

Personal Rule in Nigerian Military Regimes

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Jackson and Rosberg's book *Personal Rule in Black Africa: Prince, Autocrat, Prophet, Tyrant* (1982) is an important seminal work in the research on personal rule in Africa. In the book, Jackson and Rosberg argued that institutional rule such as constitutionalism had not functioned sufficiently well following independence in many African countries, and that in its place a non-institutional political system, personal rule, had become well established, and greatly defined the form of African politics. Further, the authors categorised African personal rulers into four types, i.e. prince, autocrat, prophet, and tyrant, and by the use of case studies the book opened up a new horizon in the research on personal rule in Africa.

Nevertheless, the book made little mention of personal rule in Nigeria. Military coups d'état occurred frequently in Nigeria following independence in 1960, and by the time that Jackson and Rosberg's study appeared in 1982, there had been at least six civilian and military heads of state, but the

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book undertook almost no serious appraisal of these Nigerian leaders. This does not necessarily mean, however, that personal rule did not become established in Nigeria. In fact, the personal rule system, or a situation resembling it, was seen to quite a large degree in Nigeria, as in many other African countries, but because of the frequent regime changes due mainly to the military coups, Nigeria had no experience of the kind of personal ruler who reigns supreme in the seat of power in the long-term, such as personified by Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, or Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). However, as I shall explain below, although the terms of office were still relatively short, qualitatively speaking, the kind of ruler that one would have no misgivings about appraising as a personal ruler had indeed appeared in Nigeria, and this became especially conspicuous in the period from the mid-1980s onwards than it had been before that time.

This article attempts to focus on personal rule in Nigeria's military regimes, especially its modality and transformation. In examining personal rule in the military regimes in Nigeria, I intend to approach its dynamics from three viewpoints. The first one is *how the person became the ruler* in the sense of the form of the seizure of power of each of the national military leaders. This viewpoint examines the establishment, or the "point of entry", for each of the military regimes. The second is *how the person ruled the state* mainly in the sense of the planning and implementation of policies. We can say that this approach focuses on the form, or the "content", of the military regime. The third is *how the person saw his withdrawal from politics*. We can perhaps say that this viewpoint focuses on the "exit" for each military regime. Further, through these three viewpoints, as well as a multifaceted examination of

why personal rule in the military regimes in Nigeria became conspicuous rather later than in other African countries, from the mid-1980s onwards, and especially during the 1990s, I will outline in the final section of the article my hypothesis that the nature of the formation of the Nigerian state may have been one factor contributing to this “time-lag”.

Before entering into the series of examinations concerning personal rule in Nigerian military regimes, we should first take a brief look at the historical unfolding of the nearly 29 years of military rule in that country.

1. Historical Development of the Military Regimes

In the 39 years of history, from the time when Nigeria achieved independence from the United Kingdom in October 1960 to the establishment of the current Fourth Republic in May 1999, in contrast to a total of merely ten years of civilian rule, the country was under military rule for 29 years. This long period can be roughly divided into two phases, the First Phase of about 14 years from January 1966 to September 1979, and the Second Phase of about 15 years from January 1984 to May 1999. Four military regimes were established in each of these periods, giving a total of eight military regimes in the two phases. The subject of the examination in this article is personal rule in the eight military regimes or juntas.

The civilian rule established as a result of Nigerian independence is generally known as the First Republic.¹ This First Republic, however, collapsed when the first military coup took place in January 1966. The ensuing political confusion was brought to an end as the then General

Commanding Officer of the Nigerian Army, Major General Johnson Thomas Aguyi-Ironsi, seized plenipotentiary power. The military regime established under Ironsi issued a decree that abrogated the country's federal structure in exchange for a unitary one. This, however, drew a strong backlash from some quarters, and subsequently the Ironsi regime was toppled in the second coup, which took place in July of the same year.

The next person to hold plenipotentiary power was the Chief of Staff of the Nigerian Army, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, who, although not being directly involved in the second coup, was as it were, carried into power by the main conspirators.² As soon as he became head of the military regime, Gowon reinstated the federal structure that had been abrogated by Ironsi, abolished the previous four-region system and, in May 1967, formally introduced a 12-state system.³ Strongly objecting to this development, the military governor of the Eastern Region, C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, unilaterally declared separation and independence of the Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra. The war between the Biafra and the federation began in July 1967 and it lasted 30 months. The Biafran War ended in January 1970 with the defeat of Biafra and the victory for the Nigerian federalist side.

Following the war, Nigeria achieved a remarkable post-war recovery and economic development thanks to the oil boom, but at the same time, there were rampant corruption and growing dissatisfaction with the Gowon regime within the military. A bloodless coup occurred in July 1975, when Gowon was travelling abroad, in which Brigadier Murtala Ramat Muhammed seized power. Muhammed started working on bold political reforms that would sweep away the negative legacy of the Gowon regime, but was felled by an

assassin's bullet in February of the following year. The regime's number-two leader, Olusegun Obasanjo, took over the reins of government as successor to Muhammed. The military regime of Obasanjo continued the policy direction of Muhammed and pushed reforms steadily forward, achieving the transition to civilian rule in October 1979, as had been originally promised. With this, the curtain fell on the 14 years of the First Phase of military rule under the four military regimes of Ironsi, Gowon, Muhammed and Obasanjo, and the Second Republic began with the election of Shehu Aliyu Shagari as the civilian president.

The Second Republic, however, collapsed in a further military coup at the end of December 1983 after only four short years, bringing Major General Muhammadu Buhari to power in January 1984. Although the Buhari regime initiated countermeasures against the severe economic crisis that arrived following the oil boom years, the severity of these measures drew a backlash from within the country and the regime collapsed in a coup in August 1985 after only a year and eight months in existence. Taking power after the coup, Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida took a positive stance in implementing political and economic reforms, such as an original structural adjustment programme, but invited great political confusion over transfer of power to civilian rule and in August 1993 relinquished the seat of power, nominating the civilian Ernest Shonekan as the Head of the Interim National Government (ING).

The ING is generally categorised as a civilian government, and so this regime is called the Third Republic. Nevertheless, this is only in a formal sense, since the ING was actually under the strong influence of the

military and did not have the independence or the legitimacy of a civilian government. This government collapsed after a period just short of three months, after Shonekan resigned as head of the government at the behest of the military in November 1993 (Osaghae 1998: 273).

Abolishing the ING and taking power, General Sani Abacha, although at first showing a quite positive stance towards democratisation, later took a more iron-fisted approach to the management of the regime, implementing the most dictatorial rule of all Nigeria's national military leaders. After Abacha died suddenly in June 1998, General Abdulsalam Abubakar acceded to the post of Head of State in his place. It was under this military regime that in May 1999 the transfer of power to a civilian government was realised, the former military leader Obasanjo, now having retired from the army, becoming president as a civilian. In this way, the Second Phase of military rule, lasting 15 years, if the short hiatus of the ING (the Third Republic) is included, came to an end, ushering in the new era of Nigerian civilian rule, the current Fourth Republic.

