Two Faces of Civil Society and the Military in Nigeria’s Democratisation

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Abstract
In societies where the military has intervened in politics and become politicized, it tends to lack the capacity to be an objective harbinger of democracy. Similarly civil society in such context is expected to play the role of a democratising force in opposition to authoritarian political rule. This is a skewed understanding that fails to factor in both the character of politicized armies and the terrain of civil society in terms of their janiform character in the process of democratisation in complex plural societies. Varying contextual political, economic, cultural and external environmental factors impinge on the dominant character of the military and civil society in different historical periods to structure their roles in democratisation. Thus the role of the military like civil society could range from facilitation to obstruction of democratisation. These roles span through the moment of transition to elective civil rule to post military regime period in which consolidation of democratic rule is expected. Essentially transformation from authoritarian military rule to democracy is a dialectical see-saw between genuine democratic interests in civil society and similar actors in the military on the one hand and a bloc of undemocratic interests constituted by actors in the military and their allies in the civil society on the other hand. Using a case study of the Nigerian experience I argue that neither the military nor civil society fit the straitjacket of a mere harbinger or obstacle to democracy; as their historical roles complexly intersect the two outcomes.

Introduction
It seems a strange conjecture to associate the military with democracy or civil society with reverses in democracy. Nonetheless, this study sets out to consider both the democratic and undemocratic values of both categories in the context of democratisation in a developing country. Thoughts about military and democratisation in this paper mostly take into account the societies where the military intervened in political rule and later eased out through a transitional process. The military usually lay claim to corrective motive as the prompt to their political intervention. However evidence shows that, military regimes not only fail to live up to this claim, but also end up as obstacles to democratisation. Transfer

* Prepared for the 22nd Congress of the International Political Science Association (IPSA), Universidad Complutense de Madrid at the Moncloa Campus, 8-12th July 2012.
of power to the civilians usually turns into hard struggles as in the case of Ivory Coast under Robert Guei (Daddieh, 2001). In many cases the military rulers transform themselves to civilian rulers such as in Gabon under late Omar Bongo, Togo under late Gnassingbe Eyadema, Gambia under Yahya Jammeh, Ghana under Jerry Rawlings, Burkina Faso under Blaise Campaore. Nigeria was treading the same path under the regime of Sanni Abacha before he died in 1998 while still a military head of state. Elections of questionable integrity often lead to cases where military transmutations to civilian leadership are successful. Thus it is difficult to link the regimes that underwent such transformations or the military institution that secured its emergence with democratic credential. But Anene (2000) raises the important point that in most praetorian African states, it is the political military sector that has progressively captured an independent influence on both the military institution and the political system. His sense is that the entire military should not be profiled as incapable of supporting democracy due to the impacts of its politicized sector. Anene’s argument reflects the important observation of Ruth First (1970) that “armies do not move monolithically” (Luckham, 1994, p. 32). They may not unanimously favour illegitimate domination of political rule by military officers. It is analytically more useful to think about the military as a sub category within the overall architecture of political power in which the officers are agents representing different political projects that link them with similar agency in the political field of the state and civil society. Indeed the military and the space of civil society in the context of military participation in politics are divided between those who favour professional civil military relations and supporters of illegitimate meddling of the armed forces with political rule. Thus the sites of civil society and the military institution in democratisation are like the Janus with each caught up in the paradox of being a useful context of both support and reverses for democratisation.

In the recent re-awakening of civil society’s link with democracy, a discourse on contemporary democratisation that ignores it appears much like a Hamlet without the prince of Denmark. Although it is as old as political theory, there is evident potency of the space in contemporary democratic transformation of societies, yet there is insufficient highlight on how the site is equally penetrated by forces with undemocratic agenda. Writers like Alexis de Tocqueville see that civil society is a veritable democratic site. This group of writers will ground civil society under ideals of citizenship under the law, freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of worship and protection of minority rights (cf Woods, 1992). Similar contribution from Habermas (1989) reposed democratic credential on civil society. To be sure, these are ideals of the terrain of civil society. But historical examples reveal appropriation of the site by actors whose agenda do not conform with democracy. The rise of Hitler for instance drew from the power of civil society (See Berman, 1997). Also Mussolini’s fascism drew support from civil society (Chambers & Kopstein, 2001). Hence, civil society is a site of action for multiple interest-bearing agents with varied preferences. This appears in various social processes including democratization. In that connection, this paper rises beyond the limited focus on politicized armies as the main obstacles to democratisation and draws attention to
the uses and abuses of civil society terrain that equally threaten democracy.

