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Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/586678h6>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 19(1)

ISSN

0041-5715

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Publication Date

1991

DOI

10.5070/F7191016803

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ADJUSTMENT, POLITICAL TRANSITION,
AND THE ORGANIZATION OF
MILITARY POWER IN NIGERIA

by Julius O. Ihonvbere

Now, soldiers are part of national problems, rather than problem solvers. And suddenly soldiers are beginning to realize how their thirst for power could plunge their nations into crisis. . . . In Nigeria, the army authorities are beginning to come to terms with the dangers that the army ironically poses to the nation.¹

If there is any institution to be least respected in Nigeria, it is the Nigerian army. How could one explain a situation where semi-illiterates whose only qualification is their unguarded accessibility to weapons, want to hold the entire country to ransom?²

With the decline in oil revenues, the closure of credit lines, mounting foreign debts and debt service ratios, and inability to manage an internal economic crisis, the Nigerian government, under General Ibrahim Babangida, had no alternative to adopting a structural adjustment program in 1986. The components of the adjustment program have not been different from those prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank for other "debt-distressed" and crisis-ridden African states. It has included policies of desubsidization, deregulation, privatization, retrenchment of workers, and political control of opposition. Nigeria's adjustment program has achieved very little.³ True, a new realism has taken over the society with increasing economic contraction and the gradual rolling back of the state. Yet, at the level of concrete economic achievement, there has been very little to show for the harsh policies imposed on the people.⁴

The failure, or rather the limited achievement of the adjustment program, can be attributed to a range of internal and external factors. The critical point to note, however, is that the adjustment program was grafted on a sea of poverty, alienation, cynicism, and general opposition to the state and its agencies. The regime lacked the required acceptability and credibility to impose such harsh monetary policies. The government had no programs in place to protect vulnerable groups already on the margin of survival. The Nigerian elite remained largely unproductive, corrupt, undisciplined and dependent. The state remained

a tool for capital accumulation and was utilized as such by its custodians. The economy remained structurally and sectorally disarticulated and vulnerable to foreign penetration, manipulation, and domination. Finally, the politics of religion, region, and ethnicity continued to combine with other contradictions to generate and/or accentuate tensions, conflicts, coups and counter-coups, instability, and ineffective implementation of policies.⁵

Recent works on the adjustment program have, therefore, tended to focus on the impact of structural adjustment on the poor and its implication for the political transition program being organized by the military. To be sure, these are very important areas of concern. Yet, beyond these is the way in which the introduction of structural adjustment has contributed to the reorganization of political power in Nigeria. This reorganization is taking place at various levels—within and between classes. Adjustment has led to the resurgence of popular struggles against exploitation; it has united popular forces and their organizations; it has encouraged the emergence of scores of civil liberty organizations and rejuvenated the struggle for democracy, human rights, accountability, and participation in the running of the country. Also, the adjustment program has promoted the crystallization of class positions and interests and facilitated the resolution of some contradictions within the ranks of social classes. While sharpening the edges of class contradictions in the country, the adjustment program has benefitted the military the most.

The focus of this paper is on the latter group; namely, the military. Our interest is to see the way in which the military regime has capitalized on the structural adjustment program to strengthen its control over the political process, contained and domesticated the civilian factions of the bourgeoisie, imposed its "hegemony" over the pattern of political and economic reproduction and actually laid the foundation for the continuation of military rule beyond the on-going transition program scheduled to culminate in the handover of power to elected civilians in 1992. The discussion is divided into three parts. First, we shall establish the place of the military in Nigerian politics. Next, we shall examine specific policies which have been put in place in order to facilitate not just the recomposition of military hegemony, but also its continued domination of Nigerian politics. Finally, we shall make projections beyond the on-going transition program in Nigeria.

The Military and Politics in Nigeria

The reasons for military intervention in politics have been examined elsewhere.⁶ Suffice it to point out here that explanations provided in the Janowitzian, Huntingtonian, and other modernization

perspectives do not really capture the *fundamental* reasons for military intervention in politics in underdeveloped formations. The military is viewed as divorced from politics, the class struggle, and the modes and relations of production and exchange in the process of which it is instituted as an ideal entity. The performance of the military in Africa and in the majority of Third World countries shows very clearly that in several respects, they have not been different from civilian administrations. True, the hierarchical nature of military regimes, as well as the command character of operations, enables the army in power to take some critical decisions faster than civilian administrations. Yet, in virtually all cases, the military has been plagued by factionalism, mismanagement, corruption, intra-organizational conflicts, ethnic, religious and regional pressures, and other constraints arising from the situation of structural disarticulation and underdevelopment of the respective social formations. This has been the Nigerian experience as well.

The first military intervention in politics was in January 1966. The coup was led by Major Chukwuma Kadun Nzeogwu to stem the steady march to anarchy as well as the visible breakdown of law and order.⁷ For logistical reasons, the plotters were outmaneuvered from power by Major-General J. T. U. Aguyi-Ironsi who was unable to hold on to the reins of power. He made serious political mistakes, was susceptible to ethnic manipulations and lacked the credibility and strength required to unite a highly factional country.⁸ In July, Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon emerged as a "compromise" military candidate sponsored by Northern factions of the Nigerian bourgeoisie. This in itself generated opposition to his rule, especially from the Eastern region. His attempts to take critical steps to resolve deep political tensions, negative coalitions and conflicts failed as the country became engulfed in a bitter civil war in 1967 which lasted until January 1970.⁹ The end of the civil war was followed by a period of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and redefining of political interests and powers. A nine-point political program that was to culminate in the handing over of power to a civilian government in 1976 was announced in 1970. Four years later, Gowon reneged on this promise on the grounds that the politicians of the first republic had learnt nothing from the experiences of the past. This singular act led to his overthrow in a counter coup masterminded by Brigadier Murtala Muhammed in 1975.¹⁰ Nigeria witnessed renewed efforts to restore a fast-decaying society and economy. Murtala Muhammed was himself assassinated in an attempted coup d'etat in February 1976, but this did not lead to the fall of the regime. Major-General Olusegun Obasanjo took over the mantle of leadership and steered the country on a very trying and unsteady

