The Republic of Nigeria

Demilitarization and the Search for Democratic Stability in Nigeria
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1. Introduction

In most parts of Africa, the politics of the gun has taken precedence over the politics of dialogue, negotiation and consensus. Armed conflicts, violent inter-communal clashes, wars, rebellions, unending inter-state border disputes and genocide are some of the features of political life in Africa. From the Horn of Africa, to the Great Lakes region, to North and West Africa, a debilitating picture of deep political crisis is palpable. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, by the end of 1994, no less than 12 countries were at war, two in the early post-war phase and 14 had a record or experience of significantly high levels of political violence. In all, a total of 28 countries, more than half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa were afflicted by serious violent conflicts at this period. By 1996, about 16 countries were at war. The effects of political conflicts in Africa have been quite damaging to the African society. Increasing poverty, hunger, diseases, escalating refugee problems, human rights abuses and a political environment inhospitable to development are what suffice.

In Nigeria, the “rule of the gun” by the military in the last 15 years (1984-1999) elicited tremendous conflicts in the Nigerian society. The militarization of politics and the denial of political space to civil society groups and other political actors by the military, provoked severe conflicts in the Nigerian society. In addition, the political misrule and economic mismanagement of the military during this period, exacerbated the contradictions in the Nigerian political economy. Inter-communal clashes, violent agitation by minority groups especially in the Niger delta, student unrest, strikes, demonstrations and violence became the norm of social and political life. The state itself relished in the culture of violence and virulent repression of its citizens.

Although a military disengagement process often euphemistically referred to as Transition to Civil Rule Program was recently completed in Nigeria, to what extent has the project of demilitarization been accomplished in Nigeria? Is military disengagement from politics synonymous with demilitarization? What is the linkage between demilitarization and democratization? How can a democratic re-orientation of the state and civil society be engineered in a country, which was badly devastated by ruthless military dictatorship, domination and savagery for the last 15 years? These are some of the salient issues which this paper seeks to address. Our objective is to provide a theoretical and of course, practical basis, through which a stable democratic order can be negotiated and achieved in Nigeria.

2. Demilitarization and Democratization: Conceptual and Theoretical Nexus

In extant literature, the concept of demilitarization implies the “disengagement” or “withdrawal” of the military from the political arena. This definition of demilitarization follows logically from its antonyms, that is, militarization and militarism. Militarization is viewed as the armed build-up and engagement of society, through military coups, authoritarian regimes, war, armed conflicts, internal military intervention and the dominance of patriarchal powerful military and repressive state apparatuses; while militarism refers to the pervasiveness in society of symbols, values, discourses validating military power. The implicit assumption in the above conception of demilitarization therefore is that as the military withdraws from the political arena, these identified practices and norms associated with militarization and militarism would be vitiated and the polity and society would seek a civil balance.
However, this definition is more formalistic and structural, rather than process-based, and does not capture the twists and nuances in the notion of demilitarization. The problematic of this definition arises primarily from its simplistic casualty or symmetry between militarization/militarism and military rule. The point to emphasize is that the practice of militarization and militarism is not synonymous with only military rule (but present also in civil regimes) hence, these practices do not simply get abrogated with the withdrawal of the military from the political arena. More especially, post-military states usually have entrenched norms and practices of militarism which are not easily deconstructed or eradicated with the formal transfer of political power from the military to civilians.

Our conceptualization of demilitarization therefore must transcend the idea of the formal withdrawal of the military from the political arena. It must include the deconstruction of the ideological and institutional structures of militarism and authoritarian ethos, and the reassertion of civil control and democratic culture over the organs of the state, economy and civil society.\(^8\) The latter (i.e. civil society) although outside the state arena, usually gets acculturated with the symbols, language, values and norms of militarism under military rule, which require being addressed and deconstructed in a post-military era.

It is when demilitarization is conceived in this broader sense, that it provides a linkage with the concept of democratization. Democratization involves the creation and expansion of the political space for multiple actors to interact, negotiate, compete, and seek political self-realization, within set and permissible rules. Democratization is a process through which the institutional infrastructures germane to the construction of a democratic polity are established (e.g. Parliament, independent and impartial Judiciary and Police, press etc.), civil liberties are codified and guaranteed, the rule of law suffices and a process of constitutionalism engineered.\(^9\) Democratization should be viewed not as an event, but a continuous process,\(^10\) implicit with struggles and contradictions and could be fitful, perfunctory, rough and tough.