There exists a nexus between military controlled state and civil society. The political sector of the military links up with a section of actors in civil society. Apart from the conventional state-organized sections of civil society such as schools and other cultural and ideological paraphernalia of the state, military regimes directly organize associational spaces or indirectly fund the organization of such spaces to articulate support for either military rule or directions defined by the military regime in relation to democratization. At the same time, the democratic sections of civil society engage the military regimes in demand for a genuine democracy project. Usually the professional elements in the army while working within a taut command structure of the military may not directly oppose the military governments, but in extreme instances, they express dissatisfaction with undemocratic project of the political sector of the military even if in subtle ways. This paper focuses on this nuanced intersection of civil society and the military in Nigeria’s experience of democratization. Apart from this introductory section, the following sections of this paper will explore discourses on civil society and its uses in democratization. The paper also discusses military and democratization. Further, it theoretically explains the two faces of civil society and military in the context of democratization. Following this is the examination of how military institution and the space of civil society were applied by political actors to advance or impede democratization during the struggle for establishment of elective civil rule in Nigeria, beginning from the late 1980s. It also explores the post military era in terms of how actors in the military and civil society advance and or reverse the development of democracy.

**Dual Manifestations of Civil Society in Democratization**

Civil society is a broad concept for which no definition commands consensus. This may explain why positions differ on which category of social forces could be accepted in theory as actors in civil society. The two divides in scholarship are those who tightly link civil society to democratic norms and rules of conduct and others who see civil society as a terrain that accommodates both actors who bear democratic or undemocratic norms and ends.

The view of civil society as democratizing draw strength from Ferguson’s (1980) work, *A History of Civil Society*, first published in 1767. His work is a discourse on the emergence of civilized society through a long transformation from barbarism. In the society that emerges from this transition, civilized attributes are the basis of social life as expressed in commerce and other law-governed activities of humanity. Also Tocqueville (2003) sought to draw attention to the power of civil society as a veritable context for articulating political actions and demands for rights. His sense is that growth of associational interaction is a necessary bulwark against the rise of authoritarianism in the state. He argued that at the associational level, members “are no longer isolated individuals, but a power conspicuous from a distance…when it speaks men listen” (2003, p. 125). It is on this Tocquevillean
democratizing notion of civil society that Havel (1985) built his thesis of civil society as constituting the power of the powerless while writing about Eastern European political transition from Communism. The focus of Tocqueville’s idea was the political outcomes of democratically motivated groups. However, he seemed to generalize much on the democratic value of associations to the exclusion of the possibility that their site of engagements could as well be applied to undermine democracy.

In a related vein, Habermas sees civil society as providing and supporting the social sphere in which people talk about their differences and come to common understanding (See Habermas, 1987). The emphasis in his model of civil society could be seen as democracy generated and sustained by culture of debates. He assumes that human being is democratic by nature and will pursue the realisation of this attribute using rationality that is embedded in deliberative processes. Thus embedding democracy is related to the freedom of the lifeworld from colonization by other sub systems of society.

Rational discourses in Habermasian model are guided by five requirements that guarantee validity and truth in the process. The five discourse ethics include:

1. no party affected by what is being discussed should be excluded from the discourse (the requirement of generality); 2. all participants should have equal possibility to present and criticise validity claims in the process of discourse (autonomy); 3. participants must be willing and able to empathise with each other’s validity claims (ideal role taking); 4. existing power differences between participants must be neutralised such that these differences have no effects on the creation of consensus (power neutrality); and 5. participants must openly explain their goals and intentions and in this connection desist from strategic action (transparence) (Cited in Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 213).

Habermas’ thesis command ethical appeal as an ideal prescription and is useful for thinking about expectations from a democratic civil society as a work in progress. It points to the fact that civil society in a democratised setting is about norms and rules apart from the institutional context it provides for actors. However, this formulation falls behind the reality of actually existing civil society. At no time does any civil society accommodate these entire criteria of the discourse ethics. Some societies have made more progress than others in the development of the terrain of political discourses in the modern state system. In these political systems, contests in civil society has transcended the level of establishment of rules of the political game and dwells more on different political projects such as neoliberal or welfarist projects. There could however be pockets of undemocratic tendencies represented by the kind of groups referred to by Chambers and Kopstein (2001) as bad civil society. For struggles leading to the restoration of elective democracies in Africa’s praetorian states, the Habermasian template of discourse ethics will not fully capture the range of the dimensions of political acts...
in the space of civil society. The reason is that the discourse framework of engagement in civil society has yet to attain predominance in such formation. This is because social forces also apply other strategies of political action beyond the Habermasian discourse ethics.