In this section, we have taken a brief bird's-eye view of the historical unfolding of the military regimes in Nigeria. In the following sections, we would like to consider the various aspects and behaviours of the personal rulers in the military regimes, taking the viewpoints of the seizure of power ("point of entry"), policy planning and implementation ("content"), and the transfer of power to civilian rule ("exit") as the main perspectives.

2. The Seizure of Power: Becoming a Ruler

In modern society, the most common route for soldiers to seize political power is through the military coup. However, all military coups are not necessarily the same, and this is certainly true in the case of Nigeria, where the form of the military coup has changed subtly with time. In this section, we will focus on the seizure of power by Nigerian military leaders, especially on the form of the coup.

As we saw in the previous section, from Nigeria's independence to the establishment of the Fourth Republic, there were six occasions when a change in national leader came about through a coup: (1) January 1966, (2) July 1966, (3) July 1975, (4) February 1976, (5) December 1983, and (6) August 1985. The event in which the Head of the ING, Shonekan, resigned at the behest of the military, leading to the establishment of the Abacha military regime, is not strictly a coup, but from the circumstances it can be seen as amounting closely to a bloodless coup. Adding this last incident of November 1993 as a coup to the above six gives us seven occasions on which the change of national leader involved a coup prior to the establishment of the Fourth Republic.⁴

Table 1 shows the military rank of the ringleaders of the seven coups. What is immediately clear from the table is that as time passes the rank of the main conspirators shows an almost continuous rise.

In the First Phase of military rule, especially the two coups which took place before the Biafran War, (1) January 1966 and (2) July 1966, the ringleaders

Table 1 Ranks of the Ringleaders of Military Coups

Rank \ Coup	First Phase				Second Phase		
	(1) Jan. 1966	(2) Jul. 1966	(3) Jul. 1975	(4) Feb. 1976	(5) Dec. 1983	(6) Aug. 1985	(7) Nov. 1993
General							●
Lt. General							
Major General					●	●	
Brigadier							
Colonel			●				
Lt. Colonel			●	●			
Major	●						
Captain		●					
Lieutenant		●					
Second Lt.							

Sources: Iroanusi (1997) and Oyewole and Lucas (2000).

were lieutenants to majors, that is, from the junior and middle class officer ranks. Nigeria's first coup in January 1966 is generally known as the "Majors' Coup" or the "January Boys' Coup", and its ringleaders were young officers of the rank of major, such as Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, who were devoted to radical revolutionary ideology. They carried out the coup with the involvement of 100 to 150 junior officers and soldiers, and although they were successful in capturing or killing the main political leaders, in the end they were unable to seize power and were forced to surrender. The situation was brought under control by General Ironsi, who was installed as Head of State.⁵

The second coup in July 1966 was carried out mainly by northern Nigerian junior officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who strongly

objected to the Igbo dominance during and after the first coup. The Head of State, Ironsi, an Igbo, was killed and in his place the northern Nigerian Chief of Staff Gowon took the seat of political power. Luckham (1971: 51) terms this coup the “Junior Officers’ and NCOs’ Coup”.

Thus, junior and middle class officers played a central role in the planning and implementation of the two coups that took place in 1966. As a background to this, the stratum of officer ranks in the Nigerian army of the time was very thin, and this had given no small amount of influence. As I will mention below, prior to the Biafran War, the strength of the core of the Nigerian armed forces, the army, numbered only about ten thousand men, and the officer ranks, the “brains” of the army, were extremely limited. This personnel limitation was especially serious among the higher ranking officers rather than the lower, such that on the eve of the January 1966 coup, there were only seven men, including Ironsi, with an officer rank higher than major. Since five senior officers were killed in that coup, on the eve of the second coup in July 1966 there were only two (Luckham 1971: 91). Within this remarkably severe senior officer personnel restriction, as the very few existing senior officers were almost completely incorporated into the regime, the young NCOs, with their strong feelings of dissatisfaction towards the civilian government and ethnic antagonism, rose up in an attempt to overthrow the regime.

Contrastingly, the Nigerian army expanded rapidly to 250,000 personnel at the time of the Biafran War, and the officer ranks were quickly enlarged in step with this. The influence from this enlarged officer stratum was that in the two coups that took place following the war in the First Phase of military

rule, (3) July 1975 and (4) February 1976, it seems to have been the field rank, middle class officers, rather than the company officers (junior officers) who played a more central role. It also seems that the involvement of military personnel of the general class was strongly implicated in these two coups, something that had not happened up until that time. For example, in the third coup in July 1975, the main conspirators were Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Garba and Lieutenant Colonel Shehu Musa Yar'adua, who carried out their coup with the prior consent and support of Brigadier General Muhammed, and in the fourth coup of February 1976 it is reported that the main conspirator Lieutenant Colonel Bukar Dimka had the consent of Major General I.D. Bisalla to carry out the coup (Osaghae 1998: 79-80, 88). In the latter coup, however, although the coup executor group was successful in the assassination of the Head of State, Muhammed, the coup itself failed, and in the end Lieutenant General Obasanjo resolved the situation and took the seat of power. Lieutenant Colonel Dimka and Major General Bisalla were later arrested and executed along with other coup participants.

Yet, even in the coups in the post-Biafran War period, when the officer stratum had been enlarged, the involvement of generals was still limited. As mentioned above, in the two coups (3) July 1975 and (4) February 1976, even though generals gave their prior support for the coup plans and acceded to the post of head of state because they had resolved the situation following a failed coup, they were not yet the masterminds behind coup attempts, nor were they directing the implementation of coups.

In contrast, all of the coups (5) December 1983, (6) August 1985 and (7) November 1993 in the Second Phase of military rule were masterminded

and directed by general class personnel instead of company officers or field officers. In this sense, the coups of the Second Phase of military rule showed much more of a leaning towards what may be termed the “Coups of Brigadiers and Generals” (Babatope 1986: viii).

