MILITARY IN POLITICS AND NIGERIA'S POLITICAL EVOLUTION, 1966-1979

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ABSTRACT
Beginning from the sixties of the twentieth century, military ascendancy was a major feature that exerted masculinity on Nigeria's political evolution. This accounted for the different experiences of military intervention and administration almost throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Essentially, the long-term impact of military governance in Nigeria's socio-political and economic development trajectory warrants more critical analysis. In light of this, the paper explores the military in the Nigerian political landscape from 1966, when the first military coup took place, to 1979, which marks the end of its first phase, which was succeeded by the second Nigerian republic. The paper adopts the conventional historical method, relying on secondary sources for its exploration. The paper found out that beyond the usual alibi of civilian incompetence, socioeconomic underdevelopment, corruption as well as electoral crisis; insurgent tendencies arising from ethnic nationalities as well as secessionist agitation were central to military intervention and administration in Nigeria during the period under evaluation. The paper concludes with reflections on the vestiges of military intervention and administration on Nigeria's civilian political culture and thereby recommends that attempts to address Nigeria's contemporary political acrimonies must necessarily appreciate the historical context and experiences of the nation's military governance, particularly between 1966 and 1979.

Introduction

Since the end of twentieth century, military ascendancy in Nigeria's political evolution has been laid to rest, yet historians and political scientists have not relaxed evaluation on the theme. This aspect of Nigerian history has remained an open discourse, most probably, because of its complex connection to the nation's colonial experiences, which necessarily midwifed its occurrence, and contributed to the nation's post-colonial realities. Adebile et al. (2016) examined military administration from an African-wide perspective as a critical challenge to democratic stability in postcolonial political experiences. On the other hand, it has been argued that military intervention and administration were not entirely strange phenomena in the area now known as Nigeria. This has been substantiated by the nature of monarchical practices in pre-colonial Nigeria, which are mostly monocratic royal absolutism

(Janowitz & Doorn, 1971; Kennedy, 1975; and Nordlinger, 1977). The latter indicates these trendy commonalities in Nigeria's pre-colonial political civilization and post-colonial military experiences. Though Afrocentric perspectives and interpretations may not readily accept such perception, the typical despotic manifestations associated with postcolonial military regimes do not make such critical explanations easily validated.

In light of the above, military intervention and administration in Nigeria's political evolution since independence seems a product of her colonial cum nationalism experiences as Eze Ogueri II maintained (Ogueri, 1976). The objective of this paper, however, is to explore the underpinnings of military intervention and administration in Nigeria's political frame between 1966 and 1979. The year 1966 was when the first military coup occurred, and 1979 marked the beginning of the Nigerian Second Republic following the end of what may be referred to as the first military epoch in the nation's historical evolution. It further attempts to critique the common perception that military ascendancy in Nigeria was primarily necessitated by civilian incompetence, socio-economic underdevelopment as well as political and electoral corruption, thereby drawing attention to a potential approach to addressing the nation's economic and political absurdities through an appreciation of Nigeria's historical experiences with the military in governance.

Context from Colonial Experiences

For the purpose of hindsight, it may be of some relevance to contextualize military forms in the nation's colonial experiences, this will provide insight into Nigeria's post-independence military interventions, if not actual insurgent reactions to civilian democratic governance. More so, it will be helpful to underline the foundations for such nature of reaction during the first half of the twentieth century, when the nation now studied as Nigeria was under colonial administration.

By the end of the nineteenth century was a period that experienced the efforts of a few elite Nigerians against colonial domination and administration, which took the form of religious as well as political movements.[1] After the Second World War, nationalist movements demanded considerable constitutional reforms, most of which were granted by the British. For instance, the first constitution by Governor Clifford in 1922 was criticized by many nationalists because it provided for a Legislative Council for Southern Nigeria and the Governor ruled by proclamation in the North. The Richards Constitution of 1946 provided for a Legislative Council for the whole country and Regional Houses of Assembly. This did not satisfy the nationalists, there were further demands for constitutional reforms resulting in the Macpherson Constitution of 1951. The latter provided for a strong centralized government with four ministers from each region as members of the executive council (Olusanya, 1980, p. 520). This encouraged the formation of two regional political parties; the Action Group (AG) and Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the West and the North respectively, while the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) remained the dominant party in the East, which used modern political methods to appeal to the people. Still, there was controversy over self-government. The political parties in the Western and Eastern regions of southern Nigeria began to push the colonial government to extend full internal self-governance to the regional assemblies. The Northern region continued to oppose the move, however, stating that it was not ready for self-government (Falola & Heaton, 2008, p. 153). Following further constitutional talks at Lagos and London in 1954 and 1957 accordingly, the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 was set up to incorporate the agreements reached by the three regions. Each region had the option of acquiring full internal self-government in 1956, but no region was compelled to become fully self-governing, and the Federation of Nigeria as a whole was to remain under British colonial authority for the time being. Hence, the Western and Eastern regions gained full internal self-government in 1957 and the Northern Region in 1959. This constitution established Nigeria as a federation of three regions, Northern, Western, and Eastern under which Nigeria gained independence in 1960. In 1957, Nigeria became a full-fledged Federation headed by Alhaji Tafawa Balewa who became the first Prime Minister (Falola & Heaton, p. 153).

