

THE REMILITARIZATION OF NIGERIAN POLITICS

*Rotimi Ajayi**

ABSTRACT: Rather than aspects of the military intervention theories, the author presents in this paper facts related to the rupture of civilian power and of democratic institutions in Nigeria, caused by the military takeover in 1993. He approaches militarism as the arbiter of political disputes in that country, evaluating three stages of the process: the July 1993 elections, the “interim National Government” (ING), and what he calls the “messianic instincts” of the military junta. In his concluding remarks, he sketches the perspectives for a democratic political culture in Nigeria.

Key-words: Black Africa; civil power rupture; remilitarization; political arbitrage; perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Now, when there is martial music heralding the arrival of another military government, there is a yawn from the populace, a yawn that says: “we have heard it before”. Such cynism is a product of experience and a sad commentary on the avowed purity and inviolability of the military¹.

The military take-over of the Nigerian government in November 1993 finally marked the end of a futile eight-year transition to civil rule which began under the Ibrahim Babangida administration. Under the new dispensation, announced by the head of the military junta, General Sanni Abacha, all democratic institutions (legislative and executive), from the local to the federal level, and other forms of political associations, including the activities of the two government-created political parties

(*) Lecturer, Department of Political Science, University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

(1) Ray Ekpu, “With Feet of Clay”, *Newswatch*, May, 7 1990.

and the National Electoral Commission were outlawed. Striking workers were ordered back to work, with a threat to deal ruthlessly with anyone that might try to test the will of the new regime². As well, with the suspension of the 1989 constitution, and an undertaking to convene a future national conference to fashion out “a new and acceptable” constitution, the new administration, it seems, attempted to lay to rest the ghost of the still-born third republic. How far it will succeed in accomplishing that task is another issue.

But to every keen observer of the Nigerian political scene, the latest military incursion was totally not unexpected³, given the turmoil, distrust and animosity that characterized relations between its different sub-units especially in the few months preceding the take-over. The fear of war and disintegration was rife, prompting an open call in some quarters on the military to intervene. However, if intervention was seen as a partial relief, the subsequent act of dismantling all existing representative institutions might not have been envisaged by advocates of the military establishment.

This work is not an essay on the theory of military intervention. That, we believe, has been extensively covered elsewhere⁴. Our objective is to analyse the events that led to this latest seizure of power, examine, in that light, the place and role of the Nigerian military as an arbiter in political disputes, and the implications it portends for the future of democracy, democratization, and permanent military disengagement in Nigerian politics.

It is divided into three parts. The first section examines the controversial June, 12 1993 presidential election as a precipitate of the army take-over. The second part discusses the Interim National Government (ING), and popular reaction to its inauguration. While it can be argued that the annulment of that election served as a catalyst to the violence that engulfed the country in the immediate period before the military intervention, we however believe that the fundamental and structural defects of the entire transition to civil rule program, both in its conception and

(2) See “Nigeria’s Latest Military Ruler Bans Political Activity”, *The New York Times*, November, 19 1993, p.A3.

(3) See Pita Agbese, “The Impending Demise of Nigeria’s Third Republic”, *Africa Today*, 37 (3) pp. 401-430.

(4) See for example, the works of S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, New York, Praeger, 1962; Constantine P. Danopoulos (ed), *The Decline of Military Regime: The Civilian Influence*, Boulder & London, Westview Press, 1988; Christopher Clapman & George Philip (ed), *The Political Dilemmas of Military Regimes*, London & Sidney, Croom Helm 1985; and A.O. Sanda, O. Ojo & V. Ayeni (ed), *The Impact of Military Rule on Nigeria’s Administration*. Ife, Faculty of Administration, 1987.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

implementation, eventually led to its collapse. The third section analyses the “messianic instincts” of the new military junta, particularly given the prominent and influential role of its leadership in the immediate past administration, and the events that led to the failure of the much anticipated third republic. The final part is the conclusion. While we may not have answered all the questions raised in the work, it is envisaged that suggestions offered herein would help in achieving the goal of a sustainable democratic political culture in Nigeria.

THE 1993 CONTROVERSIAL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: THE HIDDEN AGENDA

The ascendancy of General Ibrahim Babangida to power in August 1985 as Nigeria’s ninth president followed a palace coup that ousted the regime of General Muhammadu Buhari. The latter had twenty months earlier sacked the four-year old Shehu Shagari administration following the widespread decadence, corruption, mismanagement and general lack of direction which characterized the second republic. The 1983 military putstch was widely received by the people given the massive electoral malpractices which characterized that year’s general election in favor of the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN). Its “landslide” victory in all the elections, characterized by inflation of votes, intimidation of electoral officers, among others, was largely a precipitate of violence. The desire for change by the people was also borne out of their declining social and economic conditions, to which the government seemed not to have any immediate solution.

The goodwill and support which ushered in the new regime were however frittered away following an unprecedented display of authoritarianism, abuse of power and disrespect for basic fundamental human rights. Non-governmental organizations, particularly the press, human rights bodies, student organizations, labor unions and other professional bodies became victims of government high-handedness and autocratic rules. Several draconian decrees were promulgated to coerce and domesticate civil society. Examples included Decrees Nos. 1 and 4, which ousted the jurisdiction of the courts in matters pertaining all laws enacted by the regime, and curtailed the freedom of the press respectively. A number of tribunals were set up to exercise enormous judicial power and to impose exceptionally heavy punishments, including the death penalty⁵. Economically, the regime counter trade merely compounded the sordid state of the nation’s economy. In the midst of the

(5) See Rotimi Ajayi, “The State and Civil Society in Nigeria”, *Philosophy and Social Action*, 19 (4) 1993 (Forthcoming).

gloomy state-civil society relations, the prospect for the return to a democratic rule became highly jeopardized. In fact the government had, on assumption of power, promulgated a decree banning all forms of political discussion relating to future civil rule in the country.

General Ibrahim Babangida did not only capitalize on these inadequacies to legitimize his regime, but offered a new approach to governance based on consultation, respect for freedom and human rights. As a gesture, he repealed the controversial Decree No. 4 which drastically curtailed the freedom of the press, released the two journalists jailed under it, and set free politicians detained without trial. Some of those convicted had their sentences reduced. He also promised a new program of economic recovery to revitalize the country's sordid economic situation. As well, was a promise for an early return to civil rule, which culminated in the setting up of the Political Bureau in 1986. The body was charged with the responsibility of developing an acceptable political culture devoid of "problems of the past", notably, ethnic and religious politics, violence, election rigging and excessive monetary influence on the electoral process⁶. With the completion of the bureau assignment, the ban earlier placed on political activities was lifted in 1989. But following its refusal to register any of the emergent political associations as political parties, the government created the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Apart from funding the parties, the government also designed their manifestoes and selected their administrative officers. Thus the initial phase of the transition program was completed as scheduled despite numerous factors that militated against them. These included two attempted coups in 1987 and 1990, several religious riots, numerous strike actions by workers, and political opposition to the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP)⁷.

Elections into the local government councils, gubernatorial and national assembly seats gave hope for a return to civil rule in 1992. But rather, what obtained was the indiscriminate shift in the presidential election date. Initially planned for 1990, it was shifted to October 1992, later to January 1993, and again to August 1993. The cancellation of the June 12 1993 election led to a renewed optimism towards March 1994 before the November 1993 coup. Also the use of the discretionary power to ban and unban candidates seeking elective posts by the president and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) helped, in no small way, to engender a culture of cynicism and apathy toward the entire transition program.

(6) See *The Report of the Political Bureau*, Lagos, Federal Ministry of Information, 1987.

(7) Julius Ihonvbere, "The Military and Political Engineering Under Structural Adjustment: The Nigerian Experience Since 1985", *Journal of Military and Political Sociology*, 1991, vol.20 p.122.