For example, the fifth coup of December 1983, was masterminded and executed, with the involvement of Babangida and Abacha, by Major General Buhari, who harboured dissatisfaction with a failed economic policy, political corruption, confusion over elections, weak-kneed diplomacy concerning international border issues,⁶ and a cold-shouldering of the military under the civilian regime of Shagari. Further, in the sixth coup of August 1985, the number-three in the regime, Major General Babangida, harboured dissatisfaction against the leadership framework of the head of state, Buhari, and the number-two, Major General Tunde Idiagbon, and is reported to have co-conspired with Abacha to carry out the coup. It is also said that Babangida had a strong personal sense of indignation concerning the choice of Idiagbon as number-two, since Idiagbon was of lower rank than himself. In addition, as we have seen above, in the case of the seventh regime change of November 1993, General Abacha, who was even known as the *Khalifa* (king-in-waiting), and who had been involved with Babangida in almost every coup since July 1975, seized power by effectively forcing Shonekan, the Head of the ING, to resign (Osaghae 1998: 190).

It was this power game among the generals Buhari, Idiagbon, Babangida and Abacha that is one of the salient features of the coups of the Second Phase of military rule, and this appears to hint at the reason for the overall “personalisation” of the seizure of power in the Second Phase when

compared with the First Phase.

This trend towards “personalisation” of the seizure of power in coups in the Second Phase becomes even more pronounced when we consider a comparison of the personal backgrounds of the military leaders who became heads of the military regime after the various coups. For example, if we look at Ironsi, Gowon, Muhammed and Obasanjo, the military leaders during the First Phase of military rule, we find that their geographical origins differ somewhat; Ironsi was from Eastern Nigeria, Gowon and Muhammed were from the North, and Obasanjo was from the West. In terms of religion, Gowon and Obasanjo were Christians, and Muhammed was a Muslim, and from the viewpoint of generations, Ironsi was born in the 1920s, whereas Gowon, Muhammed and Obasanjo were one generation younger, having been born in the 1930s. Thus, within the four military rulers of the First Phase there is quite a substantial variation or “diversity” in terms of geographical origin, ethnic group, religious and generational aspects.

In contrast, Buhari, Babangida and Abacha, the national military leaders of the Second Phase of military rule, had almost no large differences between them in terms of socio-cultural background. Although all three were from different ethnic groups, they were all Muslims of the North, all were of nearly the same age, having been born in the early 1940s, all entered the Nigerian Military Training College (NMTC) in 1962, and were all commissioned in 1963. It was thus that these three men, sharing common cultural, social and generational backgrounds, and having no great disparity in ideological or political stance, were able to conspire together and implement the coup of December 1983 as comrades, and bring the Second

Republic to an end.

The background to the fact that coups involving regime change occurred several times in the Second Phase, despite this lack of any large socio-cultural or ideological differences, can perhaps be found in the personal antagonism and friction between certain members of the senior officer class, and a lurking appetite for power among them. This is not, of course, the sole factor behind the occurrence of the coups in the Second Phase, but it is almost certain that it was at least one of the main causes (Peters 1997: 200).

Thus, Buhari, Babangida and Abacha, with their several factors in common; all from the North, Muslim, born in the early 1940s, entering NMTC in 1962, being commissioned in 1963 and co-conspiring in coups, were a cohort, and in that sense, the three “Coups of Brigadiers and Generals” of the Second Phase were not conflicts of identity or ideology, but rather can be said to have been “intra-cohort power struggles” arising from personal conflict and antagonism within an effectively homogenous group of leaders.

In the case of Nigeria, it was mainly in the Second Phase of military rule that the “personalisation” of the coup as a means for military personnel to seize power became notably visible as an “intra-cohort power struggle”, and this seems to suggest to a certain extent a tendency to “personalisation” of Nigeria’s military rule itself.

Nevertheless, it goes without saying that even if a comparative study of the coup as the “point of entry” for each of the military regimes demonstrates that especially the Second Phase coups were more “personalised”, this

alone is not necessarily sufficient proof that the various military regimes themselves were more personalised in this phase. In the following section we would like to focus on the “content” of the rule of each of the military regimes, especially with respect to policy planning and implementation, and carry out a more substantial examination and discussion concerning personal rule in the military regimes in Nigeria.

Further, since the establishment of the Abubakar military regime in the Second Phase was brought about by the sudden death of the head of state, Abacha, it was not a so-called coup, and thus is not included in Table 1. However, if we take the liberty of comparing this with other regime changes that were brought about by coups in the Second Phase, we may say that the birth of the Abubakar regime was a rather exceptional regime change that was brought about by the adventitious factor of the abrupt death of the immediate predecessor. In this sense, it can be said that this regime change has close similarities with the situation under which the Obasanjo regime was established following the assassination of Muhammed in the coup of February 1976. If we then make the bold assertion that despite the great differences in historical backdrop and context, the Obasanjo regime of the First Phase and the Abubakar regime of the Second Phase were both established unintentionally by the abrupt demise of the immediate predecessor, the fact that both of these regimes later achieved a transition to civilian rule was perhaps not a totally coincidental match. It would seem that there lurks a hidden similarity concerning a certain correspondence between the form of the seizure of power (“point of entry”) and the form of the later rule and withdrawal (“content” and “exit”).

3. Policy Planning and Implementation: Ruling the State

One of the salient features of Nigeria's military rule is that in the various regimes of the First Phase the influence of bureaucracy on policy planning and implementation was in general large, but in the Second Phase the influence of military personnel became relatively greater. For example, in 1978 the number two in the Obasanjo regime, Major General Yar'adua, summed up the First Phase military rule in the following manner; "It is no longer a secret that civil servants have influenced major decisions in the last twelve years of military rule. They have enjoyed virtually unchallenged the exercise of power all these years" (cited in Adamolekun 1986: 99).

The political scientist Adamolekun has distinguished the following four periods in which the power of the bureaucracy enlarged in the 14 years of the First Phase of military rule—the first period (January 1966 to May 1967), the second period (June 1967 to 1970), the third period (1970 to July 1975), and the fourth period (July 1975 to September 1979)—and he has attempted a detailed examination of these four periods (Adamolekun 1986: 99-137).

According to this discussion, the first period is described as the "military-bureaucratic diarchy", and covers the period from the time when the first coup occurred in Nigeria, establishing the Ironsi military regime in January 1966, to the announcement of the introduction of the 12-state system by the Gowon regime, and the declaration of separation and independence of Biafra by Ojukwu as a countermeasure to this in May 1967. During this period, of the three groups, the soldiers, the politicians and the bureaucrats, the politicians were almost totally excluded from the regime, and in their place

the military personnel shouldered the management of the regime with the cooperation of the higher levels of the bureaucracy. However, the military in this period were extremely weak and undeveloped, both quantitatively and qualitatively, as the principals of regime management.

When military rule was established in January 1966, total officers and enlisted personnel in the Nigerian army numbered no more than approximately 10,500, of whom the total number of officers was just over 510. Further, subtracting from this number medical, accounting and other non-combat officers, the remaining number of combat officers was a mere 330. The Nigerian army had to carry out the responsibilities of national administration on top of the normal duties with just these 330 officers.

