Transition Planning in Nigeria: A Critique of the Military-Civil Transiting Variant

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Résumé: *A cause en grande partie de la nature des processus économiques et politiques dans lesquels l'élite nigériane opère, un gouvernement uniquement civil est devenu une aberration. La nature et les caractéristiques du paysage politique du pays ont été rendus plus coercitifs et violents par le militarisme et la militarisation. Pour l'essentiel, ces caractéristiques de l'Etat sont restés les mêmes pendant toute la période post-coloniale. Parce qu'il oublie de tenir compte de ces facteurs, le Nigeria va encore rater l'occasion de planifier correctement sa transition du régime militaire au régime civil. En rejetant à l'arrière-plan ce qui est important et en n'insistant que sur la structure du gouvernement et de la typologie du personnel à savoir la même cohorte de personnel politique, les mêmes parties avec les mêmes nomenclatures, on a l'impression que tout le processus n'est que du vieux vin mis dans des bouteilles renouvelées. Qui plus est, la tâche de mise en place d'un nouvel ordre politique incombe aux militaires, un groupe intéressé plus au maintien de l'ordre socio-économique actuel. Les expériences passées ont montré que les résultats les plus probables qui puissent sortir de cette transition sont que les militaires vont placer leurs candidats aux postes politiques.*

Introduction

Due mainly to the nature of the economic and political processes that Nigeria's inheritance elite operate, a typical civil rule has become an aberration on the country's political landscape. The military, which has stepped in on a number of occasions, allegedly to halt a dangerous slide towards national catastrophe, has lost, in the process, its apolitical posture of noninvolvement in politics. The first and subsequent coups d'etat were to serve as catalysts for the emergence of the military's internally divisive politics and a multiplicity of conspiratorial groups. By the same token, the military became a big political talking shop where politics, politricks and politicking have free rein.

Soldier-rulers, not unlike a civilian restoration government, have immense difficulty in curtailing excessive politicization of both officer-politicians and military bureaucrats. At any rate, the persistent *remise en cause* of civilian supremacy which military seizure of power occasions has put paid to the empirical validity of military apolitism of Ciceron. For, in Nigeria, as elsewhere in the militarist world, it suffices for military officers,

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who have little or no commitment to apolitism, to enthrone illegality on the thin pretext that "dominant civilian values" are at variance with "professionally military values" (J.S. Ambler, 1966: 402).

Once the coup succeeds, the military is torn between two contradictory, apparently irreconcilable, postures: recivilianization of the polity or stabilization of militarism. Empirical evidence tends to show that once the euphoria welcoming the coup subsides, some sections of the country's domestic policy elite - those who do not see themselves as primary or direct beneficiaries of 'temporarily permanent' military rule clamour for a rapid demilitarization. It would appear that unlike in the Arab world, military leadership has hardly been regarded as an historic necessity in the country (Eliezer Be'eri, 1970:4). Having stayed in power for the greater part of Nigeria's post-independence years, military politicians have shown themselves to be at once "subject to the vices of their virtues" (G.M. Haddad, 1965: 230) and something less than a neutral, disinterested armed expression of the general will.

To be sure, Nigeria's officer politicians can hardly lay claim to be the guardian, protector or defender of the wretched of the Earth; certainly not in terms of political stability or a meaningful political culture. The absence of a sustained history of State-society collaboration looms large. Nor can the military be said to be democratic. If anything, the military, both organizationally and functionally, is an antithesis of democratic rule. At any rate, Soldier-rulers do not see themselves as running a democratic and open government. Successive Nigerian military administrations have had occasions to remind the governed that since they are not issued from electoral consultations, they should not be treated as such. General Ironsi's Supreme Military Council's communique of June 8, 1966, after stressing the foregoing, declares that his administration was simply a corrective one meant to stamp out the abuses and excesses of the deposed civilian regime and create a healthy community that would permit return to civil rule (R. Luckham, 1971:281).