In addition, the zero-sum attitude of the political class, reflected in the massive rigging of votes at the party conventions, violence, outright appeal to primordial sentiments, and the inducement of voters with money, gave the government enough platform to further arm-twist and manipulate the political process to suit its objectives. For instance, following the 1992 and 1993 abortive conventions of the two political parties a new selection process known as “option A4” was forced on them. This required that a person’s candidature had to be ratified from the ward through the local government, state, and the national congresses of the party. Even where the method eventually produced the two contestants in the botched election, it was not without the malpractices of the previous methods. For example, while commenting on the 1990 conventions of the parties, Babafemi Ojuda has this to say:

In both parties, it appeared the two major factors for victory or defeat in the elections were money and ethnic considerations. Some delegates owed allegiance to some candidates because they were ferried to the convention, housed and fed by some candidates. In spite of the N2,000 allowance doled out to each delegate by the federal government, most delegates were still beholden to wealthy delegates from whom they could make some money.⁸

Thus soon after the conventions, a new law was enacted, which empowered NEC to investigate the candidature of the two aspirants, disqualify them, and postpone the election, “if necessary”. Negative public opinion against the motive and timing of the decree led to its inapplicability and the decision by NEC to conduct the election on the stipulated date. For instance, many had seen the legislation as not only a ploy to stop the election, but to terminate the transition program, and thereby prolong the tenure of the military administration. The promulgation of the decree a few weeks to the election, giving no room for the selection of alternative candidates before the election date tended to reinforce the above faer.

The legality of the election was to become a matter for judicial adjudication following a suit instituted against NEC by an “Association for Better Nigeria” (ABN), whose declared objective was to see to the extension of the Babangida’s administration “by at least four years”⁹. The court had stopped the election in its ruling but that did not prevent the NEC from conducting it. In a televised national broadcast on

(8) Babafemi Ojuda, “As in the Beginning... Money and Ethnic Loyalties Manifest in Third Republic”, *African Concord*, 6 August, 1990.

(9) Apart from newspaper advertizements, the ABN went further to paste General Babangida’s posters on the streets of major towns asking him to rule for four more years.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

June 11 1993, the chairman of the electoral body had explained that the Presidential Election Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provisional Decree No. 13 of 1993, which governed the conduct of the election had ousted the jurisdiction of the court in matters relating to it. The successful conduct of the election led to another court injunction obtained by the ABN prohibiting the electoral body from announcing the results. NEC's decision to comply with the later order, while it had earlier ignored a similar one, ignited a nation-wide protest and legal tussle which resulted in several counter judicial pronouncements mandating it to release the polls results. It was in the midst of the uncertainty that followed this legal controversy that the Babangida government announced at a meeting of the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC), the supreme legislative and executive organ of the state, on June 23, 1993, its decision to annul the election.

REASONS FOR THE CANCELLATION: AN APPRAISAL

The nulification has been attributed to several factors. In its first statement on the crisis, the government had pointed at what it referred to as the state of "judicial anarchy", from which the country needed to be salvaged. This "new found desire" to guarantee the sanctity and integrity of the nation's judiciary, ostensibly, came out of the conflicting court decisions discussed above. However, events before and after the election tended to suggest otherwise. For instance, the eight years of Babangida's rulership showed clearly, several cases of gross violation of human rights and freedom, even in the face of contrary court decisions. Numerous decrees promulgated under the regime were known to have ousted the constitutional rights of the courts to arbitrate on matters brought before them. Retroactive laws were promulgated in total disregard of the principle of natural justice. While the judiciary suffered its worst manipulation and desecration in the hands of the agencies of the state¹⁰.

As well, even if the above reason is taken on its face value, the manner and timing of the decision tended to raise other fundamental issues. For example, why was the annulment made on the day appeal by NEC on the judgement of the lower court was slated for hearing at the Federal Appeal Court. Why did the government

(10) For example, Decrees No.2 of 1985; and 41 of 1993 clearly ousted the jurisdiction of the courts in matters addressed by the laws. Examples of retroactive laws include: the Offensive Publications (Proscription) Decree 35 of 1993, backdated to January, 1 1993, and used to proscribe *The News Magazine: the News* etc. (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation Decree 48 of 1993) through which five newspaper houses, *The Concord, Sketch, Observer, Punch* and *Tempo* were proscribed.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

have to enact a new law prohibiting the courts from further interference in the crisis. More importantly is the role of NEC. Why did the commission suddenly decide to accept a court decision it had earlier rejected. This question needs to be considered against the background that, the commission had relied on the same Decree 13 to conduct previous elections, even in the face of conflicting court judgements. Answers to these questions will help us to appreciate better the nature of the political crisis, and government position in its resolution.

Thus, from the initial excuse of saving the nation from “judicial anarchy”, the list of reasons for cancelling the election was further expanded. In a televised broadcast, the president outlined the following:

- (1) A 2.1 billion campaign expenditure by the two presidential candidates.
- (2) Conflict of interest between the government and the two presidential candidates.
- (3) Election malpractices in virtually all the states of the federation.
- (4) Malpractices involving NEC officials, party agents and the electorate.
- (5) That one of the two presidential candidates had “strong neo-colonial ties”.
- (6) Proofs as well as documented evidence of widespread use of money during the primaries as well as the presidential election.
- (7) Evidence of manipulation through offer and acceptance of money and other forms of inducement against officials of the NEC and members of the electorate.
- (8) Conflict in the process of authentication and clearance of presidential candidates.
- (9) That the conduct of the election was against the interest of the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC), “which favored a post ponement by at least one week”, to enable NEC reach all the voters, following the confusion and uncertainty that followed the court injunction stopping the election.¹¹

One deduction that can be made from these reasons is that the government seemed to have had a pre-determined notion about the poll, especially that its opinion seemed to be at variance with reports of local and international agencies involved in monitoring the election. For instance, the International Observer Team (IOT), in its report, did not only “commend NEC, the security agencies, electorate,

(11) See *The Guardian*, 23 June 1993.

the political parties”, but also their candidates “for the maturity and decency the campaigns were conducted”¹². Sir John Wheeler, a member of the IOT had this to say: “I have no reason to suppose that any part of the administration of the election was wrong, dishonest and in any way interfered with”¹³. The Nigerian Election Monitoring Team (NEMG), set up by the government, in the same vein, affirmed that: “NEC officials administered the ritual of voting with meticulous precision. These included, the authentication of ballot boxes, the actual voting process, the counting, announcement, and recording of results”. More importantly the group commended NEC for the “orderly conduct of the election”, and for “being diligent, dutiful, and, in the main patriotic.” The election, it further noted, “substantially minimized the pathologies of the previous electoral commissions”, which it said, “augur well for the future of election in Nigeria”¹⁴.

Such diametrically different opinion on the electoral by independent bodies further opens government condemnation of the exercise to questioning. We agree with Wande Abimbola that the issues raised by the president were “an afterthought”¹⁵, given the fact that the electoral tribunal set up by the government was not alerted if indeed there were alleged violation of the electoral laws. In the words of Bukar Mustapha, “if anybody is contesting any results, it is not for the presidency to intervene. It is those who are aggrieved that should go to the tribunal and challenge the result”¹⁶. But in this case the government arrogated to itself the role of the prosecutor, jury and the judge, which no doubt cast aspersion on the fairness of its decision.

On the allegation of huge campaign expenses, offer of money, and other forms of inducement during the election, two issues readily come to mind. The first is that, at no point was there any regulation limiting the campaign expenses of candidates. Secondly, is the fact that the regime, more than any, has spent more money by deciding to take the place of money and the place of the bourgeoisie in the political transition process. For instance, it cost the government N811.5 million to construct party headquarters in all the 21 state capitals and 453 local government headquarters in the country. This figure increased with the creation of additional states and local government in 1991. A total of N100 million was spent on the party headquarters in Abuja, the new Federal Capital. The 5876 delegates to the

(12) See Fred Gusha, “Uneasy lies the Head” *Point*, July, 12 1993.

(13) *Ibid*.

(14) See “A Vote for NEC”, *Point*, July 12 1993.

(15) *Ibid*.

(16) *Ibid*.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

national conventions of the parties were sponsored by the government, with each receiving a transport allowance of N2000. The government spent N44 million on registration of members into the two parties¹⁷.