Modern associational forms neither wholly reflect Tocqueville’s expectations nor fit Habermas’s ideal type. As Trivedy and Acharya (1996) observed, civil society consists of a variety of groupings including those committed to democracy and others whose worldview lack democratic credentials (Cited in Swift, 1999). Delue and Dale (2009) expressed the same idea with the notion that civil society must include a diversity of voices, perhaps some confrontational. Whitehead argues this much when he observed that there are persons enjoying political rights but not submitting themselves to constraints imposed by civil society. He added that within the stratifications in society, “one sector’s autonomy and civility can easily be reinterpreted by another sector of society as elitist privilege needing to be levelled” (1997, p. 105). An inclusive definition of civil society Whitehead rightly believes, should necessarily account for all its properties. Also, Ikelegbe (2001) showed from the Nigerian experience that while civil society provided context for democratic struggles during the military rule, it also provides platform for ethnic militancy and violent confrontations in the post military era. Callaghy (1994) and Bratton (1994) equally expressed reluctance in tightly linking democratization to civil society. This position is based on experiences which show that in spite of norms and rules of the ideal type civil society, the actually existing civil society is available to groups that can advance democratisation by struggles for generalization of certain norms and rules of political practice and groups that may pose constraint to the democracy project.

An inclusive notion of civil society should actually accounts for tendencies within the site whether or not they are ideal. Alexander (1997) had conceived civil society as “a solidary sphere in which certain kind of universalizing community comes gradually to be defined and to some degree enforced. To the degree this solidary community exists, it is exhibited by ‘public opinion’, possesses its own cultural codes and narratives in a democratic idiom, is patterned by a set of peculiar institutions, most notably legal journalistic ones, and is visible in historically distinctive sets of interactional practices like civility, equality, criticism and respect”(Cited in Alexander, 1998, p. 7). But he quickly added that this kind of civil society can never exist as such. It can only exist to one degree or another. The reason he noted is that “it is always interconnected with and interpenetrated by other more or less differentiated spheres which have their own criteria of justice and their own system of rewards. There is no reason to privilege any one of these non-civil spheres over any other” (Alexander, 1998, p. 7). Therefore, while reckoning with civil society as linked with certain ideal norms, it is also an institutional space with a mix of actors who either conform with or digress from these norms. Indeed norms and rules are seen only in the context of practices of actors in the space of civil society.
Civil society and the executive arm of the state constitute a broad political field that is seen in the sense of the integral state. This is to say that the state consists of structures of governance and civil society is the soft underbelly of these structures (See Gramsci, 1971). At each point in time the defining character of the state is the economic, political and ideological interest of the dominant political forces in the integral state. Thus the spheres of executive state and that of civil society are bifurcated along lines of interests borne by groups of political agency. As Mamdani (1990) puts it, “forces within civil society penetrate the state differentially, just as the state power reinforces certain social interests and undermines others. Not only is the struggle between social forces found within society and telescoped inside the state, it shapes the very character of state power” (Sjorgren, 1998, p. 9). Under military rule in Nigeria, the government actively repressed civil society groups that demanded an end to military rule while facilitating the activities of rent-seeking organisations which supported either continuity of military rule or transmutation of military leadership to civilian leadership. There were more than 150 such associations linked through funding to military government (LeVan, 2011). The activities of these groups that linked up well with the political sector of the military on the one hand and the activities of pro-democracy activist organisations which shared democratic interests with a sector of the military that favoured army withdrawal from politics on the other hand establishes a nexus between the ‘military society’ and civil society regarding democratisation and de-democratisation in the Nigerian context.