Paradoxically, then the military, while recognizing its own undemocratic nature sees itself, in the image of the non-democratic state, as having a more or less historic task of paving the way for democratic civil rule and participatory politics. This perhaps explains why the military seeks to make its rule short and 'effective', regarding itself as being little more than a transitional government. However, while the military intervenes, ostensibly to arrest a rapid shrinking of the political arena, occasioned by civilian misrule, only to deepen the crisis, it considers its own disengagement as a desideratum for the emergence of a mature political culture. In so doing, the military seems to gloss over, either by design or by default, the negative fallouts of its own rule.

For one, several years of military rule in Nigeria have tended to permit the fracturation of government. As J. Bayo Adekanye puts it, after the first demilitarization (1979-1983), there is hardly any consensus on defence of the civil rulership (Adekanye 1985:42). For another, and flowing from the above, the Nigerian military hardly indicates any intention to totally withdraw from both formal and informal politics. It merely declares its preparedness to hand over power. Thus, while officer politicians are wont to talk about their readiness to regain barrack serenity and furnish us with some material evidence to postulate that when it comes to perpetual military rule, the military is, itself, fundamentally antimilitarist, at another, time, military untowardness, vacillations, and feet-dragging are such as to make one subscribe to the argument of Claude Welch Jr. (1970:50) that military finds it easier to seize power than to let go.

The military is therefore trapped in a dilemma of disengagement. In the Nigerian context, the first demilitarization experience instructs us that, when faced with this dilemma, the military tends "to grant power to those who (are) ready to make militarily approved decisions" (E. Furniss 1964:289-290). But then the benediction a government committed to the restoration of civilian rule by a withdrawing military regime is not enough guarantee of survival. In fact, by placing militarily favoured political candidates in political offices, the military becomes, informally, the political power-holder. The restoration government would then be involved in little more than survival politics such that it does not have enough time to adequately and effectively address crucial and critical national issues relating to the substance of government. For such a 'post-military state', how to contain the looming military factor, seems to constitute a major part of the national question. Another military intervention takes place because, as 'Mayo Adekanye observes:

> *belief in civilianism per se, in the sense of respect for civilian constitutional rule, under an open, competitive-party system, by all means and at all costs, as against any form of military rule however benevolent, is yet to take root* (Adekanye, 1984:36).

In Nigeria, some privileged *milieux* tend to have more faith in the military for the resolution of the crisis facing the post-Colonial State. In a sense, it can be argued that barring those social classes who do not know where their objective interests lie, the majority of Nigerians who express faith in the military are invariably those who are beneficiaries of military rule. In other words, those who have gained immensely from, *inter alia*, indigenization policy and other state-sponsored policies of "embourgeoisement of segments of the civil and military societies" (Ali A.Mazrui, 1975) ultimately give the military a blank cheque of perpetual rule.

Such views tend to comfort the military in its assumption that its withdrawal, necessitated by an opposing, powerful societal current, cannot but be temporary. It therefore withdraws only to prepare its return; it cannot reappear on the political landscape without initially disengaging. What is however instructive is that whether military disengagement is voluntary or not, the transition process is hardly planned in such a way as to put an end to military rule. While the military - that is, its officer politicians' segment would appear to favour the rise, via skillful constitutional engineering, of "effective civilian institutions that will render future military intervention superfluous", (D. Rustow, 1963:9) it does not seem to address itself properly to issues such as the essence of transition; the character, nature and purpose of the post-colonial State; its effect on the form and substance of government and the linkage between the foregoing and the quality of public welfare goods. Again since the society has, beginning with formal independence, been made to be servile to the State, how could the current transition process permit a reversal of this trend?

These and related issues ought to be at the centre of transition planning in Nigeria. Since it can hardly be said that the country has addressed such issues towardly, a critique of the past experience appears in order. This is the purpose of this paper. The remainder of our discussions addresses the following themes: Essence of the Transition Process; Nature, Character and Purpose of the Nigerian State; and Form and Substance of Government in Nigeria.

Essence of the Transition Process

Transition Period ought, ideally, to offer the opportunity for new options to be placed on the national agenda and for new and critical elements forming the national question to be thoroughly debated such that this process would permit the augmentation of the quality and substance of government. And about the most important contemporary challenge of the national question in Nigeria is the resolution of mass poverty. Transition planning could then be used by the dominated forces in the society to make legitimate demands on the State if only for incremental changes in the body politic. Maximally, given the context of a dislocated, dependent, and weak post-colonial state, transition planning should consist of substantial structural and functional reforms, if not transformations, in the various sectors of the polity. In short, the internally dominated forces can clamour for the use of the State as a vehicle for societal transformation.