Demilitarization and democratization are therefore set in an organic linkage on two basic grounds. Firstly, is on their background and object. They both constitute attempts at the reconstruction of the political order from an autocratic, to a relatively more open political system. Secondly, they are in real senses, products of social and political struggles, meant to emancipate a people. The end result of both when properly concretized, should be the establishment of a democratic political order and society.

3. **Demilitarization Project in Nigeria: An Overview**

Demilitarization in the Nigerian context is mostly conceived in the formal and structural sense. That is, the withdrawal of the military from the political arena. The method of doing so, involves a constitutional-evolutionary process, through which new political institutions and structures are established (i.e. electoral body, political parties, and so on etc.) and a constitution-making process set in motion for the country.

Often times, some structural adjustments are made in the federal structure of the country through the creation of new states and Local Governments, out of the existing ones. In addition, some efforts at political re-education of the civilian political elite is conducted by the military. That was the method adopted in the Murtala/Obasanjo (1976-1979), the Babangida (1985-1993), the Abacha (1994-1998) and the Abubakar (1998-1999) demilitarization projects. Perhaps, it was only during the Abubakar demilitarization plan that new states and local governments could not be created partly because of time constraint.
Military regimes in their demilitarization plans usually emphasize the object of democratization. The component parts of the plan include the withdrawal of the military from the political arena, and some efforts at its re-professionalisation, a didactic process of political re-orientation for the civilian political elite, and the establishment of new political structures. However, there are apparent contradictions in the focus and processes of the demilitarization project and the demand of democratization. These are in three areas. First, the issue of establishing civil control over the military is seldomly addressed. For military regimes, the question of military subordination to civil authority is usually posed in material terms. That is, increasing the level of military expenditure, giving material inducements to military officers, (like car gifts and salary increases, especially for the officers corp like it happened under the Babangida regime) and allowing the top hierarchy of the military unrestricted access to state contracts and the treasury.

The assumption is that once military officers are materially comfortable, they are most unlikely to be tempted to seize political power. But as Nicollo Machiavelli once observed, materialism and military life are diametrically opposed. The former breeds avarice, greed and reckless ambition, while the latter demands discipline, selflessness, sacrifice and commitment. As such, what materialism produces out of the military, are mercenary soldiers. The issues of legal, institutional and operational modes of civil control over the military and also that of the institutional reform of the military, are left unaddressed.

Secondly, military authored demilitarization plans take on the task of molding a new political culture for the political elites and society. Ironically, what the military perpetuates through this is to further militarize the political space and deepen military psyche, in the political society. As the example of the Babangida and Abacha demilitarization plans clearly illustrated, the political society was suffocated with rules, regulations, overbearing controls and military orders, such that political actors were denied any initiative and were made to act like political robots. During the Babangida transition program, over 1,000 decrees were issued on political and electoral matters, and politicians were screened, and re-screened, with many banned or disqualified from participating in the political process by the military junta. Invariably, the military became the only actor in its disengagement process.

Thirdly, the institutional bases of militarism are neither deconstructed nor reformed in the demilitarization plan. These include, the police force, which under military regimes usually act as a gestapo force, terrorizing the civil populace and the state security service (SSS), which was transformed into a mafia group under the Babangida and Abacha regimes and became an instrument of fear, frenzy and civil insecurity in the society. The enfeebled nature of the judiciary made any redress by the civil populace very difficult, if not impossible, hence, the rule of law was a hoax. There was blatant abuse and manipulation of the judiciary and the judicial process, as the issue of appointment, promotion, tenure and security of office of judges depended largely on the whims and caprices of the military rulers. The consequence was that many of the judges were either docile or inactive and succumbed to the intimidation and blackmail of the military. It was not uncommon therefore to see judges referring to the military rulers as “Kabiyesi” (His royal majesty), whose actions or decisions cannot be questioned or inquired into by the citizens.

The result of the foregoing contradictions of the military demilitarization project in Nigeria is that post-military state leaderships or regimes are usually very weak, with all the trappings of authoritarianism and are often susceptible to a military backlash through military coups or counter-coups.