These figures exclude monies spent on staff salaries, furniture, campaign expenses, a new registration of party members, the presidential election, and other institutions connected with the transition program, such as the Political Bureau, Mamser, National Population Commission, and the Constitution Drafting Committee. In fact, by preventing labor, students, radical intellectuals, and other popular organizations from participating in the political process, according to Ihonvbere, the regime succeeded in strengthening rather excluding the moneybags from the political process¹⁸.

The charge of “neo-colonial” ties against “one of the presidential candidates” is equally reflective of the contradictory nature of the regime. While it is true that both presidential candidates are part and parcel of the same bourgeois class, the Babangida regime, like every other military administration in Nigeria, represented the military wing of that same class, which has constantly intervened in politics on behalf of its civilian counterparts to stabilize and advance the long term interest of the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, we believe that even though the Nigerian armed forces has since the end of the civil war experienced major structural and other transformation, its composition, in terms of power, privileges and ideas, clearly reflect the class structure of the Nigerian society. The new class of millionaires in the military which emerged under the Babangidas’s regime attests to the above fact. The Nigerian economy is essentially neo-colonial. The regime’s Structural Adjustment Program was (and is) a design of the IMF and the World Bank which has deepened the country’s peripheral role in the international capitalist system. Its choice of the presidential constitution and the two-party system were in line with the American model. In the same vein, the country’s educational system has continued along that line.

Therefore, the cancellation of the election result seems unjustified as a struggle against the same neo-colonial forces and institutions that have conditioned the objectives and practices of the regime. Rather, we believe that the action can best be understood as part of intra-bourgeois class struggle for the control of the state. The personal animosity inherent in the decision is reflected in the press statement of the vice president that the military would not relinquish power to “a president-elect not wanted by the military” (See below). At a meeting with the diplomatic corps on July, 6 1993, the vice president elaborated further that, “government could not

(17) See Ihonvbere, op. cit; *Tempo*, August, 9 1993; and *The News*, February, 1993.

(18) Ibid.

hand over to a candidate whose business organizations are creditors to the federal government”, even though it was not part of the original electoral rules¹⁹.

This declaration further strengthens the argument that, “the August 27 group”, a powerful clique in the regime, whose coup put General Babangida in power, and whose members have held important positions in the administration, “are sensitive about who succeeds the president”²⁰. The general idea is that having built around themselves a solid financial empire, and conscious of their need to consolidate this financial base, power must be transferred to someone who will guarantee their hegemonic status. The fear of the ‘cabal’ was further reinforced by the realization that the apparent winner of the botched election, Moshood Abiola of the SDP, with his equally vast financial empire and international affiliation with powerful multinationals and foreign governments, would not subsume his authority to their (military class) whims and caprices²¹. The Guardian, a British newspaper, once wrote that, “Brigadier-General Akilu, former head of Nigerian military intelligence, had sworn that “Abiola would only become president over his dead body” (See below). The paper further reported that “many officers indeed had cause to panic that an unfriendly successor could probe the military, expose corruption and ridicule the army”²².

Such conflicts, whether between the politician and the military, among politicians, or within the military, are primarily related to the control of the state which represents the dominant means of production. But the critical control which the military exercise over the means of coercion, and the advantages arising from its organizational structure and resources have consistently enabled it to present itself as a more disciplined alternative to its corrupt, decadent, inefficient and disorganized civilian fractions. This intra-bourgeois struggle, according to Pita Agbese, has eroded the fragile consensus of the class, because such specific policies as indigenization, privatization and contract awards that materially benefit the class and allowed them to form formidable linkages among themselves have also torn them apart²³.

(19) “Government Meets Envoys Today”, *The Punch*, 15 July 1993.

(20) See “M.K.O. A Step by Step to Capture Presidency”, *Today's Choice*, vol.3 No.44 August 25-31 1993.

(21) Apart from the numerous investment of the SDP candidate in the newspaper, shipping, banking and oil industries, he was a vice chairman (Africa and the Middle-East zone) of ITT, a powerful American multinational.

(22) Quoted in Nigeria’s Military Resigns, Appoints Interim Government”, *The Washington Post* August 27 1993.

(23) Pita Agbese, op. cit.

Another significant aspect of the crisis was the ethnic dimension of the intra-bourgeois struggle. The point has often been made that the cancellation of the election was necessitated by the desire to sustain the hegemonic power structure in favor of the Hausa-Fulani tribe²⁴. The argument is premised on the fact that the election, if upheld, would have marked the displacement of this group, and the enthronement, for the first time, of a democratically elected “southern president”. Austin Iyashere, for instance, believes that “there are some of these people and few players in the north who sees government as big business both for them and their families”, and that, “such people might have found it difficult to accommodate the potentials of a presidential election that produced a president outside the area of their political influence”²⁵.

While it is true that the two-party system helped to merge divergent interests and personalities across religious and ethnic groupings, that did not completely eradicate ethnic, religious and tribal factionalization, fractionalization, jealousies and conflicts which have been the bane of politics. Of particular importance is the fact that the role of the Sokoto caliphate cannot be ignored in the political equation. In fact, one of the reasons advanced by the organizers of the 1990 attempted coup, and which informed their decision to “excise” the five dominant Hausa-Fulani states from the federation was “the deliberate impoverishment of the people of the middle belt and the south... and the collusion (of the Babangida administration) with a corrupt, aristocratic, and dictatorial powerful clique”²⁶. But ironically, the attendant effect of the coup, and the increasing fear of domination tended to have “hardened and toughened” the caliphate, making, what Okey Ekeocha referred to as, “the possibility of its relinquishing power very remote”²⁷. The fact that the muslim SDP candidate scored his least votes in the three dominant Hausa states – Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina – traditionally regarded as the seat of the caliphate has been attributed to this hardline posture of a group committed to retaining power in the north.

The late Abubakar Gumi, a renowned islamic scholar, once declared that since the south controls economic power, it was only imperative that political power belong to the north²⁸. It was in the same vein that Saleh Michika, a former governor of one of the northern states, proclaimed shortly before the election that, much as he personally admired Mooshood Abiola as an individual, the idea of a southern president was

(24) See “Results Cancelled Due Group Pressure”, *Nigerian Tribune*, 2 July 1993.

(25) Austin Iyashere, “Farewell to Peace”, *Viva Weekly*, July, 5 1993.

(26) See “The Voice of Rebellion”, *Newswatch*, May, 7 1990: Sunday Coup: The Unanswered Question” *The African Guardian*, 14 May 1990.

(27) Okey Ekeocha, “The Portrait of a Movement”, *The African Guardian*, September, 24 1990.

(28) *New Nigerian*, March 1 1992.

unrealistic²⁹. Feelings that such pronouncements actually represented the opinion of the caliphate were reinforced by the positions of both the Northern Consultative Group, (an assembly of some northern political and business elites), and the Sultan of Sokoto, (the aristocratic head of the Hausa-Fulani), calling on the winner “to forget about the election”³⁰. The position of the “northern caucus” of the national assembly on the botched election is illustrative here too. For instance, on the day the House of Representatives was scheduled to pass a motion urging the Federal Government to declare the election results, and a winner, northern traditional rulers were allegedly “despatched to speak to northern legislators in both parties of the need to prevent Abiola, a Yoruba man from getting the presidency”³¹. The fact that the House could not form a quorum to debate the issue added more weight to the allegation, more so when it is considered against the background that the SDP, which apparently won the election also had a majority control in the national assembly.

