

Two Faces of Civil Society and the Military in Nigeria's Democratisation¹

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Abstract

Dominant views about politicized armies tend to portray the political actors in the military as bearers of the collective orientation of the entire institution towards democracy. Also civil society is mostly qualified as a democratising space. Nonetheless, these notions obscure the janiform potentials of political agencies in transitional states, where the military and civil society are neither exclusively authoritarian nor democratic. Essentially transition to democracy from military rule and post-authoritarian consolidation is a dialectical see-saw between genuine democratic interests in civil society and similar actors within military institutions on the one hand; and a bloc of undemocratic interests constituted by military actors and their allies in civil society on the other hand. Using Nigeria's experience of transitions to civil rule and the post-military era, I argue that neither the military nor civil society fits the straitjacket of a mere harbinger or obstacle to democracy; as their historical roles complexly intersect both outcomes.

Keywords: Civil Society, Democratisation, Democratizers, De-democratizers, Two Faces

1. Introduction

In the recent re-awakening of civil society's link with democracy, a discourse on contemporary democratisation that ignores it appears much like a Hamlet without the prince of Denmark. Civil society's democratic virtues are illuminated by writers like Alexis de Tocqueville who associated it with the ideals of citizenship under the law, freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of worship and protection of minority rights (cf Woods, 1992). Similar emphasis on the democratic credentials of civil society draw from its ideal virtues (Alexander, 1998; Deakin, 2001; Habermas, 1987, 1989; Putnam, 2003). However, historical examples reveal the appropriation of civil society by actors whose agenda undermine the ideals of the site. The rise of Hitler for instance initially drew from the power of civil society (see Berman, 1997). Also Mussolini's fascism drew support from civil society (Chambers & Kopstein, 2001). The work of Gramsci (1971) presents religion as one of the sites of civil society action. Nonetheless, the of existence religion-driven terrorist groups like *Boko Haram* in Nigeria raises a need to further explore the character of interventions of political agents from both the political society and civil society in the process of democratization. The usurpation of civil society by undemocratic forces underpins the inherent variations in the characteristics of the agencies that populate the terrain. Hence civil society is a site of action for multiple interest-bearing agents that appropriate the terrain for their various ends. In that connection, this paper addresses the complex interactions in civil society and the military institution in which they serve the ends of both democratic and undemocratic forces.

There exists a nexus consisting of the military controlled state and civil society. The political sector of the military links up with a faction of actors in civil society. Apart from the conventional state-organized frameworks of civil society such as schools and other cultural and ideological paraphernalia of the state, military regimes directly organize associational spaces or indirectly fund groups to articulate support for the preferences of such regimes which undermine genuine transitions to democracy. At the same time, democratic groups in civil society usually demand the end of military suspension of democracy. Also, the professional elements in the army, while working within a taut command structure of the military, may not directly oppose the military governments or expanded military roles in restored civilian regimes. However in extreme instances, they could make hard choices to express dissatisfaction against undemocratic projects of the political sector of the army.

2. Dual Manifestations of Civil Society in Democratization

Civil society is a broad concept for which no definition commands consensus. This may explain why positions differ on which category of social forces could be accepted in theory as actors in civil society. The two divides in scholarship are those which tightly link civil society to democratic norms and rules of conduct and others that see civil society as a terrain which accommodates bearers of conflicting projects that have different implications for democracy.

The view of civil society as implicitly democratizing draws strength from Ferguson's (1980) work, *A History of*

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Civil Society, first published in 1767. His work is a discourse on the emergence of civilized society through a long transformation. In the society that emerges from this transition, civilized attributes form the basis of social life as expressed in commerce and other law-governed activities. Also Tocqueville drew attention to the power of civil society as a veritable context for articulating political actions and demands for rights. His sense is that the growth of associational interaction is a necessary bulwark against the rise of authoritarianism in the state. He underpinned the power of the site by noting that at the associational level, members 'are no longer isolated men, but a power seen from afar, whose action serve for an example, and whose language is listened to' (Tocqueville, 2002, p. 584). It is on this Tocquevillean democratizing notion of civil society that Havel (1985) built his thesis of civil society as constituting the power of the powerless while writing about Eastern European political transitions from Communism. The focus of Tocqueville's idea was the political outcomes of democratically motivated groups. However, he seemed to generalize much on the democratic value of associations to the exclusion of the possibility that their site of engagements could as well be applied to undermine democracy.