course to the hand over of power to a civilian administration in October 1979.¹¹

The civilian administration was plagued with political intolerance, election malpractices, massive corruption, general mismanagement, the neglect of the basic needs of the majority, violence, the erosion of the autonomy of the judiciary, and general economic decay and dislocation. Inflation, prostitution, unemployment, hunger, and destitution reached unparalleled levels as politicians revelled in squander and opulence.¹² This was enough excuse for the military to strike again on New Year's Eve of 1983.¹³ Thus, the first attempt at redemocratization after 13 years of military rule was unceremoniously terminated by the military, which had arrogated to itself the right to determine which government was good and which was not. The Major-Generals Buhari/Idiagabon regime which succeeded the Alhaji Shehu Shagari administration in January 1984 was itself overthrown in a counter-coup in August 1985. This coup brought General Ibrahim Babangida to power. There have been at least two known attempts in 1987 and in 1990 to overthrow the Babangida regime, for many reasons, but mostly for the implementation of an orthodox structural adjustment program.¹⁴

Certain broad statements can be made on this brief and sketchy outline of military involvement in Nigerian politics. First, the military has always intervened in politics at the height of social, political, and economic crises and discontent in the country. This way, it was always easy, given the military's control over the weapons of coercion, to virtually "hijack" the struggles of popular forces. The Nzeogwu coup in 1966, the Gowon coup in 1966, Murtala's in 1975, that of Buhari/Idiagbon in 1983, and, finally, Babangida's in 1985 all took place at a time of intense inter- and intra-class struggles and contradiction as well as general disillusionment with and opposition to the state and its various agencies.

Secondly, the military has arrogated to itself the right to determine which government or set of politicians may be allowed to remain in power or be overthrown once it is perceived as not meeting standards set by certain interests within the military.

Third, the military has hardly allowed the civilians to work out their differences, contradictions, and coalitions in the usual patterns of liberal democratic politicking. Hence once things get out of hand and there are debates and struggles, even the breakdown of law and order, directed towards recomposing and redefining differences, the military has seen this as an opportune moment to intervene and dismiss the politicians from power.

A fourth point is that the military, while presenting itself as defender of popular interests, has moved to entrench its interests in

society, militarized the process of politics and political relations, and created a pattern in which incoming civilian governments spend their first years in wearing off influences, relations, expectations, contradictions, and structures introduced into society and politics by the military.

Fifth, in terms of performance, it is difficult to say, with any certainty, that the military has fared any better than the civilians. Yet, in the country's 32-year post-colonial history since 1960, the military has held power for 23 years. It was also in control of governmental power during the oil boom. It certainly has taken very critical decisions—strengthened the Federal government, created more states, established a new federal capital at Abuja, carried out local government reforms, promulgated a land use decree, and introduced indigenization decrees to expand the participation of local elites in the economy. However, its style of politics and reliance on repression, depoliticization, and control of social and political relations have suffocated civil society and driven political contradictions and pressures underground. Yet, in spite of its achievements, it also squandered the country's oil wealth, neglected agriculture, promoted an import dependency syndrome, and encouraged more corruption because it could not be probed.

Finally, the military has established a pattern of controlling political power and using it as a mechanism to promote accumulation within its ranks and factions of the bourgeoisie. Today, there is almost general agreement, at least among non-bourgeois forces in the country, that "the twenty-three years of the military have been years of nightmare to Nigerians. . . . On the whole, it appears the Nigerian soldier is a better fighter than a politician."¹⁵ In the next section, we shall examine how the military has tried to use its control of state power to reorganize political power.

The Military and The Reorganization of Power

More than any other regime in Nigeria's history, the Babangida regime has done more to entrench the interests of the military in society and put the military faction of the bourgeoisie as the dominant faction in the country. The justification for this comes from a recognition of constraints arising from the undisciplined, highly factional nature of the bourgeoisie.¹⁶ It has, through its divisions and mismanagement, almost lost control of the state to popular forces several times, and has had to be "rescued" by the military—a typical case of intervention for restoration rather than intervention for revolution.¹⁷ Thus, upon coming to power, Ibrahim Babangida took some fundamental steps to strengthen the power of the military: 1) the containment of the bourgeoisie; 2) the incorporation and domestication of the radical left; 3)

the reorganization of military power to strengthen the position of the President; 4) the control of the media; 5) the creation of certain institutions aimed at reorganizing military interests and politics in order to ensure control within the armed forces; and 6) the organization of the transition to civilian rule in such a way as to leave no doubts that it was being done at the pleasure of the military. Let us now discuss these issues briefly.

The Buhari/Idiagbon regime had thrown hundreds of politicians and businessmen into jail for various acts of corruption. In addition, it commenced the execution by firing squad of persons found guilty of involvement in drug pushing and economic sabotage. The Babangida regime released these politicians from prison and terminated the public execution of convicted drug pushers. It set about establishing several avenues to enable members of the bourgeois class to accumulate as much as possible. One way this was done was to give an indirect sanction to corruption by condoning the increasing corruption among military officers, traditional rulers, businessmen, and politicians.¹⁸ This was one activity in which the bourgeoisie has proved itself adept—accumulation through corruption as against investment in production.¹⁹ The bourgeoisie has over the years come to see itself as dependent on the military for rapid primitive accumulation at a level not subject to post-military probe. With the introduction of the structural adjustment program in 1986, the majority of the Nigerian bourgeoisie did not try to put up with the policies of devaluation, desubsidization, liberalization and other monetary policies which obviously favored foreign investors instead of local producers. The virtual elimination of the gains of indigenization and the introduction of a new package of industrial incentives served further to convince the bourgeoisie that it was wiser and more lucrative to shift their operations into the drug business, currency trafficking, direct looting of the public treasury, and politics. The point, however, is that the Nigerian state under the military, but more particularly since Babangida assumed power, made it quite clear that the bourgeoisie could rely on it for accumulation and survival. There has now emerged a fraction of the bourgeoisie which is advocating permanent military rule or at best a diarchy (a joint sharing of power by the military and civilians), believing that their fortunes can only be guaranteed and their mostly ill-gotten wealth better protected under a regime that operates above normal legal prescriptions.

