The military, ethnicity and democracy in Nigeria
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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the military, ethnicity and democracy within the context of Nigeria's historical and sociopolitical reality.. Nigeria's inability to foster a sustainable democratic tradition has negative consequences for the country and at present, it is engaged in the fourth attempt at democracy. The quest for democracy and therefore development in Nigeria has been hindered by the disruptive influences of ethnicity and militarism. This paper sees ethnicity as a ploy used by the military to perpetuate itself in power at the expense of national development. The military's love for power stems partially from a love for wealth and partly from its self-image as the custodian of the independent and corporate existence of the country. If the democratic tradition is to be sustained in Nigeria, constitutional as well as policy measures should be adopted to tackle the issues of ethnicity and militarism.

Introduction

THE MILITARY IN NIGERIA has come to symbolize a particular class and class interest—that of the military élite clinging to power. In this way the military has acquired a self-perpetuating character in political life in Nigeria. Like all class and quasi-class formations, this perpetuation hinges on protecting and furthering the interests of a select few. In achieving this desire, the military may have mobilized its poorly positioned "labouring section" against the larger civilian population in a massive wave of militarization. Hence, the military has become the pivotal force defining the *raison d'être* of those it has co-opted, and by the same token it has come to believe that as a patriotic body it must protect the corporate existence of Nigeria against the various ploys of

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the political class. But military rulers in Nigeria, according to Joseph (1987) arise as political aberrations and with promises to democratize. This much-vaunted democracy has never really materialized: rather, brief civilian interregnums have punctuated the long years of military rule. In their subtle agenda to remain in power, the military may have exploited ethnicity both as a unifying tool within select military-cum-regional cliques and a check on the ambitions of dissenting officers.

In the wider society the military may secure its eventual return to power each time it hands over to a civilian regime by way of heightening ethnic tensions and allowing politicization along ethnic lines. Bjorklund (1987) contends that the articulation of ethnic feelings, goals and identities is usually directed towards the State. The political power-play involved in a modern State may give rise to ethnicity which becomes a springboard upon which such power-play is launched.

For Luckman (1994) most precolonial States in Africa depended on the use of military force to extract surpluses from direct producers. Thus, military organizations developed in an environment which emphasized its coercive power, gave it priority attention and utilized it as a means of allocating and distributing resources, usually in favour of the élite. As a result, the African ruling élite had a mutually beneficial alliance with the military right from start. In turn, in order to strengthen the military, keep opposition in check and guarantee continuous access to production surpluses, the ruling élites probably expended a significant part of these surpluses on the military and pampered its leading personnel. The implication of this form of predatory alliance in society has been well articulated elsewhere (see Reyna 1990). But right from the start the State in Africa has ascribed a privileged position to the military and has often seen its existence and strength as a prerequisite for the continued survival of the society.

In contemporary society, however, the military is no longer content with enjoying proxy leadership. With a corps of relatively well-educated and highly-trained manpower and in the context of the prevailing crisis in Africa's development, the military may see itself as the rightful heir to state power and as the legitimate recipient of public resources, as Marx foresaw.

Our task in this paper is to examine the issue of militarization and ethnicity within the context of democratization in Nigeria. This concern derives partly from the fact that the military bureaucracy in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Togo, Nigeria and Gambia may constitute the single greatest threat to democracy (Olowu 1995); and partly from the fact that Nigeria's past failures in democracy have been strongly linked to the ethnic rivalries (Joseph 1981, Muhammadu and Haruna 1979). Ethnic and regional imbalances have also been suppressed by military intervention (see Cox 1976, Enloe 1980). We therefore analyse the military and ethnicity as separate and interacting variables and as recurring features in the democratic instability of Nigeria. This examination, it is hoped, will offer suggestions towards achieving a sustainable democracy devoid of ethnicity in Nigeria.

Theoretical models

IDEALLY, THE MILITARY is concerned with upholding the internal security and external integrity of a given society. It is located outside the political arena and is mobilized only on invitation to quell an internal explosive situation that is beyond the control of the civil police, or to contain external aggression. When the military ventures into government and politics in developing nations a number of theoretical and practical problems emerge. The fear of the military remaining in government is often based on the fear of a praetorianism, in which tyranny and a State aimed at protecting the interests of those in power and repressing further processes of political development, becomes the norm (see Rappoport 1962). The concern about the military's involvement in politics can be compressed into two questions: why do the military usurp political power; and what facilitates the process of military involvement in politics?