In a related vein, Habermas sees civil society as providing and supporting the social sphere in which people talk about their differences and come to common understanding (see Habermas, 1987). The emphasis in his model of civil society could be seen as democracy generated and sustained by a culture of debates. He assumes that human beings are democratic by nature and will pursue the realisation of this attribute using the rationality that is embedded in deliberative processes. These deliberative processes are guided by ethical principles which Habermas worked out in line with Kant's moral philosophy.

Habermas's formulation commands ethical appeal as an ideal prescription useful for thinking about a democratic civil society. It points to the fact that a fully democratised civil society is about ethical norms and rules apart from its existence in institutional forms. Nonetheless, this formulation falls behind the reality of the actually existing civil society. At no time does any civil society fully bear the discourse ethics of Habermas. Some societies have made more progress than others in the development of the terrain of democratic deliberations. In such societies, contests in civil society have transcended the level of establishment of rules of the political game and dwell more on a democratic 'war of position' between different political projects such as neoliberalism or welfarism. Such advanced formations could however have pockets of undemocratic tendencies represented by the kind of groups referred to by Chambers and Kopstein (2001) as 'bad civil society'. For struggles leading to the restoration of elective democracies in Africa's former praetorian states, the Habermasian discourse ethics will not fully capture the dimensions of political acts in the space of civil society. The reason is that the discourse approach to engagements in state and civil society has yet to attain predominance.

Modern associational forms neither wholly reflect Tocqueville's expectations nor fit Habermas's ideal type. As Trivedy and Acharya observed, civil society consists of a variety of groupings including those committed to democracy and others with different social projects (cited in Swift, 1999). Delue and Dale (2009) expressed the same idea with the notion that civil society must include a diversity of voices, perhaps some confrontational. Whitehead also argued this much when he observed that there are persons enjoying political rights without submitting themselves to constraints imposed by civil society. He added that within the stratifications in society, 'one sector's autonomy and civility can easily be reinterpreted by another sector of society as elitist privilege needing to be levelled' (1997, p. 105). An inclusive definition of civil society Whitehead rightly believes, should necessarily account for all its properties. Also, Ikelegbe (2001) showed from the Nigerian experience that while civil society provided context for democratic struggles during the military rule, it provides platforms for ethnic militancy and violent confrontations in the post military era. This notion reflects experiences which show that in spite of the ideal type civil society, the actually existing civil society is available to two categories of actors. One is the group that can advance democratisation by struggles for generalization of certain norms and rules of political practice. The other includes groups that may pose constraint to democracy. This reinforces the thesis of Foley and Edwards (1996) that if civil society is a beachhead secure enough to be of use in thwarting tyrannies, it could as well be used for undermining democratic regimes.

Thus an inclusive notion of civil society should actually account for a variety of its ideal and actual tendencies. Alexander tends to fulfill this conceptual requirement by defining civil society as:

a solidary sphere in which certain kind of universalizing community comes gradually to be defined and to some degree enforced. To the degree this solidary community exists, it is exhibited by 'public opinion', possesses its own cultural codes and narratives in a democratic idiom, is patterned by a set of peculiar institutions, most notably legal journalistic ones, and is visible in historically distinctive sets of interactional practices like civility, equality, criticism and respect (cited in Alexander, 1998, p. 7).

Alexander was quick to point out that this kind of civil society can never fully exist as such. It can only exist to one degree or another. The reason he noted is that the site is:

always interconnected with and interpenetrated by other more or less differentiated spheres which have

their own criteria of justice and their own system of rewards. There is no reason to privilege any one of these non-civil spheres over any other (Alexander, 1998, p. 7).

Therefore, while reckoning with civil society as linked with certain ideal norms, it is also an institutional space with a mix of actors who either conform with or digress from these norms.

From the notion of the state as an integral field, civil society and the executive arm of the state constitute aspects of a broad political field. This is to say that the state consists of structures of governance and civil society (see Gramsci, 1971). At each point in time the defining character of the state is the interest of the dominant political forces in the integral state. The spheres of executive state and that of civil society are bifurcated along lines of interests borne by groups of political agents that act in these spheres along different interests. As Mamdani puts it, forces within civil society penetrate the state differentially, just as the state power reinforces certain social interests and undermines others. Not only is the struggle between social forces found within society and telescoped inside the state, it shapes the very character of state power (cited in Sjorgren, 1998, p. 9).