Of course, this perspective, that of the world-view of the dominated classes, cannot be said to be the dominant perspective. Latter belongs to the State, its hegemonic classes which, its internal dislocation and relative dependence on the dominated forces notwithstanding, still excels in political muscle-flexing. This perspective, ascendant in the pre-transition period, continues to enjoy prominence being synonymous, in its letter and spirit, with

the maintenance of a political, economic, social and moral order. The call for reform by leading civil and military politicians tends to be only rhetorical. Officer politicians who overtly intervene in politics, hypothetically to correct variegated ills of the society, who openly show their putative credentials of superior morality informed by barrack and/or mess notions of discipline, altruism, puritanism, sacrifice, rigour, accountability etc, and who, by the same token, promise a new lease on life particularly for the masses, soon find themselves subdued by the ills of the civil society they had intended to purify.

It, in fact, appears, by the advantage of hindsight that history offers, that such aforementioned values are little more than organizational or even putative. At any rate, they are not sociological. This explains why they are easily cast aside when the military seizes power. By easily glossing over the ethos and creed of military training and orientation as soon as they leave the proximity of the barracks, and the vicinity of the officers' mess, soldier-rulers easily become self-centered and corrupt as civil politicians. Paradoxically, or perhaps hypocritically, concern of officer politicians for the furtherance of their own private, class or corporate interests does not preclude their preoccupation, even if partly pretentious, with a recivilianized polity that would permit the articulation, clarification and resolution of leading national issues in such a way as to achieve a "sound, viable and genuinely acceptable political arrangement".

In fact, President Babangida, not unlike Generals Gowon and Mohammed, had wished for the establishment of a political system which, while allowing a shift from 'military' to 'participatory political system', will guarantee justice and equal opportunity. Thus, while inaugurating a 17-man political bureau on January 13, 1986 to structure debates on the country's political future, the Nigerian leader had hoped for a debate that would help evolve "a political system... capable of sustaining our enthusiasm for a healthy future".

In the same vein, General Babangida urged the Politburo and the general debating public to avoid institutional and constitutional import-substitution. The transition process, he contends, should make Nigerians look inward in their search for new structures and forms of government. This is mainly because:

> *We share neither the political history nor the political cultures of advanced countries. Our democratic settings and social structures differ vastly from theirs. We presently lack the sophisticated and advanced industrialism that provides the economic foundations for these alien political models (The Guardian* (Lagos) January 15, 1986:13*).*

More specifically, the President stressed the commitment of the men of August 27, 1985 to "an order that will check the excesses of government and the abuse of power by the political leadership" while also insisting that "we shall equally frown at a system in which a small group of individuals shall be allowed to misuse power to the detriment of our national aspirations" (ibid).

There is, in this presentation, a *prima facie* case for a convergent point of view between those who occupy the commanding heights of the State apparatus and those, in the society, who have generally been treated as a conquered race. I use the term "prima facie" advisedly since, once we go into specifics, the State's set of preferences does not substantially tally with the world outlook of the society. While in theory the State acknowledges and accepts dissenting voices extent in the society, in practice it shows its displeasure, in violent reaction, not only vis-a-vis dominated societal forces, but also in relation to those who "potentially belong to the same class as those who control the reins of violence" (P.P. Ekeh 1985:48).

This development is worrisome on both scores but particularly on the alienation of the spokespersons of the people who are trapped in between the *Free state* of the market economy brand and the *Restricted State* of the planned economy variant. Thus, it can be argued that the Nigerian State, in the image of its nebulous mixed economy ideology, is at once permissive towards those forces who want to maintain the status quo and repressive vis-a-vis critics of a decadent and decaying socioeconomic formation. Given this ambivalence, the State, or rather its material embodiment legislature, executive, judicial, military, security and ideological apparatuses cannot be adjudged to be neutral or value-free. It is mainly in the service of forces that are not conterminous with, but simply a fraction of, the society. Nor do the interests of the former fully coincide with those of the latter.

