

# The Nigerian Army as a Product of Its Colonial History: Problems of Re-building Cohesion for an Army in Transition

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## Abstract

This work discusses the emergence and problems of cohesion as the Nigerian army. The fact that the Nigerian army emerged from an inherited colonial army, which also emerged from a band of military expeditors. The army was introduced into various patterns of cohesion. Described in this work is partitioned cohesion, a situation in which a group although seen as one, is subtly separated into units in which some are shown certain preferences. This partitioning, in the case of Nigeria saw the North being first preferred for its martial peoples, while at later stages the South, showing promise in terms of education, gained prominence in the corps of the NCO and officer cadre. This transitory preferences, although advantageous to the British colonialists, was of gross disadvantage to the new Nigerian army. With different perceptions about themselves, a gunpowder keg was left, just waiting to be lighted to blow. The different officer types created with time between 1946 and 1966 also saw a salient but obvious partition due to the fact that they were created in different ways, this differentiation in officer types, was worsened by the fact that they were a newly created group. The officer corps was not only new, but inadvertently immature to the process and so they exuded varying traits.

## Introduction

The military in any nation is the bastion of its integrity, and by integrity here, one implies the symbolism of a nation's defence system, beginning from within it to its boundaries. This implies that a nation's sovereignty is strategically rested on its military integrity, therefore, where the military, or its allied bodies are compromised, the nation is in great peril. Thus, in its outlook, the armed force of any nation should symbolise its unity, no matter the diversity within it. The Roman army built under the Consul Gaius Marius was built on this premise (Keith 1998).<sup>1</sup>

In the areas of what is today Nigeria, apart from the efforts of ideological war in the *Jihads*, primarily that of Uthman Dan Fodio (1804-1817), most military pursuits were un-cohesive and spontaneous. Very little planning, recruitment or conscription was done in the formation for wars. Therefore, the magnitude of most military campaigns as such was small and not as significant as those of *Uthman Dan Fodio*. This situation changed with the coming of Europeans to Nigeria. With the prospects of a new market created by what they termed as the legitimate trade, Europeans, most especially the British, saw the need to penetrate the Nigerian hinterland. Realising the tendency for hostility by the African groups they might encounter due to their status as aliens, they recruited Africans and quickly trained them for the security of their various trading companies. Eventually those trained became legitimate bands under the colonial structure. While Britain was consolidating into what became Nigeria, it granted the Royal Niger Company a trading monopoly in the north. In return the company agreed to advance British interests, economic and political (Flint 1960).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the emergence of the earliest semblance of a 'modern' army in Nigeria.

This work looks at issues which encouraged the choice of certain groups relative to others for recruitment by the Colonial army, thereby encouraging a polarity within army populations in the British colonial system from India to Africa. It looks into the concept of *martiality* or groups that were perceived as martial, and analyses how these perceptions and a few others, helped create large populations of some geographical or ethnic groups relative to others within an independent Nigerian Army. The work argues that the agency of ethnic preferences as established by the colonial military, built its African armies and this had its advantages for them to build pockets of cohesive groups which presented different loyalties and services for different situations. But this produced a disadvantage for an independent Nigerian Army, encouraging groups to build on these old separations and rivalries at a point when they were not necessarily needed. This pitched them against each other at the turn of independence.

## The Origins of a Modern Military in the Nigeria Area

Ukpabi (1974; 1976) emphasizes on three distinct stages in British military policy in West Africa. First is the coming of the West Africa Squadron, comprising primarily British naval troops and a few other Europeans acquired by the British in pursuit of a defence force to protect British interests. Second were the West Indian

troops, gathered and brought in between 1840 and 1870. These troops were the primary tools used in the initial British military domination of the coastal states of West Africa and a bit into the hinterland. These West Indians were so important in the pursuit of British dominance in West Africa due to the ease with which they acclimatised in the African tropics and their already trained disposition as British soldiers, that it took the more of three decades after they had arrived before the British considered the use of Africans as possible potentials in the military as a third choice.<sup>3</sup>

While the early recruits were ex-slaves and Hausas, later entrants were from other ethnic groups like the Igbo and Yoruba (Kirk-Greene, 1980). The British had initially not favoured the recruitment of Igbo's because of their individualistic societies and non-malleability. However, with time, Igbo's were drafted into the army as clerks or technicians because of their literacy in the English language and exposure to Western education (Ejiogu 2011). The early entry into the Southern parts of Nigeria, of Christian missions, encouraged the growth of missionary schools, which produced people literate enough to be taught clerical and technological tasks and thus add to the manpower of the colonial service.