Under military rule in Nigeria for instance, the government actively repressed civil society groups that demanded an end to military rule while facilitating the activities of organisations which supported either continuity of military rule or transmutation of military leadership to civil rule. The activities of these groups that linked up well with the political sector of the military, on the one hand, and the activities of pro-democracy activist organisations which shared democratic interests with a sector of the military that favoured army withdrawal from politics on the other hand, establish a nexus between the military and civil society regarding democratisation in Nigeria.

3. Discourses on Military and Democratisation

There are two major strands on the military and democratisation. One strand denies that the military has any usefulness in fostering democratisation while the other contends that a successful democratisation has to be a product of partnership between the military and civilians. Influenced by the concept and character of democracy and the hierarchical command structure of the army, Claude Ake doubts military relevance to democratisation and argued that:

The Military and democracy are in dialectical opposition. The military is a taut chain of command; democracy in a benign anarchy of diversity. Democracy presupposes human sociability; the military presupposes its total absence, the inhuman extremity of killing the opposition. The military demands submission, democracy enjoins participation; one is a tool of violence, the other a means of consensus building for peaceful co-existence (cited in Ojo, 2000, p. 1).

Gershoni's (2002) study of Liberian transition to civil rule concluded that Samuel Doe's transformation from a Master Sergeant coupist to a civilian president showed that he was only successful in the first place because the army became part of his political machinery. In effect the Liberian army allied with Doe in undermining a free and fair transition to civil rule. Thus the military coup of Doe ended a regime that could not embed democratic norms and practices, but created a new form of crisis of political rule by transmuting from a junta to a 'civilian' leadership. Ihonvbere (1996) also finds the military's intervention as a setback to democratisation despite their usual claims of being corrective. Despite the progress of struggles for democratisation that led to the civilian elections in 1999 in Nigeria, Fayemi (2002) thinks that militarism and militarization will continue to pose a major problem to democratisation in Nigeria. Agbese (1996) and Afolayan (2000) are equally of the view that the military represents obstacle to democratisation in Nigeria. Other studies of the military in Africa by Mc Gowan (2003), Saine (2000), Kohnert (2010), Kandeh (1996), Hughes (2000), Camara (2000) and Kalu (2000) all indict the military for reverses to democratisation.

Writers focusing on Asia and the Pacific also incline towards the view that the military undermines democratisation. Vatikiotis (2004), Jemadu (2004), May, Lawson & Selochan (2004) see the military as a setback to democratisation in Indonesia. Military influence in the politics of Fiji is equally seen by Lawson (2004) as one in which force is a necessary condition for maintaining the existing political order of civil-military relations that are incongruous with democratic constitutional principles. For Rizvi (2004, p. 100) the Military in Pakistan prefers 'role over rule' because of the security environment of the country and fragmentation among civilian politicians, which renders them weak vis-a-vis the army. Thinking in this vein, Zaidi (2005) held that Pakistan's democracy found few enthusiasts due to manipulation in the 1990s which enabled military rulers to leave a political structure that allows them continued roles and constrains any effective shift towards democracy.

The 'role over rule model' of the Pakistani politics is useful for considering the contemporary Nigerian situation because post-military security challenges in Nigeria such as militant activism in the Niger Delta region and terrorism by the *Boko Haram* group in the Northern parts of the country tend create background for a garrison

state. Long years of squelching democratic forces by the ruling group both under military and civilian governments resulted in an unleashing of communities of violent dissent that not only invade civil society but also threaten the progress of democratisation. The security challenges arising from the interests of these groups create a continuing need for military securitization of democracy especially in relation to the campaign against the terrorist Boko Haram organization.