As mentioned above, this quantitative restriction in the officer stratum became even more critical following the two coups of 1966. On the eve of the establishment of the Ironsi regime, there were only seven senior officers with the rank of colonel and above, among which five were killed in the second coup of 1966. By simple calculation, in the six months between January and July of that year, the Nigerian army lost 71% of its senior officers. Similarly, the army lost 5 of its 14 lieutenant colonels (36%), 8 of its 32 majors (25%), and 60 of its total combat officer force of 330 (18%), either killed or jailed (Luckham 1971: 91). In addition, following the killing of a great number of Igbo officers in the July 1966 coup, Igbo officers and enlisted personnel moved to the Eastern Region, placing themselves under the command of the military governor of the Eastern Region, Ojukwu, further reducing the number of officers remaining on the federal side.

This quantitative restriction of the officer class at the dawn of military rule was exceedingly serious, to the extent that the Supreme Military Council (SMC) set up by Ironsi as the supreme decision-making body of the military regime, consisted of only 11 members, including Ironsi himself as the head of government. Furthermore, set up as the effective cabinet, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) had only nine members (Achike 1978: 249-250). The Nigerian army of the time could ill-afford the officer personnel to fill the SMC and FEC political posts.

The officer group at the time of the establishment of military rule was also not up to the same standard qualitatively when compared with other elite groups. For example, if we compare the age composition of key officials of the army, police and federal government in January 1966, the proportion of army combat officers over the age of 45 was a mere 0.3%, while the proportion of young officers between the ages of 20 to 24 was 62%. In contrast, the higher ranks of the police force and the federal civil service were staffed by veteran officials, i.e. the proportion of the police force at the rank of assistant superintendent and above, and the proportions of the federal civil service at administrative class and above, who were 45 years of age or older, were 28% and 10% respectively. When military rule was established in Nigeria, army officers in an overall sense as an elite group were young, and because of that, when compared with the higher echelon officials in the police force and federal civil service, it is not hard to infer that they had had very little hands-on work experience and that their ability to draw up and implement policy was quite underdeveloped (Luckham 1971: 98).

Thus the military officers during the early phase of military rule were qualitatively and quantitatively weak in comparison with other elite groups, and even though they had seized political power, had very little option but to manage the regime by relying heavily on the very experienced senior bureaucrats. Adamolekun termed this situation, under which there were no politicians, and the form of regime management where the military supervised the bureaucrats who drew up and implemented policies, the military-bureaucratic diarchy.

The second period was the civil war period from June 1967, when politicians were first appointed to positions within the military regime, to the end of the Biafran War in 1970. Faced with the crisis of a split in the state from the Biafran War, Gowon appointed Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba politician, to the posts of Federal Commissioner for Finance and Vice-Chairman of the FEC in June 1967. The Vice-Chairman of the FEC was effectively an official position equivalent to prime minister, and thus a joint military-civilian wartime government of national unity was formed in which the Chairman of the SMC (and FEC) as Head of State was a soldier (Gowon) and his assistant as Vice-Chairman of the FEC was a politician (Awolowo). It was in this way that Gowon attempted to overcome the state crisis of the civil war by incorporating a number of civilian politicians into the body of the military regime as cabinet ministers.

The third period is the period from the end of the Biafran War in 1970 to the establishment of the Muhammed regime in July 1975. Adamolekun describes this period as the period of the “military-bureaucratic complex”. According to Adamolekun (1986: 109), the expression “military-bureaucratic

complex” first appeared in the magazine *Nigerian Opinion* in 1972. The form of regime management of this period is similar to that of the period of the military-bureaucratic diarchy which existed before May 1967. The biggest difference between the two is that no politicians participated in the management of the regime in the military-bureaucratic diarchy, whereas in the later “military-bureaucratic complex” period, the politicians who had been appointed to important positions during the civil war remained within the regime as cabinet ministers.

The role of politicians serving as cabinet ministers was to a degree appreciated during the civil war. Following the war, however, as both the need for politicians in the military regime and their evaluation fell, the voice of the bureaucrats in the various government agencies began to gain more power. Among them were a number of senior bureaucrats, known as super permanent secretaries, or “super-permsecs”, who exercised especially large power (Joseph 1987: 79). The “super-permsecs” such as Allison Ayida became members of a large number of councils, government committees, boards of directors of publicly-managed companies and the like, had great influence in the planning and implementation of policies, and often wielded executive power that outstripped even that of cabinet ministers. The “militicians”, the soldiers who had been politicised, while liaising closely with these “super-permsecs”, began to take the leading role in the drawing up and implementation of policy.

As a result, the civilian politicians, who found themselves being given the cold-shoulder within the military regime following the end of the civil war, along with businessmen and academicians outside the regime,

began to react strongly against the “honeymoon” between the military and bureaucracy, the monopolisation of rights and interests and the expansion of the power of the bureaucrats backed up by the military. The term “military-bureaucratic complex” expressed the situation of the ongoing unification of the military and bureaucracy alongside the existence of the opposing forces of the politicians and others.

The fourth period, the four years from the establishment of the Muhammed regime in July 1975 to the eve of transition to civilian rule by the Obasanjo regime in September 1979, is characterised by Adamolekun as a period of “military-led consensual government”.

Once Muhammed had seized power, the first task he tackled was the elimination of the militicians, the military state governors and others who had exercised great power under the Gowon regime and who were frequently corrupt, and a purge of the corrupt bureaucrats who abused their power under them. First dismissing all the military governors of the Gowon regime and removing all the newly appointed governors from the SMC, the highest decision-making body of the state, Muhammed then created a new body, the National Council of States (NCS), separate from the SMC, and to which the military governors would be the main constituent members. Further, he purged 10,000 to 12,000 civil servants from public office for abuse of power, corruption, old age, or dereliction of duty.

While on the one hand eliminating corrupt militicians and civil servants from the government, Muhammed and his successor Obasanjo actively worked to have civilian politicians and other elite groups such as intellectuals,

who had been brushed off by preceding regimes, participate in the policy planning and implementation process. Concretely, under the two regimes a constitutional conference and various other government panels were set up at the federal level, and at the level of each state a new body called the Economic Advisory Commission was established, many civilians being appointed to these various government committees. Adamolekun's "military-led consensual government" was an expression of the form of regime management under which the military, while retaining political power within their grasp, co-opted a wide range of elite groups such as politicians, intellectuals, labour union activists and businessmen, into the regime, and attempted to build a consensus on policy directions through discussion.