Having taken care of the bourgeoisie, the regime moved against the radical left. Its policy in this area was three-pronged: incorporation, harassment and intimidation, and depriving them of effective organizational base for political action. It thus gradually, but systematically, attracted several noted leftist scholars and social critics into its fold to assist with the strategy of implementing structural

adjustment and depoliticizing popular forces and their organizations. The direct involvement in the administration of G. G. Darah, Beko Ransom-Kuti, Ikenna Nzimiro, Tunji Olagunju, Ada Ugah, Eme Ekekwe, Chidi Amuta, Jonathan Zwinigina, Adiele Knadu, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Wole Soyinka, Tai Solarin, Alaba Ogunsanwo, and others, has served to divide the left as well as the ranks of leftist supporters—workers and students. Of course, several other leftists have been involved as researchers, consultants, and advisers to the scores of panels, commissions, directorates, and boards set up by the regime to keep "radicals" and intellectuals busy.²⁰

The second tactic was to harass and intimidate those it could not incorporate. The State Security Service (SSS) has had a field day in arresting and detaining scholars on the flimsiest of grounds, including the content of their class lectures. Festus Iyayi, Itse Sagay, and Alofje Unuigboje were dismissed from their university jobs for opposing government interference in university affairs and eroding academic freedom. Decrees were passed and applied retroactively in order to give legality to illegal acts. Bala Usman was dismissed from his job at Ahmadu Bello University for "participating in politics." Toye Olorode, Idowu Awopetu, and Obaro Ikime were detained for over 90 days, and then retired from their jobs because they were identified as belonging to the radical school opposed to the adjustment program. It was expected that such acts of intimidation, outright dismissal, harassment, even elimination would force other radicals into silence. The strategy worked to an extent, but it was made more effective with the hardship imposed by the adjustment program which made life more difficult for non-bourgeois forces as well as for those with fixed incomes.

Finally, when the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) opposed the government's economic and political policies, the military regime first excised it from the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) on the grounds that it was a senior staff organization, and followed this up later with outright proscription of the union in July 1987. When this ban was lifted at the end of 1990, the ASUU was restructured in such a way that it was to operate more or less like a government agency.

The Labour Congress itself was dealt severe blows to bring it into line with the larger objectives of the regime. The grand opportunity for this came in 1986 when, following the killing of several students at the Ahmadu Bello University, the Congress tried to organize a nationwide peaceful march in support of the students; the government deployed military hardware at its headquarters, sealed it up, declared the march illegal, and left the workers in no doubt as to its preparedness to use maximum force to prevent the show of solidarity. In December 1987, when the Congress announced its plans to oppose the government's withdrawal of the petroleum subsidy, all its leaders were

arrested and detained. The government threatened to charge the leaders with sedition, sabotage, and subversion. This was followed by the dissolution of the leadership of the Congress at the national and state levels, the appointment of a sole administrator and the creation of a "new" Labour Congress that was to support the policies of the government. Leaders of the National Union of Electricity and Gas Workers, who led a nation-wide strike action in 1988, were jailed for life by the government for "sabotage." They were only pardoned in 1990 following pleas from several interest groups inside and outside the country. With inflation, the unavailability of research funds, increasing disinterest in militant activities as a result of the struggle for survival, and the general intimidation of the non-bourgeois forces, the Babangida regime felt that it had taken care of those radical elements who had not been directly incorporated into its power structure.²¹

The regime made it clear that radical positions and debates were not going to be tolerated in the universities or outside of it. Hence part of its educational restructuring programs, which also include drawing a \$120 million loan from the World Bank and the rationalization of courses and programs in the universities with particular attention to courses in the social sciences and humanities which are seen as being responsible for student radicalism in the country. Moreover, when it put in place its structural adjustment program, it made it clear that there was no alternative to the program and that it would not entertain any debates in the direction of alternatives. To make good on this position, members of the SSS arrested and detained those who, on 17 June 1989, tried to hold a privately sponsored conference on alternatives to structural adjustment on the premises of Nigeria's prominent human rights lawyer and activist, Chief Gani Fawehinmi. However, it is interesting to note that just three months after the incident, the First Bank of Nigeria (formerly Standard Bank) organized a similar conference which was obviously designed to support the government's position, and to which the four main speakers were government officials, and that it received the blessings of the regime.

This intolerance of opposition and criticism has encouraged the wide-spread reliance on detention without trial, harassment, bribery, and intimidation as political tactics to control opposition. To all forces of opposition, irrespective of vocation and status, the government made it clear that their freedom and liberty were at the pleasure of the regime and its security service, the SSS. As Ambassador Tanko Yusuf noted towards the end of 1990, "What is happening here [in Nigeria] is similar to the situation in South Africa. I am ashamed of this country. . .the SSS should be called to order. . .they should stop terrorizing people."²²

The Babangida regime is the one military government where the president is not challengeable by any other interest or power in the

country. Babangida began his reign by changing the title of his position from Head of State to President Commander-in-Chief. Hence, on coming to power, he indicated "his willingness to have all powers concentrated around him."²³ Next he set up a super bureaucracy—the Presidency in which all power resides and from which all policies emanate. He passed Decree No. 17 of 27 August 1985, which empowered him as president to single-handedly appoint the Chief-of-General-Staff, Chairman, Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff, Service Chiefs, and the Inspector-General of Police. He abolished the Supreme Military Council (SMC), which had been the most powerful political institution before his regime, and replaced it with the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). It was the power conferred on him by Decree No. 17 that enabled him to fire Navy Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe as Chief-of-General-Staff in October 1986. He went ahead to invest considerable powers in himself through Decree No. 22 of 1985—The National Economic Emergency Powers Decree—which empowered him to take any measure which, in his singular opinion, was in the best interest of the Nigerian economy and the nation as a whole. Such decisions need not be referred to the AFRC. Though originally decreed to last for fifteen months, the Economic Emergency Decree's life span was increased through Decree No. 35 of 1988. It was after this extension and the unprecedented exercise of power that Nigerians began "to see another side of the President."²⁴