Nordlinger's (1970, p. 1134) reviews ended with a dismissal of positions that find the military relevant to democratisation. He argued that when the military combines political power with their corporate interests, they behave like the most powerful 'trade union'. Like most unions, they pursue their wealth and prerogatives even when these aspirations conflict with the aspirations of the larger segment of the society. This is the case in the corporate involvement of Pakistan's army (see Zaidi, 2005). While not dismissive of military's relevance to democratisation, Hougnikpo (2012) reveals that Angolan army officers participate in contract negotiations with foreign companies, sit on corporate boards and are majority shareholders in telecommunication firms. Also, the post-military regimes in Congo DR, Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Malawi and other African countries reveal lack of transparency in military/defense spending, thus limiting the capacity for democratic parliamentary control of the armed forces. In the light of Hougnikpo's finding, one can argue that the political authorities may chose to ignore proper parliamentary control of the army as a convenient sacrifice to prevent a recurrence of direct military rule. The point here is that evading the scrutiny of democratic institutions by the military high command impedes the development of democracy.

These sets of views that indict the military for undemocratic predilections have cogency in their own rights especially for the evidence from the concrete political instances they present. Most military governments in Africa have been dictatorial. However, there have been differential attitudes toward democratisation within armies of the praetorian states during their periods of political intervention. Some actions within military-led governments have given impetus to democratisation. In this vein, Hougnikpo (2000) suggests that literature on democratisation in Africa is silent on the positive role played by the military leadership in the process. He referred to the democratic movement of the early 1990s in Africa which led to national conferences in some African states. In those conferences, Congo, Madagascar, Niger, Benin, held national conferences with the military on board. This led initially to peaceful transition. But the experience was different for Togo and Guinea due to the unwillingness of the military leaders to democratise. On this note, Hougnikpo suggests that understanding democratic renewal in Africa must take into account the contributions of 'military society'. As he puts it, 'without "military" society's" contribution, democracy will lack the momentum to take off let alone get altitude' (Hougnikpo, 2000, p. 215). The point here is that democratic forces in civil society alone are powerless to dispel the military from politics. Thus political transitions should necessarily involve institutional engineering that condition the military elite to accept the politics of the society.

Ehwarrieme (2011) follows the track of Hougnikpo's argument and suggests that the non-intervention of the military since 1999 that Nigeria returned to elective civil rule even in the presence of pre-disposing factors for a military coup should be deemed as a contribution to democratization. In a similar study on the relevance of the military in democratization, Danopoulos and Skandalis (2011) argued regarding the experience of Albania that the military contributed by not attempting to forestall the demise of the communist regime in the early 1990s and by ignoring President Berisha when he called on the army to quell a popular uprising in 1997.

The foregoing remarks show that various interests in the military and civil society intersect with democracy projects in different ways. Further on this intersection, the usual accusation by political armies that politicians are incapable of good governance and democratization may not be totally untrue. This however, does not mean that the military governments resolve these issues. In addition, during periods of military rule, some officers insist on the need for professionalism, withdrawal of armed forces from politics and civil military relations that subordinates the military to civilian control. At the same time, politically ambitious officers who prefer to use the military to advance their interest favour continuity of military rule. Both aspects of military behaviour in politics need to be placed in perspective to fully understand the institution in relation to democratisation.

The double-edged role of the military in democratization was well accounted for by Anene (2000), who upholds the view of Lemarchand (1976) that the military is an autonomous sector of politics deserving attention as a unit of analysis. Anene's earlier empirical study of African armies revealed that in the context of transition politics, two factions of the military emerged, namely military democrats who favour military withdrawal and restoration of civilian rule, and military autocrats who oppose the restoration of civilian rule and opt for a constitutionalized military rule under which the military leader substitutes his uniform for a civilian one. Both factions of the military elite compete within the military and seek alliances in the civil realm. In their zero-sum competition, they deploy military coups or threats of coups to neutralize opposing factions and gain control of the military institution. Thereafter, the winning faction either leads the military organisation to withdraw in favour of elective

civil rule, or to constitutionalize military rule.

4. Understanding the military/civil society nexus and their Janiform roles in democratisation

In praetorian states struggling to establish basic institutions of democracy and newly restored elective rules, the totality of political actions of groups in state and civil society give rise to two broad trends, democratization and de-democratization. These trends arise out of engagements by forces which are prompted by democratic principles to contest authoritarian politics and demand the embedding of rules of democratic politics on one part. The other part is comprised of political actions and alliances that reinforce undemocratic rule. A trend towards democracy is achieved when there is a broad alignment of democratic forces in the executive state and civil society with a favourable balance of power over the alternative forces. Thus, democratic struggles unfold like a dialectical see-saw between divergent forces that are competing to organise politics, economy, ideology and other aspects of society in line with their own social projects. The struggle to establish basic democratic institutions express one aspect of these engagements.

