# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td></td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Contributors</td>
<td></td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1:</td>
<td>The Nature and Scope of Political Science</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Derin K. Ologbenla</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2:</td>
<td>Pre-Colonial Political Systems in Nigeria before the British</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irene N. Osemeka</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3:</td>
<td>The Centre and the Periphery: Rethinking</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Britain's Conquest and Administration of Nigeria, 1851-1960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David Aworavo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4:</td>
<td>Nationalism and Political Development in Nigeria, 1930-1960</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. S. Mmaduabuchi Okeke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5:</td>
<td>From Clifford to Abubakar: Constitution Making</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in Nigeria Since 1922</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul Osifodunrin &amp; Ajiola Felix Oludare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6:</td>
<td>Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria: A Critical Review</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Derin K. Ologbenla</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7:</td>
<td>Military Coups and Military Rule in Nigeria</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oloruntoba Samuel Ojo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8:</td>
<td>Military Rule, the Civil War and National Integration in Nigeria</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emmanuel Ikechi Onah and G. S. Mmaduabuchi Okeke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9:</td>
<td>Fiscal Federalism: Contentious Issues in Revenue Allocation in Nigeria</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isaac Chii Nwaogwugwu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 8

MILITARY RULE, THE CIVIL WAR AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

Emmanuel Ikechi Onah and G. S. Mmaduabuchi Okeke

Introduction
By the end of 2014, Nigeria had enjoyed 15 unbroken years of democratic rule. Added to 6 years of the First Republic and 4 years of the Second Republic, it means that the country by 2015, has witnessed at least 25 years of democratic rule. Yet, even after all the years of the Fourth Republic, the imprint of the military on the life of the country remains very glaring. For instance, the military has left its lasting impact on the structure of the country. Thus, although as Wheare (1967) argues, the units of a federation must be independent and coordinate, there is no doubt that Nigerian federalism presently resembles closely the pyramidal, command structure of the military. In the same vein, even the system of democracy in the country is more like the authoritarian system of the military. The above realities and others like them are traceable to the long years of military rule in Nigeria. By the time the military finally handed power back to the civilians in 1999, they had held it for 29 years.

Within the 29 years of military rule, the country witnessed a total of 7 regimes, each of which contributed its own quota to the making of Nigeria in its present image. The military in power superintended over a number of momentous events, particularly the civil war, which began in 1967 and lasted till 1970. This is what this paper seeks to study, namely, military rule in Nigeria, the prosecution of the civil war and the impacts on national integration in the country. The concept of national integration gives us an idea about how far Nigeria has accepted Nigerians and in turn, has been acceptable to Nigerians. According to Duverger (1972: 220), national integration is the process of unifying a polity into a harmonious state.
This process involves two aspects: first, the elimination of the antagonisms dividing the society, and second, the development of solidarities among the various groups constituting the state. The history of Nigeria has shown that national integration is a process. For instance, at the initial period, the North was reluctant about the Nigerian project. In the years preceding independence, the region had to be literally bribed by the British in order to agree to remain part of the Nigerian territory. In contrast, many southern groups were at that time very enthusiastic about the Nigerian project.

Following the 1959 general elections, the Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) was dominant in the North; the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was dominant in the East, while the Action Group was dominant in the West. At independence in 1960, power was handed over to Nigerians by the British in an essentially tripod arrangement that gave the government to the NPC from the northern part of the nation, albeit in alliance with the NCNC of the Igbo East, while the AG of the Yoruba West became the opposition. Soon after however, the country was rife with political troubles. There was trouble with the population censuses conducted in 1962 and 1963, and in 1964, the general elections held in the country nearly ended in impasse. A repeat election for the Western House of Assembly in 1964 was marred by violence (Anifowose, 2006).

The country was in serious drift. The coup of January 1966 was ostensibly to arrest this drift (Kirk-Greene, 1975). Ultimately however, this coup was interpreted differently by various groups and events then degenerated in the country based on the interpretations. A counter-coup followed, and the civil war. By the time the events cleared, the country faced new realities: the North had become the driver of the Nigeria project, while the South now played second fiddle. The Igbo even became relegated from the Nigerian tripod. Subsequent years of military rule in the country served to reinforce this reality.
Background to Military Coups and Military Rule in Nigeria
Although the first coup in Nigeria was not exactly unexpected when it occurred, the whole idea of military coups was out of place in the political development of the country at the time. The Nigerian military was the product of British colonization. In giving independence to the country, the British did not envisage that the new civilian government will be toppled. Yet, even the very seeds of coup were sown by colonial rule itself. Wheare (cited in Dare, 1979) has argued that it is imperative that a federal state is designed in such a way that none of the federating units or regions is so large that it can dominate or subordinate the others. The Nigerian federal arrangement deviated substantially from this all important principle of federalism.