This tendency to perceive party politics in terms of office sharing has been the dominant feature of intra-bourgeois struggle in Nigeria. For example, at their July 1990 national conventions, the parties had carved out party and potential governmental positions, among its members. The presidency, vice presidency, senate presidency, ambassadorial positions, national party chairman, etc., were in the words of Agbese, “parceled out to particular areas in the country”³². But as events later showed, this power sharing arrangement, which was replicated in 1992, was to become the “achille heels” of the parties. For instance, in the SDP, the emergence of Abiola as the presidential candidate automatically meant the need to select the vice presidential candidate from the north. The emergent struggle between two leading contenders, Baba Gana Kingibe and Adubakar Atiku, both of whom were former presidential aspirants, was eventually resolved in favor of the former. But with the choice of Kingibe, the Hausa-Fulani lobby, led by Shehu Musa Yar Adua, a former Chief of staff under the Obasanjo regime, and which had supported Atiku’s bid for the presidency, felt not only betrayed, but marginalized. They argued that the interest of the Hausas would not be fully guaranteed under Kingibe, a northern minority, of the Kanuri stock. Yar Adua’s opposition was widely expressed, and many in fact saw the group apathy toward the party’s presidential campaign as a fall-out of this³³.

(29) See Festus Eriye. “The Mystery of Michika”, *Viva Weekly*, July 5 1993.

(30) *Tempo*, September 6, 1993; and *Vanguard*, August 16 1993.

(31) See *Tempo*, September, 6 1993.

(32) Agbese, op. cit.

(33) At the convention, Atiku had been allegedly “pressurized” by this Hausa-Fulani caucus to withdraw from the final balloting when it became apparent that he would lose the election. The game plan was to support Abiola, who in turn would “reciprocate” by choosing Atiku as the vice presidential candidate. His choice of Kingibe was therefore seen as an act of betrayal. See *Today’s Choice*, vol.3 No. 44, August 25-31 1993, p.8.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

Aside from the ethnic factor, the group resentment of Kingibe's choice was also attributed to the latter's alleged conspiratorial role (as the national chairman of the party) in the events that led to the disqualification of Yar Adua from the presidential race by the federal government. As well, Abiola's campaign pledge to choose the Secretary to the Federal Government (SFG), generally considered as the "number three position", from the eastern part of the country was seen by this group as the final act of marginalization of the north in an emerging new political order. The position of the SFG was meant to "compensate" the east which had earlier lost the national chairmanship seat to the "southern minorities".

The above events, more than anything else, demonstrate the narrow-mindedness of the Nigerian political elites on what democracy and democratization entail. In a situation where politics is rarely focused on issues the tendency is to interpret it purely in terms of the distribution of political offices or a so-called "national cake". The dominant position of the state as an instrument of both inter and intra class struggle, as has been pointed out by Ohiorhenuan,³⁴ makes the struggle for its control not only brutal and dirty, but transform such primordial considerations as tribe and religion to issues of national significance.

THE INTERIM NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND POPULAR REACTION

If the cancellation of the results was envisaged to achieve any positive results, the aftermath was to prove its architects wrong. Initial reactions to it took the form of a mass appeal across the nation, and beyond to the Babangida's administration to reconsider its stand. They included admonitions from individuals, pro-democracy movements, civil liberty organization, market women, students, religious leaders, labor organizations and traditional institutions, all urging the administration to uphold the result of the election. While the international community tended to differ in their reaction, US and British condemnation of the cancellation helped to reinforce the various local opposition and agitation.

This initial subtle response of the citizenry was premised on the assumption that resort to violence would merely prolong the military stay in office. Very prominent was the belief that the cancellation of the election results was stage-managed to provoke a violent public reaction, consequent upon which a state of emergency would be declared³⁵. As earlier pointed out, government incessant tickering with the

(34) John Ohiorhenuan, *Capital and State in Nigeria*, New York, Greenwood, 1989.

(35) General Sanni Abacha, as the Defence Secretary actually threatened all state governors who fail to maintain law and order in their areas of jurisdiction with this measure.

transition program helped in no small measure to erode whatever confidence the people might have had in the administration. Allegation of a “hidden agenda” was reinforced by government insistence on the conduct of a new presidential election as the only basis for relinquishing power, given the limited period of time (less than three months) to the proposed hand-over date, which was considered not only unrealistic for the parties to choose the new presidential candidates (the two previous contestants having been banned) but to conduct their campaigns. But while the National Republican Convention (NRC) understandably supported the call for new polls, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) opted against it.

In the ensuing stalemate, an accord was reached between the two parties to set up a ‘national government’, composed of their representatives, but with a proviso by the SDP that such an arrangement would be under the leadership of its presidential candidate and his vice. This agreement was contained in a joint representation made by the parties to the government³⁶. Assurance that such a measure would help to diffuse the growing tension in the society was followed by the setting up of the Augustus Aikhomu (former vice president) – led tripartite committee, composed of representatives of the government and the two parties, and charged with the responsibility of working out the composition, tenure and modus operandi of the new political arrangement. While the committee’s report was however never made public, feelings that the compromise between the government and the two parties was actually a fluke became evident shortly after a meeting of the Armed Forces Consultative Assembly, a group of senior military officers, where the government announced its rejection of any arrangement that precluded a new election. Its argument was centered on a supposedly anticipated conflict of interest between an unelected executive co-existing with an elected legislature. Consequently, a new National Electoral Commission was mandated to set the guidelines for the conduct of a new poll in July 1993.

It must however be emphasized that, in the two parties, were pockets of resistance to the idea of a national government. Abiola, whose victory was annulled had consistently opposed every attempt to jettison his “sacred mandate”, leading to his diplomatic shuttle in Europe and the United States to seek comprehensive sanctions, including oil boycotts, against the Nigerian government. As well, the “South-Western” (Abiola tribal base) caucus of the SDP was not only angered by the “trading away the mandate” attitude of the party, but felt betrayed by its (party) leadership, dominated by the Yar Adua faction³⁷. The latter’s position on the Abiola/Kingibe

(36) See Amos B. Idakula, “Facts About the Role of the National Executive Committee of the SDP on the Decision to go for a Interim National Government”, *The Guardian on Sunday*, August 8, 1993, p.B4.

(37) See “Abiola Reveals His Dream for Nigeria, Promises to Guard Mandate”, *The Guardian*, July 28 1993; and Abiola, “I Cannot Surrender My Mandate”, *Viva Weekly*, July, 5 1993

candidature had earlier been pointed out, and his support for a new election was largely interpreted as a ploy to facilitate his re-entry the presidential race³⁸.

With the increasing tension and instability in the country, which was further fuelled by the seemingly successful attempts by the political class at localizing the conflict, it became apparent that a new election was not only impossible but unrealistic. The questions of integration and cohesion assumed prominent positions on the national agenda, prompting an “open air” letter to the president by the Archbishop of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Reverend Abiodun Adetiloye, warning that, “history could pronounce that: while a Gowon fought for Nigerian unity, a Babangida fought for its disintegration”³⁹. Chukwuemeka Ezeife, a former state governor, put it more bluntly: “We cannot abort June 12 (1993) without reverting Nigeria to a geographical expression, without reinvigorating the shackles of our underdevelopment, and without fanning the embers of our national disintegration”⁴⁰.

In the same vein, agitations for a national conference to debate the future of “Nigerian federalism”, which to some, is the root of social injustice, inequality, and the domination of one group by another, gained wider prominence. While some specifically called for the dismantling of the federal arrangement, others echoed the need for a new confederal system that would give each ethnic group autonomous power and jurisdiction⁴¹. The Governors of the NRC – controlled states, accentuating the ethnic coloration of the political crisis actually threatened to secede if the stalemate was not resolved in a manner suitable to them⁴². An aftermath of these primordial sentiments include the mass movement of persons across the country “to their native homes for safety as the entire political landscape became awash with rumors and fears of war”⁴³. The open call for secession informed a new provision in

38 It is also noteworthy that part of the fall-out of the cancellation of the June 12 election was the lifting of the ban earlier placed on the former 23 presidential candidates, including Yar Adua, for their role in the allegedly widespread irregularities that characterized the November 1992 presidential primaries.

(39) *Tempo*, 26 July, 1993.

(40) See “Goodbye to All That”, *The African Guardian*, September, 6 1993.

(41) Edwin Madunagu, “Transition Snaps: National Conference”, *The African Guardian*, July 29, 1991, and Otegbeye, “Times for National Conference”, *The Punch*, July, 29 1993.