Initially, Babangida had forged strong relations with officers from Plateau state, the so-called Lantang Mafia. This was necessary given their predominance in the middle and officer ranks. Having used them to consolidate his rule, he moved systematically to eliminate them from power, including the removal of Major-General Domkat Bali in January 1989. As Seye Kehinde correctly puts it, Babangida virtually edged out "all those that could be said to be members of the inner circle."²⁵ He then set up a Presidential Advisory Council (PAC), a sort of faceless kitchen cabinet made up of an admixture of right and left wing scholars. Following this, Babangida "re-organized military formations early enough in such a way that strategic commands and positions were manned by his loyalists." This has of course not prevented him from removing such "loyalists" from power rather unceremoniously and without notice.

It is also this regime, more than any other in Nigeria's political history, that has changed its cabinet the most. Some states like Benue and Rivers have had four military governors in five years, and the Federal Cabinet has been reshuffled about six times since 1985. The first of the numerous reshuffles took place in just six months of power on January 24, 1986. Six months later there was another reshuffle at the state level. This was followed by yet another reshuffle at the Federal

level on 18 September 1986. This has become a steady pattern leading to waste, inconsistencies, lack of policy continuity, insecurity in office, and promotion of corruption as each new appointee tried to make the very best of the new position. This is also extended to university councils, boards of parastatals, and other commissions at the Federal and state levels. The President then moved to let serving military officers know that he would show no sympathy to any attempt to overthrow his administration. Hence, in March 1986, he executed ten military officers, including his long-time friend, Major-General Mamman Vatsa, for plotting to overthrow him. In July 1990, he executed 69 officers, mostly from the Middle Belt and the South, for an attempted coup. These executions took place in spite of pleas from human rights organizations, academics, and international bodies: Babangida wanted to demonstrate his ruthlessness as an example to other potential plotters.²⁶

As a way of further exercising his new and unprecedented powers, on February 6, 1989, Babangida dissolved the Armed Forces Ruling Council without debate and without explanations. It took him a week to single-handedly reconstitute the body with each member holding a letter of appointment from the President himself as against the previous practice where military rank and posting automatically qualified most of the members.²⁷ Finally, as if to demonstrate to the nation that he could do whatever he wished with his powers, Babangida promoted two ex-military officers to the rank of full generals of the Armed Forces. The promotion of retired Lt. General Domkat Bali and retired Vice-Admiral Augustus Aikhomu was made "without explanations."²⁸

This concentration and sometimes arbitrary use of power was one of the issues highlighted by Domkat Bali when he resigned from the administration claiming that Babangida had become a dictator. By the end of 1990, Babangida was Chairman of AFRC, Police Service Commission, Council of States, Council of Ministers and the State Security Services, Budget Affairs, the Central Bank, National Security Council, and some of the national directorates all reported directly to him.²⁹ Until the appointment of General Sanni Abach as Minister for Defence in 1990, Babangida combined the office with his other portfolios.

The main implication of these developments is that Babangida has increased the premium on the presidency to unprecedented levels. With powers unparalleled in the history of the country, he is able to determine the direction of politics and accumulation. More importantly, the next civilian administration is bound to spend a longer time in redefining the division of power between the presidency and states, as well as in redetermining the limits of presidential powers in a democratic environment. The contradictions and disagreements that will inevitably

arise from such a battle might just be the excuse required by a faction of the army to terminate the Third Republic. As a Nigerian magazine has argued in one of its editorials, "The alarming regularity with which pressure groups are proscribed in Nigeria raises critical questions as to the superficiality of our polity and our ability to eventually evolve a consensus as a nation," the regime seeming to have "favored proscriptions as a technique of crisis management. In this way, we have unwittingly not permitted the system to develop in-built devices to absorb, process and manage stress; and absorb, therefore, useful lessons for the future."³⁰ The Babangida regime has not tried to build any consensus as it has relied on sinecure appointments, intimidation, bribery, and other repressive methods to maintain "control" over society and politics. This is bound to jeopardize the transition to the Third Republic and provide a fertile ground for the return of the military.

To strengthen the corporate interests of the military and distinguish it from society at large the Babangida regime has taken several major steps—some novel, others mere extensions of previously existing policies. These steps include: 1) the increase in the number of military officers sent to the universities to study an array of subjects, with particular emphasis on the social sciences; 2) the establishment of a military university to produce qualified manpower, ostensibly to reduce reliance on civilian administrators; 3) the strengthening of the Command and Staff College, Jaji, into a special and elitist institution for research and interaction for military officers; 4) the elevation of the Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, which was established in 1977, to a status almost resembling a cult (attendance at the Institute has almost become a requirement to certain political appointments and it has become a place to forge linkages between military officers and civilians); 5) the creation of the Armed Forces Consultative Assembly (AFCA) as a forum for the President to meet with and mediate possible tensions between middle-ranking officers and the custodians of state power; 6) the creation of scores of panels, boards, and commissions to give top civilians, retired military officers, and military personnel a route to the "national cake."³¹ Through the creation of these and other institutions, not only has the military strengthened itself—acquiring more education and gaining some independence from bureaucrats and intellectuals—but it has also established structures that are bound to enhance its corporate interests in the future. More interesting is the way in which it has used the panels and directorates to incorporate intellectuals and social critics of radical and liberal persuasions alike, as these individuals now struggle to win appointments to these bodies.