Increasingly, the State uses its many apparatuses of coercion and violence to forestall the expression of the will of societal forces constantly led to demand a more humane, just and egalitarian socioeconomic order.

Nature, Character and Purpose of the Nigerian State

The foregoing elements would suggest that if the State performs, in Nicos Peulantzas' language, cohesive and integrative function, it is also divisive and arbitrary. The State is the former to those whose interests coincide with controllers of State power, while it is the latter to the labouring classes, generally treated as subversive elements. It is the abrasive, arbitrary and secretive character af the post-colonial State that is laid bare before the general populace. The State is closed and unpredictable. Thus, while it can be argued, following Alavi and Saul, that the post-colonial State is overdeveloped, it can also be contended that the State is weak, by its disability to effectively contain 'entrenched forces of society' (P.P. Ekeh 1985:32).

The State therefore permits itself the luxury of employing violence vis-a-vis civil society; the opposition, real or imagined, is worsted with insecurity becoming the norm rather than the aberration. With the simultaneous phenomena of 'shrinking province of power' and 'growing prominence of violence' (P. P. Ekeh, 39), the State approximates to what Alexander J. Groth refers to as a 'non-State', where the community is left to the fancies, whims and caprices of 'lawless predators' (Groth 1971:251). Not only are participatory values absent and the people used as a sociological fraud, the agencies and apparatuses of the State are also periodically, if not regularly, commandeered for both class-relating and private-regarding purposes. But, again, the ubiquitous paradox and ambiguity of the post-colonial State resurface: while the bureaucracy, for instance, is sometimes "more or less sensitive to public opinion", it is also at some other times, "more or less arbitrary of its treatment of people. (Groth 1971:240).

At any rate, the State, whether militarist or civil, becomes essentially militarized in terms of the use of certain military-inspired structural and functional modalities. In such systems, certainly the use of arbitrariness, violence and coercion defy political system typology; yet the use of retroactive decrees, amongst other, suffers the military to be classified as a more or less autocratic system whose degree of autocracy varies, sometimes according to the temperament of those who control the State edifice. In short, there is the stark absence of both the tangibles and intangibles of personal security. Again, we turn to Alex J. Groth:

> *the individual ... can never be sure that what was not a crime yesterday may not become a crime today. He does not know what the rulers may construe, to be a 'political security matter' rather than an ordinary legal matter. Even if the use of the procedure is rare, the citizen can never forget the possibility of being arrested and banished to prison, even executed without anyone knowing about it except for the "authorities", of course ...* (Groth 1971:214).

Admittedly, the Nigerian post-colonial State cannot be said to be as autocratic or arbitrary as traditional autocracies. To say this is to read the character of the State in some other climes and climates into the Nigerian State. But, then, the Nigerian State does not possess elements of the liberal-democratic political tradition sufficient enough to have compassion for and solidarity with the poor masses. Contemporary efforts respectively under the Buhari/Idiagbon and Mohammed/Obasanjo regimes to make Nigeria embrace elements of these two grand historical experiences were short lived. Neither can the country be said, by any stretch of the wild imagination, to be a socialist, centrally-planned economy.

However, if the Nigerian State defies any rigorous classification on the ideological spectrum; if it is neither 'hot' nor 'cold', it appears to be 'warm'

and it is perhaps this middle-of-the-road, 'moderate' character of the State that allows for ambiguities and paradoxes, complex rigidities and inexplicable flexibilities in the behavioural patterns of the principal agency of the State - the government. This explains why, sometimes, the State gives the impression that, to paraphrase Frantz Fanon, the people are creating the summit themselves. At such instances the State appears to be pursuing popular, if not populist, policies; at other times, the State uses its major apparatuses in such a barefaced violent manner as to instill fear and distrust of a 'distant' State in the citizens.