When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, hopes were high that, with mineral wealth and a handful of educated folks in Africa, Nigeria would emerge as African first superpower and a stabilizing democratic influence in the region. However, these lofty hopes were soon dashed and the country lumbered from crisis to crisis, with the democratic government eventually being overthrown in a violent military coup in

January 1966 (Siollun, 2009, p. 7). Economically, from 1966 to 1979, Nigeria's clout grew from being just the most populous Black and African nation to a height of influence and glory. It became the richest African country and by far, the most influential in African affairs. The praise for this was partly due to the oil boom of the 1970s which spelt unprecedented national prosperity, as well as the personalities and preferences of some of the military rulers of the period (Fawole, 2003, p. 2). In a political sense, the decades of the 60s and 70s were perhaps, the touchiest epoch of Nigeria's historical evolution, during which the nation almost suffered disintegration, and Nigerian governments mastered the art of taking their country to the edge of an abyss and pulling back at the last moment. Nigeria was dominated by the military for over four decades of unstable governance – irregular coups supplanting democratically elected governments, the insurgent secessionist Biafra war (1966 – 1970) as well as imposed economic blockade that caused famine and pervasive deaths, reckless squandering of the country's oil wealth - which largely disrupted the country's political evolution (Siollun, 2009, p. 7).

The Military in Nigeria's Political Space from the 1960s

A brief historical excursion into the political antecedents of military involvement in Nigerian politics is necessary to make military rule more understandable. An army officer named Captain David Ejoor commanded the army guards at the midnight flag-raising ceremony on Nigeria's Independence Day on October 1, 1960. But little did Ejoor perceive the role he and his army colleagues would play in their country's post-colonial political evolution (Siollun, p. 11). The army that the departing British colonialists were bequeathing to the newly independent Nigeria had not fully imbibed the strict apolitical tradition of the British army. Hence, the army was still largely officered by British personnel, only 18 percent of its officers at independence were Nigerians. Its commanding officer up till 1965 was Major General Sir Christopher Welby-Everard (Luckham, 1971, p. 163), the Nigerian army therefore was a dedicated disciple of the British army. The army was not a nationalistic organisation, it was far from being political, ideological, or revolutionary. By 1966, the largest segment of the officer corps consisted of very conservative elements who devoted themselves to the attainment of the very top in their career. In some cases, they did this with the aid of top politicians and senior civil servants. Partly as a result of the nature of their training and orientation as well as their ambition to get to the top of their career as soon as possible, thus, many of them were prepared to do the bidding of the politicians (Falola et al., 2010, p. 143). The military came to power in January 1966 with the justification of a failed civilian rule in the country. The attainment of political independence in 1960 inaugurated a new era in which Nigerians assumed the responsibility of governing themselves with the birth of the First Republic. However, this First Republic was short-lived. The conduct of politics in the First Republic witnessed a series of crises which featured oppression, political violence, official corruption, rigged elections, ethnic baiting, bullying, and thuggery (Falola et al., 2010, p. 137). For example, the Action Group (AG) crisis of 1962, the census controversy of 1962/63, the rigged general elections of 1964, the rigged western Regional elections of October 1965, and the bloodletting, arson, and destruction that followed it (Fawole, 2003, p. 4). These attitudes led directly to the overthrow of the civilian democratic regime by several military officers in January 1966.

The politics of the bitterness that characterised the First Republic can be seen as a background to the advent of military rule in Nigeria. The ruthless race to win and consolidate party interests, ethnic supremacy as well as economic and political prospects, which had been gathering clouds since the late 1950s eventually climaxed in the 1962/63 census controversy. The manipulation of the census figures was calculated to entrench a certain ethnic group in the centre thereby dashing the hopes of the other groups (Akinbi, 1999, p. 29).

There was a serious political crisis in the West which started as an ideology but later developed into a personality clash between the leaders of the Action Group. The Federal Government seized the opportunity to impose a state of emergency on the West for six months thereby assuming direct control over the region. A special Commission of Enquiry was set up and the AG leaders including Awolowo were arrested and imprisoned for treasonable felony which alienated the Yoruba (Eluwa et al., 1988 p. 273).

The coalition arrangement between the NPC and the NCNC for the control of the federal government had collapsed. Initially, the coalition government was an act of victimization

calculated to reduce the overall influence of Awolowo and his Action Group; this did not augur well for the image of the Federal government. Struggle over the party that would control the federal government created serious tension and mistrust (Akinbi, p. 30; Adesote & Falade, p. 144).