More than ever before, the military has become the fastest route to "risk-free" accumulation. In spite of booming corruption and

scandals of financial impropriety surrounding several military governors, ministers, the vice-president and the president himself, the politicians have been at their best in convincing the regime that they are not interested in probing it after it leaves office in October 1992. This is one legacy which has been expensive to put in place and maintain, and which the incoming civilians are going to have to deal with—what with the array of intellectuals, military officers, politicians and others who had come to rely on sinecure appointments, generous financial allocations, condonement of misappropriation and other financial malpractices, and a general capacity to abuse office and power, all in the name of working for the President.

The Nigerian media is undoubtedly one of the freest in Africa, in fact in the world. True, it has its own problems and constraints, but its ability for objectivity, trenchant and unrepentant criticism as well as unabashed exposure of misdeeds in high places is extremely high irrespective of the regime.³² For taking this posture, journalists, editors, and newspaper proprietors have suffered a great deal. The state has responded to the attitude of the media in four major ways: 1) countering private ownership with public ownership of newspapers; 2) carrying out some press censorship; 3) proscribing newspapers and magazines, detaining editors and journalists, and harassing the media in general; and 4) bribing through gifts, and through incorporating and developing some sort of personal relationships with prominent and influential journalists. There is no space to explain all of these in this paper. Let it suffice to note that these strategies reached their highest levels of sophistication under the Babangida regime.³³

Having come to power with the banner of human rights, Babangida received mass support from all sectors of society. He abrogated Decree No. 4, which had been promulgated by the Buhari/Idiagbon regime to protect public officers and control the media. He then released the two journalists, Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor of *The Gurdian*, journalists who were jailed under the decree. This was followed by some propaganda, discrediting the National Security Organization (NSO) which it reorganized into the State Security Service (SSS) while throwing open to public view the numerous detention centers of the organization. All detainees, including the hundreds of corrupt politicians detained by the ousted regime, were released by Babangida in the name of human rights. He followed this up by granting an interview to the *Nigerian Tribune*, an Ibadan-based opposition newspaper which had never been on the side of any federal government in the country. Soon, the media, caught in the wave of these unprecedented moves, started referring to the President fondly as "IBB," an acronym for Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. He was being referred to as "a military democrat," which was followed by his being

called "Maradona" for his unpredictable political moves. The President even appointed Prince Tony Momoh, one of Nigeria's leading journalists, as his Minister for Information, and Chief Duro Onabule, another leading journalist, as his Press Secretary. This process was followed by his calling journalists by their first names, buying and presenting them gifts on their birthdays, and engaging in chit-chats over personal issues with them.

This strategy was so successful that when he moved against the media, many journalists hardly saw it coming. First, when *Newswatch* published portions of the report of the Political Bureau, which had been set up to look into the country's political future, it was proscribed for six months in April 1987. This was done as a way of teaching a lesson to other media houses that if the government could move against such a major and reputable media organization, there was need not to disobey its orders. Second, his Minister for Information got the government to pass a Press Council Decree No. 59 of 1988, which virtually empowered the state to determine the content and context of the practice of journalism with heavy government control and power to security forces to break into media houses to retrieve information.³⁴

In November 1985, the founding Editor-in-Chief of *Newswatch*, Dele Giwa, was murdered in a parcel bomb explosion, the first such incident in the country. Accusations were made against the government, and a Lagos-based lawyer, Gani Famehinmi, actually took the case to court, accusing the government of involvement in the murder. The military regime, by constantly interfering in the case, ensured that Chief Fawehinmi never succeeded in prosecuting the accused security chiefs. In the six years of Babangida's rule, he has detained more journalists, closed more newspaper houses, and proscribed more newspapers and magazines than have all the regimes and administrations before him since political independence. Not even cartoonists were spared detention for attempting to send political messages through their comics in the newspapers. To make it easier for journalists and other opposition elements to be detained, the regime, which had promised not to use the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree No. 2 of 1984, arbitrarily reneged on that promise. Under the Buhari/Idiagbon regime, the decree was used to detain persons considered, in the opinion of the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters (later Chief of General Staff under Babangida, and now abolished completely for a civilian vice-presidential position), to be threats to state security, to cause or to have caused "economic adversity" for an indefinite period, though this must be renewed every three months. The Babangida regime increased the period of detention without trial to six months. Also, other than the Chief of General Staff, the Inspector General of Police and the Minister of Internal Affairs were given the

power to utilize the decree in the detention of persons they considered threats to national security.

Again, there is no gainsaying the fact that the ruthless use of these decrees and control mechanisms have served to intimidate the populace, forced scores of journalists and scholars out of the country, and contributed to driving opposition underground. The implications of such repressed opposition for the future can at best be imagined. That flagrant detention of journalists, students, social critics, and scholars has created an atmosphere of fear and open support for the military by those not directly benefitting from it is usually a facade to hide the reality of hatred and contempt for the regime. As Wale Akin Aina has argued, when Babangida came to power, he "promised to respect human rights and freedom of speech. Today, more than any other thing, accusations of human rights violation have occupied the center. *In no other time have human rights organizations sprouted as now.*"³⁵

The final point we wish to briefly discuss is the way in which the Babangida regime has used the transition program to strengthen the role of the military in the determination of the character of politics, in particular the place of the military in the determination of political specificities and the power balances between civilian society and the military in the country. One feature of the regime has been to always give an initial impression of a desire to take a policy based on public debates and popular wishes. In all cases where this has been tried—political debate, foreign policy conference, housing debate, IMF loan debate, constituent assembly, and so on—the regime never made serious use of recommendations given to it. Thus, such public debates and the creation of hundreds of panels at the Federal and State levels were either mere diversions or attempts to elicit public acceptance to positions already decided by the President himself.