(42) The governors had in a statement titled, “Nigeria is greater”, stressed that the annulment of the June 12 election was a coup, and as such must not be revisited. They argued that any revisiting would be in the form of asking Shehu Shagari, who was overthrown in December 1993, to come back and rule. For details, see *The African Guardian*, October 11 1993.

(43) See “To thy Tents O! Israel”, *Tell*, August, 23 1993; Families Flee to Home State”, *Sunday Champion*, July, 25 1993; Dan Agbese, “Cruel Hand of Faith”, *NewsWatch*, September, 13 1993; and *The African Guardian*, September, 13 1993.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

the electoral law which required presidential aspirants to demonstrate unflinching belief in the “corporate existence of Nigeria”. It also led to the introduction of a new law specifying death penalty for protagonists of such idea, all of which were reflections of a growing discontentment among the various components that make up the federation. *The Tempo*, in an editorial captured the mood thus:

“The reaction the absurd act triggered, the social insecurity it created for the Nigerian people, the mass movement to primordial bases, the rise of ethnic distrust..., are only frightening reminders of the mid-1960s. whether these series of reactions to the poll annulment would breed a civil war of its own, whether it would lead to the dismemberment of Nigeria cannot be easily predicted for now. The mournful reality, however, is that our nation perches at the edge of a precipice from which extrication is difficult unless there is a readiness to confront basic truths and a readiness to talk with ourselves”⁴⁴.

Coupled with the perilous economic situation of the society, reflected in an ever depreciating value of the local currency, inflation, unemployment, disinvestment, capital flight, and scarcity of basic amenities of life and general mass deprivation, political discontentment and frustration soon paved way to anarchy and disorder as strikes, demonstration, riots, arson and mass destruction of lives and property became the order of the day. It was in the midst of this gloomy state that General Babangida announced his resignation and the setting up of the Ernest Shonekan-led Interim National Government (ING) on August, 26 1993, in a move the former described as his “personal sacrifice” towards the resolution of the political crisis⁴⁵.

If the ING, especially the choice of Shonekan (who comes from Abiola’s home base) as its Head was designed to placate any group, that did not achieve its desired result. Rather, it was confronted with a new crisis of legitimacy. While some state governors, especially of the SDP controlled “south-western” states, specifically declared their non-recognition of the council, the Osun state legislature was to back its own executive decision with a resolution⁴⁶. Opposition to the new government centered mainly on its public perception as a surrogate of the Babangida’s regime, particularly given the retention in the new council of some key members of the administration whose role in the events before and after the annulled election have remained controversial. They included: General Sanni Abacha, defence secretary;

(44) “The Way Forward”, *Tempo*, September, 13 1993.

(45) “The president Address to the Joint Session of the National Assembly, August, 1993

(46) *The Guardian on Sunday*, September 5 1993.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

Clement Akpabango, Attorney General; and Uche Chukwumerije, information secretary. The fear was that as a hand picked body, their strong loyalty to the Babangida regime would deny the council the autonomy and freedom of action it needed to chart a new pattern of governance. Shonekan's chairmanship of the defunct transitional council merely helped to reinforce this negative perception.

For the masses in particular, the change to baton from the military to the civilian wing of the same bourgeois class merely accorded with their characteristic marginalization in the mainstream of government and the pattern of "hijack" of popular movements by the bourgeoisie in most developing societies. For example, it is not by accident that in the 32-member interim administration, there was no single representative of labor, human rights groups and other similar non-governmental organizations, even though protests against the political excesses of the military were spearheaded by these groups. Shonekan's attempts to win public support by freeing political prisoners, reopening closed universities, setting up the Justice Maman Nasir Commission to probe the cancelled election, and promising to lift press restrictions turned out to be grossly inadequate. Popular distrust of the council was summarized in the following words of Gani Fawehinmi: "...political stability is rooted in confidence. The confidence of the people (was) lacking in the administration of Shonekan, as it was lacking in the administration of Babangida... If the people have no confidence in the leadership, they cannot participate in the leadership's program⁴⁷.

In addition to a mounting internal opposition was an inherited international hostility spearheaded by the United States of America and Britain. For instance, in addition to suspending all flights to and from Nigeria, the US government also put on hold \$22.8 million worth of aid to the Federal Government. Also suspended were all forms of military assistance including visa permits to government functionaries. The European Community (EC) also applied similar sanctions, including a review of aid programs, totalling N1.5 billion, and other forms bilateral assistance⁴⁸.

One major by-product of the political crisis, and that changed the pattern of state-civil society relation in Nigeria, was the emergence of various groups and organizations with different leanings and persuasion, each set to resolve the imbroglio in different ways. The hasty retirement of General Babangida was no doubt facilitated by the combined force of workers, students, and such pro-democracy movements as the Civil Liberty Organization (CLO), the Women in Nigeria (WIN), the

(47) Fawehinmi, "The Future of Nigeria Hangs on June 12", *The African Guardian*, September 13, 1993.

(48) See "America Maintains Sanctions", *The Guardian*, September, 4 1993; and *The Punch*, July, 12 1993.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), and the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL). In addition to these were the roles of such professional bodies as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU), the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), and the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA).

Several popular organizations (some opportunists) also emerged, in a manner unprecedented in the history of the country, to support the crusade for democracy. Some of these organizations included the Ken Saro-Wiwa led Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Mike Ozekhome led Universal Defenders of Democracy (UDD), the Ebenezer Babatope's People's Committee for Liberty (PCL), and the Olusegun Obasanjo's Association for Democratic and Good Governance (ADGN). Others included the Anthony Enahoro led movement for National Reformation (MNR), the Edataen Ojo led Media Rights Agenda (MRA) the Ayo Opadokun led Committee for Unity and Understanding (CUU), and the Pat Utomi led Concerned Professionals (CP). There are also the Felix Adenaike led Association for Democracy (AD), the Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF), the Eastern Forum, the Northern Forum, the Western Forum, the June 12 Movement for National Unity and Democracy, the Revolutionary Army council (RAC), Hizballah Movement (Nigerian wing) the Middle-Belt Forum, the National Prayer movement, the Committee to Total Freedom and Democracy, the Movement to Liberate Nigeria from Military Rule, and Movement for the Advancement of Democracy (MAD), which hijacked a Nigerian Airways plane in November 1993 and demanded, among others, "a probe into the finances of several elites, the resignation of the Interim Government, and the restoration of full democracy in Nigeria"⁴⁹.

The MAD hijack operation was particularly reflective of an increasingly sophisticated culture of societal violence since the advent of military rule in Nigeria, and which according to Dele Omotunde, the country has been forced to live with since 1985 when Babangida "quick-marched to the center stage of Nigerian politics with his populist militocracy"⁵⁰. For while the regime promised a "new dawn of grassroots democracy", he further maintains, "a new culture of urban kleptocracy ably assisted by the ever present vultures of fortune" was bequeathed to the nation. It is this form of structural violence that engender within the populace, more sophisticated methods of conflict resolution. Baba Omojola articulated this view thus:

"When the in-built principles which "check" and "balance" the interaction of the citizens and institutions within the polity are ignored; when

(49) Syllvester Olumhense, "Terror in the Sky", *Tell*, November, 8 1993.

(50) Dele Omotunde, "Before the Fire Next Time", *Tell*, November, 8 1993 p.6.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

individuals inscribe their whims on a piece of paper and parade it as law; when the citizens cannot have their wrongs redressed according to accepted norms; and when the institutions of state are bastardized and vandalized, then people will look for more unconventional and pointedly forceful or violent means of making themselves relevant"⁵¹.

Thus, in addition to the MAD episode, the RAC also circulated a leaflet in July 1993 outlining its plans toward a revolution against the government to achieve its overriding objective of "entrenching sustainable democracy", and salvaging the nation from a "small powerful military political class"⁵². This goal of "eradicating the cancer in the society and its henchmen", the organization further maintained, was to be accomplished with "a bit of sacrifice for the shortest possible period of time". In the same vein the Hizbollah (Nigerian wing), fashioned along the Lebanon-based middle East fundamentalist group claimed that it had "fashioned its own way out of the political problem", and that "Nigerians would be shocked when it (Hizbollah) begins its own operation"⁵³.

