matter how vague, pick up some officials of the state legislature to sign impeachment notices, or throw them into jail, create a semblance of insecurity in the place, set the place ready for emergency rule, sponsor protests against the governor, hold-up state fiscal allocation, sponsor some indigene of the state often those with political ambition to speak against the governor, take away some members of the legislature indoctrinate them and bring them to the assembly under arm escort to effect the impeachment. This was the scenario used against DSP Alamesieaya- former Governor of Bayelsa and Plateau states respectively.

The explanation for the above situation is derived from the low of political culture which Nigeria belong, characterized by; low level of political secularization in which ethnicity rather than issues determine the course of action; Politics is not about an alternative view point of how to resolve issues but on where he comes from; in this system, the end justify the means used, no matter how unlawful the action deployed; Military rule receives great reception with the civil society because they are weakly organized to pose any opposition to it. In this socio-political setting, the military institution is looked upon as an alternative political party. These give rise to the issues discussed in the subsequent sections.

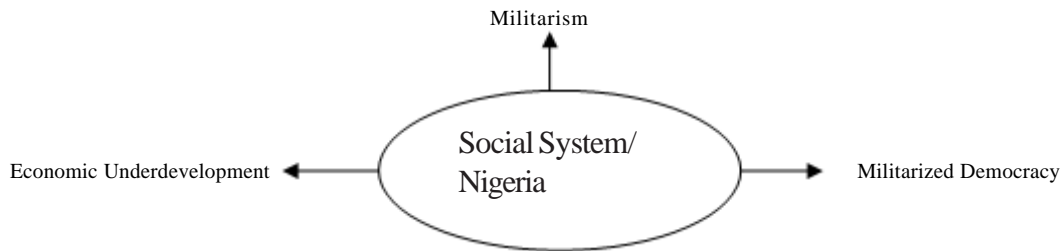


Fig. 1. Effect of military rule on development

Source: Author's Fieldwork 2011

Dialectical Impacts of Militarism

In order to further demonstrate the dialectics of militarism and the vicious circle it generates, a diagram is presented below for proper understanding of the immobilization in the Nigerian state as a result of considerable military culture imbibed.

Figure 1, shows the Nigerian social system in which the military is at the level of supplantment or governance. Due to consistent rule, its ethos permeates the society, and many people internalized the military ways of conducting businesses, in military vocabulary etc. The militarization of the social forces, led eventually to the economic underdevelopment because the military were not trained for governance in several respects. The economic underdevelopment leads to discontent in the system and a praetorian social situation is created. Social upheaval and discontent characterized this state of affairs but were suppressed. As Samuel Huntington (1968) and Decalo (1976) opined, the soldiers also coup and the circle is vicious. The salient impact of militarization in Nigeria included but not limited to the ones discussed below as:

i) Militarisation of Vocabulary of Engagement

It is a known fact that the command structure of the military gives no room to dialogue, negotiation, arbitration and conciliation. The absence of this in social discourse brought to the fore the principles of 'with immediate effect' in the conduct of social engagement. Today, Nigerians employ the concept of 'with immediate effect' in social discourse. The military were trained to war, maim and die or survive in the process. In the current dispensation, the President had enjoined the members of his party to

regard the election as a 'do or die affair'. This is reminiscent of militarization of semantics and aberration of democracy.

ii) Freedom of Expression

The military governance is a one party phenomenon where dissent is an anathema. A dissenter is promptly detained. 'Miniere Amakiri' a chief correspondent of a Nigerian Newspaper (Nigerian Observer) had his head shaved just because he wrote a piece that was distasteful to the former Governor of Rivers State 'Alfred Di-ete Spiff', in Port Harcourt (Badejo 1978). In 1978, the military proscribed the 'Newbreed Magazine' and many journalists suffered humiliation as cited above. This dialectics were replicated in 2007 in a democracy thus; in 2006 May 14, during the debate for the tenure elongation (Obasanjo wanted the parliament to approve a 3rd term for him). African Independent Television (AIT) aired the debate live, thereby scaring way those who would have debated in favor of the elongation. The State Security Service (SSS) assaulted the AIT reporters and stopped and destroyed the master tape of a documentary entitled 'a tenure elongation'. In April 2007 during the election acclaimed to have been widely flawed, the State Security Service (SSS –the Secret Police) again invaded the studio of the station during the airing of 'a documentary on Nigerian political development'.