Towards the transition to civilian rule in 1992, the regime started with a Political Bureau inaugurated on January 13, 1986. The recommendations of the Bureau, submitted in March 1987, were doctored by a committee of the Armed Forces Ruling Council headed by Major General Paul Omu. A White Paper based on the report of the Omu committee was released in July 1987, showing a general rejection of the most critical recommendations based on nation-wide debates, conferences, and interviews. The regime then created a Constitution Review Committee in September 1987 to look into the 1979 constitution. This was followed by the Constituent Assembly, which was to look into the recommendations of the Constitution Review Committee. The report of the Assembly was practically thrown overboard after costing the country millions of naira. Since then, it has been the creation of one body after another in the name of transition to civilian rule. At the same time the government decided to take the place

of "moneybags" in the political process, since it had analyzed the major political problem of the country to be the negative role of the wealthy in influencing and controlling political parties. Following this, it undertook to build party offices at the federal, state, and local levels. It went further than just that. After encouraging politicians to form political associations that would eventually be registered as political parties, the government rejected the list of associations submitted to it by the NEC. It went ahead to create its own two parties—The Social Democratic Party (SDP), "a little to the left," and The National Republican Convention (NRC), "a little to the right," provided their emblems, appointed administrative secretaries for the two government parties, paid for all delegates to the national conventions of both parties, gave them start-up funds, and set the parameters for debates and politicking.³⁶ Prior to this the government had banned former politicians from the political processes, radicals had been labelled "extremists" and barred from the political process, and a so-called "new breed" of politicians were to be encouraged to take over the leadership of the transition program. The government then set about infusing billions of naira into the system in the name of taking the place of the rich in the political process. This strategy has generated more tensions than was expected by the military. It eroded the credibility of the program, promoted a culture of waste and corruption as billions of naira is poured into the transition program, leading Nigerians to reach the conclusion that Babangida's transition program "may clinch the prize for the costliest exercise in restoration of democracy ever undertaken anywhere in the world."³⁷

All politicians and political aspirants came to live in fear as the government announced new policies every week, made changes to the transition program without explanations, removed officials from office and made new appointments at such a rapid rate that it was difficult to keep track of who was in charge of what at particular times. This unpredictability as to what the next move of government, in fact the President, was likely to be—the banning of experienced politicians, belief in the so-called "new breed of politicians," the excessive infusion of public funds into the political process, the inability to control the role of millionaires and retired military officers, and the excessive concentration of powers in the hands of the President—convinced many that Babangida as a person as well as a political leader had other hidden agenda. This bred a culture of cynicism about the future of Nigerian politics and fears about the sincerity of the military as far as the transition program was concerned. Based on the issues highlighted above, Air Iyare, one of Nigeria's leading social critics, was emphatic about the point that "should the politicians make the mistake of taking power in 1992, within two years, the military boys will be back."³⁸

This pervasive feeling of cynicism and distrust about the plans of the military was not helped when in an address to the Armed Forces Consultative Assembly (AFCA) on June 5, 1989 (after the May 1989 nation-wide anti-structural adjustment riots), the President tried to incite the army against the civilian populace:

It is my duty to bring to your attention. . .that the Nigerian military today faces a crucial and potential destructive challenge. . . . We, privates and generals alike, are depicted as the privileged ruling class who are immune to the sufferings of the rest of society. . . . Today unlike any other time in the political history of our country, individual soldiers and their properties were made targets of attacks by vandals, supposedly protesting against the policies of government.³⁹

Such an argument was made to divorce the military from government and to create the impression that all ranks within the armed forces had similar problems, faced similar challenges, and should, therefore, fight together against a common enemy—the civilians.

In his 1991 budget speech, Babangida announced, to the surprise of all Nigerians, that political parties were no longer going to be funded.⁴⁰ Though it was Babangida's position that the so-called political parties could now stand on their own and generate their own funds, it can also be seen as an attempt to return the parties to the money bags, sow the seeds for unbridled corruption in the post-military era, and thus create the possibility for another coup d'etat. Until now, the political process, in spite of the banning of and campaigns against radicals, had been under the full control of retired politicians, millionaires, retired military generals, and other businesspersons with very dubious sources of wealth. With the new policy, and in spite of Decree No. 27 of 1989 which regulates individual contributions to political parties, it is very clear that nothing had changed; the moneybags would now openly take over the transition program, invest millions of naira and recoup these after the final elections. As the *Newbreed* magazine put it, "what is actually on the ground is politics of millionaires and multi-millionaires who buy votes, who would buy the party and political offices."⁴¹

Olubanjo's assessment was made well before the funding of political parties was withdrawn by the military government. It is therefore easy to imagine what the situation would be with the withdrawal. As was the case in the previous republics, the pattern of politics following military withdrawal will divert public funds away from development programs, deepen alienation and opposition to the state, generate conflicts as the premium on political power increases,

and create the sort of conditions which have traditionally led to the fall of civilian governments in the country. Yet, the two attempted coups of 1987 and 1990 (the Vatsa and Orka coups respectively) showed very clearly that not all military officers support the transition program and that the military remains a major obstacle to the redemocratization process in Nigeria. All the politicians remain insecure as to what step the military might take next, especially if the transition to civil rule will take place in 1992 as promised by the regime. Given its unpredictability and efforts to reduce all institutions and structures of society to appendages of military power and its efforts to domesticate all social forces, this is not the last we may expect to hear of the military.

The situation is that today, the military is the only institution that is responsible to no one and to no organization, one in which all political and economic powers are concentrated, whose decrees and edicts are not challengeable in a court of law, and which determines the content and direction of the law itself to suit its interests and political agenda. Through a combination of programs of incorporation, intimidation, detention, harassment, manipulation, bribery, sinecure appointments, diversions and impoverishment (through the adjustment program with no protection for popular groups), the Babangida regime is today the lone actor on Nigeria's political stage.

Conclusion

In his address at the Command and Staff College at Jaji on June 29, 1990, President Babangida told the graduating officers that the Major Gideon Orka-led coup attempt of April 1990 "provided a dress rehearsal of the potential problems which your generation and the social environment which you have cultivated within the barracks pose to the future development of the military and the nation," further noting that "the event of April brought home to us the fact that the internal mechanism of institutional coherence and survival in the armed forces appeared to have dramatically failed."⁴² In a similar vein, in his address to the Alumni Association of Oxford and Cambridge Universities in Lagos in May 1990, General Yakubu Gowon, who was himself overthrown in a coup in 1975, noted that the "esprit de corps and loyalty, two attributes without which no armed forces can survive, have become severely threatened."⁴³ Both Babangida and Gowon blamed the lack of professionalism, over-exposure of the military to politics, and the lack of patriotism as some of the reasons for the breakdown of discipline in the armed forces.