British colonization bequeathed Nigeria with a deficient structural arrangement, in which the Northern Region was more than half the size of the entire country. British design of Nigeria was such that one region (the North) was larger than the other two regions (East and West) combined together. The colonial regime regularly conducted censuses that saw the North always with population figures higher than the other regions in the country. In addition, colonial policy had ensured that people from the Northern Region were dominant in the army. The region was thus assured of continued political dominance in the country. At independence therefore, Northern domination of the country was resented by the other regions.

The Eastern and Western Regions feared that the North would use the assumed numerical advantage to dominate them politically. Structural imbalance thus created mutual suspicion and fear between the regions. This in turn created tensions at many times in the country. It was the degeneration of these tensions that ultimately created the conditions for a coup. The very first coup took place in January 1966. But even this attempt to disrupt the inherited political status quo in the country immediately elicited another coup in July of that very year that ultimately restored northern dominance (Muffett, 1982). The consequences of all this was the plethora of military coups that followed afterwards.
Apart from the above history, there have been explanations for the various coups in Nigeria and elsewhere. These explanations also provided justification for military rule in the country. The explanations include that such interventions were a continuation of the intra and inter class struggle in the wider society, with the military being just an extension of the society. Contagion has also provided some explanation for coups (Welch, 1967). This factor was obvious once the first coups occurred in Africa. Within a few years, the phenomenon had become a vogue, such that in the 3-year period between 1965 and 1967, there were 12 successful coups in Africa (Smaldone, 1974: 209).

Some other writers have tried to formulate general theories of military intervention in the politics of developing countries such as Nigeria. Some of these writers maintain that military coups were reflective of the post-colonial state and the crises of legitimacy that followed the failures of the first years of independence. In this regard, military coups could be seen as the result of the failure of the independence movement. The independence struggle was a movement by the people for better conditions of living. According to Cabral (1979: 241), “the people did not fight for ideas, but for peace, material benefits, and a better future for their children”. When independence was finally achieved, hopes were high that these expectations would become reality.

This was however not to be, as soon after independence, it became obvious that the promises made by many independence leaders were never meant to be kept. Once this truth came out, disillusionment became widespread among the peoples of several of the newly independent countries. The political leaders then became jittery and subsequently, dictatorial (Enemuo, 1991). It was therefore under this atmosphere of widespread disillusionment and political dictatorship that the military intervened in politics. Writing in this vein with a specific reference to Africa, Gutteridge (1975) noted that “military take-over in Africa reflects urban and intellectual discontent as well as a vacuum in national power and infrastructural underdevelopment within states”. This was certainly true in the case of Nigeria, as
confirmed by the statement of the leader of the country’s first coup, Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu:

Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent. Those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as Ministers or VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those who make the country look big for nothing before international circles; those that have corrupted our society and put Nigeria’s political calendar back by their words and deeds (Adeniyi, 1981: 89).

A related theoretical position on military intervention in politics argues that military intervention in third world politics is due to societal factors or characteristics. This view is propounded by several writers, including Huntington (1968) who identifies these characteristics to include the absence of effective political institutions, the fragmentation of power, weakness of authority, politicization of social factors and institutions, as well as the militarization of society and prevalence of violence in the society. This also applied to Nigeria, as according to Tyoden (1985), the Nigerian military was subject to the vicissitudes of the Nigerian society just as any social institution within the country and developments within the Nigerian society cannot but be reflected and have repercussions in the Nigerian military.