Before the need for an itemized and unit based army arose in Nigeria, recruitments were based upon the perception by colonial army officers of some Nigerian groups having a high propensity for violence, a sort of warrior-hero complex, which they coined as being "martial". The British adopted their choices of recruitment based on these "martial" groups. This first arose in India, with the observation of the Ghurkhas. Ghurkha soldiers come from several different ethnic backgrounds within Nepal, north-east of India. Having a military tradition dating from the 16th century, the Ghurkha were spectacularly outstanding in resisting British colonial occupation (Kirk-Greene 1980; 398).<sup>4</sup> After showing fighting spirit while fighting the British, They were drafted into the colonial British army in India and designated as the *Nasiri*, meaning 'friendly' and it is said that the Ghurkhas have been loyal friends of the British since then, joining in both world wars and other British expeditions in South East Asia.<sup>5</sup> Not all groups were like the Ghurkha's, many groups like the *Sikhs* rejected an extensive and coercive recruitment drive, into the army by the British, because it was to the detriment of their progressing businesses, and would require that people leave their opportunities of making money for the pursuit of the crown. This rejection of forced recruitment and what the Asian groups saw as disrespect for their religions and traditions, led to the Sepoy Rebellion (1857-59), (Amin 2001).<sup>6</sup>

Kirk-Greene also observed that British officers built a bias over recruitment from these rebelling groups based on the fact that their devotion to tradition and religion and also the growing prosperity within the urban classes made them unfit to be soldiers (Kirk-Greene 1980; 400-404).<sup>7</sup> As a result, recruiters developed a detailed system of ethnographic classification that identified certain rural ethnic groups, religions, and castes with the specific biological and cultural attributes of a 'martial race'. Kirk-Greene then notes that a number of these British officers, came from the India to Africa, and introduced these martial stereotypes to Africa, thus its influence on the Royal West African Frontier Force (Kirk-Greene 1980; 400-404).<sup>8</sup>

The whole idea of the use of either martial or other groups by the British arose from the perspective that some groups had either from before the time of their encounter with the British, or even after that, developed a valuable trait, *soldierliness*, which the British could use in determining the development of their empire. As some West African areas fell under the British axe, the British then began to accentuate values that would be put to good use. The Hausa were of value to the British first because they were impressed with the mode of resistance to the British occupation staged by the Sokoto Caliphate and with the subsequent submission which helped to expose the caliphates impressive administrative qualities, the British took advantage of this and emphasized Hausa and Northern recruitment into the colonial army.

To the British, these qualities were non-existent in the Igbo. First, the Igbo had shown an uncoordinated but successful resistance, mainly with the Arochukwu and Ekumeku, a case which showed that Igbo unitary states and the democracy within them provided an increased tendency to hold onto their individual ranks and defences (Dike, K.O & Ekejiuba 1990),<sup>9</sup> thereby posing a more complicated front than the Hausa and Yoruba, whose pre-colonial administrative structures, which consisted of hierarchical classes, made for convenient occupation of the area. Almost all Igbo states had to be individually subjugated, and so the British had a much more difficult task in subjugating the Igbo in relation to most other groups in Nigeria. This, and the fact that Igbo people generally rejected the British military regimentation, discouraged early British recruitment of Igbo's in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Hausa and Yoruba were the preferred choice. In fact Barrett (1976) cites a communication between Brigadier-General Cunliffe, Commander of the Overseas East African Expeditionary Force and the Nigerian Administration; "I strongly deprecate the enlistment of troops from this tribe or in fact any tribe in the dense bush country of Southern Nigeria. These men are both mentally and physically far inferior to any tribes in the rest of Nigeria" (Barrett 1976; 108).<sup>10</sup> Barrett explains the reason for Cunliffe's outburst as a misconception based on mistaken identity; the British colonial government still maintained this perception throughout the period of the First World War and close to the Second World War. This was not to be so in the latter half of the century though, because although the British regarded the 'martial races' as valiant and strong, but they also saw them as intellectually challenged, lacking the initiative or leadership qualities to command