**Discourses on Military and Democratisation**

There are two major strands on military and democratisation. One strand denies that the military has any usefulness in fostering democratisation while the other contends that a successful democratisation has to be a product of partnership between the military and civilians. Influenced by the concept and character of democracy and the hierarchical command structure of the army, pessimists of military relevance to democratisation like Ake (1995) argues that:

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

Ojo inclines towards Ake’s persuasion and furthered the perspective by noting that “no single country in Africa has been advanced by military rule” (2000, p. 13). He also drew attention to the comment of Lt Gen. Ocran of Ghana that “military training and skill provide knowledge but only a superficial insight into civil administrative machine” (Ojo, 2000, p. 16). The main claim arising from this is that the military cannot mid-wife democracy in the light of the Nigerian experience.
Gershoni’s (2002) study of Liberian transition to civil rule concluded that Samuel Doe’s transformation from a Master Sergeant coupist to a civilian president showed that he was successful in the first place because the army became part of his political machinery. In effect Liberian army allied with Doe in undermining a free and fair transition to civil rule. Thus the military coup of Doe ended a regime that could not embed democratic norms and practices, but created a new form of crisis of political rule by transmuting from a junta to a civilian leadership. Similarly Kohnert (2007) argued that one of the three pillars of Eyadema’s despotism in Togo was an army organized like Praetorian Guard as well as security services and pro-Eyadema militias dominated by members of his ethnic group. In the wake of democratic movement in parts of Africa in the early 1990’s Eyadema was able to bungle the success of a national conference for political reform (sovereign national conference) with active support of the army. Ihonvbere (1996) also finds the military’s intervention as a setback to democratisation despite their usual claims of being corrective. Despite the progress of struggles for democratisation that led to conduct of civilian elections in 1999 in Nigeria, Fayemi (2002) thinks that militarism and militarization will continue to pose a major problem to democratisation in Nigeria and does not in fact mean an end of a political army in the state. Agbese (1996) and Afolayan (2000) are equally of the view that the military represents obstacle to democratisation in Nigeria. Other studies of the military in Africa by Mc Gowan (2003) Saine (2000), Kohnert (2010), Luckham (1994), Kandeh (1996), Hughes (2000), Camara (2000) and Kalu (2000) all indict the military for reverses to democratisation.

Writers focusing Asia and Pacific incline towards the view that the military undermines democratisation. Vatikiotis (2004), Jemadu (2004), May, Lawson & Selochan (2004) see the military as a setback to democratisation in Indonesia. In the light of the structure of Indonesian politics which has strong military influence, Vatikiotis doubts a radical departure in the near future despite the presence of institutions of elective civil rule. Taylor (1998) Bunbongkarn (2004) and Selochan (2004) addressing the experiences of Burma, Thailand and Philippines respectively portrayed the military as an impediment to the evolution of institutions which embed democratic norms and practices. Military influence in the politics of Fiji is equally seen by Lawson (2004) as one in which force is a necessary condition for maintaining the existing political order with a civil-military relations that is incongruous with democratic constitutional principles. For Rizvi (2004, p. 100) Military in Pakistan at the moment prefers “role over rule” because of the security environment of the country and fragmentation among civilian politicians which renders them weak vis a vis the army. Thinking in this vein, Zaidi (2005) held that Pakistan’s democracy has found few enthusiasts due to manipulation by the military in the 1990s which enabled military rulers to leave a political structure that allows them continued roles and constrain any effective shift towards democracy.

Legacies of military rule and the ultimate impact of the military on democratisation are shown to have variations in the case of South America. Aguero’s (1998) basis
of arguing in this vein is that modes of transition from authoritarian rule is a major determinant of military’s continued influence in politics in the post military era. He argued that the military will not be able to sustain its power and influence in post-authoritarian regime if this power is not backed by legal arrangements. Aguero noted that Chile’s immediate post military regimes had difficulty in controlling its military because there was an authoritarian constitution left behind by the military which constrained it from doing so. This essentially draws on the nature of pacts among elites for the end of military rule. Where there is a legal pact that opens the leeway for military influence in politics, it usually constitutes a setback to democratisation.

Nordlinger (1970, p. 1134) reviewed and dismissed positions that find the military relevant to democratisation. He argued that when the military combines political power to their corporate interests, they behave like the most powerful “trade union”. And like most unions, they pursue their wealth and prerogatives even when these aspirations conflict with the aspirations of the larger segment of the society. This is the case in the corporate involvement of Pakistan’s army (See Zaidi, 2005) Also, the Angolan army officers participate in contract negotiations with foreign companies, sits on corporate boards and are majority shareholders in telecommunication firms (Hougnikpo, 2012). Altering this kind of pattern is likely to attract a backlash from the armed forces. Thus, the military in this kind of formations constitute an impediment to building of democratic civil military relations.