Historical and structural characteristics

AN EXAMINATION OF THE origin of the military in Africa may help to find some relationship between the past and present rôles of the military in African States (Smaldone 1975, Welch 1975, Lee 1969). Only a few scholars have, however, shown some interest in this direction (Smaldone 1975, Welch 1975). More attention has been given to the structure of

the military and its subculture as core variables in the military's political leaning (see Almond and Powell 1966, Javowitz 1964). Although the military in many countries may show global structural similarities, the differences between them may be explained by historical and developmental realities. For a full picture we need to know the level of socioeconomic development and military history, and the relationship between the military and other groups in the society as well as the political climate in the society. For instance, during Nigeria's second republic, with the political system on the brink of collapse, politicians became so irresponsible that they called on the military to assume power (see Joseph 1987a).

Co-option of civilians

BIENEN AND FITTON (1978) argue that studies must focus on the activities of civilians, especially civil servants and politicians, in military governments. They argue that, because countries are more complex than armies, the military often rule by abrogating political activity and using administrative fiat in alliance with civil servants. Such an alliance, or "coalition" as Feit (1968) labels it, has no legal or moral basis but serves the exigencies of the time, as defined by the military. Bienen and Filton see military rule as engendering the sharing of power and authority between civilians and military, although the final or ultimate authority resides with the military. The civilians thus involved are predominantly civil servants and former politicians. Based on this finding, Bienen and Filton call for the re-examination of the concept of military rule in view of the considerable participation of civilians in it. This view was recently echoed by Saro-Wiwa (1994) who argues that it is futile to complain about military excess without including the colluding élite of bureaucrats, businessmen, professionals, politicians and so on, who have not only egged on and collaborated with the military but have also benefited from it. Thus, the rôle of the society at large, particularly, the élite, may be useful in any analysis of this sort.

Internal characteristics

ONE OF THE EARLIER theoretical characterizations is that of Janowitz (1964) with an "internal characteristics" model. In this model, the military's intervention in politics can be explained through reference to the internal

structure of the army. Hence, the sociocultural background of military men, skill, career lines, internal social cohesion and professional and political ideology are crucial (see also Hutchful 1979, Zolberg 1968, and Luckham 1971).

Politicization of social institutions

HOWEVER, HUNTINGTON (1968) has argued that military intervention occurs because of the general politicization of social forces and institutions. When every sphere of societal life, from the clergy and churches to schools and armies, is politicized, every one of them claims a stake in the political process and struggles either to dominate or to control it. For Huntington military intervention occurs where there are frequent disagreements on the legitimate method of resolving conflicts among the groups competing for political power.

External influences

OTHER SCHOLARS (Crocker 1974, Rowe, 1974, Eleazu 1973, First 1971, Miller and Zimmerman 1987, and Lefevre 1970) believe external influences condition the behaviour of the military within the political system. This includes such things as economic dependency, external socialization agents, reference groups, military assistance and training, ideologies, global orientation or globalization and so on. For these writers, global trends, events and interactions have a bearing on the behaviour of the military. This may be conceive the military as basically the same in many societies.

Trusteeship and corruption

DENT (1978) HAS OFFERED two typologies of military governance relevant to the African experience. He makes a distinction between military trusteeship and the corruption of military power, namely, military usurpation and tyranny. The trusteeship type of military intervention, according to him, is marked by a genuine rôle for military government *vis-à-vis* the civilian body politic. There are three forms of trusteeship military intervention, (a) the caretaker model, which aims at mere maintenance of government itself (as represented by the first military government in Ghana); (b) the corrective model (most military interventions in Nigeria); and (c) the military revolution which seeks to make fundamental changes in society and arises from the military's

exaggerated belief in its unique qualifications to put right basic defects in the body politic.

The above viewpoints do not exhaust available theories on the military involvement in politics. But Dent's (1978) categorization of military intervention seems to approximate the nature of military involvement in politics in Africa, even up to the 1990s. In terms of this typology, military intervention in African countries appears to have oscillated between trusteeship and the corruption of military power. The match between Dent's typology and empirical reality gives us the confidence to utilize this framework, particularly in the West African subregion.