Again, national morale was at its lowest ebb because of the corrupt practices and mismanagement of the economy by the politicians. These top politicians diverted public funds into the accounts of their political parties. They also used public institutions such as Regional Development Corporation and Regional Marketing Boards to enrich individuals who were staunch supporters of their respective parties (Falola et al., 2010, p. 138). For instance, as the Coker commission of enquiry fully demonstrated the Western Nigeria Marketing Board Funds seemingly reserved for social and economic development projects were cleverly reallocated through a complex chain of banking, construction, and real estate institutions to key AG leaders for use in financing the 1959 Federal elections and for generally strengthening the party at National and regional levels. The AG government of Western region and the NPC government of Northern region wasted about one million six hundred pounds of public fund through the purchase of the much-overvalued assets of Arab Brothers Limited. The venture proved to be worthless to the two governments (Akinbi, 1999, p. 31). In the process of draining the country of its wealth, many of the politicians built luxurious houses brought expensive cars and indulged in all sort of prodigality.

The 1964 federal elections fiasco largely contributed to the political violence and takeover of civilian rule. In order to effectively contest the elections, the various political parties formed alliances. The United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) were formed. Thus, the election was characterised by electoral irregularities and increasing incidents of thuggery and intimidation leading to its boycotts by UPGA (Falola et al., 2010, p. 139). A national crisis was imminent and there were talks on possible takeover by the military. To avert such a development, the Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa was invited by the President and agreed to form a government of National Unity thereby allowing a fresh election (Eluwa et al., 1988, p. 277).

Then came October 1965 Western Region election which actually was the immediate precursor to military intervention. During the campaign both the NNA and the UPGA used violence, murdering their opponents and destroying their properties. UPGA then accused the NNA of rigging the election. Thus, the election generated much controversy and later, large scale civil disturbance. For a period of almost three months, governmental activities were relatively paralysed in the region as the people reacted to the NNDP's victory. Lawlessness was on rampage, social disorder all over the west, burnings in towns and cities, including human beings. Yet, the Federal Government failed to intervene (Akinbi, p. 30; Eluwa et al, p. 278). Balewa seemed incapable of acting to quell the riots such that Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Johnson, the then Chief of Army Staff had to withdraw troops that had been earlier deployed to the region because many of the soldiers got sympathetic with the rioters. The social devastation, profiling deaths, and injuries of persons, most probably must have instigated military response to rescue and restoration of order to the region (Bourne, 2015, p.113). Histrionically, every significant issue gave rise to a serious political crisis and this prepared the ground for the coming of the military on 15th January, 1966. This was followed by a countercoup in July of the same year which ultimately led to the civil war in the year that followed.

The First Experience Ever

In the early hours of January 15, 1966, Nigeria's first military coup took place. The coup was led by ''five military majors'' namely, Kaduna Nzeogwu, Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Don. Okafor, Chris I. Anuforo and Adewale Ademoyega who were later dubbed, and operated out of each of the three regions of Nigeria and Lagos (Ademoyega, 1981; Falola & Heaton, 2008, p. 172). The experience was a bloody one that saw the murder of the Federal Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, Premier Samuel Ladoke Akintola of the Western Region, Premier Ahmadu Bello of the Northern Region, and Minister of Finance Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, the young military officers believed, were responsible for the chaos of 1964 and 1965. Scores of Western and Northern top military officers were also killed during the coup, including Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun, Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari; Colonel R.A. Sodeinde, and Colonel Kur Mohammed; Lt. Col. J.Y. Pam; Lt. Col A.C. Unegbe and Lt. Col. A. Largema (Adesote & Falade, 2020, p. 150). The

leaders of the coup claimed that their goal was to bring an end to the tribalism and corruption that had characterized the First Republic. They came with the notion to correct all the social, political, and economic ills of the politicians and restore sanity to governance. The coup only partially succeeded in the North and West while it failed woefully in the East and Lagos (Fawole, 2003, p. 6). The failure of the coup led to the demise of the First Republic and the emergence of military rule in the country. Unfortunately, it was not the original planners and executors of the coup that eventually became the rulers. That the coup failed was due to the inefficiency of the so-called revolutionaries rather than the alertness, discipline, and 'military preparedness' of the loyal troops (Falola et al., p. 145). Again, the Majors' coup probably failed because they simply did not have enough men and transport at their disposal to complete their operation of arresting and guarding leading political figures and senior army officers, disrupting communications networks, setting up roadblocks, defending themselves against counter-attacking forces and taking over broadcasting facilities. They did not even have enough military vehicles and some of them resorted to using civilian vehicles. Rather than launch simultaneous attacks on all the targets or assign one team to each target, the Majors were so undermanned that they had to sequentially move from one target to the next (Siollun, 2009, p. 64). For example, Major Ifeajuna arrested the Prime Minister, then set out for the Ikoyi Hotel, shot Brigadier Maimalari along the way, and then later shot Lt-Colonel Largema at the Ikoyi Hotel. This sequential execution is what allowed the warning to reach Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi and enabled him to organize a counter-attack. Additionally, the need for secrecy meant that a rehearsal of the coup was not possible. Major Nzeogwu was the only participant who was able to rehearse (under the guise of a military training exercise) (Siollun, p. 65).