There is also the argument that the military intervenes in third world politics due to the internal structure of military organization in the countries. Janowitz (1964) argues that certain characteristics of the military in the new states such as the military organizational format and technology, training and professionalism, internal cohesion and esprit de corps, and the monopoly of force, provide enough motivations for the military to intervene in the political arena in order to salvage the nation from wreckage. There is no doubt that at a time when Nigerian politicians of the First Republic were already in disarray, the military could still muster the esprit de corps necessary for the type of collective action that could produce a coup. There is also the explanation that coups are the results of the level of political culture in a country (Finer, 1962; Almond and Verba,
1963). It is often pointed out that the low democratic cultures of the newly independent countries such as Nigeria helped bring about coups. Some writers even argue that the surviving aspects of the cultural past of some of these countries aided the coups. Elaigwu (1979) contends that military interventions in Africa are the products of the traditions of African societies. In these societies, there was no clear-cut distinction between the military and civil society, and the wave of military interventions in Africa was therefore, simply a continuation of what obtained in the past when almost every able-bodied male was a warrior and people could use might to obtain what they wanted.

The January 1966 Coup and the Pogroms in the North
Some of the events that took place in parts of the country in the period before the first coup already portended that all was not well. The first such event was the census crises of 1962/3. Originally, censuses were meant to be conducted in Nigeria every ten years. A census was conducted in 1952, and another was therefore due in 1962. In 1952, the population figure for the entire country was around 31 million. In 1962, this figure shot up astronomically. The figure for the entire country was 46.1 million. The 1962 census in the country was cancelled because of allegations that some regions inflated their figures. The figure for the North in 1962 was 22.5 million, while for the West, it was 10.5 million and 12.3 million for the East (Aluko, 1965, cited in Anifowose, 2006).

In 1963 a repeat census was conducted. This census however did not reduce the figures, instead they were even increased. The figures for the 1963 census were 29.8 million for the North, 10.3 million for the West, and 12.4 million for the East. The Mid-West Region had 2.5 million and Lagos, 0.7 million (Anifowose, 2006). A compromise was eventually reached by the governments, and some adjustments were made to the final figures for the 1963 census. Although the final figure of 46.1 million was eventually accepted, misgivings remained.
Trouble had also brewed in the Western Region since 1962, when a split in the Action Group (AG), the ruling party in the region, led to a series of political violence. Following a feud in the AG, Chief S. L. Akintola, the Deputy Leader of the party and Regional Premier of the West was removed from his office in the party and asked to resign his position in government. When he refused to comply, a petition was signed by all the members of the AG in the Western Regional House of Assembly asking the Governor of the region to remove the Premier from office (Anifowose, 2006). The Governor accepted this and promptly replaced Chief Akintola with Chief D. S. Adegbembo as the new premier.

Before Chief Adegbembo could take office however, Chief Akintola went to the courts. But even before judgment was delivered in that case, the federal government intervened and declared a state of emergency over the Western Region. Dr M. A. Majekodunmi was then appointed as Administrator of the region. When the 6-month period of emergency ended however, the Federal Government reinstated Chief Akintola as Premier, under the platform of his new party, the United Peoples Party (UPP). In the federal elections called in 1964, the UPP joined with the Yoruba- members of the NCNC in the West to form a new party – the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). This party then formed an alliance with the NPC, called the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA).

This alliance won the 1964 federal elections amid allegations of massive rigging across the country, particularly in the Western Region. This created a near-impasse in the country. In the compromise among the various parties to resolve this impasse, it was agreed among others, that new elections be held into the Western Regional House of Assembly in 1965. On 11 October 1965, the postponed general elections in the Western Region were finally conducted. The AG and NCNC also had gone into alliance, called the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA).

Members of UPGA had hoped to win the elections with the peoples' support, but as the elections approached, it became obvious that
official manipulations and interference with the electoral process by the NNDP-NNA government were commonplace. On election day, results were already flying about even before voting started and not long after, it became certain that the people’s will was going to be truncated. Akintola’s NNDP was eventually declared the winner, but shortly afterwards, all hell was let loose in a violence that led to the literal christening of the region as the ‘wild, wild, West’ (Anifowose, 2006).

Coupled with the rising spate of corruption, nepotism and mediocrity in various aspects of national life, the military eventually struck on January 15, 1966. Led by a group of young officers that included Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna and Major Adewale Ademoyega, the coup was to be carried out simultaneously in Lagos, Kaduna, Ibadan and Enugu (Ademoyega, 1981). When the action came to an end, a number of high profile politicians had been killed, including the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the Premier of the North, Ahmadu Bello. Others killed included Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh - the Finance Minister, and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola - the Premier of Western Region.