These sets of views that indict the military of undemocratic predilection have cogency in their own rights especially for the evidence from the concrete political instances they presented. Most military governments in Africa were dictatorial. However, there were differential attitudes to democratisation within armies of the praetorian states during their periods of political intervention. Some actions within military-led governments gave impetus to democratisation. In this vein, Hougnikpo (2000) suggests that literature on democratisation in Africa is silent on the positive role played by the military leadership in the process. He referred to the democratic movement of the early 1990s in Africa which led to national conferences in some African states. In those conferences, Congo, Madagascar, Niger, Benin, held national conferences with the military on board. This led initially to peaceful transition. But the experience was different for Togo and Guinea due to unwillingness of the military leaders to democratise. On this note, Hougnikpo suggests that understanding democratic renewal in Africa must take into account the contributions of ‘military society’. As he puts it, “without ‘military’ society’s contribution, democracy will lack the momentum to take off let alone get altitude” (Hougnikpo, 2000, p. 215). The crux of his idea is a return to strategic elite explanation of transition to democracy by O Donnell and Schmitter (1986). This approach sees the cooperation of the military elite as inevitable for democratisation. The point here is that democratic forces in civil society alone are powerless to dispel the military from politics. This is a quick pointer to the fact that the state is framed not just on law books but also on force. Thus political changes
should necessarily involve institutional engineering that conditions the military elite to accept the politics of the society.

Ehwarieme (2011) follows the track of Houngikpo’s argument and suggests that the non-intervention of the military since 1999 that Nigeria returned to elective civil rule even in the presence of pre-disposing factors for a military coup should be deemed as a contribution to democratization. In a similar study on the relevance of the military in democratization, Danopoulos and Skandalis (2011) argued regarding the experience of Albania, that the military contributed by not attempting to forestall the demise of the communist regime in the early 1990s and by ignoring President Berisha when he called on the army to quell a popular uprising in 1997. Hougnikpo (2012) in addition to his earlier position that the military contributes to democratization draws attention to the lack of involvement of the military in security policy processes in Africa’s restored civil rules and the gap it creates in attaining proper civil military relations in such states. Giving instances with The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Angola, he noted the lack of transparency in the audit of military budgets. He observed that in most cases information are not available on this and it is a source of misappropriation of public funds. He averred that a state without parliamentary oversight of its security sector should at best be deemed as a fledgling democracy. His basic argument is that democratic control of the military through parliamentary processes is a necessary part of a successful democratization. To effectively do this, the military should be involved in the defence policy processes all of which must be subject to democratic audit.

Contrary to the views that dismiss the modernisation potential of the military as capable of linking it to democratisation, South Korea’s military rule tends to justify the modernization/democratization nexus. In the course of about thirty years of military rule, South Korean economy became transformed leading to pluralism in the society with growth and better organization of class forces. Also democratic orientation of the general populace strengthened in the process. With these changes, the military was no longer the most advanced sector of the Korean society. The military leaders realized this as democratic movement was strengthened, thus ruling out long survival of harsh authoritarian rule (Kim, 2004). Fioramonti and Fiori (2010) demonstrated that the partial liberalization by the Korean military Government in 1983 created a window of opportunity which groups in civil society utilized and pressed for democratization. This may illustrate an instance in which military’s action led to democratisation. Nonetheless, it is possible that this outcome was an unanticipated result of military’s use of modernization to legitimize its political rule. Sierra Leone’s military in the 1990s reflect two sides of possible directions of a military rule. Populist Captain Valentine Strasser who ousted the civilian regime of Momoh began to prevaricate on transition to elective democratic rule, but was overthrown by his deputy Julius Maada Bio. Even though Bio and his group showed signs of possibly delaying elections, they ultimately kept to plans of conducting elections that returned the country to civil rule. In effect, that intervention against Strasser’s prevarication
enabled continuity on the path of building institutions of political democracy (See Kandeh, 1996).

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

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

Understanding Military/Civil Society Nexus and Janiform Roles in Democratisation

The connection between the realm of civil society as an institutional space and state in relation to democratization could be understood within the framework of the neo-Gramscian relations of forces. This conceptual approach is built on the notion of contest between multiplicity of groups in society for the establishment of domination and power. Relations of forces was a conceptual term used by Gramsci (1968). He related it to the actions of social groups which arise out of development of material forces of production. The development of political forces is linked to further economic progress in which those who share similar economic and professional interests felt a duty to organize as groups in the economic field. Their interest was extended to the political field when they demanded a political voice or representation in legislation and asserted a need for reform of the existing political order. The site of these acts is the political field comprising state and civil society. Civil society viewed in spatial terms, provides the basic institutional setting
where associational interests rise along various lines of economic functions and other interests. But the executive state is the platform on which assertions for political rights and establishment of new rules of political relations takes place. These assertions are also either accommodated or repelled depending on the interest of the forces that control the existing structure of domination. In effect, the political field is an arena for relations of forces. Gramsci was able to see that these relations weave agents together into political or social forces in state and civil society on the basis of shared interests.