Nevertheless, it is not at all true to say that bureaucrats were totally eliminated from the centre of the regime in this period. While many bureaucrats, including "super-permsecs" were purged from public office, not a few bureaucrats did survive the purge, and although some of these senior bureaucrats were excluded from membership in the various councils and government committees, they did make free use of their administrative checking function and continued to exercise an influence on the policy planning and implementation process (Adamolekun 1986: 123, 126).

Thus, concerning policy planning and implementation in the First Phase of military rule, it is possible to see differences in the influence of bureaucrats in different periods. Particularly in the first period (the military-bureaucratic diarchy) and the third period (the military-bureaucratic complex), the influence of bureaucrats on the process of the planning and implementation of policy was extremely great, whereas one can say that in the second

period (the civil war) and the fourth period (the military-led consensual government), the role of civilians, politicians and intellectuals, was relatively greater. However, as is symbolically represented in the words of Yar'adua mentioned above, overall the bureaucracy can be said to have come to exercise greater power throughout the First Phase of military rule than during the First Republic. In that sense, the Nigerian military regimes of this period, although being iron-fisted, as military rule is apt to be, were not necessarily remarkable for their personal rule aspects, but rather showed quite a large degree of the nature and features of bureaucratic rule.

In contrast, coming to the Second Phase of military rule, the role and influence of soldiers became relatively greater. Military personnel were appointed not only as state governors and cabinet ministers, but many also sat on a wide range of councils and government panels, or took over key posts in publicly-managed companies. In the Second Phase, increased numbers of retired military personnel attracted attention not only in business circles, but also became new actors in the political field (Adekanye 1999). Among them were such people as Buhari, who served as the Executive Chairman of the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) under the Abacha regime. Buhari had been pushed out from the political centre-stage by the coup of August 1985, but was later rehabilitated and appointed to key positions in the government.

So it was, with the expansion of political influence of these soldiers as one backdrop, there began the appearance in the Nigerian political arena of national military leaders that could truly be described as none other than personal rulers. Representative examples of these personal rulers were

Babangida and Abacha.

Babangida was the first Nigerian national military leader to call himself “President”. Nigerian national military leaders up to that time had generally used the rather more modest title of “Head of State”, and not the “President” of the republican period. In this sense, we can perhaps say that Babangida’s inauguration as “President” was an event that symbolically indicated the unconventional nature of his rule. Moreover, the choice of the title “President” was not made by those around him, but was a personal decision by Babangida himself. According to evidence given by Major Debo Bashorun, Babangida’s aide and spokesman, Babangida himself rewrote every instance of “Head of State” in the draft speech as “President” in the car on the way to the television broadcasting station to record his first speech immediately after the 1985 coup. Bashorun, who had drafted the speech, later recalled Babangida’s sudden action in the car by saying, “It was unexpected” (cited in Peters 1997: 201).

Babangida, who had thus arranged to be the first Nigerian national military leader to be inaugurated as “President”, went on to actively concentrate a great deal of power into his own hands. For example, immediately following the successful coup, Babangida transferred the power of appointments of the military service chiefs and inspector general of police, previously under the jurisdiction of the SMC, to the exclusive prerogative of the president. Further, he abolished the post of Chief of Staff of the Supreme Headquarters, the highest staff position in the national armed forces, which held the authority to command the national armed forces, and established in its place a new post, Chief of General Staff, General Staff Headquarters

(CGS) with no command authority. The CGS was formally the supreme staff position, as was the former post, but in the sense that it did not carry the authority to command the national armed forces, it was rather more reminiscent of what was effectively the political post of vice-president in the republican period. By expropriating the authority to command the national armed forces from the Chief of Staff, Babangida had manoeuvred to strengthen his own position as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces (C in C) (Osaghae 1998: 191-192; Peters 1997: 201).

While thus appropriating the authorities to make key appointments and to command the police force and armed forces, Babangida carried out frequent reshuffles of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), the highest decision-making body in his regime, and NCS, never forgetting to pay meticulous attention to ensure that no member of the military regime could build up a power base by remaining in the same political post for a number of years. For example, in the five years from August 1985 to the end of 1990, Babangida reshuffled the cabinet all of seven times, and state governors six times. These frequent personnel changes were, for example, in great contrast to the Gowon regime in the First Phase of military rule, under which military governors were hardly ever replaced.

Concerning individual concrete matters of policy planning and implementation, Babangida also demonstrated an adroit handling not seen in previous national military leaders. The pioneering example of this was the introduction by the Babangida regime of an original Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). In the mid-1980s, there was persistent opposition to an IMF-imposed SAP in Nigeria. In this situation, while evoking a national

debate on the acceptance of IMF funding and the conditionality of the SAP, Babangida took the stance of rejecting acceptance of IMF funding on the basis of the debate, but at the same time successfully introduced his own SAP for economic reform, which was similar in content to that drawn up by the IMF. This adroit footwork in policy planning and implementation was one of the salient features of Babangida as a national leader, thus the Nigerian mass media called Babangida the “Nigerian Maradona”, likening him to the famous Argentinian soccer star Maradona for his skilful ability to dribble the political football at will, shoot and finally score the intended political goal (Adekanye 1997: 57-58). Later, one of his biographers would eulogise the statesman Babangida as governing in the very image of the wise ruler in dubbing him “the Prince of the Niger”.

However, even this skilful regime management by a personal ruler of the ilk of the “Nigerian Maradona” or “the Prince of the Niger” eventually began to show signs of wavering. One of the turning points was the abortive coup attempt of April 1990. With the year in which this incident occurred, 1990, as a rough dividing line, the state of policy execution and financial expenditures of the Babangida regime became far more arbitrary than previously, lost its dexterity, and descended into opaque backroom politics and an iron-fisted approach to regime management, manifesting a conspicuous and severe degree of corruption (Maier 2002: 68). Lieutenant General Alani Akinrinade, who served as minister for agriculture and minister for industry under the Babangida regime, has described the political confusion and rampant corruption in the terminal stage of the regime as follows:

I didn't have very serious misgivings in the first five years of the regime.

It was after 1990 that things actually went bad. There were no council meetings, there were extra-budgetary expenditures. There were all sorts of bilateral arrangements between ministers and the President. The extent of corruption was terrible. I honourably had to leave when things were not going well (cited in Peters 1997: 217).⁷

In addition, in the latter part of the Babangida regime, as we shall mention later, serious confusion arose over the most important task of the regime, the programme of transition to civilian rule, and this resulted in a strengthening of opposition to the regime from pro-democracy and anti-government forces. Babangida would later choose to take responsibility for political confusion surrounding the presidential election of June 1993 by resigning from office.