Initial reaction to the January coup by the public was one of jubilation and satisfaction throughout the country. Even in the Northern Region, where Balewa and Bello hailed from, there were a few public scenes of jubilation following the events of the coup (Ademoyega, 1981). However, although prominent government officials had been killed, the government was not immediately toppled. Moreover, the military hierarchy was not part of the putsch and worked actively to quell it. Three days of standoff followed the coup, between the army command and the coupists. Following negotiations involving the army command, the coupists and the remnants of the civilian government, the stalemate was resolved when the civilian government resigned and handed over power to the highest military officer at the time, Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi (Obiezuofu-Ezeigbo, 2007).
Soon after this however, events took a different turn. The reasons for the new turn of events included the stalemate that immediately followed the coup. A number of events took place within this period that gave some new impressions of the coup: the negotiations between the coupists and the military high command, which enabled the coupists to escape possible death for treason; and the deal between the military and the civilian government that eventually led to the handover of power to the military commander, Ironsi, who was Igbo, all gave the impression of an Igbo plot to inherit power.

Other events of the coup also started attracting new interpretations. During the coup, the plot in Enugu had failed to take off. Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, who was given the duty to carry out the coup in Enugu, apparently developed cold feet, as a result of which, Azikiwe and Okpara, earlier penned down by the plotters to be killed, were left free. The fact of Azikiwe and Okpara not being killed in the coup gave the indication that there was a deliberate plan by the Igbo plotters of the coup to keep their own safe. Zik was inexplicably said to have gone outside the country days before the coup was supposed to take place. Okpara remained in government house but was not disturbed. The Premier of the Mid-West, Osadebe (also Igbo), was also left free.

In the emotions of the time, this feeling that the coup was an Igbo grab for power became a convenient argument. As this interpretation gained ground across the country, the feeling arose in the north that the coup was a deliberate ploy by the Igbo to eliminate the north from power and take it for themselves (Muffett, 1982).

The January coup was actually structurally anti-Igbo. The coup, according to Okocha (1994: 97):

Dismissed an Ibo President, Ibo President of the Senate, Ibo Foreign Minister... That coup also dismissed Ibo Premiers in two out of the four regions of the Federation.

In the same vein, it has become convenient to forget that it was an Igbo man – Major General J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi, who ultimately
ensured that the January 1966 coup did not succeed. In Kano also, strong sentiments for the coup were actually subdued by another Igbo officer, Lt Col Odumegwu-Ojukwu.

In the circumstances, it became easy to input meanings into some events that could ordinarily have been plain. There was thus the issue of some initial actions of the new military government, such as the promulgation of Decree 34 into law, which returned the country to the unitary form of government. This was ostensibly done to prevent the extreme forms of ethnic and religious bigotry as well as the nepotism and inefficiency that regionalism had brought about in the country.

In the North however, there was a feeling that this was a ploy to make the country, especially the northern space, open for unmitigated Igbo business exploitation. Soon therefore, northern elements in the army commenced their own plot to retake power and retaliate against the Igbo for the earlier killings of high Northern government officials. News of an impending coup filled the air, but even before the coup, riots broke out in the North. Starting on 29 May 1966, the North flared up, and mobs were on the prowl in the various cities of the region, killing and maiming the Igbo living in that region as well as burning and looting their properties.

The July 1966 Coup as Prelude to War: The Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967 to 1970

On 29 July 1966, a counter-coup was finally staged by northern army elements. The Head of State was killed. He was the guest of the Military Governor of the Western Region, Lt Col Fajuyi, when some of the elements, including his Aide de Camp (ADC), Lt T.Y. Danjuma, came to arrest him for execution. Col Fajuyi, who refused to give up his guest, was equally killed. In addition, 185 Igbo officers of the Nigerian army were killed in the coup (Achebe, 2012). Lt Col Yakubu Gowon then became Head of State. Even with the July 1966 counter-coup in the country, the troubles in the North did not abate. The killings continued over the next four months, at the end of
which, more than thirty thousand Igbo and other Easterners had been massacred (Achebe, 2012).

Following the massacres, hundreds of thousands of Igbo still alive in the north headed home to the Eastern Region. Many of these people had believed the Nigerian promise that everywhere in the country was home and had invested all their incomes in their regions of abode, including erecting their permanent residences. Without personal buildings in their villages and forced to flee back to their regions of abode, many of them who managed to get home were received there as refugees. As the numbers of these refugees increased, conditions in the camps deteriorated. New refugees brought tales of increasing inhuman treatments in the north. Tensions soon mounted. As the situation degenerated, several attempts were made both within the country and abroad to find a peaceful settlement to the crisis.