Nevertheless, with so many of the most powerful political figures in Nigeria dead or imprisoned, the country was thrown into yet another major political crisis thereby creating an opportunity for the military to seize power from the federal parliaments (Falola & Heaton, 2008, p. 173). The new military government was welcomed with a massive outpouring of jubilation and goodwill. The vast majority of the public had never been in close contact with soldiers before and thus held them in a mixture of awe and fear. Having seen the ease with which the soldiers dispatched politicians they did not like, many civilians looked at soldiers as invincible and fearsome creatures. The soldiers' crisply starched uniforms, peaked caps, Sandhurst honor, and impeccable British accents (gained from their training by British instructors) reinforced positive public perceptions of them (Siollun, p. 65). Power quickly devolved to the commanding officer of the Nigerian army, Major General John Aguiyi-Ironsi, who immediately went about restoring order. Aguiyi-Ironsi broadcasted to the entire country proclaiming the new military government. Lt-Colonel Ejoor made a broadcast to the Eastern Region reiterating Ironsi's proclamation and stating that he would be the military government's representative in the Region. Lt-Colonel Ojukwu made a similar broadcast to the Northern Region and another broadcast was made to the Western Region. Lt-Colonel Ejoor went so far as to meet with Eastern civil servants to introduce himself. The announcements and introductions made to the various regions were confusing as the officers who made them were soon redeployed and assigned by Ironsi to regions other than those to which they had made their announcements (Siollun, p. 70). Notably, between 1966 and 1979, four military heads of states ruled the country namely; Major Genral J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, Lt. Col. (later General) Yakubu Gowon, General Ramat Muritala Muhammed and General Olusegun Obasanjo.

The emergence of Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi as military head of state of Nigeria on January 17, 1966 laid the foundation for military administration experience in the nation. The new Federal Military Government (FMG) was empowered to make laws for the "peace, order and good government of" Nigeria. Ironsi said his government would last only ''until such a time when a constitution is brought out according to the wishes of the people" (Falola & Heaton, p. 173). He seemed to get off to a good start by initiating some popular actions at the outset. He appointed military governors who replaced the deposed Premiers in each of the country's four regions namely; Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka (''Emeka'') Odumegwu Ojukwu, Eastern Region; Lt. Col Francis Adekunle Fajuyi, Western Region; Lt. Col. David Ejoor, Mid-Western Region; and Lt. Col. Hassan Usma Kastina, Northern Region. Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon succeeded Colonel Kur Mohammed as the Chief of Staff at army headquarters (Falola & Heaton, p. 150). He abolished the posts of Prime Minister and President, and formed a new a Supreme Military Council (SMC) and Federal Executive Council (FEC). The SMC composed of

the Head of Federal Military Government who was also the President/Chairman of the Supreme Military Council; Head of the Nigerian Navy, Commodore Joseph Wey; Head of the Nigerian Air Force, Lt-Colonel George Kurubo; Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Chief of Staff of the Nigerian Army, Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe; and the Military Governors of each of the four regions. The acting Inspector-General of Police, Alhaji Kam Selem, was later added to the SMC (Siollun, p. 72).

He also suspended several parts of the 1963 constitution (mostly those parts dealing with party politics) and promulgated a number of Decrees. Decree No. 33 of 1966 abolished 81 political parties and cultural organisations. On 24 May, he issued Decree No. 34 of 1966, which, at a stroke, abolished Nigeria's Federal System of Government and introduced unitary System of Government in the country (Bourne, 2015, p. 117). Thus, the Federal Government became a "national government". The decree unified the senior civil service and made it possible to transfer civil servants across the former regional services. The regional structure of Nigeria ceased to exist, and was replaced by "groups of provinces." Both the military and the civil service, which had previously been administered regionally, were to be integrated and administered from the center. This unification decree was unanimous as the four military governors were against the establishment. Despite this, Ironsi went ahead and passed the decree (Akinbi, 1999, p. 33). Hence, the northerners interpreted this as an attempt to bring the northern region under southern control and Igbo domination. This singular act of betrayal by Ironsi destroyed the original vision of the planners for the country. Unfortunately, the political fragmented and unstable country simply went into more internal turmoil.