As well, within the armed forces were reported "rift" and "restlessness", culminating in rumors of coups, killings and dismissals. There is no doubt that over the years, politicization of the Nigerian military had resulted in the loss of its esprit-decorp, order, discipline and cohesion. General Garba Duba, the former Chief of Operation in the Army Defence Headquarter, in his assessment of this situation, conceded that, "the image of the Nigerian Army has been soiled by its prolonged romance with politics at the expense of professionalism"⁵⁴. Thus shortly after Babangida's resignation, General Abacha had removed from key positions some officers considered "close Babangida allies", leading to widespread dissension and the voluntary retirement of some officers including the former Chief of Defence Staff, General Dogonyaro⁵⁵. The latter, in his resignation letter, had thrown a lot of swipes at (Abacha's) "malfeasant act" and personal "ambition" to perpetuate the military in power⁵⁶. The state of acrimony and insubordination in the military reached

(51) Baba omojola, "Colonial Economy Was Better Run", *Vanguard*, November, 10 1993.

(52) See Adegbenro Adebajo, "In Their Own Ways", *Tell*, November, 8 1993 p.22.

(53) Ibid.

(54) See *The Guardian*, November 6 1993, p. 4.

(55) For example, the head of military intelligence, Brigadier Halilu Akilu, the Chief of Defence staff, General Joshua Dongoyaro, the Chief of Air Staff, and some commanders of mechanised divisions were removed and replaced by suspected Abacha loyalists. The commander of the controversial National Guard, Colonel Abdul Mumuni was also removed.

(56) Wale Akin-Aina, "Rumblings in the Military", *Newswatch*, September 27, 1993.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

an all-time low ebb with the purported formation of a clandestine organization, the Association of Nigerian Army Young Officers and Soilders (ANAYOS). While warning that its “refusal to intervene” in the political crisis should not be “construed as a sign of weakness”, the body had threatened mayhem, codenamed, “Operation Aso Rock” against those it described as “emergency millionaire officers”. While another group was canvassing for the reinstatement of General Babangida, a third was said to be rooting for an Abacha presidency⁵⁷. The head of the ING, whose purported resignation preceded the military take-over had acknowledged in a valedictory press statement, “a great deal of restiveness in the military and instability in the country”, and that, the military “believe that Nigeria deserve better⁵⁸. This scenerio, which Ihonvbere aptly described as “political irrationality, economic confusion and social decay”,⁵⁹ provided the basis upon which General Abacha seized control of the government and assumed the mantle of head of state.

BETWEEN BABANGIDA AND ABACHA: NATIONALISM VERSUS OPPORTUNISM

While one may be tempted to believe that the current military intervention in Nigeria derieved from “the weak and ineffective political instruments for mediating conflicts and resolving social contradictions”,⁶⁰ or “a proof that the society is as yet politically immature and unfit for representative institutions”,⁶¹ the personal interests of the military officers has contributed significantly to this political atrophy. As has been clearly articulated by S.E. Finer, military intervention (like the Abacha’s), is nothing but “an attempt upon feeble but nevertheless operative civilian institutions by a small group of wilful men armed with lethal weapons, nutured in arrogance, and pricked on by pride, ambition, self interest and revenge”⁶². This assessment is predi-

(57) See *The Guardian*, November, 6 1993, p. 4; Ademola Oyinlola. “Operation Aso Rock”, *Tell*, November, 8 1993 p. 31. Although the military denied the existence of ANAYOS, many interpreted it as a device to save the badly demaged image of the establishment.

(58) See “Coup Ousts Nigerian Leader” *The Daily Texan*, The University of Texas, Austin, Texas, November, 18 1993; and *The New York Times*, November 18 1993.

(59) Julius O. Ihonvbere, “Political Irrationality, Economic Confusion and Social Decay: The Evolution and Prospect of Nigeria’s Political Economy”, Keynote Lecture to the Anjoma Association, Austin, Texas, September 25, 1993.

(60) Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soilder and the State*, Cambridge, Havard University Press, 1967.

(61) S. E. Finer, *The man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, New York, Praeger, 1962, pp. 242-242.

(62) *Ibid.*

cated on the belief that much as the “highly disturbed political situation” in Nigeria provided the basis for the new junta, other alternatives existed for the military to have resolved the political impasse. These include, either providing support to the interim administration, or aligning with the opposition forces for the installation of the democratically elected president. But by promoting its interest above other contending forces in the society, halting in the process, the country’s constitutional evolution, the short-term gain (if any) is likely to be overbalanced by a longer-term catastrophe.

The general failure of the twenty-three years of military rule in Nigeria to generate the much-needed social change, following Claude Welch’s assessment, has done a great deal to dispel whatever notions might have existed within the establishment that “their professional training, discipline, devotion, managerial skill, and incorruptibility gave them the ability, duty and even the moral right to save their (country) from the bickering and self centered politicians”⁶³. Their intervention, in Tony Okonedo’s view, is “like the good health bequeated an ailing by a quack physician who himself has a deadly infectious disease”⁶⁴. More than any other group, the Nigerian military has contributed to the social, economic and political plundering of the country. During General Babangida’s eight years in office, Nigeria experienced its sharpest drop in living standards in recent history due to gross mismanagement, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, lack of accountability, and the development of a spoil system, which emphasized patronage to military men and other closest associates⁶⁵. Apart from siphoning hundreds of millions of Naira (local currency) from the country’s oil reserves, military men were showered with a wide range of material gifts, monetary gratifications and questionable promotions⁶⁶. Under the regime, the “art of settlement”, a synonym for manipulation, intimidation, domestication, incorporation, and bribery of opponents became an attribute of statecraft. The moral decadence and profligacy that characterize his reign recently earned him the appellation, “Nigeria’s Mobutu”, a reference to Zaire’s president, Mobutu Sese Seko’s high level corruption, enormous wealth and dictatorial tendencies⁶⁷.

(63) Claude E. Welch, “Obstacles to Disengagement and Democratization: Military Regimes in Benin and Burkina Faso”, in Constantine P. Danopoulos(ed), *The Decline of military Regimes: The Civilian Influence*, Boulder & London, Westview Press, 1988, pp. 25-44.

(64) Tony Okonedo, “The Senate and Political Death Warrant”, *Sunday Vanguard*, November, 7 1993.

(65) See *The New York Times*, December 2 1993, p. A2.

(66) For instance, the regime spent over N500 million in purchasing peugeot sedans and executive jettas to some categories of military and police officers. See Yta Doff Okon, “Loan, Gift or Bribe”? *Tell*, March, 23 1993.

(67) *The New York Times*, December, 2 1993. The paper also reported that apart from a 50-room villa he built in his hometown, the general is reported to have bought a luxurious home on the French Riviera.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

In the midst of these massive appropriation, urban squalor and rural decay have remained significant features of the Nigerian society. Real income has plummeted ten times since 1985 when Babangida took over the reign of government. While wages are crawling behind it. Amenities have deteriorated though their cost daily increase. Agriculture is in a state of abject neglect, imports are increasing while exports are nothing to write home about⁶⁸. In the words of Ray Ekpu, “the socio-economic triangle is getting narrower at the apex, denoting a small, fabulously rich minority, and the broader at the base denoting a greater pauperization of the masses and the systematic elimination of the middle class, the engine room of any nation’s development”⁶⁹. The 1988 World Bank report indicated that Nigerians who lived in 1968 were better off than those who lived in 1988. The Bank also, recently listed the country as one of the 13 poorest nations in the world.