But with mutual suspicion on both sides, all the efforts failed to yield any appreciable result. One of the attempts at peace involved a meeting of OAU leaders convened at Aburi, Ghana. It was attended by Gowon and other African Heads of State, as well as Ojukwu and other leaders of the Nigerian imbroglio. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that Nigeria will become a confederation, to allow the regions more space to determine their affairs. When Gowon returned to Nigeria with the news, it is believed that the group of super-permanent secretaries, including Gamaliel Onosode, Simeon Adebo, Allison Ayida and others, on whom the Head of State largely depended on for advice convinced him to jettison the idea of confederation and continue with the arrangements that already existed.

Back in the East, Ojukwu was frustrated just as secessionist sentiments among the people were rising. In response to the increasing possibility of the secession of the East, Gen Gowon decided to break the hegemony of the regions by creating more states in the country. The erstwhile Eastern region was divided into 3 states, two of which were for the non-Igbo people of the former
region. The Igbo were given only one state, and it was ensured that this Igbo state was denied any access to the sea or any boundary with another country. This was evidently calculated to hem in the Igbo and make it impossible for them to draw in external resources and support in the case of an eventual war.

The move was seen by the Igbo as the last straw in their fight for survival in Nigeria. A Consultative Assembly of the people, sitting in Enugu then mandated the then Military Governor of the Eastern Region to secede from the country. On 30 May 1967, then Lt Col Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, Governor of Eastern Nigeria, declared the independence of the area of the erstwhile Eastern Region of Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra (Nwankwo, 1972). With the secession, the Igbos, who had hitherto been the strongest advocates of a strong and united Nigeria became the subject of attack in a war that pitted them against other Nigerians, including those who until the war only reluctantly accepted to be part of the country.

In the aftermaths of the war, some writers have tried to mystify the issues that led to secession, by claiming that the secession was an attempt to corner the expected huge revenues from the then recently discovered oil in the Eastern Region (Ayoade, 1973). But there can be nothing farther from the truth. According to Soyinka in his memoirs (2006:20):

It would be a distortion of history, and an attempt to trivialize the trauma that the Igbo had undergone, to suggest – as some commentators have tried to do – that it was the lure of the oil wealth that drove the Igbo to seek a separate existence. When a people have been subjected to a degree of inhuman violation for which there is no other word but genocide, they have the right to seek an identity apart from their aggressors.

Achebe (2012: 95) puts it thus:

Beginning with the 15 January 1966 coup d’etat through the counter-coup (staged mainly by Northern Nigerian Officers, who murdered 185 Igbo officers) and the massacre of thirty thousand Igbos and Easterners in pogroms that started in May 1966 and occurred over four months – the events of those
Military Rule, the Civil War and National

months left millions of other future Biafrans and me feeling terrified. As we fled “home” to Eastern Nigeria to escape all manner of atrocities that were being inflicted upon us and our families in different parts of Nigeria, we saw ourselves as victims. When we noticed that the Federal Government of Nigeria did not respond to our call to end the pogroms, we concluded that a government that failed to safeguard the lives of its citizens has no claim to their allegiance and must be ready to accept that the victims deserve the right to seek their safety in other ways- including secession.

The Nigeria-Biafra war started in June 1967 and lasted till 15 January 1970 when the Republic of Biafra negotiated to return back to Nigeria. The cost of the war was enormous in human and material terms. Properties worth millions of dollars were lost and more than half a million soldiers died on both sides. Then a further 2 million people died in Biafra from bullets and from hunger and malnutrition, which ravaged Biafra as a result of a Nigerian blockade of the area throughout the war period. The blockade prevented deliveries of food and medicines to the abortive Republic, as a result of which, kwashiorkor became rampant, killing thousands of people, especially children (Forsyth, 1977). At the end of the 30 month-war, the Nigerian Head of State, Gen Gowon decided on a policy of ‘no victor, no vanquished’, under which the Igbos were to be fully reincorporated into Nigeria (Anifowose, 2006).