Northerners Reaction and the Counter Coup of July 1966

Ironsi's subsequent policies as head of state alarmed many northerners, however, who came to view the coup and Ironsi as part of a plan by southern – specifically Igbo – officers to use the military as a means of imposing a new era of Igbo domination. In many ways, circumstantial evidence corroborated such a view. In the first place, four of the five majors who led the January coup were Igbo. Of all the officers and politicians killed in the coup, only one had been Igbo, while the majority had been northerners. While the two most prominent figures in northern politics – Balewa and Bello – had been murdered along with their ally Akintola, the Igbo premiers of the Mid-Western and Eastern Regions had been arrested but later released. To many, this pattern indicated that the coup was primarily an Igbo strike against the north (Falola & Heaton, p. 173). He failed to put on trial the Igbo majors in the January plot. They were initially arrested and detained in Kirikiri before being dispersed to various prisons all over the country. While the members of the SMC wanted them tried, and while Ironsi was clearly afraid of them. Both the civilian and military elite of the Igbo insisted that they should not be tried. In other words, he allowed the coup plotters to remain in detention, rather than bringing them to trial for the crimes that northerners believed they had committed (Falola, et al., p. 146).

Making matters worse, Ironsi made several moves in the first half of 1966 that led many northerners to believe that he was part of an Igbo conspiracy. Ironsi was himself an Igbo, and, in an unwise political move, he tended to surround himself with Igbo advisers who by passed both the civil service and the study groups he had set up to look into the future constitutional, judicial and economic arrangements for the country (Falola & Heaton, p. 173). The appointment of Francis Nwokedi, an Igbo, as Sole Commissioner to inquire into the unification of the regional services was particularly tactless given Northern sensitivities about 'domination' by the better educated southerners. Furthermore, some of Ironsi's promotion in the army provided evidence that could be used to build up a case of nepotism. For instance, of the 21 promotions in April 1966, 18 Igbo officers were promoted to the rank of colonel against the advice of his Supreme Military Council (Akinbi, 1999, p. 33). The euphoric and provocative attitudes of the Igbos living in the North did not help the situation, for instance, Igbos were blamed for worsening economic conditions and rising food prices, as many of them were traders and Northerners reflexively attributed their worsening economic situation to the Igbo traders who had "control" of commerce and prices (Siollun, p. 83). Ironsi's public moves were centralist and anti-democratic. In the situation where northerners were alarmed at an Igbo takeover – some Igbos in the north were triumphalist. The most damning evidence against Ironsi in the eyes of northerners was the passing of the Unification decree. Given the relatively small number of

educated northerners, the decree was regarded as being unfair to the North (Bourne, p. 117). Within a few days of the publication of the decree, what had been muted displeasure developed into large-scale communal killings of Southerners, particularly Igbos living in the North. Educated northerners, civil servants, staff and students at Ahmadu Bello University spearheaded violent anti-Igbo riots. Lives were lost in massacres, property was destroyed and Igbos began to retreat to safety in the East (Akinbi, p. 33). From then on, until the end of the civil war, the country faced a fearful degree of uncertainty.

On July 29, 1966, a redemptive counter-coup was launched by Northern Military officers such as Lt. Col Joseph Akahan, Major Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma, Major Abba Kyari, Major Martin Adamu, Major Shittu Alao, Major Musa Usman and including Major Murtala Muhammed who masterminded the coup (Adesote & Falade, p. 152). Aguiyi-Ironsi was staying at Ibadan with Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, Military Governor of Western Nigeria, when a detachment of northern soldiers arrived at the Government Lodge and killed them. Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe, Chief of Staff in Lagos, ordered troops to quell the mutiny, but they were ambushed with heavy losses. Ogundipe felt he had to negotiate with the rebels. Colonel Emeka Ojukwu, military governor in the east, phoned Ogundipe to offer his support if he wished to declare himself supreme commander. But Ogundipe was losing control of the army and declined. The rebels said there was strong pressure in the north for secession – the code name for the coup was Operation Araba ('secession') – and ideas were circulating for a simultaneous breakaway by both the north and the west (Bourne, p. 118).

For three days the country teetered without a head of state, until Lieutenant Colonel. Yakubu Gowon, the then Chief of the Army who had at first been taken prisoner by the rebels, agreed at their request to take over as Supreme Commander of the armed forces and the new head of state (Falola & Heaton, 174). He was thirty one-year-old, a Christian and from a small tribe, the *Ngas* (Angas), in the Bauchi/Plateau area; this categorized him as a northern minority figure, but from that middle part of Nigeria that was always likely to get squeezed in struggles between north and south and with an interest in keeping the polity together (Bourne, p. 118).