The group that gains a reasonable margin of power over others determines political and other forms of the society. Relations of social forces in more democratised formations take the form of contest among forces that have accepted certain rules and norms and seek to frame political practices along such lines. This nature of civil society in more democratised societies gives rise to the tendency to view the terrain only in the light of its democratic characteristics. The consequence of this emphasis on the democratic component of civil society is a gap in conceptual validity because it ignores invasions of the site by undemocratic forces, thus portraying the space as a bearer of only democratic virtues. Anene (2000) observes a similar inclination among several works on the military and democratization which focus on the anti-democratic activities of political officers in the military, but not political activities within the military that facilitate democratization. Thus, there is a validity issue with such conclusions. Accounting for this paradox of democratization and de-democratisation within the military or civil society requires an understanding of the forces at play in each of them during periods of military rule and post-military era and how each of the forces relates with the project of democratization.

The need for alliances by competing factions of the military brings civil society into the internal struggles within the armed forces of praetorian states. Nigeria's former military ruler, Ibrahim Babangida, had remarked that the military could not have succeeded in their coups without assistance from civil society (Maier, 2000). Financial support was provided from civil society for example. This illustrates that a coup coalition may cut across the civil realm and the military. However, it was not all civil society actors that supported military coups and its regimes. Therefore contrasting attitudes draw from tendencies in the society and materialize in various contexts of civil society such as in the press and associational groups. In these associational realms, some struggle for the establishment of norms and rules of a democratised political order while others seek to legitimate an undemocratic political order. Thus the division in the interests of social groups splits the political field into groups of democratisers and de-democratisers.

In the struggle for democratization in Nigeria at the peak of military rule in the 1990s the groups that represented the relations of forces included the military institution, comprising both the military democrats and military autocrats; the traditional rulers that were co-opted into collaboration with the military leaders; domestic civil society which was divided into oppositional democracy activist groups and a pro-regime group; international civil society organisations and international political institutions. These groups, together, made impacts on Nigeria's struggle to end of military rule and return to elective civil rule. In the ensuing relations of forces, the line of alliances was either with the democratisers or the de-democratisers.

Democratisers

Pro-democratic civil society groups
Military democrats
International Civil society
International Political Organisations

De-democratisers

Anti-democratic Civil Society groups
Military autocrats
Pro-regime traditional Rulers

5. Democratisers in the Transition to Civil rule in Nigeria

The democratisers included the pro-democracy civil society groups including the oppositional press, human rights organisations such as the Campaign for Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Campaign for Democracy, Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Labour unions especially the Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG), the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) among others. The groups were committed to various aspects of democracy. Some emerged to

struggle for validation of June the 12, 1993 presidential elections which was annulled by General Babangida's military regime. Together with the activist press, they exposed the breaches of civilized standards of conduct by the military regime in the areas of human rights, corruption and other levels of misrule. Intensification of repression by government through the assassination of opponents, use of prohibitive decrees to suppress the media, human rights and democracy activist organisations, led some members of oppositional civil society organisations to go into political exile overseas. This became a source of reinforcement to the activist organisations within Nigeria because they linked up with international civil society to further expose the dictatorship. The link with international civil society became quite important because it elevated Nigeria's political crisis to global visibility. When in November 10, 1995, Ken Saro Wiwa and other environmental activists were gruesomely hanged by General Abacha's military regime, the Commonwealth group of Nations meeting at the time in Auckland imposed sanctions on Nigeria. This became important in linking international democratic forces that cut across civil society groups, governments and Inter-Governmental Organisations with the democratisers in Nigeria.

The linkage between domestic democratisers and external forces was strengthened through funding. Many donors supported human rights organisations as part of a broad programme of support for civil society in the process of democratic struggle. The Norwegian Human Rights Fund, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Office of Transition Initiative (OTI), European Union, the United States Information Service, the British Council Department for International Development (DFID), the Danish International Development Agency, and a number of embassies and High Commissions supported democratic activism at the time and continue to support groups with agenda that include democracy building (see Ibhawoh, 2001). In a sense, the web that forms out of linkages between these groups cuts across state and non-state actors and operates beyond national boundaries. This created an expanded constituency of democracy that reinforced the local democratic forces in their political struggles against entrenched undemocratic forces during the military rule.