Meanwhile, political forces do not all have the same interest or act in similar direction. Civil society as a terrain that hosts aspects of the actions of these forces is therefore layered according to the intensity of their political pursuits with the most politically active being closest to the executive state not necessarily in terms of direct exercise of political power, rather as influence on the process. In praetorian states struggling to establish basic rules of political practice, the totality of political actions of groups in the spaces of state and civil society give rise to two broad trends viz democratization and de-democratization. These trends arise out of engagements by forces which are prompted by democratic principles to contest authoritarian politics and demand embedding of rules of democratic politics on one part. The other part is political actions and alliances that reinforce undemocratic rule. A trend towards democracy is achieved when there is a broad alignment of democratic forces in the executive state and civil society with a favourable balance of power over alternative forces. Thus relations of forces could be described as a dialectical see-saw between forces that are working towards competing projects of how to order society in politics, economy, ideology and other forms. Struggle to establish basic democratic institutions express one aspect of these engagements.

The group that gains a reasonable margin of power over others determines the political and other forms of the society. Thus the difference between countries that have advanced in democracy and others undergoing transition to democracy is that advanced democracies have a preponderance democratic coalition in state and civil society over alternative interests. Relations of forces in this kind of formation takes the form of contest among forces that have accepted certain rules and norms of political practice but compete over various social projects for framing these practices within the existing democratic norms and rules. This nature of civil society in more democratised formations societies give rise to the tendency to see civil society only in the light of being a democratic terrain. The consequence of this emphasis on democratic component of civil society is that it over-determines analysis and poses validity challenge to several claims about the democratizing characteristic of civil society. Anene (2000) also points out similar inclination among several works on military and democratization. His claim is that many analyses focus on anti-democratic activities of political officers in the military but not political activities within the military that facilitate democratization. Thus, there is an internal validity issue in such conclusion. Accounting for this paradox of democratization and de-democratisation within the military or civil society requires an understanding of the forces at play in each of them during periods of military
rule and post military era and how each of the forces relate with the project of democratization.

The need for alliances by competing factions of the military brings civil society into the picture of internal struggles within the armed forces of praetorian states. Of course Nigeria’s former military ruler Ibrahim Babangida had remarked that they (the military) could not have succeeded in their coups without assistance from the civil society (Maier, 2000). Financial support is provided for the purpose from the civil realm. This illustrates that a coup coalition may cut across the civil realm and the military. Writing on the first coup in Nigeria, Siollun (2009) reported that officers were harangued by civilians to intervene in politics in the face of political crisis occasioned by politicians. This is not to say that these individualized attitudes fully represent civil society. But attitudes within civil society draw from tendencies in the society. Views about military intervention are varied as much as they do about their withdrawal from power and consolidation of democratic rule. These attitudes materialize in civil society at various associational forms or contexts of public opinion such as the press. In these associational realms, some of the struggles are for the establishment of norms and rules of a democratised political order while others seek to legitimate the existing order of rule which is not founded on democratic principles. Thus the division in the interests of social groups splits the political field into groups of democratisers and de-democratisers.

In the struggle for democratization in Nigeria at the peak of military rule in the 1990s the groups that represented this relations of forces include the military institution comprising both the military democrats and military autocrats; traditional rulers some of who were easily co-opted into collaboration with the military leaders; domestic civil society which was divided into oppositional democracy activist group and the pro-regime group; international civil society organisations, international political institutions. These groups altogether made impacts on Nigeria’s struggle for the end of military rule and return to elective civil rule. In the ensuing relations of forces, the line of alliances was either with the interests that supported democracy (democratisers) or the ones whose actions undermined democracy (de-democratisers).