Military Coups and Military Rule in Nigeria After 1970

After the January 1966 and the July 1966 coups, the Gowon government led the country through the civil war, and remained in office till 1975. General Gowon had promised to return the country to civilian rule by 1976, but as the time approached, the government argued that the date was no longer feasible. In July 1975, the Gowon regime was toppled in a coup led by General Murtala Mohammed. General Mohammed in his maiden broadcast summarized the situation in the country at the time: “the leadership either by design or default had become too insensitive to the true feelings and yearnings of the people”. The new Head of State then announced plans for a handover to civilians in 1979. Although he was assassinated in 1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo who succeeded

185
him eventually handed over power as planned. This was however, not the end of coups in Nigeria. The civilian regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari was toppled on 31 December 1983 in a coup led by General Mohammed Buhari. In announcing the coup, the spokesman, Brigadier Sani Abacha gave the reasons for the action as:

the harsh intolerable conditions under which we are now living. Our economy has been hopelessly mismanaged. We have become a debtor and beggar nation. There is inadequacy of food at reasonable prices for our people. Health services are in shambles as our hospitals are reduced to mere consulting clinics without drugs, water and equipment. Our educational system is deteriorating at an alarming rate. Unemployment figures, including the graduates, have reached embarrassing and unacceptable proportions. In some states, workers are being owed salary arrears of eight to twelve months and in others, there are threats of salary cuts, yet our leaders revel in squandermania, corruption and indiscipline.

Mohammed Buhari who eventually inherited the mantle as Head of State in his maiden speech elaborated on the above themes and gave the reasons for the military take-over broadly as the nature of politics since 1979, mismanagement of the economy, corruption and indiscipline, and the realities of the 1983 elections. Despite some serious commitment, Buhari’s regime could not resolve the issues he himself raised before his government was toppled in another coup led by General Ibrahim Babangida. Once more, it was Major General Sanni Abacha who heralded the coup. According to him:

If you could all recollect in my maiden speech of December 31, 1983, I announced the circumstances that necessitated the Armed Forces into taking over the reign of administration of this nation. It is most disheartening that most of the ills that plagued the nation during the civilian regime are still present in our society.

Major-General Ibrahim Babangida, who took the reins of power remarked in his maiden speech that:

when in December 1983 the former military leadership of Major-General Muhammadu Buhari assumed the reins of government with the most popular enthusiasm accords any government in the history of this
Military Rule, the Civil War and National

country...a new sense of hope was created in the minds of every Nigerian. Since January 1984, we have witnessed a systematic denigration of that hope. Events today indicate that most of the reasons which justified the take-over of government from the civilians still persist.

Gen Babangida stayed in office till 1993 when he ‘stepped aside’ following the crisis that resulted from his annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election in the country.

He was replaced by an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. Although the ING was headed by a Yoruba, this did not assuage the ethnic group, which insisted on the re-invalidation of the June 12 mandate. The impasse was compounded by a number of court judgments that pronounced the ING illegal. Riding on the illegitimacy of the ING, General Abacha contrived a palace coup against the regime in which he was a prominent member. On 17 November 1993, the ING resigned from office and General Sanni Abacha took over. The Abacha government stayed till 1998 when the Head of State died in office and was succeeded by General Abdusalami Abubakar, who quickly configured a programme of transition that led to the hand-over of power in 1999 to a civilian government under General (Rtd) Olusegun Obasanjo.

Military Rule and the Integration of Ethnic Groups in Nigeria Since 1970

Military coups go hand in hand with military rule. A military coup usually ushers in a military regime. Through a spate of coups, the military eventually ruled the country for a total of about 29 years. Within this period, the country witnessed a total of 7 military regimes. Although military rule was tentative at first, the circumstances of military rule changed fundamentally after the civil war. The military had emerged from the Nigerian civil war in a very strong state. The routing of the secessionist threat to the country’s existence made the army more confident than ever. Then, shortly before the war began, the country had started reaping huge earnings from oil and this brought great wealth to the country within a few years.
The above two factors soon enabled the military in government in Nigeria to proceed to remake the country in its own image. The first major aspect to feel the military impact was the system of federalism in the country. The military took power at a time when the regions were very powerful compared to the federal government. In fact, one of the reasons commonly adduced for the July 1966 coup was the attempt by the Ironsi government to introduce the Unification Decree 34 of 1966. It is however, ironical that not long afterwards, the very leaders of that coup were to transform the country into a federalism that was unitary in substance, in which the regions became subordinate to the federal government.