The military and politics in Nigeria

WELCH (1975) HAS POINTED out three factors relevant to military institutions in Africa. These are the facts that (a) traditional African armies vary considerably in their military organization but are usually typified by short service, non-professional volunteers and/or conscripts; (b) the notion of a standing army and therefore the problem of civilian-military relations was introduced by the colonial regime; (c) the long-range problems of contemporary African States in civil-military relations are how to nationalize the military and institutionalize civilian control. These features are relevant to nature of the military in most African societies, but the last two are of particular relevance to Nigeria.

The idea of a standing army was a product of the colonial experience. Colonialism bequeathed Nigeria a standing army that saw itself as a distinct social group. The military during the precolonial era, whether of the professional or volunteer sort, may have acted as the pivot of the continued corporate existence of the society. The precolonial experience may also have created the consciousness that Uzoigwe (1974) sees as marking the army's struggle to return to its precolonial status. In this the army was the State and the State was the army. This may have given rise to the present crisis when the peoples of Nigeria attempt to surmount their relationship with the military as well as control it. If the military has internalized the notion that it is, and should be, in control, any attempt to wrest control from it may create some form of cognitive dissonance.

This fear has been expressed by Decalo (1973) in the case of Dahomey, and by Smaldone (1974). This may explain why the civilian-military relationship has become brittle, with the military showing its readiness to assume dominance via the use of its coercive instruments.

The military in Nigeria may also be seen partially in the frame of reference used by Almond and Powell (1966). In this framework the military constitutes a subculture with a characteristic self-image and corporate and class interests, together with a distinct set of cognitive, affective and evaluative orientations towards the external world. Hence, the military may also exemplify Ekeh's (1975) notion of two different publics to which every Nigerian relates. These are the ancient historical community and the nation-state. The individual relates with normal honesty to the first but usually sees the second as belonging to nobody and therefore as a legitimate object of pillage. Thus, if the average military man is one who displays basic loyalty to the military establishment while seeing the nation-state, Nigeria, as a more distant entity, then the army's involvement in politics in Nigeria may be a result of protecting and furthering parochial interests more than a consequence of deep patriotic concerns.

The military has dominated post-independent Nigeria in the political arena and is largely responsible for the present political, economic and social underdevelopment of the nation. Apart from the first republic ushered in by the British, the military has acted as both the midwife and the terminator of democracy in Nigeria. With the exception of the one properly supervised democratic exercise in 1979, the military has displayed a markedly halfhearted attempt to usher in democracy in the 1990s while terminating such steps in mid-stride in 1966, 1983 and 1993.

The military in Nigeria comes to power with the expressed intention of acting as a corrective regime (Dent 1978). It represents itself as having been reluctantly lured into government to help improve the civilian polity and after that hand-over to civilians. But, as Dent argues, only the military regime of Mohammed/Obasanjo can lay any claim to having performed this corrective function. According to him, "the enormous respect, verging on adulation, for the memory of Mohammed throughout Nigeria is a sure sign that, at least for the six months of his rule, Nigeria

was set on the path of corrective government" (Dent 1978:102). This contention has been vindicated by history. Only the Mohammed/ Obasanjo regime was able to foster with genuine sincerity a democratic transition programme, conduct fair elections and hand over power. And that democratic exercise scarcely outlived its first term when it was derailed by a *coup d'état* at the beginning of another term.

However, as Nigeria's recent history shows, even when the military come to power as a corrective regime, there is always the danger of the corruption of military power. This form of corruption usually stems from either the ruling military élite's love of power for power's sake or the love of power for money sake. The enormous financial resources that stream into the country, particularly from the oil sector, may have been strong inducements for corrupt men to corner power for themselves at the expense of the larger society. In Peil's (1976:48) words, "the army has learned the civilian ways of corruption all too well, and its inability to fulfill its promises in this direction makes the public suspicious of its efficiency in others". Having usurped power and having tasted its benefits the Nigerian military have a proclivity towards either clinging to power endlessly or seeking reasons to intervene in governmental processes. In this quest, the military élite exploits all features of the Nigerian society that may help it achieve this desire.