What Babangida, particularly, failed to address were the implications of condoning corruption and mismanagement, the visible rehabilitation of retired and discredited politicians and military officers,

the use of the army as a bastion for capital accumulation, the total lack of control and order within the armed forces as the regime struggles to superimpose military interests over all other interests in society and the general unpreparedness to subordinate military power to civil authority. Babangida himself, in an attempt to justify military intervention in politics as well as demonstrate the moral and political superiority of the military, had on June 5, 1989 declared, in his address to the Armed Forces Consultative Assembly, that "the military remains the bastion upon which the survival of the Nigerian polity rests," warning further, in a tone that incites the military against civilians, that "If we allow the military as an institution to be ruined or humiliated, then the consequences for Nigeria would, indeed, be very grave."⁴⁴

The implications for the future are enormous. First, the legacy of the concentration of power in the hands of the president would be very tough for the civilians to deal with. Second, the current tendency to condone, in fact encourage, corruption will certainly be carried over to the Third Republic, with very serious consequences in terms of stability, accountability, and political competition. Third, not all military officers believe in or accept the transition to civil rule. Those who have served want to remain or return to power to continue to accumulate, and those who have had no access to power or were close to assuming power want to have the opportunity to do so. The military has become the fastest, and perhaps the easiest, route to wealth in the country. Fourth, by suppressing some opposition groups and incorporating others, the Third Republic will be faced with a massive resurgence of those it has excluded in one form or another. Inability to effectively contain such forces will contribute significantly to political instability. Fifth, the military under Babangida has not resolved problems of region, religion, ethnicity, and power. If anything, it has accentuated these problems with the skewed composition of his political appointments, the secret enrollment of the country into the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986 which led to several religious riots, and the consolidation of chauvinism in the various states. Sixth, part of Babangida's transition program has almost nothing to do with subordinating the military to civilian authority. Rather it is aimed at convincing the populace that the military will be watching the performance of civilians with their fingers at the trigger and will not hesitate to take action against any civilian administration that deviates from its standards. As *The Probe* magazine asks, "What is the guarantee that junior and middle-cadre officers, who are currently engaged in full-blown military chores, would not make a sudden appearance on the political theatre of the Third Republic?"⁴⁵ Based on conditions in Nigeria today, the answer to this question, unfortunately, is that there are no guarantees. Seventh, while the military has

strengthened itself against other social interests, including the establishment of the AFCA, the recomposition of the AFRC, the restructuring of military command positions and the unquestionable authority of the presidency, it has tried to weaken other groups. This would be impossible to maintain under a civilian government. Finally, the introduction of an orthodox structural adjustment program which has proletarianized the middle classes, led to the retrenchment of hundreds of thousands of workers, made life difficult for the poor with desubsidization, frozen employment, imposed new fees, tools, and levies, and the general inability of local business interests to compete with foreign firms which benefit from the new incentives and enjoy the advantage of foreign exchange against the massively devalued naira, all pose a fundamental challenge to post-military politics in Nigeria. The country's foreign debt profile has increased substantially with foreign debts reaching \$35 billion at the end of 1990. This will pose a major problem to the politicians of the Third Republic. As G. G. Darah has argued, "the Third Republic will have to meander through a rough, gloomy financial storm to survive. . . . The government of the Third Republic will be a debtor government to start with, and a debtor government cannot have a strong mouth to talk."⁴⁶

Right now the economic crisis and the orthodox adjustment program adopted since 1986 as a policy response to that crisis have led to unbridled corruption, waste, prostitution, cynicism, disillusionment, tensions between and within classes, delegitimization of the state and its agencies, drug-pushing, and other extra-legal activities. These hold serious implications for the survival of the Third Republic, but also hold possibilities for another military intervention in the near future after 1992.

NOTES

¹"Nigeria: Taming the Army," *African Concord* (16 July 1990), p. 26.

²Ademola Ajagbe, "Orka's Coup: The People's Verdict," *African Concord* (28 May 1990), p. 24.

³See Sam Aluko, "The Burden of Economic Structural Adjustment: The Nigerian Scenario" (Ile-Ife: Convocation Ceremony Lecture, University of Ife, 1987) and Adeotun Phillips, *Economic Impact of Nigeria's Structural Adjustment Programme* (Ibadan: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1990).

⁴See Julius O. Ihonvbere, "Economic Crisis, Structural Adjustment, and Social Crisis in Nigeria." (forthcoming).

⁵See Sam Aluko, Op. Cit.; Seyi Olu Awofeso, "Nigeria: Decades of Nightmare," *African Concord*, 8 October 1990; Demola Abimboye, "And the SAP Song is Sad," *African Concord*, 3 September 1990; and Julius O. Ihonvbere and Eme Ekekeke, "Dependent Capitalism, Structural Adjustment, and Democratic Possibilities in Nigeria's Third Republic," *Afrika Spectrum*, 3, 1988.

⁶See Toyin Falola and Julius O. Ihonvbere, *The Rise and Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-84* (London: Zed Press, 1985).

⁷See Adewale Adegboyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers Nigeria, 1981). For a counter- and controversial view see D. J. M. Muffet, *Let the Truth be Told: The Coups d'Etat of 1966* (Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1982).

⁸See Billy Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1973).

⁹John S. Strelau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

¹⁰See James Ojiako, *Thirteen Years of Military Rule, 1966-79* (Lagos: Daily Times, 1979).

¹¹*Loc. Cit.*

¹²See Toyin Falola and Julius O. Ihonvbere, *Op. Cit.* and Ladipo Adamolekun, *The Fall of the Second Republic* (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1985).