The subsequent creation of states by the military, and which continued till the very end of military rule, further made Nigeria a federation in which the federal government loomed large and the states only played second fiddle. The federal government simply appropriated functions as it deemed fit, and this was sanctioned by military decrees, including revenue allocation formulas that gave the federal government the lion-shares of virtually all revenues, including those that were derived from the states. No sector of the Nigerian society was left out—economy, politics, culture and others. In fact, the military so permeated the Nigerian society that even now that they have been out of power for quite some time, a psychology of might and violence still pervades the country’s politics and social life.

Although the military fought the Nigerian civil war under the slogan of “One Nigeria,” subsequent actions of military governments in the country mostly produced negative effects on national integration. At the end of the war, General Gowon had not only declared that there was “no victor, no vanquished,” but the Federal Government of Nigeria proceeded to adopt a policy of ‘3Rs’—rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation. Had those policies been pursued faithfully, perhaps the aftermaths of the civil war would have dissipated and the country could have achieved genuine reintegration. Forty-four years after the war however, in the year 2014, nothing of the sort has happened and the psychology of the
Military Rule, the Civil War and National

war has continued to inform political thinking and action in the country.

This psychology has negatively affected the integration of the Igbo as equal partners in the Nigerian socio-political arena, as well as hampered the unequivocal acceptance of the Igbo by other Nigerians as equal stakeholders in the Nigerian project. First, as part of the war strategy, the Igbo were lumped into the East Central State in the 1967-state creation exercise. Although this was unfair, considering that the Igbo were a majority ethnic group in the country and one of the tripods on which the nation stood at independence, subsequent state creation exercises have not addressed the anomaly. In 1976, the Igbo were split between two states. Nineteen states were created in all across the country.

Even now, the South East is the only one of six zones in the country that has only 5 states. Four other zones have six states each while one zone has seven states. Considering that so much in the country now depends on the number of states—revenue allocation, civil service recruitment and political appointments, the siting of projects and infrastructures, it becomes immediately clear the level of continuing sense of injustice being felt among the Igbo in Nigeria. Following the war, the Igbo have continued to be treated as anathema in the country. The Igbo ethnic group continues to be treated as people not to be trusted. It was in this wise that the area was denied any access to the outside world – deliberate efforts were made to ensure that no south-eastern, Igbo-speaking state borders the sea, while all airports in the Igbo area were barred (until 2013) from attaining international status.

Sensitive offices, particularly those having to do with national security and high political office, have been denied the Igbo people. Between 1979 and 1983, Dr Alex Ekwueme, an Igbo, was the Vice President of the country. For a brief period in the 1980s, also, President Babangida appointed Ebitu Ukiwe as the Deputy head of the military government. Since then however, no other Igbo has ever come that far, and it was only in 2012 that an Igbo attained the
position of Service-Chief in any of the armed forces in the country. Many economic policies conceived by the immediate post-war governments in Nigeria were actually calculated to pauperize the Igbo and prevent the development of an Igbo economic middle class. These policies included the Indigenization Policy of 1972. This policy was designed to give Nigerians the ownership of the commanding heights of the Nigerian economy. In the end, it only enabled other Nigerians apart from the Igbo to buy up foreign businesses in Nigeria at the time. The Igbos could not participate as they had not recovered from having been forced to convert all their personal wealth into 20.00 at the end of the war (Achebe, 1983).

Since the war, no meaningful economic project has been undertaken in the Igbo South-East, and public infrastructure such as roads in the area continue to wear the damaged looks of the after-war years. There is now even an Igbo dimension to the issue of population census in Nigeria. Because of projections which showed that Igbo in Nigeria if counted together in all their states of abode in the country would likely turn out to be the largest ethnic group in Nigeria, the Obasanjo government ordered that ‘divisive terms’ such as ‘ethnic origin’ would not appear as categories in the census books of 2006. As a result of this, the millions of Igbo living outside their states of origin were not counted as Igbo, but were rather counted as belonging to their states of abode. This has reduced the Igbo population figures by more than half and has now enabled political leaders of this country to treat the Igbo as if they were a minority ethnic group.