Labour unions used the instrumentality of strike action to press home their demands. It is not uncommon for organised labour demands to revolve around improved working conditions. But at the peak of the political impasse, occasioned by the annulment of free and fair presidential elections held in 1993, the oil workers unions NUPENG and PENGASSAN, declared that the economic rights of the workers could not be actualized under conditions of undemocratic rule (Onyeonuru & Aborisade, 2001). Consequently, they included the political demand of restoration of democratic rule to their reasons for embarking on strike. The oil workers industrial action crippled the economy and deeply affected the military dictatorship of General Sanni Abacha. Though the Military Government suppressed the strikes which lasted for about two months, it was a landmark engagement of civil society against an authoritarian state. Prior to this strike, the workers umbrella union in Nigeria, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) had been a vanguard organisation curtailing the government's policies with possible harsh economic consequences, especially the withdrawal of government subsidy on petroleum.

Among the military democrats, the easily identifiable ones are the officers and men who retired in protest of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections by General Babangida. Fifty officers had threatened to retire on account of truncation of the transition to civil rule by General Babangida (Lewis, 1994). By the end of June 1993 thirty Colonels and Brigadiers had retired because of the cancellation of the election (Butts, & Metz, 1996). Equally, some officers who became part of General Abacha's Cabinet made a case for the release of political detainees and the completion of transition to civil rule. These officers were removed from their positions as service chiefs in General Abacha's regime and retired from service (Afolayan, 2000). The attitudes of these officers point towards sympathy for democratization.

6. De-democratisers in the Transition to Civil Rule Programme

Like the democratisers, the de-democratisers cut across the executive arm of the state and civil society. The agencies of democratic reverses in civil society include groups which though, claim to operate independent of government, but act in furtherance of undemocratic political interests of the incumbent government, especially in connection with the transition to elective civil rule. It is interesting that these groups also explore institutional approaches to their engagement with the state such as resort to court action, rallies, publications and mobilization of support for the regimes. The links between these rent-seeking groups and the government are usually funding or the extension of perks of corruption to their leadership from the top echelons of government. In addition to the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) and Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA), other such groups have included: the National Mobilization and Persuasion Committee (NMPC), the General Sanni Abacha Movement for Unity and Stability (GESAM), the General Sanni Abacha Movement for Peaceful and Successful Transition Programme (GESAM 98), Abacha Solidarity Movement (ASOMO), the Movement for Indigenous Democracy

(MIDIA) (Aluko, 2002). These are but a few instances of associations running into more than 150 (see LeVan, 2011) that organised in support of policies of the military dictatorship and the continuity of military rule.

As for the effort of the military ruler, General Babangida, to circumvent a successful transition to civil rule programme, a network of support among some groups that established associational bases to enhance the dictatorship's power and durability was created. Notable among this was the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN). The founder of the organisation, Chief Arthur Nzeribe, went to the Cable News Network (CNN) in February 1993 to make the case for an extension of the Nigerian military government. His reason was that Nigerian politicians were rogues and would be unable to hold the country together if the military handed over power (Omoruyi, 1999). The organisation he founded tried to further this objective by going to court to obtain an injunction to restrain the electoral body from conducting the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections. Playing a related role for the General Abacha dictatorship was the group called Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA). In a notorious rally called the 'Two Million Man March' organised by the group on March 3, 1998 to persuade General Abacha to run for president, 500 million Naira of public funds and public facilities were put at their disposal including two helicopters belonging to Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (a government department). This was an attempt by the regime to create a semblance of public support for General Abacha's project of turning himself into a civilian leader (Mustapha, 1999). The section of the associational actors in civil society that was amenable to this kind of purpose was a part of the overall forces against democratisation.