In contrast, Abacha is the leader who has been evaluated as the most dictatorial military ruler in Nigerian political history. As mentioned above, Abacha came to power in November 1993 by forcing the resignation of Babangida's successor, Shonekan. At the time, however, Abacha quickly expressed his intention to carry out the transition to civilian rule and actively appointed pro-democracy civilians to public positions to appease public opinion, strongly antagonistic to military rule. Before long, nevertheless, strong-arm tendencies became explicit. The armed forces, military intelligence and the police were used to clamp down on the media and pro-democracy forces, and a series of arrests and assassinations of political enemies and pro-democracy activists occurred. Especially notable was the execution in November 1994 of Ken Saro-Wiwa, an Ogoni people's rights activist, which was strongly denounced both inside Nigeria and internationally, and it resulted in the strong impression of the personal rule

by “Abacha the dictator”. Further, Obasanjo and approximately 40 retired soldiers and civilians were arrested for alleged involvement in a coup plan. These human rights violations and suppression of the media and activists by the Abacha regime drove a large number of intellectuals, pro-democracy activists, politicians and journalists, including the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Wole Soyinka, into taking the option of overseas exile.

Under the Abacha regime, important policy issues were at first discussed in the highest decision-making body, the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC), and the overall mood of the regime management is said to have been quite temperate. However, in May 1994, a coalition of pro-democracy organisations known as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) was formed, and the posture of the regime rapidly hardened as NADECO’s movement to boycott the constitutional conference began to show signs of picking up steam (Babatope 2000). PRC meetings almost never occurred, and instead important policy decisions were made one after another simply on the judgement of Abacha himself and his aides, and announced by proclamation (Alli 2001: 333). Along with this, budgetary expenditures of an indeterminate nature increased.

Looking back historically on the form of policy planning and implementation in Nigeria’s periods of military rule, we can see that there are considerable differences between the different periods. In the First Phase of military rule, the influence of the bureaucracy on policy planning and implementation was generally speaking large, and although there naturally existed the iron-fistedness that one would expect from a military regime, there was no conspicuous example of personal rule. Gowon, for example, whose regime

was the longest, lasting for nine out of the 14 years of the First Phase of military rule, was even ridiculed as a national leader for being “too soft, slow and weak” (Elaigwu 1986: 301). In contrast, in the Second Phase, especially as we come to the Babangida and Abacha regimes, the unfolding of a “personalised” regime management (personal rule) took place against the backdrop of expanded political influence of the soldiers, policy-making by the military ruler himself with the other elite groups, the soldiers, the politicians and the bureaucrats, being carried out sometimes skilfully, sometimes with an iron fist, and sometimes arbitrarily.

4. The Transition to Civilian Rule: Going Back to the Barracks

Thus far we have carried out an historical analysis of what normally should be two public acts—the taking over of the reins of power, and the policy planning and implementation—that in the case of Nigeria’s military regimes, became increasingly “personalised” in the Second Phase than in the First Phase, especially during the regimes of Babangida and Abacha. In this section, we shall focus on the handling of the transition to civilian rule by each of the military regimes.

Firstly, at least up until the 1980s in African countries, there were many incidents in which military regimes put in place a “sham civilianisation” when a military-led single-party rule was established. For example, in November 1965 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mobutu seized plenipotentiary power in a bloodless coup, was inaugurated as president, and later established one-party rule through a 1970 amendment of the constitution. Gnassingbé Eyadéma seized power in a military coup in

Togo in January 1967, established a single political party in August 1969, and moved the country to one-party rule. Likewise, in Ethiopia, where the imperial regime collapsed in the revolution of 1974, Mengistu Haile Mariam, who was installed as the head of the revolutionary military regime in February 1977, later founded a single political party, and in 1987 carried out a purely ceremonial transition to civilian rule. It was through this “sham civilianisation”, which was little more than soldiers shedding their uniforms, that these “civilians” such as Mobutu, Eyadéma and Mengistu made their appearance as personal rulers.

In contrast, the salient feature of military rule in Nigeria, especially in the First Phase, was that it did not involve a “sham civilianisation” as in other African countries, but almost always set forth a more comprehensive and credible transition to civilian rule. For example, as mentioned earlier, right from the outset Ironsi had described his military regime as an interim government, by clearly stating that he had no intention of aspiring to prolong military rule. To this end, Ironsi set up multiple research groups and began working on preparations towards a transition to civilian rule at an early stage (Osaghae 1998: 57-61). With the end of the Biafran War in January 1970, Gowon also announced his own programme for transition to civilian rule in an Independence Day speech in October of that year. This programme, having set January 1976 as the target date for implementation of the transition, set out nine points of policy issues that had to be tackled by that time. In October 1975, the Muhammed regime also announced its programme of transition to civilian rule. This programme set the target date for the achievement of the return to civilian rule at October 1979, divided the period up to that point into five phases, and presented policy tasks for

each phase. Following Muhammed's death, this programme for a four-year transition to civilian rule with five phases was taken over by the Obasanjo regime, which successfully carried out the transition to civilian rule according to the original target date of October 1979.

Thus, as far as the First Phase is concerned, all four military regimes expressed the intention of making the transition to civilian rule, and with the exception of the Ironsi regime the remaining three regimes announced and implemented a programme for the transition to civilian rule. Naturally, there is a certain difference in the degree of earnestness with which the different regimes pursued the preparations towards the transition, and especially in the case of the Gowon regime, efforts towards the transition to civilian rule were not always pursued with great vigour. Nevertheless, the regimes of Nigeria's First Phase of military rule did not generally seek to engage in the kind of "sham civilianisation" seen in other African countries, and did advocate the transition to civilian rule with the major premise of the complete withdrawal of the military from politics.

Coming into the Second Phase, in contrast, we see regimes which either did not formally express the desire to make the transition to civilian rule, or which on the other hand deceitfully attempted to hold onto power by adroit manipulation of a programme for transition to civilian rule. For example, the Buhari regime of the Second Phase did not formally express the intention of making the transition to civilian rule, and was the only Nigerian military regime not to do so up to that point. Although the short-lived nature of the regime had some influence on the failure to draw up a basic guideline on the transition, on the other hand Buhari propounded as the overriding priority

of the regime not the transition to civilian rule, but rather a social revolution under military rule, and attempted to carry out a strengthening of social discipline by deploying a mass mobilisation campaign known as the War Against Indiscipline (WAI), handing down severe sentences, including the firing squad for narcotic traffickers, and banning news reports slandering or maligning public officials.

In contrast to Buhari's failure to announce a programme of transition to civilian rule, in January 1986, five months after seizing power, Babangida quite quickly announced the intention of achieving the transition to civilian rule by October 1990. In July 1987, he then publicised his programme for the transition, under which the timing for the return to civilian rule was set at October 1992, two years later than the original proposal, thereby stipulating a long span of over five years for the transition period. In the first half of this period, preparations for the transition to civilian rule would concentrate on setting up the necessary administrative organs, a constitution, political parties among others, and the second half would see the implementation of elections building up from the local level, to the state level, and on up to the federal level.