The most vivid evidence of the non-complete acceptance of the Igbo back into the Nigerian fold is in the political arena. Before the war, the Igbo were at the very centre of government in the country, but since the war, this is no more so. This marginalization was started under military rule, as the various military regimes, except the Babangida regime for a short-period, did not feature even a single Igbo at the commanding height of the Nigerian political arrangement. In the Second Republic, an Igbo was Vice-President, but ever since, there has been a conscious effort to frustrate the Igbo
from attaining the presidency of the country. In fact, they remain the only majority ethnic group that has not been President or Vice President in the Fourth Republic, and presently the Igbo are the only sizeable ethnic group in the country that do not head an organ or branch of the federal government (Ayoade, 2011: 41-2).

Minority ethnic groups have also made the argument that they are deliberately and structurally discouraged from being integrated into the Nigerian nation. In fact, elements from the Niger Delta region led by Isaac Adaka Boro had even attempted secession in the First Republic when they declared the Niger Delta Republic (Digifa, 2003). A police action at the time by the Federal Government however restored normalcy. The agitations resumed under military rule, but in the Fourth Republic, the minorities of the South-South zone have taken their agitation to the level of militancy and violence (Mudiaga-Odje, 2008), until one of their own only recently became the President of Nigeria. Since President Jonathan assumed office, restiveness in the Niger-Delta has been considerably mellowed.

The people of the South-west and the people of the North have remained at the commanding heights of the Nigerian economy and polity ever since the two groups led the Nigerian coalition that defeated the Igbo in the civil war. However, certain events concerning the groups in the recent history of the country have also posed challenges to national integration in the country. For the South west, the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections, which was set to be won by the late Chief Moshood Abiola drew the ire of the people. Although the military immediately installed another Yoruba as the Head of the Interim National Government in 1993, the people never accepted the gesture.

Largely because of opposition from the Yoruba, the ING could not stand and was eventually replaced by General Abacha. This did not douse Yoruba opposition, which continued throughout the Abacha regime. By the time of Abacha’s sudden death in 1998, the situation was already degenerating into one in which the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC), a Yoruba militia group, had started to mount
operations against the government. The OPC threat continued till well into the first years of the Fourth Republic (Fasehun, 2003). The situation has however normalized now, especially after General Olusegun Obasanjo was made the first elected President of the Fourth Republic, a move generally believed to have been in appeasement of the South-west zone for the annulment of the June 12 1993 Presidential election (Ayoade, 2011: 36).

The North was recently embroiled in agitations for the return of the Presidency of the country to the region. At the beginning of the Fourth Republic, there was an informal understanding that the Presidency will reside with the South for eight years before returning to the North for the next eight years. It was this understanding that enabled President Obasanjo to emerge in 1999 through an election in which only southern candidates essentially featured. President Obasanjo’s tenure ended in 2007, and the general election that year actually succeeded in returning power to the northern part of the country, with Umaru Yar’Adua becoming president. But President Yar’Adua, formerly Governor of Katsina state in North-western Nigeria, was a sick man. Although the full nature of his sickness was never disclosed, the president increasingly became frail with the passing days. He was flown to Saudi Arabia in 2010 for medical treatment following which he eventually died.

An unwritten agreement within the ruling PDP at the time provided that another element of northern origin was to be picked in replacement. But arguing that the country was in a “precarious situation” at the time, a ‘doctrine of necessity’ was formulated by the country’s leaders which enabled the then Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to take over as Acting President (Adeniyi, 2011), and ultimately President. President Jonathan was from the South and this situation did not go down well with the Northern establishment, who felt shortchanged by the return of the presidency to the South of the country before the end of their slot. This sentiment remained, and was so strong that even the Boko Haram insurgency, which has ravaged some northern states as well as taken a huge toll on the country’s resources, has been alleged to be a ploy of the northern
establishment to make the country ungovernable until power was handed back to the region (Suleiman, 2012). Power was eventually handed back to the North when Muhammadu Buhari defeated Goodluck Jonathan in the presidential elections in 2015.

Conclusion
Military rule failed in Nigeria. The long years of the military in government in the country proved this assertion conclusively. The military usually came on the premise of solving problems created by civilian rule. In the end, they could not solve these problems, but instead, created new ones. In fact, many years into the Fourth Republic, the problems created by military rule are still there, particularly the problems of power rotation, mutual suspicion and lack of national cohesion among the diverse groupings in the country. This should then be the focus of democratic rule in the country, namely, to solve the lingering problems created by military rule, provide democracy dividends to the people and ensure national integration. This way, military rule will be properly seen as the aberration that it was and which must not be allowed ever again in the country.
References