On 1st August, 1966 Lt. Col. Gowon announced that he had assumed control of the federal government and the leadership of the armed forces. Gowon immediately announced the repeal of Decree no. 34, indicating that Nigeria was committed to unity within a federal structure with respect for regional differences. Again, ethnicity re-echoed itself as Gowon was not the most senior surviving officer. At least, five surviving officers were senior to him, but he was the most senior Northern officer and Chief of Staff of the army (Akinbi, p. 34). Gowon was to find reconciliation difficult, however, particularly with Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu, the Igbo military governor of the Eastern Region, who had many grave reservations about the legitimacy of the countercoup. In the first place, Ojukwu did not believe that Gowon had the authority to become supreme commander of the armed forces. Several still living officers had higher rank and more experience than Gowon, and Ojukwu argued that any of these officers had a greater claim to the title of supreme commander than the usurper Gowon (Falola & Heaton, p. 174). From August 1966 to July 1967, the country watched helplessly a strange struggle between Ojukwu and Gowon. Both officers held the country to ransom. The restoration of Northern hegemony in governance and the military did nothing to improve the political instability that had plagued the nation, especially from January 1966. If anything, the second coup merely worsens the sense of alienation that the Easterners felt as a widespread anti-Igbo pogroms began throughout the Northern region from September and October 1966 (Fawole, p. 52). A spate of massacres, many conducted by northern soldiers, took the lives of between 80,000 and 100,000 easterners during this period, the worst occurring in September. These massacres sparked revenge killings of northerners resident in the Eastern Region. Such events led Ojukwu to question whether Igbos could ever live in harmony within a federal Nigeria. He urged all easterners outside the region to return home and suggested that all northerners in the east do likewise. This led to large population movements in the latter half of 1966 and the early part of 1967 (Falola & Heaton, p. 174). After the collapse of the constitutional conferences and peace-meetings to reconcile the two contenders, on May 30, 1967 Ojukwu declared secession and the birth of independence of the Eastern Region, which he renamed the Independent Republic of Biafra. From the perspective of Gowon and the Federal Military Government, Biafra could not simply be

allowed to secede. Hence, the country moved to one of its grimmest movements, the 30 months civil war which started from May 1967 and was finally terminated in January 1970. With the victory of the Federal Government over Biafra, and the successful conclusion of the civil war, the savior image of the military received a boost.

A Second Experience

Lieutenant Colonel. Yakubu Gowon emerged as Nigeria second military Head of State following the July 29, 1966 counter-coup. Gowon regime remains the longest serving military or civilian administration in Nigeria's political history. It lasted exactly nine years in power, from July 29, 1966 till July 29, 1975 when he was overthrown in a bloodless coup. It is remarkable not just for its long tenure but also for witnessing some of the most momentous events and laudable achievements in Nigeria's history (Fawole, p. 52). The political and administrative structures of government were established at the Federal and State levels as from 1967. However, these structures of government did not begin to function until after the civil war (Falola, et al., p. 146).

Gowon's government at the end of the civil war militarized the Federal structure thereby creating 12 states by Decree No. 14 of 1967. The former four regions were split into 12 states. The North was split into six states: North-Western, North-Central, North-Eastern, Benue-Plateau, Kano, Kwara; the East into three: East-Central, Rivers, South Eastern; the West into two: Lagos, Western; and Mid-Western region was left intact as a State (Adesote & Falade, p. 159).

He went ahead to initiate some populist programmes. One of such was the 3Rs – a policy toward reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation for the nation. This was launched to help wipe out bad memories, reduce resentful and hostile feelings and integrate the various parts of the Nigerian populace into a united Nigerian nation (Eluwa et al., p. 288). The main aim was to bring the country together again, resettle war victims (both internally displaced persons and refugees), repair and replace what was destroyed during the civil war.

This was followed by the Second National Development Plan which spanned between 1970 and 1974. The development plan launched was aimed to accelerating both economic and social developments by increasing agricultural productivity, growing the petroleum industry, and boosting the manufacturing industry (Adesote & Falade, p. 161). Also, in April 1975, the giant Third National Plan (1957-1980) that would consume a whooping sum of thirty thousand million naira was launched with fanfare.

Added to these was the Nine-Point programme of political transformation. This programme created an enabling environment for the envisaged return of governance to a democratically elected dispensation in 1976. It encompassed the reorganization of the armed forces; national reconstruction; creation of more states; preparation and adoption of a new constitution, implementation of a national development plan, and so on (Eluwa et al., p. 288).

Between 1971 and 1974, there was the fortuitous oil boom which enriched state coffers abundantly. It was due to the Middle Eastern war which curtailed the supply of Middle Eastern oil to the Western capitalist countries and the insistence of some militant oil-producing countries, notably, Libya on getting better prices for crude oil (Falola et al., p. 148). The proceeds went into gigantic projects like urban road construction, fly-over bridges, sea and airports across the country, telecommunication services, construction of stadia, medical institutions, educational institutions, and the National Theatre for hosting the Second African and Black Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977 (Akinbi, 1999, p. 34). Children from the age of kindergarten to adulthood were sent out in thousands on government and private scholarships to study in different part of the world.