In demilitarizing the Nigerian political and social space and engendering democratic re-orientation and a new democratic order, which would be stable and durable, there are three dimensions or issues which could serve as analytical/practical bases of reform, and on which those goals could be constructed. These are the military question, the issue of public institutions and the civil society question. The military question takes two major dimensions. These are, firstly, the issue of reforming and re-orienting the military institution, and, secondly, the issue of the retired soldiers in politics. These issues will be discussed in a sequential order.

5. Reforming and Re-Orienting the Military Institution

It is ironic yet true, that the Nigerian military has been the worst victim of military rule. As Eboe Hutchful and Abdoulaye Bathily rightly observed, military rule, apart from being an important ingredient in the decay of the state in Africa, has facilitated the disintegration of the military institution itself. At the dawn of self-rule in most African states the Military Institution was regarded as the most patriotic, nationalistic and puritanical public institution. It was on this basis that the theory of the “modernizing soldier”, popularized in the 1960s and 1970s, mostly by western scholars, was constructed and legitimized. However, long years of military rule have fractured the military institution, both from within and outside, and lay bare the tenuousness of the “modernizing soldier” argument. From within, the professional ethos of espirit de corp, pyramidal hierarchy, discipline, and strict subordination have all been squandered. From without, the incompetence of the military in governance, with the greed, avarice, opportunism and reckless corruption by military officers have been exposed and made quite palpable to the society. The military, particularly in Nigeria, has lost all iota of respect and public credibility.

In Nigeria, although the size of the military has grown astronomically after independence, from a size of 10,000 in 1960 to 250,000 in 1970 and slightly down to around 150,000 in the 1980s, so also has been its claim on public resources. The military has overtime maintained a high budgetary profile in the national accounts. From a budgetary allocation of 4% in 1960 (immediate post-independence era), this increased to 19.4% in 1973, down to 13.1% in 1981 and further down 9.8% to in 1987. Between 1994 to 1999, the allocation to the defense sector as percentage of the Federal Government budget was on the average of 15.8%. This did not include the extra-budgetary allocations made to the defense sector. Those allocations are far higher than that of the social sectors like education and health. The two sectors (education and health) were allocated an average of 2% and 1% respectively of the Federal Government expenditure between 1980-1990.

Paradoxically, neither the increase in the size of the Nigerian military, nor its colossal drain of public resources has been transformed into professional integrity and value. Military professional ethos have deteriorated sharply in the Nigerian Armed Forces. Disorderliness, reckless ambition, intrigues, blackmail, dirty politicking, fraud and manipulations are the new norms of military life in Nigeria.

Indeed, a former chief of Army Staff, General Salisu Ibrahim (retired), once remarked that the Nigerian Military has become “a military of anything goes”. General Alani Akinriade, (retired), a former Chief of Army Staff in Nigeria, also noted that the Nigerian Military has
ceased to be a national or a professional army. According to him “the military has become politicized and ethnicised. Right from the military school in Zaria, students are trained to be governors, not generals, anymore. Those who want to be generals are only interested in being head of state, not as a general in the army”\(^{16}\). As another retired officer, Colonel Emokpae sums it up, Nigeria in his words; “does not have an army”\(^{17}\). What exists is a praetorian guard of plunderers and what Wole Soyinka refers to as a “bankrupt military class”\(^{18}\).

Political corruption and the primitive accumulation of wealth are the hallmarks of public life for the military elites in Nigeria. Many military officers, serving and retired, have manipulated their access or influence to state power and public parastatals to become stupendously wealthy, with diverse business interests in banking, commerce, transport, oil, aviation and real estate sectors.\(^{19}\) For example, an examination of the 1993 boards of some financial institutions revealed that at least some 61 retired military officers were involved in those financial institutions.\(^{20}\) This category of military officers (serving and retired) enjoys what a Nigerian newsmagazine aptly described as an “unceasing good life”\(^{21}\). They have become an “ultra elite” in the Nigerian society.