One of these features is ethnicity, which Muhammed and Haruna (1979) see as a tool frequently employed by corrupt politicians and leaders to cover up their guilt, with the result that matters of principle may be resolved in an unprincipled, that is to say, ethnic manner. Like most plural societies, Nigeria has its fair share of ethnic, problems. In addition, the ethnic factors in the sociopolitical life of Nigeria have always been prominent. All facets of national life ranging from the survival of the political system (Joseph 1987) the completion and commissioning of key federal government projects and siting of industries (Azeez 1997, Chukwuezi 1996), to the administration of sports (Ocholi 1997) and the allocation of stalls in metropolitan markets (*The Rising Sun* 1997), are all seen through ethnic prisms. The Nigerian military is by no means ethnically neutral: this affects its rôle in the sociopolitical development of the nation.

The military, ethnicity and politics in Nigeria
Ethnicity as a socially-constructed category

OYEDIRAN (1979) HAS shown that societal cleavages in form of ethnic and regional conflicts seriously affect the organizational integrity of the Nigerian army. Ehic and regional conflicts in the larger Nigerian society spill over into the military establishment. Both the collapse of the first republic and the military involvement in politics were ethnically inspired (Muhammadu and Haruna 1979).

This is not surprising since the post-independence military in Nigeria was ethnicized in the sense that ethnic or regional origin was made a core principle for recruitment. It was government policy that the Nigerian army from 1958 be composed as follows: Northern region, 50 per cent; Eastern region, 25 per cent and Western region, 25 per cent (see Oyediran 1979). This recruitment policy was in line with the desires of the Nigerian Peoples Congress (NPC)—then the leading political party on the basis of its numerical strength. By this one sweep, the military in Nigeria became both heavily politicized and ethnicized. Recruitment and promotion became election issues and captured the interest of political and ethnic leaders.

But ethnicism as a crucial element in Nigeria's national life has a much earlier origin. The colonial era seems to have given *carte blanche* for the ethnicization of Nigeria with the Richards Constitution of 1946 which created three regions based on ethno-geographical lines in Nigeria. Nigerian nationalists and scholars attacked this constitution as likely to create eventual ethnic and regional conflict. Before the Richard's Constitution Nigeria's politics was moving towards unification in a centralized State and the realization of a common nationality: afterwards, this tendency was arrested (Irukwu 1983)

Ruptures along ethnic lines do not arise in a vacuum. They are usually the product of the interaction between people of different geo-ethnic backgrounds in the quest for some scarce resources. The ethnic factor becomes important when people can see it is a way of gaining an upper hand in the struggle. Such a struggle may be open and public or it may be subtle and discrete, but it is still a struggle between people of different sociocultural or geo-ethnic backgrounds. In the views of

Osaghae (1994) ethnicity arises only when the people concerned decide to employ ethnic differences as weapons in pursuing competing interests. The situational nature of ethnicity is captured by the fact that some of the groups which presently conceive of themselves as ethnic groups were previously made up of largely antagonistic units with no cohesive ethnic base.

This is the case of the Yoruba (Falola 1985). Dudley (1970) shows that internecine conflicts existed within the Yoruba group in the precolonial era and sees this as a factor that militated against Yoruba unity during Nigeria's first republic. The Ogoni, who became a self-conscious ethnic group separate from all others as a result of the threat of extinction from oil pollution, especially since the 1980s, can also be seen in this light. Thus in Marxist terminology, the sociocultural or geo-ethnic group may be a group *in itself* (devoid of ethnic fervour), or, when the situation arises, a group *for itself* (when ethnic loyalty dominates action). Groups that share historical similarities but have not seen themselves as one ethnic whole may develop ethnic solidarity with time and when the enabling circumstances are propitious [see Muhammadu and Haruna (1979), on the Hausa/Fulani group].

Ethnicity and conflict

WHEN ETHNIC CONFLICTS arise in the struggle for power and allocation of national resources they are usually intense. This may stem from the fact that people have seen the control of power, especially in developing nations, as the determinant factor in control of all other social goods. The group that wields power controls every other important sphere and oversees the allocation of national resources. Power, then, becomes a great privilege that can be put to various crucial uses. So what produces ethnicity is not just the fact that the society in question is plural or complex (see Barrows 1976) but the wish of people to use ethnicity as a weapon in the competition for resources in such a plural society.

Ethnicity therefore becomes a useful weapon in political and economic struggle. But political power is the more crucial since an élite class from one ethnic group can easily corner power by appealing to the self-interest of that ethnic group. Such appeals often mask the high level of individualism that characterizes capitalist economic activities.