In post-Obasanjo era, Yar Adua had re-enacted same with 'Channels Television' and 'This Day Newspaper' respectively even with the claim of due process and the Rule of Law' as the mantra of his regime. This was an indication that beyond 2007, the military values pervaded the polity. The dialectics of the garrison state in a democratic setting is explicable.

iii) *Political Intimidation*

Intimidation is a weapon of warfare deployed by the military to psyche the enemy. It is a psychological approach to warfare. This has been extrapolated into the democratic milieu. The Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) has been used as a mechanism to intimidate political opponents to toe the same part with the executive. Impeachment had been used as an instrument of intimidation. This had been successfully employed in the impeachments in 'Oyo', 'Plateau and Anambra' states respectively.

iv) *Uni-cameralism*

The military as an institution is not disposed to another center of order or dissent. It has no pedigree to tolerate 'opposition' or dissent of view on its directives. This has been imprinted in the psyche of Nigerians and practiced in the democratic arena. This was manifested during the infamous moves towards the third term of governance. Any person perceived as a stumbling block was intimidated with the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), administrative panel report and gazette and the declaration of the office of the vice President vacant, which processes were all declared as constituting '*functus officio*' (procedural irregularity) by the courts.

Finally the conduct of democratic elections in Nigeria bore a mark of warfare and events in a garrison state. During elections military men are made battle ready, policemen are seen everywhere, their sights engendered fear in the civil populace. Secondly, international borders are always closed. Considerable contradictions marked the preparation and execution of the elections as some candidates' names were/would not be included in the ballot papers. This was a further attempt to shrink the democratic space. It matters little whether an ex-military officer is the President or not. The values were learned by all from the military and would always be replicated in the democratic arena hence the title of the paper.

CONCLUSION

Militarism is not a dying phenomenon in African-Nigerian politics; it would resurface

again having become an element of Nigerian political culture. Militarism as a political phase, replicates itself in political behaviors in the democratic space. Its economic phase is continuous underdevelopment of all the social forces of production.

Nigeria is currently under another lap of its democratic experiment. The military mentality could be seen not only in Obasanjo but also in Late Umaru Shehu Musa Yar Adua who with military dispatch closed down 'ThisDay Newspaper', which reported that Mr. President was sick and may resign from the presidency. The President could not practice the rule of law, which had become his ideology. This is the relic of long years of military rule.

In order to lay militarism to rest in Nigerian politics, good governance (consensus oriented, participatory, follows the rule of law, effective and efficient, accountable, transparent, responsive, equitable and inclusive, rule of law) base on justice and practice of democracy with its operational principles is the only panacea. After all it was Plato who said that 'Justice is the basis of peace.' The argument that there is no ideal democracy anywhere, hence the inadequacies should be allowed to stay is but a banal alibi. There is no crime in getting it right. Why has Ghana gotten it right? What of all other former military states now democracies?

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below should be pursued with vigor else Nigeria would find itself in the concentric vicious circle of militarism on a continuous basis. It is worthy to state that democratic practices should be devoid of militarization and it is instructive to observe that the politicians should be ready to learn the norms in democratic academies before being qualified to stand elections. The civil society should be vigilant and ready to engage the politicians through various non-governmental organizations else militarized values would become a prominent element of the political culture.

Like all other reforms, the democratic process is a reform process from the status –quo, instead of advocating for a body to watch over the operators of the system, it is herein recommended that there should be constitutional amendment to reflect the experiences of the past eight (8) years and the judicial precedent from

the cases (those voided by the courts) which have tested the constitution.

The constitution should be amended at certain intervals to accommodate daily experiences, towards the institutionalization of democracy in Nigeria

Secondly, the establishment of the centre of democratic studies, in which potential politicians would undergo scholarly training on democratic values, norms and processes, as well as in what Development entails, should form the synthesis for democratic practices.

Thirdly, the judiciary should have a constitutional court, whose business should be the expeditious discharge of cases emanating from politics. It is hoped that this is a credible process towards the institutionalization of democracy devoid of military dialectics.

Fourthly, the civil societies (defined as the set of intermediate associations, which are neither the state nor the extended family and therefore includes voluntary associations and other corporate bodies) have onerous duty to engage both the government and legislature with enlightened democratic values. This is a means towards the end of military democratic norms.

Fifthly, whether military rule is gone forever in Nigeria, would be a function of how democratic and accountable the present democratic exercise is. It would also be a function of how fast the politicians learn the practice of democracy; least the value of the past military would continue to haunt Nigeria.

Finally, not all these would have the expected impact without an unfettered and courageous press, to communicate the evolving novel values to the mass of the citizenry and expose the politicians to the society for reactions.

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