Thus, while Nigeria may constitutionally, and procedurally be more 'liberal' than 'autocratic', concrete social welfare policies towards both the *old* and the *new* poor, hardly appreciable in any sense, tend to push the country more to the 'autocratic' than 'liberal welfarist' political system typology. It can therefore be argued, following Alex J. Groth, that, in the image of some traditional quiescent autocracies, Nigeria seems: "dedicated not to the remaking of (its) society in some chosen image, but simply to the perpetuation of an inherited order ... It is neither politically mobilizational, socially innovative, nor materially generous" (p. 1745).

The list of the basic components of public welfare as presented, in 1961, by the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs is extensive and comprehensive enough. The components include provision of unemployment insurance to workers and employees; granting of subsidies to families and individuals to maintain 'minimally satisfactory' standards of nutrition and health; payment of subsidies to public institutions, governmental or private - such as schools, hospitals and recreational centres - for promotion of the material, physical and spiritual or cultural well-being of persons served by them (United Nations, 1961:79-80).

Certainly, it is not as if the Nigerian State does not attempt through its numerous development plans and budgetary proposals, to boldly come into grips with the phenomenon of the immiseration of the rural, semi-rural, urban and peri-urban masses. However, the conception of the State as a source of private enrichment and the furtherance of the interests of a class; of governors as against the society, has the potential of thwarting the realization of such goals. Public welfare is also conceived by the State merely as a process of periodic concession to the society. But perhaps more important is the fact that political structure and a dominant political, ideology are deemed relatively irrelevant to a 'good' government, a government that is 'substancefull'.

Form and Substance of Government in Nigeria

The failure of the government is its inability to provide, minimally, the elements of existence - food, shelter, clothing for the mass of the people. This failure appears to have been a recurrent political decimal. Each government has experienced a dilemma of incongruity between declared

goals and actualized objectives - the astute civil and military politicians' catalogue of promises couched in welfarist, if not populist, language. This phenomenon seems to have accounted for the passivity, frustration and apathy of the mass of the people an apathy creeping into the rank and file of peripheral members of the core elite group in relation to any and all forms of government.

Now, early studies in the policy sciences in advanced capitalist industrialized polities have tended to conclude that political structures and ideas are relatively unimportant in the determination of public policies. Scholars like J. H. Gold Thorpe, S. S. Lipset, H. Marcuse, Wilensky, T.R. Dye etc., postulated the convergence theory of industrial society and its variants: the "end of ideology thesis" and the theory of "deradicalization of the working class movement". Gold Thorpe's summation of the convergence theory bears quotation:

> *As societies adopt a progressively more industrial infrastructure, certain determinate processes are set in motion which make them more and more alike. Technology and economic development have their own inherent logic which has a levelling and convergent impact on diverse social structures, cultural traditions and political systems* (Gold Thorpe, in F. Castles and R.D. Mckinlay ed., 1979:170).

In short, this traditional school argues that "social and cultural patterns and processes of economic development" are evidently more important in shaping social reality than "formal distribution of power embodied in constitutional procedures" (F. Castles et. al. ibid).

While it can be argued that since Nigeria is neither an industrial society nor an economically advanced State, the convergence theory is hardly intelligible when confronted with the Nigerian social reality, Wilensky's argument that "economic growth makes countries with contrasting cultural and political traditions more alike in their strategy" (1975:27-28 in Castles et al.) and T. R. Dye's contention that " ... health and welfare policies, regardless of political systems are closely associated with levels of economic development" (1976) are true in respect of the developing world, particularly the constellation of poor African States, where, irrespective of political system and party typology, social welfare policies differ from one country to the other only in degree and not in kind.

More recent studies on the correlation between form and substance of government in the industrialized capitalist world show that politics and political forms are not irrelevant in the delivery of social or public goods. In their joint study on some twenty Euro-American capitalist States, Frank Castles and Robert D. Mckinlay conclude that:

> *in the context of the public welfare commitment in advanced democratic States ... politics in both relevant and irrelevant. However not only is*

> *politics more relevant than irrelevant, but also its irrelevance is only manifested once its relevance has been taken into account* (1979:182).