In this way, the élite uses the political ideology of ethnicity to usurp power and appropriate resources. The military as an élite group may also use ethnicity to usurp power and appropriate resources. Its ethnic solidarity may lie in fostering ethnic disunity among the populace and thus prevent any form of united or concerted effort at challenging militarism. The military may also manipulate ethnicity, particularly in the officers cadre, to ensure that political-cum-military power rests solely with a particular ethnic group and thus marginalize other ethnic groups (see *The Nsukka Analyst* 1994).

Hence the argument of scholars like Nnoli (1994, 1978) and Bjorklund (1987) that ethnicity gains ascendancy in the quest for political interest and gains sound plausible. While social differentiation based on language, culture and even ancient castes may be of long historical origin, ethnicity has a much later origin, probably arising with the notion of the modern nation-state in Africa. Historically, African societies were made up of small sociocultural units, each one of which, even though in contact with others, maintained its independence politically. Their contact with each other was mainly economic, for the exchange of goods and services, and in boundary skirmishes or other intergroup conflicts, usually over territories or natural resources.

A nation-state experiment foisted by external agents upon these small groups meant the unification of several independent sociocultural units into one entity. In some cases, as in Nigeria, over 300 identifiable and separate units were merged with no regard to the wishes and aspirations of the members. This unification under one flag and name did little to expunge the fact that each nation-state was often a conglomeration of different and sometimes warring sociocultural groups. In this way the root of ethnic conflict was implanted. But initially, people exploited their racial similarities to fight the external and common enemy, colonialism. At the end of colonialism, as Nnoli (1978) shows in Nigeria, the indigenous élites saw ethnicity as a means of stepping into the power vacuum left by the Europeans. And this quest for power has bred ethnic conflict among various groups in the society. But as these conflicts become fragmented among different groups and social élites, the military in Nigeria has emerged as the most consistent power élite.

Democracy and democratization in Nigeria

QUITE CONTRARY TO POPULAR Western opinion, Nigerians are traditionally a democratic people. The rule of law, freedom of citizens, and the application of checks and balances on rulers marked a majority of traditional Nigerian societies. A fieldwork study conducted by Peil (1976) on the views of the Nigerian people on politics, discovered that the people are verbal and ready to comment on any subject. Politics forms an important part of their lives and citizens generally feel they have inalienable rights to speak their minds. Given this, the recent observation of political alienation (Mabogunje 1995) may be the product of a long history of the military usurpation of this privilege.

What is new about democracy in Nigeria—what can be called modern democracy—lies in its scope and its westernized electoral system. Traditional democracy practiced in villages in the east of Nigeria before the colonial period resembled the classical democracy found in the Ancient Greek city-states rather than the currently widespread and more equitable representative democracy. Democracy, according to Olowu (1995:16) "is a system of governance that underscores the plural nature of politics and hence gives recognition to the diversity of social forces in any political community". But this definition, while bringing out the very valuable nature of democracy in plural societies, does not completely capture the modern ideal of democratic political culture.

Understanding the term

ACCORDING TO WILLIAMS (1995) the difficulty in providing a precise definition of democracy is compounded by the fact that throughout history, the concept has been the subject of intellectual and ideological contestation. The term "democracy" is fluid and complex in meaning. Dahl's (1971) attempt to overcome this limitation by focusing on the functional aspects of the concept is not wholly satisfactory. The notion of democracy must be related to the sociocultural realities of the people concerned while at the same time encompassing the known processes of citizens' rights and privileges, political competition in a regular and free atmosphere, probity and the supremacy of the people's will. Judging by such standards, democracy in Nigeria should be governed by the

need to benefit the people at large. Satori's (1987:34) views seem useful here. Thus:

> Democracy exists when the relation between the governed and the government abides by the principle that the State is at the service of the citizens and not the citizens at the service of the State, that the government exists for the people and not vice versa. Democracy surpasses the rituals of polling stations, voting and swearing-in exercises to include recognition that the governors have obligations towards the governed including rendering the greatest possible service to the citizens.

Olowu (1995) sees democratization as involving matters of constitutional choice that transcend multi-party elections or the replacement of one group by another in government. He argues for the evolvement of a type of government that gives all the opportunity to make inputs into the governing process without compromising the integrity and effectiveness of those processes. In other words, he makes a case for multiple or concurrent constitutional order rather than one single centre of authority and power.