The implication of the foregoing is that, on the one hand, there is a lot of tension within the military institution itself, between the political-soldiers, who are the nouveau riche and the impoverished majority, who are mostly subalterns. On the other hand, there is also a lot of tension between the military and the civil society. In this context, the military constitutes a potential danger to the evolution and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. It is an institution which lacks professional ethos and a culture of servile subservience to civil and democratic authority. An overly politicized military cannot complement or support a democratic polity. Kent Butts and Steven Metz put the issue quite poignantly:

> During the decades of military rule the Nigerian military have lost nearly all semblance of professionalism and became thoroughly corrupted. Senior officers all became immensely rich through theft, while junior officers and enlisted men live in poverty. Today, there are no civil-military relations in the normal sense of the phrase. The military is incapable of self-reform and cannot lead democratization. Only a radical transformation of the military and the wholesale replacement of the officers’ corps could open the way for democracy.\(^{22}\) (Emphasis mine)

In order to achieve the goal of a stable democratic order in Nigeria there is the need for a restructured, representative and accountable military which in terms of its composition, especially at the top hierarchy, will take cognizance of the multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian society, reclaim its professional ethos, and imbibe a culture of political subordination to civil control and authority.

The reform of the Nigerian military will involve three major and immediate policy steps. First, is the policy of demobilization. The Nigerian military in terms of its size tends to be unnecessarily unwieldy. Although the exact number of the nation’s armed forces is not disclosed by the military authorities, however, it is estimated to be about 100,000. A trimmer, but competent armed forces would be of greater benefit to the nation. General T. Y. Danjuma (retired), a former chief of Army Staff and the current Minister for Defense, had as far back as 1978 observed that the Nigerian Military is “very, very large, which neither the economy nor the defense needs of the country justified”.\(^{23}\) He further noted that the size was based not on need or strategy, but was only compelled by the exigency of the civil war (1967-1970), which
should have been appropriately re-adjusted after the war. Danjuma remains an unrepentant advocate of demobilization. Although it is quite difficult to determine what the optimal size of the military of any country should be, as this depends on a host of factors, which include, an assessment of the threat to the security of a nation, the foreign military commitment of the country and its defense strategy and policy. However, informed opinion in Nigeria, both in the civil society and among government officials in the Obasanjo administration, contend that the country should downsize its armed forces to about 50,000. Indeed, General T. Y. Danjuma, the Minister for Defense, has specifically mentioned this figure. According to him, the Nigerian Armed Forces, should be composed of 30,000 soldiers, 10,000 Airforce and 10,000 Navy personnel.

Although the Obasanjo regime is yet to take a policy position on this, however, Danjuma’s view has generated much interest and gathered tremendous public support, from the civil society. The only step taken so far by the Obasanjo regime, shortly on its assumption of office, was to retire former military governors and some other senior military officers who held key political offices under the Abacha and Abubakar military regimes in Nigeria. General Obasanjo (retired), the current Nigerian President, has denied any intention of mass demobilization by his regime, despite the position of his Minister for defense, on the issue.

For any demobilization programme to be meaningful, it must be thorough, methodical and well conducted. It must not degenerate into political blackmail and personal vendetta within the military. The first and major victim of demobilization in the military should be the political soldiers who participated in military rule, while others to be demobilized must be re-trained with new skills to cope with civil life.

The second dimension of military reform is the creation of stable civil-military relations. A major step in this direction is to create constitutional provisions or legal order, which would explicitly deter military coup, and impose severe sanctions on military defaulters. Also, constitutional rules must be made which clearly establish civil control over the military. Firm constitutional guarantees on the military is necessary in order to protect the state and the armed forces from two types of potential dangers; from politicians who have military ambitions who would like to use or misuse the military to attain political goals and from serving military men with political ambitions.

Unfortunately, this issue of a constitutional guarantee has been a thorny one which military regimes and the military institution itself, have often barred civilians from deliberating upon. For example, during the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly in 1989 under the Babangida Transition to Civil Rule programme, the members of the Assembly resolved to criminalise military coup, by inserting such in the constitution. Clause 1(4) of the 1989 draft constitution therefore states that; “Any take-over or control of government of Nigeria by any person or persons other than in accordance with the provisions of the present constitution shall remain a punishable crime at all times under Nigerian Law.” This provision in the 1989 draft constitution was expunged by the Babangida regime, with the flimsy excuse that military coups have always been illegal.