large troops. They were also regarded as politically subservient or docile to authority (Greenhut 1983; 68).<sup>11</sup> The Igbo on the other hand, had with time gained intellectual opportunity which would become useful to the colonial army. Igbo clerks and technicians became an integral part of the colonial army, and although not many of them joined the rifle brigades, they provided very essential services, which the colonial army officers and NCO's found value in. These relatively advanced Southern Igbo, Yoruba and minorities, were to become the potentials for the new Nigerian officer corps which was to come about due to the inevitability of independence (Ubah 1999; Ejioogu 2011).

According to Jeffrey Greenhut (1983; 68); "The Martial Race theory had an elegant symmetry "(those) who were intelligent and educated were defined as cowards, while those defined as brave were uneducated and backward."<sup>12</sup> The evolution of the modern Nigerian army was a paradigm of colonial perceptions strongly held and based on misconceptions. Picturing the rich diversities of African societies as modern or primitive, good or bad, the colonialists chose to pick on martial or aggressive tendencies of some groups as their strengths and reasons by which their people would be encouraged to join the colonial army. Others, who were seen in the negative, were rejected and made to look worthless. These perceptions and actions were to become constraints later on after independence.

The cohesive build-up of the Nigerian army during colonial times was primarily for the benefit of the colonial governments pursuits. The introduction of the presumptuous idea of "martial" groups in the early 1900's saw the architecture of a new structure for the imperial military under the colonialists. The British developed a liking of the Hausa/Fulani emirate system, as also the Yoruba rulership. The former was convenient for its administrative structures, which were usable by the British, while the latter was convenient due to its malleability (Smith 1974).<sup>13</sup> With these two groups, they pursued the campaigns of the First World War. The Igbo's on the other hand were seen as weak willed and not good for regimental life (Barrett 1976; 108).<sup>14</sup> This perspective was to change later on between the First and Second World Wars.

Because of the negative perception the colonialists had for Africans, they encouraged (or allowed) the various groups to construct separate impressions of their superiority, thus making the groups incline towards ideas of superiority or less sophistication. An obvious case of this colonial machination is seen in the writings of Flora Shaw (Lugard), which describe the Fulani as more or less closer to her kind, than the darker ethnicities. Because of their features, she ascribes superiority over the other dark skinned groups (Shaw 1906; 262).<sup>15</sup> This impression built by quite a number of the British and the divergent views held on the other groups helped expand the perception of some groups of themselves in relation to others. Thus, while the "martial groups" saw themselves in the light of a superior fighting force (recognized by the British), the others however (most especially Southerners), saw themselves as educationally and culturally more exposed due to Western ideals, thereby placing them equitably exposed as the Westerners. Nevertheless, the convenient relationship between the Northern caliphate (what eventually became a sultanate) and the British, built a grander sense of confidence within the Northern oligarchy of mutuality between them compared to southerners. The Sultan and emirs were accorded higher recognition by the colonialists because of the realization that there was a stronger sovereign-subject relationship in the Hausa-Fulani systems, which helped the colonial government to entrench its indirect rule policy. The policy had hardly worked in Asia and wasn't as successful in Southern Nigeria (Perham 1960).<sup>16</sup> Lugard's belief in the Hausa-Fulani willingness to submit and capability to entrench indirect rule is seen in his comment below:

The Fulani in old times under Dan Fodio conquered this country. They took the right to rule over it, to levy taxes, to depose kings, to create kings. They in turn have by defeat lost their rule which has come into the hands of the British. All these things which I have said the Fulani by conquest took the right to do now pass to the British. Every Sultan and Emir and the principal officers of state will be appointed by the high commissioner throughout all this country (Lugard 1902).<sup>17</sup>