¹³See Julius O. Ihonvbere, *The 1983 Elections and the Buhari Coup in Nigeria: Contradictions in a (semi-) Peripheral Political Economy* (Halifax: Center for African Studies, Dalhousie University, 1985).

¹⁴See "Coup that Failed: The Storming of Dodan Barracks," *Newswatch*, May 7, 1990 and "Nigeria: More Questions than Answers," *Africa Confidential*, May 18, 1990.

¹⁵Victor Omuabor, "Ballot of the Bullet: An Insight into the Nigerian Soldier in his 21-Year Grip on the Reins of Government," *Africa Concord*, 28 January 1991.

¹⁶See Eddie Madunagu, *Problems of Socialism: The Nigerian Challenge* (London: Zed Press, 1982) and *Nigeria: The Economy and the People — The Political Economy of State Robbery and its Popular Democratic Negation* (London: New Beacon, 1984). See also Julius O. Ihonvbere, "The State and the Irrationality of the Bourgeoisie: An Examination of How the Nigerian Bourgeoisie Subverts its own Future." (A Paper presented at the National Conference "Obafemi Awolowo: The End of an Era?" Obafemi Awolowo University, 1987).

¹⁷See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1985), pp. 210-226.

¹⁸See "Who Will Probe Babangida?" *New Breed*, 1 October 1990; "Corruption a Nigerian?" *African Concord*, 26 March 1990; "Why Governors are Corrupt," *African Concord*, 26 March 1990; "An Era of Scandals," *African Concord*, 11 February 1991; and "Retired Generals: The Good Time Continues," *Thisweek*, Lagos, May 9, 1988.

¹⁹See Claude Ake (ed.), *Political Economy of Nigeria* (London: Longman, 1985) and Okwudibia Nnoli (ed.), *Path to Nigerian Development* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1981).

²⁰See "New Job for an Activist," *African Concord*, 28 January 1991.

²¹See "Five Years After," *The African Guardian*, September 3, 1990 and "Human Rights: No Need for Applause as the Year Saw a Gross Abuse of Human Rights," *The African Guardian*, January 7, 1991.

²²Bosah Iwobi, "The Press and Human Rights: Bitter-Sweet Tales," *African Concord*, 3 September 1990.

²³Seye Kehinde, "Babangida: The Man, His Style," *African Concord*, 3 September, 1990, p. 37.

²⁴"Five Years After," *Op. Cit.*, p. 30.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁶See "Can IBB Tame the Army?" *African Concord*, 16 July, 1990; "Coups That Failed: The Storming of Dodan Barracks," *NewsWatch*, May 7, 1990; "Orka's Coup: The People's Verdict," *African Concord*, 28 May 1990.

²⁷See "IBB's Surprise Move: The Sacking of AFRC," *NewsWatch*, February 20, 1989 and Seye Kehinde, "The Man, His Style," *Op. Cit.*

²⁸"Why Did IBB Do It? Riddles Emerge as Nigeria's Leader Promotes Two Retired Officers as Generals," *African Concord*, 22 October 1990.

²⁹Dare Babarinsa, "Toss of the Storm," *NewsWatch*, May 7, 1990, p. 27.

³⁰"Poor Crisis Control Breed Coups," *Probe*, Lagos, December 15, 1988, p. 3.

³¹"Nigeria: How Costly is Democracy?" *NewsWatch*, May 28, 1990. Some of the Panels, Boards, and Commissions are: Directorate for Mass Mobilization, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), National Electoral Commission (NEC), Transition to Civil Rule Tribunal, Code of Conduct Bureau, Code of Conduct Tribunal, National Transition Committee, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Directorate for Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI), Federal Road Safety Commission, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Women, Community Bank, Technical Committee on Privatization and Commercialization, Brain Drain Panel, People's Bank, National Commission for Women, and several bodies associated with the transition to democracy, all with very generous budgets.

³²See "Structural Adjustment and Corruption," in Pita O. Agbese and Julius O. Ihonvbere, *The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Nigeria* (Forthcoming, Westview, 1991).

³³See Bosah Iwobi, "The Press and Human Rights: Bitter-Sweet Tales," *Op. Cit.* and various issues of *Victims*, Newsletter of the Nigerian Committee for Defence of Human Rights, for a regular report of hundreds of cases of blatant human rights abuses under the Babangida regime.

³⁴See "The Heat is Still On—Anti-Media Council Feeling is Still Running High in Media Circles," *NewsWatch*, February 20, 1989.

³⁵"Five Years After," *Op. Cit.*, p. 30.

³⁶See "How Costly is Democracy?" *Op. Cit.*, Julius O. Ihonvbere and Eme N. Ekekwe, "Dependent Capitalism, Structural Adjustment and Democratic Possibilities in Nigeria's Third Republic," *Op. Cit.*, "Transition Programme: Third Republic Lies on Weak Foundation," *Newbreed*, 1 October 1990, and "3rd Republic Dead on Arrival? Will It Survive? Scepticism Mounts as Military Plans to Hand Over in 1992," *Probe*, December 15, 1988.

³⁷See "Transition Programme: Third Republic Lies on Weak Foundation," *Op. Cit.*, p. 27.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁹Ibrahim Babangida, *Portrait of a New Nigeria: Selected Speeches of IBB* (Lagos: Precision Press, n. d.), p. 118.

⁴⁰See Femi Otubanjo, "Funding Political Parties," *The African Guardian*, January 21, 1991 and "Parties in the Money Market," *The African Guardian*, January 21, 1991.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Ibrahim Babangida, Address at the Graduating Ceremony of the Command and Staff College, Jaji, June 29, 1990.

⁴³Yakubu Gowon, Lecture at the Alumni Association of Oxford and Cambridge Universities in Nigeria, Lagos, May 1990.

⁴⁴Ibrahim Babangida, Address to the Armed Forces Consultative Assembly, Abuja, June 5, 1989.

⁴⁵"3rd Republic Dead on Arrival?" *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

⁴⁶G. G. Darah, as quoted in "3rd Republic Dead on Arrival?" *Ibid.*, p. 13.