Gowon's government also projected the take-off in 1976 of a programme of Universal Free Primary Education (UPE). This scheme was aimed at extending literacy to the entire population of the country. A number of Federal Government Colleges were established across the country. Also, new federal universities were set up. In 1973, he introduced new currency into the country i.e, the Naira and Kobo which replaced the former Pound Sterling currency. In creating a spirit of self-reliance and national unity among Nigerian youths, Gowon established the National Youth Corps. According to the scheme, all tertiary institution graduates in the degree category who are less than 30 years of age are expected to participate in one

year compulsory service to the nation in states/geographical zones outside theirs.

Unfortunately, however, Gowon's programmes did not earn him a lasting reputation because he seem not to have the political will and other necessary qualities to tackle the problems before him successfully. Incidentally, corruption got worse after the programme was made public. He could not remove or redeploy his military governors in the face of allegations of corruption against them. He was literally hostage to the depredations of his subordinates to the point that he virtually ceased to be an effective leader who was subjected to derision by Nigerians (Fawole, p. 55). One of the problems of Gowon's military administration was that soon after the creation of the twelve states; he thought it was wise to establish executive councils at the Federal and State levels. Consciously, he fell back on the same 'corrupt and decadent' politicians they had overthrown. Most of the top politicians were back in power again as members of the executive councils, these 'crafty' politicians were not accountable to him (Falola, et al., p.146). In addition, the Second National Development Plan was inadequately implemented owing chiefly to corruption, inefficiency and lack of executive and managerial capacity. Gowon's government failed to take firm and positive action over an ever-widening range of issues that serious affected the people's welfare. Among these were rising inflation, increasing congestion and chaos in ports, traffic congestion in Lagos, and mal-distribution of petrol around the country. There was also the disorganization brought about by the Second World Black Festival of the Arts and Culture (FESTAC). The worst in Gowon's catalogue of inaction was his setting aside of the transition programme. He had earlier promised to return the country to civilian rule but in 1974, according to him, he said it was impracticable (Eluwa et al., p. 289). The resultant was a successful bloodless coup staged against Gowon by General Muritala Muhammed on July 29, 1975.

The Third and Fourth Regimes

Between 1975 and 1979, Nigeria was governed by two successive Military regimes, namely Muhammed regime (1975-1976) and Obasanjo regime (1976-1979).

General Muritala Muhammed was appointed the third Military Head of Nigeria on July 30, 1975 following the overthrown of Gowon in a bloodless coup. He made his maiden speech to the nation as the Head of State of Nigeria and commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. He has, as second-in-command, General Olusegun Obasanjo. The new regime of Muritala Muhammed was welcomed with a great sense of relief by the generality of the Nigerian populace. In accordance with the expectation of the people, Muhammed was determined to do the things that Gowon had promised: to introduce a new constitution prior to elections, clean up corruption and the ballooning public service and create new states. Within weeks of taking over as Head of State on 30 July, the new leader had promptly and ably waded into the nation's enormous problems (Bourne, p. 134). The structure of the Federal Government was re-organised into three main organs, namely the Supreme Military Council, the National Council of States and the Federal Executive Council. He lost no time in replacing the twelve states governors with new ones. The new governors unlike their predecessors, were not members of the SMC. Muhammed ordered a prompt and energetic enquiry into corruption and inefficiency. He dismissed or retired some 11,000 civil servants and purged the police, the judges and four Vice-Chancellors (Eluwa, et al., p. 291). Gowon's twelve states became nineteen, Muhammed created seven new states which were Niger, Bauchi, Gongola, Benue, Ondo, Bendel and Imo. With regards to chronic congestion and overcrowding of Lagos by February 1976 the decision was taken to remove the Federal capital from Lagos to Abuja, a central site dominated by a huge rock that looked like a sleeping elephant, in a small Hausa emirate ruled by Sulamainu Barau. The government also tackled the problem of congestion at the port, shortage of food, transportation network and petrol distribution. Muhammed took control over universities and primary schools, tightened controls on journalists and broadcasters and reorganised the trade unions. His regime cut back FESTAC, the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, which was to be a global demonstration of African artistic achievements floated on Nigerian oil wealth. In 1975, Mohammed initiated a Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) for a new constitution. On the international affairs, he successfully and impressively promoted foreign policy and championed the African Liberation struggle of Angola. A four-year timetable, leading to a transfer of power to elected civilians on October 1, 1979, was announced. His announcement of plans to cut Nigerians army to

size and the resentments of those who had done well with Gowon and were now sidelined by Muhammed led to a failed coup on 13 February 1976. The plot was led by Lieutenant Colonel Bukar Dimka, unfortunately, however, Muhammed was assassinated. He had been travelling with minimal security, part of his commitment to austerity, when his car was riddled with bullets (Bourne, p. 136). The mourning for Muhammed was national and authentic, his short but vigorous tenure and his untimely demise have made him a populist hero in Nigeria. Today the international airport in Ikeja (Lagos) is named for him, and he appears on the N20 note, one of the most commonly used bills in the country today.