Incorporating democracy into Nigerian society

THE TREND TOWARDS democratization in Africa has faced difficulties and problems. Some of these emanate from the realities of African society. It is still a matter of debate as to whether these societies can work out an enduring democratic tradition in the face of deep ethnic cleavages, recent historical experiences and whether, as Diamond (1988) states, grinding poverty is compatible with democracy. Taking the Nigerian case, Mabogunje (1995) identifies three factors that are part of the problems of governance and democratization. These are the overriding and pervasive feeling of alienation among most Nigerians; a lack of certainty on the rights, obligations and responsibilities of citizens; and the weakness of the State. He sees that any genuine aim at democratization must address these issues.

In spite of the importance of these factors to the democratization process, evidence shows that the efforts at democratization in Nigeria has been very much hampered by ethnicity (see Joseph 1987; 1981) and the

military (see Soremekun 1995, Olowu 1995, Dent, 1978, Saro-Wiwa 1994). But while militarism and ethnicity, can be stand on their own separately, they can also interact. Thus the military uses ethnicity as a means of perpetuating itself in power and weakening the collective resolve of the citizens as well as creating conflicts among the political élites—conflicts that give the military a further excuse to usurp power.

Apart from the fact that the coup and counter-coup of 1966 which put paid to the first attempt at democratic government in Nigeria was borne out of ethnic sentiments, the demise of the second republic (1979–1983) was predictable on the basis of the strong ethno-regional bias of the leading political parties (Joseph 1987, 1981). The military ushers in a democracy that is shaky and looks expectantly forward to an opportune time to take over again. Moreover, the top hierarchy of the military establishment is structured in such a way that military-cum-political power always lies with a particular ethno-regional group (The *Nsukka Analyst* 1994). This situation has not been helped by the annulment of the 1993 presidential election polls, allegedly on ethnic grounds, since that election would have provided a remarkable watershed in the post civil war governance of the country.

Adekson (1981) argues that whatever positive contributions to the socioeconomic development of Nigeria may have made by the military, these have been neutralized by the phenomenal rate and growth of extraction from society by the military over that period. This argument was made, it shoulod be noted, over two decades ago when the military was still in its formative years in terms of societal corruption. At that time it possessed power mainly as a result of national crises on two occasions. Now the picture is quite different. While the 1980s was a period of realistic fiscal policies that tried to achieve a balance between military budgetary allocation and the socioeconomic needs of the people; today defence receives the highest budgetary allocation of all ministries. This totally bypasses any consideration of the socioeconomic plight of Nigerians, a plight made worse by the gruelling experience of economic structural adjustment. The spending of huge resources on defence and the military may have led to the situation whereby Nigeria is now home to a gigantic military structure that it barely needs.

Despite grinding poverty throughout the land and the decay in educational, social and physical infrastructure, military and defence allocations continue to top the budget of a country that is neither at war nor threatened by one. The allocation of a large percentage of Nigeria's revenue to the military establishment may be viewed as a direct cause of the military's reluctance to leave power. This situation holds true in some other African states where the spending on military and military activities constitutes an inordinately large chunk of the budget and creates foreign exchange imbalances as well as squeezing investment and limiting spending on social welfare (see Luckman 1994).

Soremekun (1995) has argued that between 1970 and 1994, oil and oil revenue, have proved the greatest obstacle to democracy in Nigeria because the military has "tasted oil money" and is unwilling to vacate the scene. According to him, all *coups d'état* in Nigeria can be indirectly related to the quest to control oil money, except for the 1966 military intervention, which occurred when oil was unimportant in the Nigerian economy. He argues that there is a relationship between oil, the military and instability in Nigeria. Military ethos and values have been stamped so thoroughly on the Nigerian polity that democratic ideals continue to recede daily. Soremekun continues, "as repulsive as a military regime may appear to be, its rewards and spoils system are such that they confer privileges and benefits on some *status quo* forces". These forces include indigenous and international players who stand to gain from continued military domination.

A substantial case has been established regarding the negative rôle of military and ethnic factors in the democratization process in Nigeria. However, a more useful task may be accomplished by offering realistic solutions to these problems. My task in the next section is to examine how militarism and ethnicity can be managed in the quest for a viable democratic tradition in Nigeria.

