



Colonialism, Military Intervention and Political Instability in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The British colonial administration used the divide and rule system, thereby making sure that no part of Nigeria is seen as an integral part of the other. The indirect rule system worked only in Northern Nigeria, while protests characterized the system in the Eastern and Western parts of Nigeria. Indeed the warrant chiefs who became symbols of authority in Eastern Nigeria maintained stability in the country before Independence. Another feature, which characterized this period, was regionalism. This was the system in practice during the First Republic. It was based on the ability of each Region for compete autonomously for economic sustenance, but in reality, this was not feasible. Therefore, in 1966, the military overthrew the first democratically elected government of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Bewawa. Thus, between General Aguiyi Ironsi and General Abdusalam Abubakar, the Military stayed in power for about thirty-three years. This period was characterized by massive underdevelopment and human rights abuses. This paper therefore reviews this era of military interventions and their consequences to the Nigeria social and political climate.

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Introduction

More than half of the countries in Africa had been under direct military rule like Nigeria and the remaining had been under indirect military rule. Countries like Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Kenya had experienced attempted coup d'etat. Ethiopia and Burkina Faso could be the exceptions.

In most cases, coups in Africa have been carried out by the officer coup. This particular rank of the army hardly lack any amenities from shoes to food. The coups they had carried out go beyond corporate interest to personal interest.

The first coup in Africa was in Egypt in 1952. This coup set the stage for the coups that swept through Africa. This was closely followed by that of the Congo that overthrew the Government of Lumumba. Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania and Nigeria followed in quick successions.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars like Huntington, Janowitz and Decalo have argued that military intervention in politics have a lot to do with its corporate interests, sophistication, its puritanical ethics etc.

Janowitz argued that military intervention through military coups are precipitated by the superior modern organizational attributes which are lacking in all other sector. These attributes include cohesion, efficiency, professionalism, rationality and esprit de corp. He continues by saying that it was these attributes that compelled them to take over power and rescue society from total collapse. They step in as "redeemers, liberators and savior" (Janowitz 1964:34). But Decalo on the other hand notes that "African armies have rarely been cohesive, non-tribal, westernized or even complex organizational structures" (Decalo 1976:14).

Meanwhile Hutchful does not agree with Janowitz's description but argued that Janowitz's was describing an ideal situation that lacked empirical observation of African

behaviour (Hutchful 1979:1). He contends that if those attributes compelled the military to intervene in politics, then all developed countries should be under military rule as those attributes are more pronounced there. First on his own part sees the military acting for army reason (First 1970:11).

This paper contends that the military in Africa to all intents and purposes is a colonial creation. The military in Africa has all the attributes of colonialism viz process of subjugation, underdevelopment and the extraction of surplus from the affected nations. The African military are from the same class as the educated elite that succeeded in the first place from taking over power from the traditional rulers of the Colonial Native Authorities during the indirect rule era particularly in Northern Nigeria and eventual take over from the elite almost immediately after independence six years later.

African armies have clearly demonstrated their ignorance about history and are generally corrupt and lacked direction. On taking over power they still depended on the educated elite to assist them in running their regimes.

Regional Influence

Sometime the proximity of the African Countries can also influence the coups. First in comparing the coups of Benin Republic, Nigeria and Ghana puts it this way: Sogol's take over in Benin Republic was prompted by the fear that the schedule election might produce disorder similar to that which followed the Western Nigeria election. Nzeogwu and Afrifa, coup makers of Nigeria and Ghana were two courses terms apart in their Sandhurst training. Ghana coup makers recount how they were spurred into action by taunts that the Nigerian soldiers who carried out the coup were men after all.

Colonialism and Its Aftermath

The first coup that the Nigerian indigenous states and communities experienced was the overthrow of the pre-

colonial political systems by the colonial master, Britain that started from the 1870s. This overthrow led to the displacement of virtually all political structures, thanks to the slave trade and the palm produce trade which climaxed in the missionary activities.

Instability

Instability therefore must be seen as the manifestation of structural disarticulations inherited from the colonial and post colonial experiences. The colonial experience ensured the restructuring of Nigeria's political economy to depend on the metropol in this case Britain and in so doing arrested the natural process of state development.

The Nigerian nation inherited at independence very unstable and uncertain state of affairs: a dependent economy based on raw materials to feed the industrialized Britain. Nigerian economy produced palm produce, cotton, groundnuts and cocoa for export. The British maintained this state of affairs throughout the period of colonial rule while traditional authorities were used as pillars of indirect rule in the villages and towns of Northern Nigeria, a parallel growth of cultural unions, professional associations and political parties were developing in the southern provinces (Tamuno 1980:400). This created a framework for opposition in Nigeria during the colonial period and the elections that ushered in the First Republic.

Furthermore, the Marketing Boards that were established in the different regions fixed the prices of commodities and the Central Marketing Board did not oversee transactions and export of the commodities. One of the policy formulations during the last years of colonial rule was the idea of derivation and even progress. Derivation meant giving a region a sum equivalent to its contribution to the central revenue. Even progress meant assisting the relatively backward areas to catch up with the more advanced (Tamuno 1980:404). Before 1958, the Northern Region benefited from the principle of derivation and even progress. They also benefited from the 1954 constitutional changes which gave autonomy to the regions and power for independent revenue.