More specifically, Alex J. Groth has persuasively demonstrated the remarkable influence of structures and processes government and political systems - 'pluralistic democracies', 'traditional authoritarianism' and 'innovative-mobilizational autocracies' - on distribution of political goods and resources in key public policy areas such as taxation, education, health care delivery, housing, food production etc. He has also shown how variables such as structures and processes of politics - the "openness and participatory tendencies in group life" (1971:32), the clashing orientations within the ruling elite or chronic division of policy makers; degree of their control over the system etc, all come to bear on government impact or otherwise on civil society. In the same vein, a State's dominant Political ideology determines to a large extent the thrust of its public welfare programmes. In States where public welfare is a privilege rather than a right, public welfare programmes amount to little more than what Groth calls "statute book tokenism": the welfare of the people improves only on the pages of development and budgetary plans.

Form of government, one often hears in Nigeria, is hardly relevant as long as there is 'good' government. This idea has become rampant in the country's body politic; such that while suggesting varying forms of government during the one-year political debate in 1986, various members of the Nigerian public were quick to point out that whatever form of government is adopted - Federation, Confederation or Unitary; Parliamentary or Presidential or semi-presidentialism; or party typology - zero-party, one-party, two-party or multi party - what is important is the ability of the government to deliver. The kernel of the argument seems to be that good political leadership defies governmental forms; that any leadership of vision, without subscribing to what General Mohammed calls "a rigid political ideology" and irrespective of structural and constitutional *modus vivendi*, would perform.

Of course, it would be misleading to posit that form of government has no relevance. For one, there is a material linkage between form and substance the question of whether forms of government have a way of exercising pressure on the manner public policy is being delivered. Opposition parties in a typical competitive party-system, tend, at once by their presence and programme - enunciation to modify governmental policy. The party in power is forced, periodically, to adopt opposition's more qualitative programmes with a view to neutralizing opposition or making it irrelevant. It is doubtful if zero or one-party states can experience the same phenomenon with the same degree of intensity. For another, there is a psychological linkage between form and substance of government, that is in the manner in which performance is regularly concretized - *the question of how*. Specifically, the quality of public policy, particularly in a 'liberal' polity, emphasizes

the safeguard of the dignity of man while supplying his basic material needs. The Spanish dictator, Franco, was delivering materially, but his intense love for authoritarianism led his peers and compatriots to reject him.

The country's soldier-rulers and civil politicians seemed to have comprehended this social reality. The consistent defence of the federal political corpus on the grounds that it enhances political stability, that it brings government nearer to the people; that it ensures even development; that it permits some measures of decentralization of power etc, does not appear gratuitous: It would, however, appear that the intangible goods of the federal arrangement are more than the tangible ones. It is not, for instance, clear what positive impact a much more federal arrangement under Shehu Shagari's second Republic (1979-1983) had on the mass of the country's population in contradistinction to a more centralized and stronger unitary form of federal government that the military tends to operate. Simply put, it is one thing for a government to be close to the people, it is entirely another thing for it to use the advantage of close 'grass root' knowledge and contact to mobilize for mass participation and, ultimately, popular development.

Conclusion

The present effort towards another transition planning appears, not unlike the first (1975-1979), to have glossed over critical issues relating to the nature and character of the Nigerian State and the effect of this on both the form and substance of government. By relegating the substance to the background and pursuing the shadow of mere structure of government and personnel typology - the same set of political personnel, same parties with different nomenclatures constituting old wine in renovated bottles - Nigeria seems set, once again, to miss adequately planning the transition from military to civilian rule. Moreover, it is on the same military, more interested in maintaining the present socioeconomic order, that the task of preparing a new political order has devolved.

With their eyes irrepressibly fixed on survival and primitive capital accumulation, it is very much likely that the scenario present in 1975-79 would recast itself between now and 1992, particularly because the nature, character and purpose of the country's post-colonial State remain essentially the same. It has been the major thesis of this paper that the problematic of transition planning can be more concretely located in the nature and character of the State, which militarism and militarization have simply rendered more violent and coercive. The crisis of misplanning or nonplanning is therefore less the consequence of the form of government; though there is an umbilical cord between nature and character of the State and substance of government.

Emphasis needs, henceforth, to be placed on the Nigerian State whose character and relationship with civil society does not seem to have been

adequately and satisfactorily apprehended and studied in the search for a new political end - I dare add - social and economic order.

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