Facing the situation

A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT of work has been done by Nigerian scholars on ways of managing ethnicity (Nnoli 1994, 1989; 1978, Osaghae, 1994) and on how to overcome the obstacles posed by the military in the

democratic process (Soremekun 1995, Adekson 1981, Joseph 1987b). While these views are valuable, the persistence of the problem shows that more effort is needed both in terms of implementing suggestions and in finding novel ways of coping with the problem. The fundamental factor that engenders military intervention may lie in the psychology of the military or in the internalization of the belief that the military owes posterity the duty of keeping the country united. This orientation, which may have served its purpose during the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970), now runs antithetical to the development of the country.

A basic argument is that the number of coups and attempted coups in the history of Nigeria may have created a situation whereby coup planning and execution is seen by the military as part of the essence of the institution (see Smaldone 1974). The recruitment of well-educated and highly trained élite corps in the military may have even strengthened this belief since this category of military personnel may see themselves as bearing the responsibility for the corporate survival of the country. As good as this is for morale, it may breed incessant intervention by the army in the democratic process in Nigeria. Thus the "corrective" rôle of military intervention in Nigeria (Dent 1978) may continue to mar democratic experiments in the country. What needs to be corrected is the anomalous allocation of this rôle to itself by the military. The entire populace should be allowed to exercise their civic responsibility of correcting their leaders through the ballot box.

Educating the military into accepting the supremacy of the ballot in the distribution of power should form the background of other ameliorative measures, both constitutional and extra-constitutional. At a constitutional level, measures such as federalism, a quota system and the federal character principle can be finely tuned to solve the problem of ethnicity. In addition the principle of federation, despite its proclaimed good features (Ekeh and Osaghae 1989) should be modified to recognize the need for a meritocracy. The need for a federal character in Nigeria's public life should never override the need for merit as an evaluative and allocation principle.

It is in view of this that the move by government to set up a tribunal to try government ministries, parastatals, agencies and government

officials who default on federal character, should be examined (*Thisday* 9 February 1997). It would clearly be in the general interest of the country if those who default on this principle on the altar of merit are spared punishment. After all, a too-sweeping application of the quota system in the past may be related to the low quality of Nigeria's bureaucracy and may have even heightened ethnicity, as the hiring, promotion, and even firing of people depends on their geo-ethnic origin. And this has contributed to the ethnic consciousness pervading the Nigerian military.

The zoning system provided for in the new Constitution for allocating political office, if well applied, may help reduce the fear of ethnic minorities of domination by the majority groups and also tackle the issue of the marginalization of ethnic groups (The *Nsukka Analyst* 1994). Moreover, the military should show sincerity in their desire to establish a lasting democracy. Political parties allowed to participate in politics should be monitored regularly to ensure that they are ethnically neutral. Those that are not should be banned from participation in the political process as any democratic arrangement based mainly on the ethno-regional strength of political parties will not last (Joseph 1981).

Finally, the use of ethnic or geographical consideration as a basic principle of recruitment into the military should be de-emphasized. As Nigeria approaches the twenty-first century, other criteria such as physical and mental ability as well as patriotism should be made the core categories for both military recruitment and promotion. Again, the question of demobilizing the military, in view of the fact that Nigeria is a relatively peaceful country, and the use of the abundant military manpower and potential in smallscale industrial and agricultural ventures should be reconsidered. At the very least, it would be worth knowing if the incessant *coups d'état* have anything to do with the under-utilization of military manpower and if the involvement of the military in productive ventures would aid the ailing Nigerian economy.

Conclusion

THE ARGUMENT HAS BEEN that militarism and ethnicity separately and in combination are impediments to the democratization process in Nigeria. Democracy, from all indications, is not just a global trend but is also the

sine qua non for meaningful development in any nation. Given Nigeria's realities, the need for development in the country is not only necessary but acute. For this reason the militarism that has dominated the country's public and political life for far too long is no longer desirable. The military in Nigeria is not only highly politicized but is steeped in ethnicity which it uses as a weapon to frustrate efforts at democratization.

Ameliorative measures, both constitutional and otherwise, should be taken in order to curb the menace of militarism and ethnicity. Such measures can work if there is a thorough understanding of the psychology of the military. The military should be re-oriented to refrain from seeing their rôle as largely that of intervening in the democratic process in the country under the guise of maintaining the corporate existence of Nigeria.

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