Crude Oil of 1956 and the Change in Principles of Derivation

But this arrangement changed when crude oil increasingly became a greater revenue source for the Eastern Region. There was serious need for fiscal changes. The fiscal commissioner went to work in 1958, the term Derivation was removed though the regions were empowered to levy and collect taxes. The commissioner brought in the consideration of the well being of Nigeria as a whole and according to Tamuno, the commissioner argued forcefully that the financial stability of the federal centre was the main guarantee. The problem of revenue allocation had caused tensions in Nigeria before and after independence. There is no way Nigerian government can be stable when the issue of revenue allocation has not been resolved adequately. The leadership must resolve the contradiction set in 1958 where the federal government, the region of origin of the resources and the other regional governments are to share such revenue. This revenue is oil. Before now cocoa, cotton, groundnuts that come from the Northern and Western Regions of Nigeria were exclusive revenue income for their governments and when they asked for autonomy at that time, they got autonomy. Revenue allocation sharing had caused instability in Nigeria since independence and would continue to cause political upheaval in the country.

First the British Administrators worked against the unification of the Northern and Southern Nigeria and kept the North out of reach of the south. If not how could any one explain the turning down of the offer to claim a seat into the Legislative Council in Lagos by Shehu Makama (Abubakar 1980:473). So a parallel administration was maintained as long as the British were in Nigeria and after independence the North insisted on maintaining status quo.

Secondly the colonial policy of allowing the missionary a free hand in the Southern Protectorate to educate and Christianize the people and not allowing the penetration of missionaries into the Northern Protectorate was a deliberate way of creating the need difference between the two parts of Nigeria which brought instability in the country and this was for the selfish interest of the British. The word boko means Roman scripts and the British limited Western Education for the North to just to understand better the transaction of Native Authority business (Abubakar 1980:475). Meanwhile the Northern Muslims preferred ajami Muslim education to boko Christian education and this protest had continued and had assumed very dangerous levels from 2010. The recent violent protest in northern Nigeria against western education had its roots during colonial period but only took on a bitter dimension from the recent times.

Thirdly the root of political instability in Nigeria could also be found in the colonial legacy of forceful getting of everything: from the forceful end of the slave trade, to the forceful introduction of missionary activities, to the forceful introduction of "legitimate trade" and the gun boat expedition of the British men on the spot and the forceful penetration of the hinter land for trade and the forceful sacking of the coastal middle men. Force became synonymous with British policy and Nigerian Government inherited force during the military regime.

The position of this paper is that force is part and parcel of the legacy handed down to the leadership of Nigeria. The leadership located this force in the military and so worked in partnership with them to achieve their selfish objective of maintaining power.

Fourthly, the Utman Dan Fodio's Jihads of the early 19th century added impetus to the sectionalization of the military and the professionalism of the Northern Nigerian men in the army. The training they received from the founding fathers of the jihads exposed them to "Power is might". The jihadists forcefully wrestled power from the Habe dynasty of the ruling class and hoisted their flags and introduced emirate administration. The flag bearers of Fulani origin were the first emirs in Northern Nigeria. Kano which was the political centre of administration was sacked and Sokoto which was not there originally became the seat of the Caliphate. This administration was fully established when the British foot soldiers sacked Atahiru and appointed their own colonial Sultan, which maintained the established Caliphate (Okeke, O. 1992:16-17).

The Political Instability in the Third World

The political instability in the third world countries, Nigeria inclusive have historical linkages in the sense that whatever the Metropolitan Europe bequeathed to the third world was received with two hands. According to Falola et al the post colonial states inherited peripherization in the capitalist world economy, the indigenization of the unequal exchange system entrenched during the colonial period, unification of the various powerful forces of production. This explains why the leaderships at independence created the

three regions of Northern, Western and Eastern Nigeria and maintained the cash crop economy policy of the different regions which attracted revenues to the North and West, with groundnuts and cocoa respectively. The Nigerian bourgeoisies were created at this period. The East whose yams and cassava could not fetch any foreign exchange engaged in the transport sector of the economy (Okeke, O. 1992:16-17). the revenue that accrued from these cash crops were effectively utilized by the regions and only a negligible part was remitted to the centre, thus, the underdevelopment of Nigerian entrepreneurship was promoted during the colonial period and consolidated at the attainment of independence. (Okeke, O. 1992:16-17).

Falola et al observed that those that received a good dosage of colonial education in the south were denied control of the leadership of the country and this led to continuous crisis which they called "distortion of social formation" (Falola et al 1985:247). The Utman Dan Fodio's Jihads also produced men that joined the West African Frontier Force during the colonial period. After independence the leadership encouraged the soldiers to enlist into the Nigerian army in greater proportion, than the rest of the social group that made up the country.