A perusal of previous constitutions in post-independent Nigeria (1960, 1963, 1979, 1989, 1999) reveals that there are no adequate provisions on how civil control could be effectively guaranteed over the military, beyond merely designating the President as the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces (as contained in 1979 constitution). Three steps could be taken to facilitate civil control over the military and engineer stable civil-military relations. The first is
to criminalise military coup and prescribe stiff sanctions for such, punishable at all times. In addition, a constitutional clause on civil disobedience can be inserted in the constitution, in the event of any military usurpation of state power. The second step is the placing of broad policy decisions affecting the military under the control of the National Assembly. The Parliament must have full powers to legislate on defense and security matters, in influencing the formulation of a national defense and security strategy, in giving budget approval and in controlling spending - using “the power of the purse” in issues relating to “the power of the sword”.\textsuperscript{26} which will include the power of investigation of its activities. Thirdly, is prescribing what Bayo Adekanye refers to as “civic integrative” functions for the military, besides those of pure war-making and security tendering, especially in peace time.\textsuperscript{27}

The third dimension to the re-orientation and re-professionalization of the military is to evolve a program of political and civic education for the military officers, on the need to subject themselves to civil control. As Thomas Sankara, a former military Head of State of Burkina Faso once observed “a soldier without political education is a potential criminal”. The political education process must in part create a basis for dialogue, mutual understanding and confidence building between the military officers, members of the political class and the civil society. The issues of defense and security matters must cease to be the exclusive preserve of military officers. Those issues, (i.e. defense and security matters) are issues which should be interrogated, analyzed and debated by non-military actors (i.e. politicians, civil society actors, academics, and so on). The trend in South Africa is quite instructive on this. There are some civil society groups like the Institute of Security Studies (I.S.S.) which concern themselves with analyzing and interrogating defense and security matters, in South Africa. Those issues are not the exclusive preserve of the military in South Africa. It is through this process that a mutual social pact can be negotiated between the military and the civil populace, with the latter gradually establishing effective control over the former.

6. The Retired Soldier in Nigerian Politics

In recent times, there has been the emergence of the “retired soldier” as a new, but powerful phenomenon in Nigerian politics.\textsuperscript{28} Although the trend of the involvement of retired soldiers in politics became noticeable under the Babangida political transition program (1986 – 1993), it seemed to have reached an unprecedented and worrisome dimension, under the Abubakar political transition program (1998 – 1999). It is estimated that no less than 130 rich, and influential retired military officers are members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the current ruling party in Nigeria at the Federal level. Amongst them, at least 30 are of the rank of Major General and above, while the others comprise mostly of colonels and other ranks. Indeed, some have aptly dubbed the PDP as a party of “Army arrangement”.\textsuperscript{29} Currently, this social category constitutes the most powerful force in the political arena in Nigeria. Indeed, the pre-eminence of the “retired soldier” in Nigerian politics is best attested to by the fact that Nigeria’s current president, Olusegun Obasanjo is a retired military general.

The large band of young military retirees in Nigeria reflects the high level of personnel turnover in the Nigerian military. The military has become the most unstable state institution in Nigeria. Factors like the Nigerian civil war, coups and counter coups, political blackmail, suspicion and intrigues among military officers have resulted in large-scale retirement in the military. For example, any military coup, successful or abortive, is usually accompanied by large-scale retirement of military officers. When a coup is successful, members of the ousted regime and their supporters in the military are often retired, if not detained. On the other hand, when a coup is abortive, the culprits are regarded to have committed treason, and
thereby not only dismissed, but mostly executed. Also, when a military regime is disengaging from power, such process usually involves the retirement of some top military officers, especially those who have served the regime in important political positions. Through those processes, the Nigerian military is engaged in a cyclical game of internal self-destruction.

But what is the import of the involvement of the retired soldiers in politics? While it is true that retired military officers have citizenship rights to participate in politics, contest elections and hold public offices, the concern of the civil populace is centered around three main issues. The first is that the involvement of retired soldiers in politics may signal the re-militarization of politics in Nigeria, by other means. This is because military culture and training, which they were schooled in, is antithetical to democratic norms and practices, and may reinforce authoritarian and military values in the political arena. The second issue concerns the interrogation of the motive or rationale for such involvement. Given the fact that most of them had previously controlled political power or had access to it when they were serving officers, what else do they want by re-capturing political power through the ballot box? The third issue concerns the question: how possible is it, for there to be an even playing political field, between an enfeebled civilian political class, persecuted, suppressed and emaciated by long years of military rule, and a crop of rich and powerful military retirees. Moreover, as the latter group enjoyed the tacit support and approval of their serving, but most junior military colleagues, who conducted the political transition process.