The implementation of this programme for transition to civilian rule proceeded relatively smoothly at first, but gradually postponements and confusion became more conspicuous. In October 1989, for instance, the Babangida regime suddenly dissolved all 13 of the political associations which had applied for registration, announcing in their place the government-led founding of two official parties. Then in December of that year the schedule for the programme of transition to civilian rule itself was

revised.

Confusion over the programme of transition to civilian rule further deepened following an abortive coup attempt in April 1990. In January 1992, a second alteration to the timetable was made, the timing of the transition to civilian rule being postponed to January 1993. Further, in 1992, the Babangida regime annulled the results of primary presidential elections carried out within the two official parties, ordered the dissolution of the executive councils of both parties, and then in November of that year, announced a further postponement of the timing of the transition to civilian rule to August 1993 on the grounds of delays in the process of electing presidential candidates.

However, as mentioned above, the incident which effectively dealt the final blow to the Babangida regime's programme of transition to civilian rule was the chaos surrounding the presidential election held in June 1993. Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) appeared to have won the presidential election, but the high court ordered the publication of the results of the election to be suspended, and in the end annulment of the election results was announced by the Babangida regime. Anti-government rioting broke out, centred on Abiola's home region in Western Nigeria, and the looting and destruction of the runaway crowds developed into a situation in which there were fatalities and injuries. It was amid these scenes of confusion that the Babangida regime ushered in its final days.

Looking back on the programme for the transition to civilian power of the

Babangida regime, it was not purely a programme that aimed at a return to civilian power, but rather a transition programme that gave the impression of being an unprecedented “grandiose social experiment” or a “long-term political learning process involving the participation of the people”. A wide swathe of the government and people were swept up in the illusion and rhetoric of the programme, and it appears to have been a ploy designed to prolong the life of the regime. In fact, this Babangida-led series of processes towards a transition to civilian rule later came to be ridiculed as the “transition without end” (Diamond et al. eds. 1997).

On the other hand, in November 1993, Abacha announced that a constitutional conference (hereafter called confab) would be held in January 1994. Further, in January 1994, Abacha set up a National Constitutional Conference Commission to elect delegates to the confab, and then in April of that year announced a two-phase programme of transition to civilian rule along with a timetable for the first phase of the programme.

Thus the Abacha military regime expressed a desire to make the transition to civilian rule at a relatively early stage and announced a political programme to achieve this. However, the full constituent powers originally promised to the confab were in the end not granted, and the confab came to be placed under the military regime’s strict supervision and restraint (Agbaje 1999: 200). Moreover, regarding the election of delegates to the confab, as noted earlier, a wide campaign to boycott the elections developed, centred on the Western area, and the legitimacy of the elections was severely compromised.

In June 1995, the confab submitted a report to the Abacha regime, and in October of that year the regime then, on the basis of this report, announced the timetable for the second half of the programme for the transition to civilian rule. When the year for the return to civilian rule, 1998, came around, a disturbing movement began to appear, both inside and outside the regime, to push for Abacha to become the next president, and in April 1998 the five official parties elected Abacha as their joint candidate for the presidential election. A common perception arose among the people that perhaps the Abacha regime's programme of transition to civilian rule itself had been nothing more than a self-written and self-starred play to retain hold on power, and the cries of disappointment and anger against the regime over its handling of the transition to civilian rule began to grow. As mentioned above, it was in this setting in June 1998 that Abacha died suddenly, Abubakar being installed as Head of State in his place.

The Abubakar regime expedited the process for the transition to civilian rule. First revoking the Abacha regime's programme for the transition, and postponing the timing for the transition to civilian rule until May 1999, the regime released Obasanjo and other political prisoners. In August 1998, the schedule for the transition period of approximately six months to the transition to civilian rule was announced. At first, in addition to scepticism concerning Abubakar's leadership capabilities, voices were raised both domestically and internationally casting aspersions on the chances for the realisation of the programme of transition to civilian rule within such a short timeframe. Despite these negative assessments, however, the Abubakar regime carried out a smooth implementation of a series of elections from December 1998 to February 1999. Obasanjo was victorious in the

presidential election, and the transition to civilian rule was carried out on schedule in May 1999.

Thus, concerning the Second Phase, although the Abubakar regime worked steadily towards the realisation of a transition to civilian rule, the Buhari, Babangida and Abacha regimes were less positive about the withdrawal from politics than the First Phase regimes, or rather were generally reluctant or even downright negative about it. Buhari did not publicise any programme for a transition to civilian rule, and although Babangida announced a programme at an early stage, he cleverly manipulated the process of implementation in an attempt to prolong his rule. Abacha, as personal rulers in other African countries had once tried, plotted what amounted even to an anachronous “sham civilianisation” in the mid-1990s.

It is probably not appropriate to overemphasize the contrast between these attempts at a transition to civilian rule in the First and Second Phases. As noted above, Gowon, for example, though announcing a civilian rule transition programme, is also regarded to have secretly explored the notion of a transition to a one-party rule “sham civilianisation” on the persuasion of the “super-permsecs” and others (Adamolekun 1986: 110). As Finer correctly points out, one of the vulnerabilities of military regimes is their lack of legitimacy (Finer 1962 [2004]: 14). All of Nigeria’s military regimes to a greater or lesser extent utilised or manipulated the programmes of transition to civilian rule as a means of bolstering their lack of legitimacy.

Nevertheless, even if essential differences did not exist among Nigeria’s various military regimes regarding the handling of the transition to civilian

rule, we can at least on a relative level say that, with the exception of the Abubakar regime, the Second Phase military regimes had a weaker desire to withdraw from politics in comparison with the First Phase regimes; and that they either did not announce a programme of transition to civilian rule; or even in the case that they did announce one, the tendency to adroitly or arbitrarily manipulate it as a tool for prolonging the rule of the regime was strong. This important feature of the Second Phase of military rule concerning the transition to civilian rule is considered to have a rather large degree of linkage with the tendency to the development of the “personalisation” of rule mentioned above.

Conclusion

As I have pointed out repeatedly thus far, personal rule in Nigeria’s military regimes was more notably apparent in the Second Phase than in the First Phase. In this article, I have examined this strengthening of the tendency towards personal rule in the Second Phase from three viewpoints; the seizing of power as the “point of entry”, policy planning and implementation as the “content”, and the transition to civilian rule as the “exit” for the military regime. First, we focused on the form of the coup as the means of seizing power, and pointed out that in the Second Phase there was a change towards “intra-cohort power struggle” ascribable mainly to personal conflict and desire for power within one section of the senior officer class. Secondly, we examined the circumstances under which, against the backdrop of expanded political influence of the soldiers, the process of policy planning and implementation became gradually more “personalised” by the military rulers at the core of a section of the political elite. Finally, as corroborative

evidence of the tendency to “personalisation” of rule under the military in Nigeria, the reluctance and arbitrariness of the military rulers towards the transition to civilian rule, which became more notably apparent in the Second Phase, was pointed out.