De-democratisers in the military included the officers who played the politics of interminably postponing the transition to civil rule. These were officers who moved from one political position to another. Fayemi (2002) reported on the massive corruption that became common in both government and the military. Serving officers became closely identified with oil, financial and shipping interests while justifying their role as political actors. Some of them declared in public forums that they were the ones to lead Nigeria to political and economic heights due to their military training and university education. Under General Abacha's regime, some military officers openly boasted that they would return to power by hook or by crook even if they were removed from direct political roles. Indeed, to illustrate the ambition of the politicized officers to prolong military rule, some officers and intellectuals were assigned to study the basis of prolonged military domination in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and some of the countries of Latin America and Southeast Asia (Fayemi 2002). When Babangida could not continue as the military ruler of the country, he stepped aside in August 1993 but strategically left General Abacha behind as the Secretary of Defense to the Interim regime that was constituted to take the country through another transition process to elective civil rule. Within a space of three months General Abacha took over power and returned the country to military rule. But it again has to be noted that these acts were carried out by politicized officers. It actually came to the fore that some officers favoured military withdrawal from power when there were protest resignations from the army due to the annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential election.

Some prominent traditional rulers in the country who were allies of the military regimes also lined up among the de-democratisers. The coalition of traditional rulers and authoritarian political rule goes back to colonial times, especially through the mechanism of Indirect Rule across Nigeria (Okonjo, 1974). The culture of allying with authoritarian rulers continued in post-colonial times. Its most notorious moment was under military rule. Indeed the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections in Nigeria was strongly supported by a leading traditional ruler in the Northern part of the country, Sultan Ibrahim Dasuki. He was reported to have said that a handover of power to the winner who was of the Yoruba ethnic origin in Southern Nigeria would alter the achievements of the late Sarduna of Sokoto for the North (Omoruyi, 1999). The actions of these de-democratisers were aimed at the continuity of military rule or the undemocratic transmutation of a military leader to a civilian one. Of course their actions were playing out in the same political field as those of the political forces that were acting on the side of democratisation. Thus it was a dialectical engagement to be understood in terms of varying inclinations of the forces regarding democratisation.

7. The post military era

The post military era, which began in 1999, represents a shift in the context of struggles for democratisation. While the resultant elective civil rule represents progress in democratisation, it is not a sufficient condition for democracy. Within the new context of struggles, the forces that represent de-democratisation within the military may have been submerged but not totally subdued. Also, civil society still provides a broad context in which competing agencies either act for or against democracy.

In the current post military era, some elements within the military institution still plot to reverse the gains in the struggle for democracy. By the second quarter of 2004, there was a coup threat in Nigeria which the authorities preferred to call a breach of national security. About seventy five people, including military officers and civilians, were under investigations by the Special Investigations Panel at the Directorate of Military Intelligence in Apapa,

Lagos (Ojo, 2006, pp. 268–269). Perhaps this is a subtle manifestation of the threat of a former military administrator of Oyo state, Col. Usman, that ‘even if the masses managed to remove them from direct political control, they would scale the fence and get involved’ (Fayemi 2002, 235). This comment reflects the obsession of politicized officers to invade the terrain of politics but it hardly holds true for others who stick to professional discipline and obedience to civilian political authority. Another illustration of the bifurcation of interests around the progress of democracy is the terrorist insurgency of Boko Haram in which the military plays extensive security role. Part of Boko Haram’s objective is the abolition of democracy for an Islamic theocratic state in Nigeria. In containing the violent campaigns of the group, some soldiers and officers play collaborationist roles by revealing vital intelligence to the group regarding the national army’s plan of action against terrorism. Also some serving soldiers desert the government forces and fight on the side of the insurgents (Alechenu, Soriwei, & Isenyo, 2014; Soriwei, 2013).

In the terrain of civil society, both democratic and undemocratic inclinations still persist. In 2007 when President Olusegun Obasanjo, earlier a military officer and coup conspirator, tried to manipulate a constitutional change to enable him rule the country more than the legally specified two terms, some groups organised support for him. The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), which prior to this period had been associated with progressive democratic stance on national issues supported the tenure elongation. The leadership of the union went further to decorate President Obasanjo with an award, ‘Defender of Democracy’, following which the president publicly donated the sum of five million naira (about 41,667 USD) to the association (Akintola, 2010, p. 114). At the same time other political interests in civil society rose in opposition to the plan which was eventually defeated in the Parliament.