The decline in the economy has been further attenuated by a military imposed Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), recently described as “one of the most poorly run programs in Africa”⁷⁰. Currently, about 1/3 of the country’s export earnings is spent on servicing its over \$28 billion debt, with little left for any meaningful development projects⁷¹. Other side effects of SAP, especially its attendant policies of privatization, commercialization, devaluation, desubsidization and deregulation, include a growing inflationary rate (following the massive devaluation of the Naira), retrenchment of workers and its attendant upsurge in crime rate, particularly currency trafficking and drug pushing. Hospitals are without drugs, educational institutions are under the worst decay as teachers and students stay more out of classes to protest a poor working environment, while illiteracy, hunger, disease, prostitution and mental illness have reached an all time high level. The nightmare of incessant fuel (gas) shortage in the midst of abundance has become a reality⁷².

The manufacturing sector also paints a gory picture of a low capacity utilization which dropped from 37 percent in 1991 to 36.36 in 1992, described by the World Bank as being below historical level⁷³. The implication of this is that about 64 percent of the fixed assets of the various industries remained idle. The devaluation of the local currency and its attendant high cost of foreign exchange, have made

(68) *Newswatch*, October 4, 1993.

(69) *Ibid*.

(70) Ihonvbere, *op.cit.*, p.16.

(71) See “Economy Grinds to a Halt, *National Concord*, July 19 1993.

(72) See Chijioke Odom & Emeka Nwadioko, “Hard Times, the Progeny of Political Impasse, *The Guardian*, August, 27 1993; *The Punch*, July, 16 1993; and *Tempo*, August, 9 1993.

(73) “SAP Sucks Them Dry”, *Newswatch* (Special Edition), October, 4 1993, p.26.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

sourcing raw materials, which were mainly never available locally, problematic for this sector. This has further made investment in the sector unattractive. In 1981 total investment in manufacturing was N17 billion. This shrank to N2.6 billion in 1988 and it went further down to less than N1 billion in 1990⁷⁴. The nation's highly unstable political climate only complicated the problem of disinvestment as willing investors were not only scared, those already on the ground massively repatriate their capital home⁷⁵.

Yet, the transition to a third republic, described as the most tortuous and expensive, with the cost estimated at over N50 billion, did not only fail to engender the much touted "grassroot democracy, it succeeded in "rolling the country to the cliff of disintegration and total despair"⁷⁶. If political development is defined in terms of "popular participation and the building of legitimized political institutions",⁷⁷ it will be safe to conclude that Babangida's eight years of "socio-political-economic engineering" was sterile in so far as political development is concerned. As has been observed by Talukder Maniruzzamani, "military intervention creates a vicious circle that perpetrates the conditions of political underdevelopment"⁷⁸. The period, he further maintains, is usually a total waste as far as the development of political skill is concerned, for it "restricts the flow of the political process and force would be politicians into a long period of hibernation"⁷⁹. Like Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser⁸⁰, Babangida experimented with some populist programs by inaugurating the Mass Mobilization for Economic Recovery and Social Justice (MAMSER), the Directorate of Food and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), and the Movement for Na-

(74) Ibid p.28.

(75) See "Business is Grinding to Zero", *The Guardian*, August 31, 1993; and "Financial Institutions: A Boom Gone Bust", *Tell*, August, 16 1993.

(76) Abraham Ogbodo, "What a Frightful Mess", *The African Guardian* (Special Feature), October 11, 1993.

(77) Thomas Cox, *Civil-Military Relations in Sierra Leone: A Case Study of African Soldiers in Politics*, Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1976; Claude Welch Jr., *Soldiers and State in Africa. A Comparative Analysis of Military Intervention and Political Change*, Evanston, North Western University Press, 1970.

(78) Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Military Withdrawal from Politics: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge Massachusetts, Ballinger, 1987 p.7.

(79) Ibid.

(80) Nasser (1952-1970) launched the three political movements for political mobilization, namely, the National Liberation Rally, the National Union, and the Arab Socialists Union in 1953, 1957 and 1961 respectively. None of these was however able to engender an enduring political institution. Like Nasser, Babangida also adopted the title, "President", and insisted on being addressed as such.

tional Reformation, all of which, in the words of Ruth First, “went from torpor to paralysis, intrinsically unable to stir vitality in villages, factories and neighborhood communities”⁸¹. Their fascinating appellations aside, the programs turned out to be monumental waste of public funds particularly through dubious and inflated contract award⁸².

As well, the regime human rights record, if anything, further cast aspersion on whatever pretensions the military might have had about their salvaging mission. Taking advantage of the disorganizations, greed, opportunism and weaknesses of the political class, Babangida had proceeded on a two-prolonged project: populism and repression. His open commitment to human rights, release of political detainees, opening of prisons and fraternization with the press and known critics became mere integument for legitimacy. He did not only proscribe the Nigerian Labor Congress, its leaders were thrown into jail. The Academic Staff Union of Universities was banned and all professors relieved of their jobs⁸³. Newspapers houses were closed at the slightest provocation, while not a few lost their freedom and rights to Decree No.2 which empowered the state to detain for a long period of time without trial⁸⁴. At a time, the president was the head of the State Security Service, the Ministry of Defence, the Police Commission and the entire armed forces. He created, against all public opposition, the National Guard and initiated several other programs to strengthen, and consolidate the power and place of the military in the political equation.

The prospect of any significant change under the present dispensation looks very bleak. It is not only because the *dramatis personae* have remained the same, but there has been no shift in the socio-political and economic orientation of its predecessors. As aptly observed in a recent New York Times report, “this (intervention) was not about ideology or preserving civil order – this was about power and greed”. General Sanni Abacha, as equally noted in that same report, “has been too close to successive military governments which were corrupt, inept and truncated Nigeria’s march to democracy”⁸⁵. He was not only part of the Babangida’s eight years of

(81) Ruth First, *The Barrel of a Gun. The Role of Military in Politics*. London, Penguin, 1970.

(82) See “The Food Crisis”, *Newswatch*, March, 13 1989; and “Nigeria: Oil Rich, Poor People”, *African Concord*, Vol. 2, No. 18, August 2, 1993.

(83) He later rescinded the sack order on the university teachers when the futility of such an action became apparent.

(84) Details of these human rights violation have been treated elsewhere. See Rotimi Ajayi, op. cit.

(85) See Kenneth Noble, “In Nigeria, Change = More of Same (i.e., Military)”, *The New York Times*, December 2 1993, p. A2.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

misrule, serving in various capacities as the Chief of Army Staff, Defence Minister, Chairman Joint Chief of Staff, and Chairman, Defence Staff, he played an equally prominent role in sustaining the regime to its end. Firstly, he had announced in a radio broadcast in December 1983 the coup that brought to power General Mohammedu Buhari and ousted the four years old Shagari's administration. When in 1985, Buhari's tenure was terminated in a palace coup, Abacha also announced the installation of General Babangida as the first Nigerian military president. His third nation-wide broadcast came in 1990 when he led loyalist troops against the Major Gideon Orkar-led attempted coup against the Babangida's regime⁸⁶. This active involvement in the decadence of the Babangida's era, no doubt negates whatever altruistic motive(s) might have been attributed to his (Abacha's) latest incursion into Nigerian politics. His coming to power can rather be understood within the context of elite circulation in Nigerian government and politics.

Firstly, the new regime has not initiated any economic blueprint different from its predecessor. Neither has there been any indication of its intention to deviate from the IMF imposed Structural Adjustment Program of its predecessors. The pattern of political recruitment and administrative style have equally remained the same. For instance, Idika Kalu, whose role as both the Finance and National Planning Minister was pivotal to the Babangida's economic program has been assigned the Finance portfolio under the current dispensation. Politicians whose mismanagement of the second republic facilitated the 1983 Abacha-led army take-over are also being rehabilitated with some holding important ministerial appointments⁸⁷. That the same discredited political class, some of whom were convicted and jailed, now constitute the "think tank" of a supposedly "corrective" and "salvaging" regime suggests that their initial overthrow and subsequent incarceration were either unjustified, or that there is a complete lack of genuine ideas or direction on the part of the government.