Personal rule was already a widely apparent circumstance in Africa by the early 1980s. In contrast, as we have seen, personal rule in Nigerian military regimes in Nigeria arose during the Second Phase of military rule, beginning in the mid-1980s, and became more conspicuous during the period from the Babangida regime to the Abacha regime in the 1990s. In other words, during the period up to the 1980s, when personal rule was widely apparent in other African countries, it was not as notable in Nigeria, and it can be said that, conversely, it arose at the time when the tendency to personal rule was weakening in other African countries with the progress towards democratisation in the 1990s. It is indeed due to this “time-lag” concerning personal rule in Nigeria that there is only limited reference to that country in Jackson and Rosberg’s work on personal rule.

Why was it that personal rule in Nigeria’s military regimes become notable in the Second Phase, especially in the 1990s, and not in the First Phase? What could have been the cause of this “time-lag”?

It is not possible in this study to carry out a detailed consideration of this question, but I would like to complete this article by presenting one hypothesis that may be a hint towards the consideration of the question. This hypothesis relates the “time-lag” in the rise of personal rule to the “time-lag” in the formation of the Nigerian state.

Nigeria achieved independence in 1960 as a federal state with a fragile central power. As mentioned above, however, coups occurred frequently in Nigeria after the mid-1960s, with several military regimes being established. Centralisation of power proceeded under the iron-fisted rule set up by these regimes. Nevertheless, these political phenomena of military rule and centralisation of power themselves were not particularly exceptional in African countries at the time. Rather, it can be said that the factors that had greater influence on the nature of the Nigerian state were the Biafran War of the late 1960s and the oil boom of the 1970s. In Nigeria, it was not only military rule and the centralisation of power, as seen in other African countries, but also in parallel with these it was the experience of the two great political, economic and social upheavals of the Biafran War and the oil boom that brought about the throwing off of the preceding colonially-inherited state structure, with its politically fragile centre and great economic dependence on primary agricultural produce. The political resources of power and public office and the economic resources represented by the oil income were first gathered to the centre, and were then redistributed through either formal or non-formal mechanisms, resulting in the transfiguration of the state structure into one of an oil-dependent, resource-centralizing- and-redistributing nature.

In this sense, it can be said that there were two defining reference points for the establishment of the state in Nigeria. The first was the establishment of the framework of the Nigerian state, that is independence in 1960, and the second the Biafran War and the oil boom period between the late 1960s and the late 1970s which marked the establishment of the current political and socio-economic state structure. The “time-lag” concerning the formation

of the Nigerian state referred to in this article is none other than the gap between these two events.

Jackson and Rosberg (1982: 5), having pointed out that the non-institutional political system of personal rule was seen not only in modern Africa, but was also widely apparent in the age of the absolute rulers in Europe, state that, “In general, personal regimes may be thought of as typical of transitional periods, when one institutionalised order has broken down and another has not yet replaced it”. If this is so, then we can perhaps say that the personal rule especially apparent in African countries following independence was a political phenomenon of the transition period occurring after the collapse of the institutionalised political system of colonial rule and up to the point where it was replaced by another institutionalised political system. The background to the rise of personal rule, which has the nature of such a transition period, was somewhat delayed in Nigeria, and further the transition to civilian rule arrived later than the democratisation in other African countries, finally being realised in 1999, and this may have been due to the influence in some way of the unique circumstances or path dependence of Nigeria’s state formation, which we may quite simply indicate by the notion of the “time-lag” between independence and the Biafran War.

However, a full discussion of this hypothesis will have to be postponed until another opportunity at some point in the future.

Endnotes

1. Nigeria achieved independence in October 1960 as a state with the British monarch as the Head of State, and became a republic in October 1963. Thus, strictly speaking, Nigeria’s First Republic refers to the period between the

- establishment of the republic and its collapse (October 1963 to January 1966). However, in general, the period from independence, including the three years before the establishment of the republic until its collapse (October 1960 to January 1966) is called the First Republic (Osaghae 1998: 31).
2. Biographies of Gowon are, for example, Clarke (1987) and Elaigwu (1986).
 3. The administrative division of the “Region” may be somewhat difficult to understand for readers who are not familiar with Nigerian history. The three-region system of the Northern Region, Western Region and Eastern Region was formally introduced in the constitution enacted under British rule in 1946. Following that, and through the introduction of a *de facto* federal system in 1954, the “Regions” became administrative units with a high degree of autonomy, each having their own governor, premier, administration and legislature, the terminology and function being basically carried over to post-independence Nigeria. In 1963, the Mid-Western Region was separated from the Western Region, and the four-region system was established, but as is also noted in the text, the administrative division of the “Region” was abolished under military rule in 1967, and in its place the administrative unit of the “State” came into use.
 4. Concerning the coups of January and July 1966, the latter was a counter-coup to the former, and in that sense these were a distinct series of incidents in the same “political upheaval”. In this article, however, in order to carry out an individual and detailed analysis of the circumstances of personal rule of each military regime established through a coup, the two coups of 1966 are counted not as two incidents in the same “political upheaval”, but as two separate coups; and seven regime changes involving coup incidents are recognised as having occurred prior to the establishment of the Fourth Republic. Further, besides these seven coups, several abortive coup incidents which did not result in a change of national leader have occurred in Nigeria—the the April 1990 plot to overthrow the regime led by Major Gideon Orkar, for instance. Still, since the purpose of this study is to focus on the examination of personal rule in the military regimes, these abortive coup incidents which did not result in a change of national leader are not included within the subject matter of this discussion.
 5. Regarding the January 1966 coup and its main conspirator Nzeogwu, see Ademoyega (1981), Nzeogwu (2003) and Obasanjo (1987).
 6. A shooting incident occurred in the coastal area of the border with the Republic of Cameroon in 1981, in which five Nigerian soldiers were shot dead by the Cameroon force. Further, in 1983, a clash between the Nigerian and Chadian armies in the region of Lake Chad resulted in many injured. Thus, in the period of the Second Republic, there were frequent tense situations with neighbouring countries concerning border issues, but the failure of the Shagari government to

take a strong diplomatic stance in these circumstances drew a strong backlash from the upper echelon of the armed forces (Osaghae 1998: 167).

7. This citation from Peters (1997) does not include a reference to a published source.

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