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Democratisers in the Transition to Civil rule in Nigeria

The democratisers included the pro-democracy civil society groups such as the oppositional press, Human rights organisations such as Campaign for Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Campaign for Democracy, National Conscience Party (NCP), Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Labour unions especially Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG), Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) among others. The groups are committed to various aspects of democracy. Some emerged to struggle for validation of June 12, 1993 presidential elections which was annulled by the Babangida regime. Together with the activist press, their activities exposed the breaches of civilized standards of conduct by the military regime in the areas of human rights, corruption and other levels of misrule. Intensification of repression by government through assassination of opponents, use of prohibitive decrees to suppress media houses, human rights and democracy activist organisations led some members of oppositional civil society organisations to resort to political exile overseas. This became a source of reinforcement to the activist organisations because they linked up with international civil society to further expose the dictatorship of military rule in Nigeria. The link with international civil society became quite important because it elevated Nigeria’s political crisis to global visibility. When in November 10, 1995 Ken Saro Wiwa and other environmental activists were gruesomely hanged by General Abacha’s military regime, the Commonwealth group of Nations meeting at the time in Auckland imposed a sanction on Nigeria. This became important in linking international democratic forces cutting across civil society groups, government and Inter-Governmental Organisations with the democratisers in Nigeria at the period.

The linkage between domestic democratisers and external forces were strengthened through funding. Much of the donors supported human rights organisations as part of broad programme of support for civil society in the process of democratic struggle. Norwegian Human Rights Fund, USAID, Office of Transition Initiative (OTI), European Union, United States Information Service, British Council Department for International Development (DFID), Danish International Development Agency, Macarthur Foundation, and a number of embassies and High Commissions supported democratic activism at the time and still support groups with agenda of democracy building (See Ibhawoh, 2001). In a sense, the web that forms out of linkages of these groups which cuts across state and non-state actors and operate beyond national boundaries created an expanded constituency of democracy that reinforced the local democratic forces in their political struggle against entrenched undemocratic forces during the military rule.
The labour unions used the instrumentality of strike action to press home their demands. It is not uncommon for organised labour demands to revolve around improved working conditions. But at the peak of the political impasse occasioned by the annulment of a free and fair presidential election held in 1993, the oil workers union NUPENG and PENGASSAN declared that the economic rights of the workers could not be actualized under conditions of undemocratic rule (Onyeonoru & Aborisade, 2001). Consequently, they included the political demand of restoration of democratic rule to their reasons for strike. The oil workers industrial action actually crippled the economy and deeply affected the military dictatorship of Abacha. Though the Military Government suppressed the strike which lasted for about two months, it was a landmark engagement from civil society against an authoritarian state. Prior to this strike, the workers umbrella union in Nigeria, Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) had been a vanguard organisation in curtailing government’s policies with possible harsh economic consequences especially withdrawal of government subsidy on petroleum.

Among the military democrats, the easily identifiable ones are the officers and men who retired in protest of the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential elections by General Babangida. Fifty officers had threatened to retire on account of truncation of the transition to civil rule by General Babangida (Lewis, 1994). By the end of June 1993 thirty Colonels and Brigadiers had retired because of the cancellation of the election. Col. Abubakar Umar, a former military Governor who also retired in protest condemned the military leadership at the time for being “a stumbling block to the development of the nation’s democracy” (Butts, & Metz, 1996, p. 14). Equally, there were officers who became part of General Abacha’s Cabinet and made case for release of political detainees and completion of transition to civil rule programme. These set of officers were removed from their positions as service chiefs in General Abacha’s administration and retired from service (Afolayan, 2000). There was an evident sympathy for democratization among these groups of officers. To obliterate this group of officers and their disposition in the study of military and democratization challenges the validity of claims arising from such analysis. More appropriately, they were part of the democratic interests.

De-democratisers in the Transition to Civil Rule Programme

Like the democratisers, the de-democratisers have a cross-cutting spread across the executive arm of the state and civil society. The agency of democratic reverses in civil society include groups which though claim to operate independent of government, but act in furtherance of political interests of the sitting government especially in connection with the transition to elective civil rule. It is interesting that these groups also explore institutional approaches to their engagement with the state such as resort to court action, rallies, publications and other forms of support mobilization. As rent-seeking groups, their links to the government is usually funding or linkage of their leadership to the top echelons of government for the extension of perks of corruption. In addition to Association for Better Nigeria (ABN)
and Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA), other such groups include: National Mobilization and Persuasion Committee (NMPC), General Sanni Abacha Movement for Unity and Stability (GESAM), General Sanni Abacha Movement for Peaceful and Successful Transition Programme (GESAM 98), Abacha Solidarity Movement (ASOMO), Movement for Indigenous Democracy (MIDIA) (Aluko, 2002). These are few instances of associations running into more than 150 (See LeVan, 2011) that were organizing in support for policies of military dictatorship or designs of its leadership that undermined democratization.