As well, following General Babangida's pattern, Abacha had re-opened media establishment closed in the wake of the crisis that attended the presidential election, appointed some known critics to important governmental positions, reduced the price of fuel, and reserved other similar unpopular policies enacted by his predecessor. For instance, Baba Gana Kingibe, apparently elected Vice President in the June 12 election was appointed a member of the ruling council and foreign minister. Olu Onagoruwa, the new Attorney-General, apart from being a known

(86) See "Abacha's Third Coming", in "Coup that Failed: The Storming of Dodan Barracks", *Newswatch* May, 7 1993.

(87) For instance, Samuel Ogbemudia, Melford Okilo, Bamanga Tukur, members of the new cabinet have at one point or another been indicted for corrupt practices.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

anti-government lawyer, had consistently been part of the radical opposition to all forms of military dictatorship in Nigeria. His appointment could therefore be seen as a move to placate the various pro-democracy organizations. Also, in the Education Ministry was Iyiorcha Ayu, a former radical university teacher and immediate past senate president. His, was expected to bridge the ever-widening gap between the government and the radical Academic Staff Union of Universities.

All these are clear reminders of the various pretorian tactics of manipulation, intimidation, diversion, incorporation and domestication perfected under the Babangida administration. Furthermore, they are reflective of the greed, opportunism, sychopancy, and ideological bankruptcy, which have been the dominant features of the Nigerian elites since political independence. Lastly, they point to a cardinal weakness of every military regime long recognized by S.E. Finer namely, that force does not automatically create right. Coups, he says, pave way for a series of counter coup, and to legitimize the regime, its leaders often devise a political formulae or create a worldview that tend to support a (false) sense of identity⁸⁸. But as clearly stated by Edward Fiet, it is in formulating ideology that military politicians fail most. Because, by believing that fundamental problem of underdevelopment can be reduced to simple and mundane solutions (such as the distribution of political offices), military politicians “fail to espouse imaginative doctrines that will set men’s minds on fire”⁸⁹.

While it may seem too early to assess the performance of the new regime, historical realities of military adventurism in Nigeria inform us that there is certainly “no light at the end of the tunnel”. For instance, while promising a future democratic government in his maiden broadcast, General Abacha had given no specific commitment for a such transition. The press had been cautioned “to be careful about what they report”.

And while pledging to run a “firm, humane and decisive” administration, he had promised to “deal decisively” with “any attempt to test (his) will”⁹⁰. All these, if nothing else, are certainly reflections of darker days ahead.

CONCLUSION

While Nigeria, like most developing nations, seems confined to the whims of military dictators, the increasing wave of democratization in the world today is

(88) S.E. Finer, op. cit., p.17-18.

(89) Edward Fiet, “Pen, Sword and People: Military Regimes in the Formation of Political Institutions”, *World Politics*, 25 (2) January 1973, p.251-255.

(90) *The New York Times*, November 19, 1993. p.A3.

becoming a direct challenge to “every claim to rule by virtue of superior force”. Rule by force, or the threat of such force has proved to be inadequate as the Nigerian experience has clearly demonstrated. One point successive military adventurers in Nigeria have been forced to appreciate is that the political arena is not a one huge barrack governed by a questionable command and obey principle and hierarchical structure. They have learnt, for instance, as Fawehinmi has noted, that “military might or decrees do not create jobs, but persuasiveness, hard thoughts, well-articulated and well-accentuated economic and political programs”⁹¹. The Nigerian military has been discredited and as Kola Animashaun rightly pointed out, they cannot remain “arbiters in the quarell they overtly engineered”⁹². To him, democracy must not only be “allowed to make mistakes”, it must be oppertuned to “correct itself, to learn, to totter and to finally work”⁹³.

The fact must however be stressed that disengagement of the armed forces from direct political roles, though necessary, is not a sufficient step in the process of democratization. Eric Nordlinger has tried to distinguish between civilian rule and political democracy⁹⁴. While military disengagement may lead to some kind of civilian participation in the policy-making process, he argues, democracy is not a mere governmental system to be imposed. In most developing countries, such disengagement has come to represent the enthronement of western-styled liberal democracy characterized by universal adult suffrage, regular elections, and partisan competition. We must however emphasize that the historical peculiarities of these countries suggest that democratization must go beyond these measures for it to be relevant to the masses of the people. It must address the critical issues of the redistribution of power, politics, priviledges, opportunities and exchange in these societies. Democratization, according to Kenneth Banzon, is a “total process that integrates all aspects relevant to the improvement of the human condition”, namely, “enviromental condition, population growth, and its attendant food situation, the distribution of scarce resources both within and between countries, human rights the responsibility and acountability of international institutions both public and private, and underlying ethical and moral criteria in guaging public performance by both individuals and institutions”⁹⁵. The ability of the various pro-democracy organizations in Nigeria

(91) Fawehinmi, op. cit., p.19.

(92) Kola Animashaun, “Slowly, Slowly Please”, *Sunday Vanguard*, November 7, 1993, p.7.

(93) Ibid.

(94) Eric Nordlinger, “Soldiers in Mufti, The Impact of Military Rule Upon Economic and Social Change in Non-Western States”, *American Political Science Review*, 64 (4) December 1970, p.1131-48.

(95) Kenneth E. Banzon, “Democratization: Myth or Reality”, *Development and Democratization in the Third World, Myths, Hopes and Realities*, Washington, Taylor & Francis, 1992, p.16.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

to sustain their current crusade against militarization will go a long way in determining the attainment of these objectives. The international community, especially the developed countries and the numerous non-governmental organizations, must also move beyond cosmetic and half-hearted measures toward ending all forms of dictatorship in the world. This includes the imposition of enforceable political-diplomatic and economic sanctions against such regimes. As Bolaji Akinyemi, Nigeria's former External Affairs minister, has clearly noted, "the developed world must recognize the correlation between world peace and democracy, for peace and stability can only reign where democracy exists"⁹⁶.

More importantly, demilitarization must have as its ultimate objective the economic transformation of the society, by focusing on the fundamental problem of underdevelopment. Political stability, as has been further confirmed by the failure of Babangida's "political engineering", is not a function of the number of political parties. Neither is it guaranteed by the method of voting. It can only flourish within a context of mass mobilization, education and economic security. These can only be accomplished when government commits itself to the provision of the basic needs of the majority of the society. But the picture of the Nigerian economy can only be a recipe for further crisis and military intervention, given its monopoly of the means of coercion. As Okwudiba Nnoli rightly predicted:

"... The Nigerian economy will reach the inevitable dead-end of expansion. This has been the experience of the Latin American countries, India, Egypt and other Third world nations which have a longer history of peripheral capitalist development than Nigeria. Regional integration will only delay the time of arrival to the dead-end, but will not be able to bypass it... Only a development strategy that is fundamentally antagonist to economic dependence, (mass poverty, unemployment, food shortages and other forms of deprivation) and external control will break the grip of this inevitable stagnation"⁹⁷.

This is the greatest challenge before the present set of military rulers, and in it lies the prospects for a viable democratic political order in Nigeria.

RESUMO: Neste trabalho o autor apresenta aspectos não das teorias das intervenções militares mas de fatos concretos ligados à ruptura do poder civil e de instituições democrá-

(96) See "Akinyemi Joins the Army", *The African Guardian*, October 4, 1993, p.8.

(97) Okwudiba Nnoli (ed), "Path to Nigerian Development: Conclusion", in his *Path to Nigerian Development*, Dakar, Cordesria, 1981, p. 252.

AJAYI, Rotimi. The remilitarization of Nigerian Politics. *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos*. USP, S. Paulo, 18-19 (1): 23-51, 1995/1996.

ticas da Nigéria, ocasionada pela tomada do poder em 1993 por uma junta militar. Procura por essa via abordar o militarismo como árbitro de disputas políticas naquele país, percorrendo três etapas do processo: as eleições de junho de 1993, o “interim National Government” (ING) e o que chama de “instintos messiânicos” da junta militar. Ao final, indica perspectivas para uma cultura política democrática abrangente da Nigéria.

Palavras-chave: África negra; Nigéria; Ruptura do poder civil; Remilitarização; Arbitragem política; Perspectivas