Military Interventions

In looking at the indicators of the failure of order, three of them were mentioned by Bingham Powell as riots, death and suspension or replacement of national regime. In Nigeria, riots and deaths from political violence had been recorded during the elections of the early 1960s but suspension of national regimes was a recurrent decimal in Nigeria before 1999. According to him suspension or replacement of national regime comes about, usually, through actions of the military or the Chief Executive. In the Philippines, Chile and Uruguay, his study showed outright replacement of democracy (Powell 1992:21).

In Nigeria, it was not an outright replacement but suspension of national regimes. The military actors being Chukwuma Nzeogwu, Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo, Mohammadu Buhari, Badamosi Babangida. On August 27, 1993, General Babangida stepped aside for Chief Ernest Shonekon to come in. Two months later, on November, 17 1993, General Sani Abacha sacked Chief Ernest Shonekon with interim government and assumed office. He died in office without his attempt to enthrone himself a civilian president on 8 June, 1998. General Absalami Abubakar took over power (Emmanuel Chigozie Osuchukwu 2012 : 129).

The first military coup of 1966 came to the political elite as a shock. This should not be surprising because the military possessed the force of coercion. It was precisely this force which it put into use on 15 January, 1966. The coup inaugurated a military regime that lasted only seven *months*.

The dawn broadcast announcing the coup of 17 January, 1966 read thus: "Whereas the Governor of the Northern Region of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has lost the confidence of the masses, having been itself incompetent to govern, and whereas the said Northern Regional Government is no longer able to guarantee the safety of human lives as well as the rule of law in its area of jurisdiction, I, Sir Kashim Ibrahim, on whose shoulders the gubernatorial powers of the said Northern Regional Government have rested since independence, having been myself the accredited custodian of the Constitution in this same Region, do hereby, on this day, Saturday, the 15th of January, 1966, relinquish to the Nigerian Armed Forces all those powers,

statutory or otherwise, hitherto exercised by my Government. (Gbulie B. 1981:81)

The feeling of unease in the face of military rule was glaring. The army in any case recognized their illegitimacy as political leaders. As a result they pledged to hand over power to civilians and create conditions necessary for the working of democracy. All the promises of that regime embodied in General Aguyi Ironsi came to nothing when he was toppled on 29th July, 1966 and Lt Col Yakubu Gowon came on board and promised to hand over within six months. This he couldn't achieve because a section of the country felt they were not wanted and attempted cessation. So for three years, 1967-1970, Nigeria was plunged into a civil war which prolonged Gowon's stay in power. That regime lasted for nine years precisely 29th July, 1975. The Murtala Mohammed's regime that replaced that of Gowon was publicly applauded as a welcome development in the face of a protracted money spinning regime of Gowon.

The Mohammed regime was however determined to disengage the military from politics with a five stage programme of transition announced in 1975 which included restructuring of the political system, e.g. creation of more states, local government reforms and demilitarization.

Within six months, Dinka attempted an unsuccessful coup. Obasanjo who succeeded Mohammed was determined to pursue the programme of disengagement with vigour and within three years he handed over to a civilian government in 1979. This paper is not interested in the performance of the civilian administration of Shehu Shagari but a call to look inwards for the solution of the myriad political problems of Nigeria as a nation.

First trade, which developed between Africa and Europe, linked America in unique ways. While Europe maintained their traditional political system and economic transformation from feudalism, mercantilism to capitalism, Africa was embattled with the scramble and partition of Africa after the abolition of slave trade and the search for markets in Africa for the mass produced goods from the industries in Europe.

What was unique about African linkage to Europe was that the economic transformation came in quick succession. Apart from the slave trade which lasted for four hundred years, legitimate trade came with exploration; missionary activities and colonialism. This event brought so much confusion in the young nation which was compounded with the strange political system called indirect rule.

Conclusion

There is a call by this paper that the leadership should look inwards for political and economic transformation of Nigeria and other African Countries, taking cognizance of the traditional ways and means of political development indigenous to Nigeria for a way forward. Rodney may not be alone when he called for indigenous indices of development that he noted were the increase of stratification and the consolidation of states (Rodney 1974:52). To lay emphasis on stratification and consolidation of states, the Eastern Niger Delta City – states of Bonny, Kalabari, Nembe, Okrika and Opobo in Nigeria, stratification was the basis of the economic activities both during the slave trade period and the palm produce period.

The Amanyanabo (King) was respected by his people. The able slaves were nurtured by the "greater wives" of the Amanyanabo and most of these slaves transformed as "gentlemen" and nobles in society. The slaves who turned gentlemen and noble were given opportunity to rise to

prominence and their masters provided them with the wherewithal to establish independent war canoe houses. They were thus established as Wari Alabo (house chiefs). The war canoe houses were the platform on which the slave trade and the legitimate trade thrived. Ruling classes and dynasties emerged from these states and each of the ruling classes produced princes that succeeded to the thrones. These dynasties included the Pepple, dynasty of Bonny, the Amachree dynasty of Kalabari, the Mingi of Nembe, the Addo of Okirika and Jeki of Opobo Kingdom.

The leadership had sidelined the traditional rulers and hijacked the powers bestowed on the ancient thrones and this had caused untold tension and instability in Nigeria. Until proper recognition is given to both the traditional rulers and the labour force, stability and order will continue to elude the country.

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