While the issues raised above may be quite complex in their manifestations, and may not lend themselves to ready answers, what is quite obvious is that entrenched personal and group interests is a major factor in the involvement of retired military officers in politics. The need to protect their mostly illegally accumulated wealth, institutionalize and consolidate their power, control and hegemony, over the state and society in Nigeria, is a major factor in their involvement in electoral and party politics. However, the effects and consequences in their participation in democratic politics remain quite uncertain, as such is presently an unfolding process. What may be conjectured is that those effects would certainly be mitigated by complex environmental variables, which will include the engagement of the civil society in the democratic process.

7. **Reclaiming Public Institutions**

One of the major legacies of military rule in Nigeria is the erosion and destruction of the institutional capacity and autonomy of public institutions, which in the main constitute the institutional infrastructure for a stable democratic order. These include, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police force, the electoral institution, and public parastatals and agencies. The military rulers transformed those institutions into organs of patronage and clientele networks. Largely networks of personal and informal connections with the leadership determined appointment, promotion, discipline and funding of those institutions.

In addition, those institutions became thoroughly completed leading to the perversion of institutional goals. For example, under the Babangida regime (1986 – 1993) most public agencies ran unaudited accounts for over five years. A classic case was that of an extra-ministerial agency called the National Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRR1), which expended over 5 billion Naira (Nigerian Currency) of public funds for about five years, of which its accounts were neither audited nor the money properly accounted for. Similarly, under the Abubakar Junta (1988-1999), it was reported that the Nigerian Maritime service, a Federal Government parastatal had its foreign accounts completely depleted.
through dubious contract awards, on the instruction of the Head of the military junta, General Abdulsalam Abubakar.32

The consequence was that public institutions became thoroughly depreciated and devalued and could not deliver public goods and services or guarantee public welfare. For example, the police force, rather than protect the people, terrorized them, the civil service rather than facilitate government business, became privatized through a culture of bribery and corruption, while public services like electricity, water supply and telephone services virtually collapsed. Indeed, the bankruptcy of political leadership rapidly destroyed the fabric of state institutions.

Certainly, the project of democratization in Nigeria must incorporate the revitalization and reconstruction of public institutions as a very important element of that process. Without those institutions, the nascent democratic order will likely be constructed on a foundation of sand.

8. **The Civil Society Question**

In Liberal Civil Society theory, the Civil Society is believed to be the most effective agency of democratizing society and the best antidote to military rule.33 This perspective privileges the civil society with the virtues of freedom, justice, fairness, equity and the expansion of the democratic space. However, despite the claims of the Liberal paradigm, it is important to make two observations on the civil society discourse. Firstly, civil society is defined not by its homogeneity, but its heterogeneity. Secondly, it has no determining characteristics; it could be democratic or reactionary or a complex mixture of both.34 Essentially, the civil society is an arena of social, political and ideological struggles, in which different group and class interests seek expression and claims and attempt to create hegemonic practices in society. As such, civil society is a complex terrain, and should not be confused with the “civic community”. The ‘civic community’ as Robert Fatton points out, may be marked by egalitarian political relations, a fabric of trust and cooperation and democratic ethos, the civil society may not be.35

Historically, the existence of a vibrant civil society has been part of the political and social life of Nigeria. The project of political decolonization was woven around the struggles of civil society groups.36 What is new in the present conjuncture is the renewal of the political struggles of civil society groups towards what Nzongola Ntalaja aptly referred to as the struggle for the “second independence” (i.e. democratization).37 In recent times, the civil society in Nigeria has played significant and decisive roles in the trajectory of the chequered political events leading to the enthronement of democratic rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999. These include the struggle against vicious military rule, large-scale human rights abuses, and pervasive social and economic oppression of the Nigerian people.

However, the civil society itself has been plagued by severe contradictions some of which could be considered as part of the backlash of long years of military rule. The first introduction is what I refer to as the malaise of militarism and autocracy. Many civil society groups in Nigeria, especially human rights and pro-democracy groups, lack internal democracy, accountability and responsiveness. It is ironic that these groups in terms of their internal organization, lack what they advocate – democracy. Some leaders of civil society groups could best be described as “small tyrants”, who run their organizations like “personal fiefdoms”. They have internalized the signs, symbols and behavior of military leaders, and
often times, perpetuate their rule, as “President for life” of sort, in those organizations. A civil society without democratic culture cannot sustain or deepen a democratic political order.