In the current regime of President Goodluck Jonathan, the contentions related to the control of political power fail to indicate a progressive embedding of democratic norms. Associational organising is still common around ethnic, regional and religious factors. Political support or opposition to a regime is largely bound up with how the political leader is linked with political aspirations of each of the groups. At the regional level of the divides for instance, there is the North-South divide and an expectation that the leadership of the country has to rotate between the north and South on alternate basis. A subsidiary level of divides along this line is the further carving up of each of the major regions into three thus we have North East, North West and North Central in the Northern section of the country. The Southern section has South East, South West and South-south. These units desire a pattern of rotation of leadership of the country that guarantees the ability of each group to produce a president for the country on the basis of rotation among the geo-political subdivisions.

The end of military rule in 1999 commenced a two term presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo who is from the South western part of the country and ended in 2007. His successor Shehu Musa Yar Adua is from the North-West. He died on the third year of his first term in office. Yar Adua’s deputy Goodluck Jonathan became the President as a matter of constitutional provision. When the next electoral cycle came up in 2011, the political elites of the Northern section of the country argued that it was their turn to produce the president because the late President Yar Adua had not completed the two maximum terms of eight years which is due to the Northern part of the country. While it is an aspiration of the various component groups in Nigeria that occupying the presidential office should rotate among the groups to ensure equity, it is not provided in the constitution.

In the absence of legal obstacles, President Jonathan, after completing the tenure of the late President Yar Adua, contested and won the presidency in 2011. Consequently, several groups in the Northern parts of the country began to oppose the president for breach of the unwritten understanding about power sharing in a fragile federation. Prominent among the associational platforms deployed in articulating the oppositional sentiments are the Northern Elders Forum (NEF) and the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF). Indeed statements from influential leaders of Northern Nigeria origin that were bitter about the outcome of the 2011 elections made comments that led to post-election violence. Muhammadu Buhari, one of the presidential candidates in the 2011 elections had advised voters to defend their mandate if they suspected irregularities in the ballot. Some, in the Northern states interpreted this advice to mean violence and actually resorted to mayhem in the northern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara after the presidential election. The violence led to a loss of about 800 lives (Human Rights Watch, 2011). After the victory of Goodluck Jonathan in the 2011 election there was a resurgence of terrorist activities via faith-based organizing, in particular, the Boko Haram terrorist group. The terrains exploited by the agents of these violent actions are mostly civil and political society. And the invasion civil society by ‘insurgent societies’, undermines the ideal essence of civil society and recreates it in ambivalent characteristics. Consequently, the fragile space of civil society is increasingly narrowed while its capacity to function as a context for the defense of democratic virtues dwindles.

8. Conclusion

From the basic claim that military and civil society accommodates janiform tendencies in relation to democratisation, this paper reinforces the critiques of some analysis of praetorian states that fit both the politicized and non-politicized officers into anti-democratic category. The paper suggests that it is more appropriate to see the military as a sector in the society. Military officers who act in this sector have either supportive or uncooperative attitudes toward democratisation. The study also used experiences that cut across the military and post-military rule trends in Nigeria to further illuminate the idea that civil society is not to be taken for granted as a place for democracy. It is double-edged, malleable and serves both forces that advance democracy and the ones bearing alternative agenda. Accordingly, it is the civil realm of social struggles which accommodates all shades of interest while the military is an institutional space within the state that is subject to control by the ascendant force among a diversity of competing interests. Thus the fate of democracy in transitional states is tied to the outcome of the struggles in the political field between democratising and de-democratising forces. This logic applies to both the era of transition to civilian rule and the post-military era.

The democratisers in the era of transition to civil rule include both military officers and a diversity of actors in civil society, while the de-democratisers also draw from the two spaces. In the post-military era, a similar division in interests between democratising elements and de-democratising forces continues to be manifest and stretches even to the use of the military against terrorist insurgency. This unending dialectics of engagement should be the central focus of analysis for understanding the future of democracy in Nigeria and other transitional states. Analysis must transcend the fears about coups by the military as the only major threat to the success of democratisation. This is because military coups and regimes also find prompts and reinforcing attitudes from some actors in civil society, a tendency which extends beyond periods of military rule. Accordingly, a two dimensional solution that privileges the democratic faces of civil society and the military is necessary in securing the progress of democratisation in states where elective civil rule have been restored. One is the building of a professional army imbued with an ethos of democratic civil military relations. The other is enabling the expansion of groups within civil society with a commitment to the preservation and furtherance of democratic values.

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