The colonial process of indirect rule was most successful where strong bases for administrative and judicial systems and a hierarchy of traditional rulers existed. This was the case in most of the Hausa-Fulani dominated north of Nigeria where the emirate system constituted a confederation with all the markings of an organized administrative system. The relationship between the emirs and their subjects was one in which the British could encourage manipulation. As seen earlier with Ubah's (1999) work, although there was a concerted effort to recruit soldiers on their own free will, there was coercion. Although the colonial government in all its records never admitted that as it pressurized for recruitment, it was clear from oral evidence acquired by Ubah that emirs felt an unofficial obligation to forcefully recruit from their domains in order to meet quotas set by the colonial government. The men, most of whom also felt obligated to their emirs, grudgingly subscribed to the colonial army (Ubah 1999; 190-194).<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, south-Easterners (many whom were interested) found it difficult to join the army at will between 1900 and the 1940's. Ubah describes the reasons for these inhibitions as "complex," in that the "...the British had little faith in the martial qualities of many of the ethnic groups in the South."<sup>19</sup> However, their value as other vocations emerged within the army, become pertinent. Therefore, between 1900 and the late 1940's

Ubah points out that "...most Southerners who had been rejected on territorial grounds, cunningly subsequently presented themselves at other recognized stations...making false declarations with regard to the ethnic groups to which they belonged."<sup>20</sup>

Lugard's preference for Northerners instead of Southerners as infantrymen in the colonial army was made clearly obvious in his correspondence with the commandant of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> battalions of the then West African Field Force, which were located in the South. Lugard approved a request for the making up of a shortfall in men with recruits from the North. This irrespective of the fact that there were available men from the South. Barrett (1976; 107-108) buttresses on this sentiment when he points out that; "...up till 1942, there were no recruits to the Nigerian Regiment from south of a line from Ilesha to Ibi...a man, wrote the Ibos off as "a bunch of clerks, cooks and bottle-washers." In fact, Barrett quotes Cunliffe who concluded that the Ibo were useless as combatant troops, and wrote to the Secretary of State: "I strongly deprecate the enlistment of troops from this tribe or in fact any tribe in the dense bush country of Southern Nigeria. These men are both mentally and physically far inferior to any tribes in the rest of Nigeria" (Barrett 108). This was a perception which brought in a factor that greatly affected the structure of the future independent Nigerian army.

It must be noted here that most of these recruits were not necessarily of Hausa or Fulani origin, but also from minority areas of northern Nigeria like the Dakarkari of Niger, Tiv of Benue and Kanuri of Bornu provinces respectively. Thus the combined forces of what started as "Glover's Hausa's," or later designated as the Hausa Constabulary (1862) consisted of freed slaves who were originally kidnapped from minority areas and had come to learn the Hausa language. Not many Hausa themselves were favourably disposed to joining the constabulary and army, and so it would not be completely right to say that recruitment was widely accepted in the North. Ubah (1999) points this out in his narrative of how District Officers and other administrators over time (most especially after the First World War), found it very difficult to recruit men for the constabulary and subsequently the Nigeria Regiment of the Royal West Africa Frontier Force (RWAFF) (Ubah 1999; 185-235).<sup>21</sup> Miners further point this out when he quotes from Sir Ahmadu Bello's biography:

Within sight of the school we could see the square fort and the sentries behind the parapets... We did not like the soldiers; they were our own people and had conquered us for strangers and had defeated our people on the plain just before us. This feeling was very common all over the North (Bello 1962; 23).<sup>22</sup>

Horowitz (2000) notes that colonial policies and patterns basically introduced the complication in ethnic relations within the Nigerian army. He points out in particular, the processes of recruitment of certain ethnic groups as a major factor. In fact he says that; "Once heavy recruitment of certain ethnic groups begins, it is likely to continue...Recruiters may favour or be thought to favour members of the group already serving" (Horowitz 2000; 445) <sup>23</sup> The colonial mentality of the appreciation of 'martial races' for instance, shows how this tailored recruitment in Nigeria produced more men and NCOs from the North, while educational exposure in the South encouraged the later recruitment of Southerners into the officer cadre after World War Two. This is evident as seen in Luckham's (1971) data which showed that by 1960, an estimated 65% to 70% of the riflemen (men and NCOs) in the QONR, were from the North, while only seven (7) out of thirty six (36) officers were Northerners, an estimated 19% (Luckham's 1971; 72).<sup>24</sup>