The second contradiction is the politics of funding of civil society groups. Due to the harsh economic conditions in Nigeria, many civil society groups (especially those with political bent) are financially insolvent and thereby depend on organs external to them, for financial support. This is either from the foreign donor community (through the international NGOs or private philanthropic organizations) or the state. This development often compromises or at least attenuates the autonomy of the civil society groups. More importantly, it also leads to a wave of opportunism and financial aggrandizement in civil society groups. Because of the financial incentive, there has been the sudden birth of many “make-shift” civil associations or what Mathew Hassan Kukah aptly refers to as the “cloned civil society organizations”. Thus, there has been the rise of a crop of civil society entrepreneurs, to whom NGO activity is a business enterprise through which they make profit and illegally accumulate wealth.

The third contradiction is that some civil society groups subsist in the tactics of force and violence as a method and language of political expression, rather than dialogue, negotiation and consensus. The tradition of militarism has had a socializing, but debilitating impact on those groups. This is why some associations with ethnic bent have been involved in recent inter-communal conflicts in Nigeria. A perception of binary opposition between the military predators and the citizens, the oppressors and the oppressed, a relationship which evoked stiff, but sometimes violent resistance by civil associations under military rule, remained ingrained in the operational logic of some groups. However, there is the need to transcend the politics of the old order, to a new era of peaceful political engagement with the state by civil society groups in a democratic dispensation.

The efficacy of the civil society under democratic rule in Nigeria will require changes in some important respects. There must be the democratic re-orientation of those groups. The civil society must shed the vestiges of authoritarianism and dictatorship. Issues of internal democracy, due process, accountability and responsiveness must be taken seriously and respected. Also, there must be the deepening and politicization of those organizations. The deepening of an organization implies its increasing capacity for self-organization and development, which is crucial to its strength and vitality. Its politicization involves the ability of civil society groups to transcend their parochial group differences. Ultimately, the sustainability and consolidation of a democratic order in Nigeria would depend largely on the quality and efficacy of its civil society.

9. Conclusion

The process of military disengagement from the political arena has been concluded in Nigeria, however, the process of demilitarization, conceived in a broader sense, is yet to be fully accomplished. Demilitarization from this perspective involves more than the formal notion of military withdrawal from politics, to include the deconstruction of authoritarian and militaristic rules, norms, and practices in the state and civil society. The heinous legacies of military rule are pervasive and deleterious, which cannot be wished away by the mere transfer of political power from the military to elected civilian rulers. Demilitarization should not be conceived as an event, but a continuing process, with the object of re-establishing democratic culture and values, in the state and society.
In achieving the goals of demilitarization and democratic re-orientation in Nigeria, it is important to emphasize three salient issues. These are: resolving the military question, which involves a complex process of demobilization, re-professionalization of the armed forces, and the establishment of firm civil control over the military. The second issue is the task of reclaiming public institutions which constitute the institutional infrastructure of a stable and enduring democratic order. This includes the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police force, and public parastatals and agencies. The third issue concerns the democratization and empowerment of the civil society through deconstructing authoritarian practices and a military psyche, which afflicts the civil society. Civil society groups must squarely address questions of internal democracy, due process, accountability and responsiveness. Indeed, strengthening the fragile democratic experiment in Nigeria will require the vitality and resilience of the civil society.
Notes and References


5. The Abubakar Political Transition Programme was completed on May 29, 1999, with the hand-over of power to elected civilian leaders.


13. In 1989, the Chief Judge of Lagos State, Justice Ligali Ayorinde, in dismissing a suit brought before his court against General Ibrahim Babangida, challenging Babangida’s decision on the dissolution of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), referred to General Babangida as “Kabiyesi” (His royal Highness), whose actions cannot be queried or challenged by any citizen. See Clement Nwankwo, “The Nigerian Judicial System and Human Rights”. In Diamond, Larry et al, (eds.) *Transition without End*, p. 404.


21. See *This Week*, May 9, 1988. P.17.


24. Ibid.


15
26. Ibid. p.6.