Following the assassination of General Muritala Muhammed, the SMC appointed General Olusegun Obasanjo the second-in-command as well as the Chief of Staff of the Army as the Head of State of Nigeria with this development, Obasanjo became the fourth and last Military Head during this period. He was a southern Yoruba who had also distinguished himself as a field commander during the civil war. In spite of Muhammed's assassination, Obasanjo continued with the transition programme. In fact, the transition between them in terms of goals and methods was so smooth that their tenures are usually considered together as the Mohammed/Obasanjo regime (Falola & Heaton, p. 188). There was a high degree of continuity between the Muhammed and Obasanjo governments, but Obasanjo was responsible for a reorganization of local government which made the local government system all over the country more democratic, purposeful, functional, and effective. He was also responsible for the Land Use Act, 1978, which decreed a kind of nationalization that was subsequently embedded in civilian constitutions. It vested all lands within the states in the military governors to be held in trust 'for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians' (Bourne, p.136). To tackle the yet unresolved corruption, he established the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau and Public Complaints Commission aimed at minimizing vices such as corruption, bribery, and nepotism in Nigerian society. This exercise led to many dismissals and compulsory retirements, confiscation of ill-gotten assets, and specific scandals like the cement over-ordering scandal. He launched the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme to eradicate illiteracy and boost food production respectively in the country. In 1977 Obasanjo hosted FESTAC '77, an international festival of black and African arts and culture designed to showcase the ''traditional'' cultures of Nigeria and facilitate interaction and discussion amongst the greatest leaders and minds of Africa and its diaspora. On the international scene, Obasanjo continued Muhammed's courageous and dynamic policy. He gave impressive support to the liberation effort of Zimbabwe. The CDC initiated by Muhammed in 1975 produced a draft constitution that was voted on by a Constituent Assembly in 1978, ultimately leading to federal and state elections in 1979. After some preparatory activities and a series of elections ending in the presidential election of August 11, 1979, the country returned to civilian government. On October 1, 1979, Obasanjo transferred power to Shagari, marking the end of thirteen years of military rule with the establishment of the Second Republic.

Conclusion

Thus far, we have explored military intervention and administration in Nigeria's political evolution (1966 – 1979). Our study has shown that Nigeria's political landscape witnessed four different military regimes with varying experiences in the period under evaluation. During this period of interregnum, the civilian populace yearned for an opportunity to again exercise their political and civil rights. This was however challenging to come by because, in the view of the present study, it became clear that military intervention in Nigeria's political frame was particularly a result of insurgent tendencies arising from ethnic nationalities as well as secessionist agitation to overthrow the central government. Even though some people seem to have welcomed the idea following the coup of January 1966, it was mainly on the pretext of civilian incompetence, socio-economic underdevelopment, corruption as well as electoral crisis presented by the military for such 'noble' adventure for change. More so, Nigerians desired restoration of order, socioeconomic stability, and a political order that would manage the country toward a better future. Incredulously, the actual motive behind the military engagements in the nation's political affairs, which can be trapped in ethnic rivalry and insurgent reactions, turned out to be different from their vocalized excuses and motivations. This was responsible for the instability and irregularity that featured in the nation's political space for the first two decades of her independent experience with the involvement of

the military. It follows that the military, instead of correcting the unusual disorder, further worsened the situation, since the top echelon of the junta shared the same traits with their civilian counterpart. Hence, the expected change was far from being realized during their period in power, which influenced their democratic transition agenda with the adoption of a new constitution that eventually instituted a second Nigerian republic on October 1, 1979.

However, it must be understood that the vestiges, if not legacies of military intervention and administration between 1966 and 1979 have remained evident in the nation's political culture in the post-1979 era. In essence, ethnicity, nepotism, civil unrest, corruption, and economic woes that characterised the military era have reared a complex of authoritarian rule, human rights violations, and economic mismanagement even in the nation's civilian dispensations. Despite the restoration of democratic governance in October 1979, military patterns in governance were not done away with, which has shaped the enduring nature of civil-military relations in the country (Babatunde, 2015). Even after the democratic triumph of 1999, military legacies have survived and continued to shape not just the nation's political culture but intensified the challenge of national unity, ethnic rivalry, and more recently the destructive rage of insurgency confronting the nation's political stability and socio-economic development. Overall, it is crucial to underscore at this juncture that any attempt to address Nigeria's contemporary political cum economic distortion requires an appreciation of the historical contexts and experiences of the nation's military governance, particularly between 1966 and 1979.

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1 Some of these elite Nigerians include, Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikwe, Rotimi Williams, Ahmad Bello, Anthony Enahoro, Kudirat Abiola, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Aminu Kano and a handful of others.