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

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

Some prominent traditional rulers in the country who were allies of the military regimes also line up among the de-democratisers. The coalition of traditional rulers and authoritarian political rule goes back to the colonial times especially through the mechanism of Indirect Rule across Nigeria (Okonjo, 1974). The culture of allying with authoritarian rulers continued in post-colonial times. Its most notorious moment was under the military rule. Indeed the annulment of June 12 1993 Presidential elections in Nigeria, was strongly supported by the leading traditional ruler in Northern part of the country Sultan Dasuki. He was reported to have said that a handover of power to the winner who was of the Yoruba ethnic origin in Southern Nigeria will alter the achievements of Sarduana of Sokoto for the North (Omoruyi, 1999).

The actions of these de-democratisers were coterminous at the point of continuity of military rule or undemocratic transmutation of the military leader to a civilian one. Of course their actions were playing out in the same political field as those of political forces that were acting on the side of democratisation. Thus it was a dialectical engagement to be understood in terms of varying inclinations of the forces regarding democratisation.

The Post military Era

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

In the current post military era, some elements within the military institution still plot to reverse the gains of struggles for political democracy. By the second quarter of 2004, there was a coup threat in Nigeria which the authorities preferred to call a breach of national security. About seventy five persons, including military and civilians, were undergoing investigations by the Special Investigations Panel at the Directorate of Military Intelligence Apapa, Lagos (Ojo, 2006, pp. 268–269). Perhaps this is a subtle manifestation of the threat of a former military administrator of Oyo state Col. Usman that “even if the masses managed to remove them from direct political control, they would scale the fence and get involved”(Fayemi, 2002, p. 235). This comment reflects the obsession of politicized officers to invade the terrain of politics but it may hardly hold true for
others who stick to professional discipline and obedience to political authority controlled by civilians.

In the terrain of civil society, both undemocratic inclinations still persist as evidence from certain political events illustrate. In 2007 when President Olusegun Obasanjo tried to manipulate a constitutional change to enable him rule the country more than the legally specified two terms, some groups organised support for him. The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) which prior to this period had been associated with progressive democratic stance on national issues supported the tenure elongation plot. The leadership of the union went further to decorate President Obasanjo with the award of “Defender of Democracy”, following which the president publicly donated the sum of five million naira (about 41,667 USD) to the association (Akintola, 2010, p. 114). At the same time other political interests in civil society rose in opposition to the plot which was defeated in the Parliament. In effect, it was not only democratic forces in civil society that defeated the plan. Members of Nigeria’s Parliament who acted in defence of the constitution fitted into democratic agency on that particular issue.

Conclusion

From the basic claim that military and civil society accommodate janiform tendencies in the context of democratisation, this paper demonstrates that the common emphasis of some analysis on the politicized section of the military to the neglect of non-politicized officers challenges the validity of claims that ascribe the same political culture on the entire military institution. It is more appropriate to see that as a sector in the society, officers have different attitudes to democratisation. This is supported by empirical studies of African armies in which it was found that there were officers who support democracy as well as those that favour continuity of military rule (Anene, 2000). Civil society is also not to be taken for granted as a place for democracy that must conform with the criteria of certain norms. It is double-edged and serves both forces that advance democracy and the ones bearing alternative agenda. Accordingly, it is a civil realm of social struggles which accommodates all shades of interest while the military is an institutional space within the state that is subject to control by the ascendant force among a diversity of competing interests. Thus The fate of democracy in transitional states is tied to the outcome of the war of position in the political field between democratising and de-democratising forces. This logic applies to both the era of transition to civil rule and continuation of engagements for democratisation in the post military era.

The democratisers in the era of transition to civil rule include both military officers and a diversity of actors in civil society while the de-democratisers also draw from the two spaces. In the post-military era, a similar division in interests between democratising elements and de-democratising forces continue to manifest. This unending dialectics of forces should be the important focus of analysis for
understanding the future of democracy in Nigeria and other transitional states. This should move emphasis beyond fears of coups from the military as the only major threat to the success of democratisation. This is because military coups and regimes are also connected with prompts and reinforcing attitudes from actors in civil society. Accordingly, a two dimensional solution that privileges the democratic faces of civil society and the military is necessary in securing the progress of democratisation in states where elective civil rule have been restored. One is the building of a professional army imbued with ethos of democratic civil military relations. The other is enabling the expansion of civil society groups with commitment to preservation and furtherance of a genuine democracy project.
References