Although scholars like Horowitz (2000; 445) <sup>have</sup> discussed ethnic recruitment in the army, as a deliberate colonial policy, for maintaining order, others like Luckham have pointed out that bureaucratization led to class creation which affected the bureaucracy in post-colonial times, he observed that that there was a divergence between organizational models and reality in Africa, and that these models as they are in the West, had very little meaning in the African context at the morning of their independence (Luckham 1971; 1).<sup>25</sup> Barrett (1976; 105) observed that there was a controlled but overt partitioning, which helped maintain cohesion in the early colonial army, where priority and handling was based on need and perceptions of regional prowess. Although these perceptions were to die down after the World War Two, they had been established.<sup>26</sup> The issue of class creation and partitioning during the colonial period was not considered as a factors that could possibly affect the transition of the army, in fact, as Miners points out; there was a premature handing over of the military at independence. The likely problem being that there were differences in the way cohesion was achieved (Miners 1971; 45-50).

The North, even though perceived as more favoured by the colonial authorities, lagged behind educationally in relation to the South, and this caused a disparity in how the cards were dealt to each. Crompton (1979) emphasises on the fact that contrary to various points of view that the North was educationally disadvantaged due to the delay in colonial occupation, makes a point that the strong desire of the British colonialists to work within a controlled, subservient and loyal group, untainted by Western ideals and logic. This was a factor tucked within their minds.<sup>27</sup>

The North had quite a lot of patronage from the colonial military. As early as the first two decades of the twentieth century, the colonial office encouraged a cordial relationship between emirs and colonial residents. Barrett indicates that:

(The) British Administration took upon the task of obtaining public pledges of loyalty, especially from Muslim rulers. Residents in the Northern Provinces were sent duplicated pledges of loyalty printed in Hausa and Arabic, and were instructed to persuade the Emirs and other rulers to sign the documents. The officers commanding the garrison troops were instructed to turn out a military guard to present arms whenever an Emir visited a Resident. Emirs were further to be identified with the army by giving them the “honour” of being greeted by a military salute (Barrett 1976; 113).<sup>28</sup>

These perks in themselves expanded the egos of these Northern leaders, who assumed a larger than life perception of their position in the colonial chain. This patronage encouraged the forced drafting of Northern men into the colonial army. Although in most cases the military claimed non-obligatory subscription, many of the men were forced by their emirs and district heads when recruitment drives were requested. Ubah gives a detailed discussion on drafting and how there was compulsion. Although in the claims of the British recruiting officers, the emirs conveniently brought in willing men. In truth, there was a lot of coercion by the emirs, who felt compelled to impress the colonial residents. The residents on the other hand were under pressure from the colonial administration, most especially during the two World Wars (Ubah 1999; 185-200).<sup>29</sup>

By 1960, the military structures began to take shape. But as seen from the build-up of installations in the North, factors of recruitment were definitely to the North's favour.

Omoigui (2004) observes that the British build-up of a proper colonial military arose not as a need for colonialisation, but in response to the growing ambition of their rival European empire makers. Lugard was sent to counter inroads made by the French, and in 1897 he was made responsible for raising a West African Force. Joseph Chamberlain saw the need for this and pursued the cause. (Anderson & Killingray 1991).<sup>30</sup> By the time the First World War started in 1914, the British needed additional manpower. An estimated 13,980 troops and about 10,000 carriers were provided by the Nigerian Administration alone between 1914 and 1918.<sup>31</sup> The British armed forces in this period even outpaced the tin mines and railways in the need for manpower (Barrett 1976; 105).

### **Ethnicity and Regional Identities**

Luckham's (1971) work on the military gentleman discusses cohesion primarily among the officer cadre, pointing to the fact that although there was the notion of the “military gentleman,” ethnic cohesion also had an influence in the budding Nigerian army. Ethnic sentiments were slowly built by weekend meetings held in either NCOS or officers' quarters (Luckham 1971; 39-41),<sup>32</sup> and these lent credence to ethnic biases and the possibility of collusion among people of similar ethnic groups in dealings or involvements in non-cohesive negativities.<sup>33</sup>

Gbulie (1981; 13-15) discusses a spate of meetings held by Igbo officers in Kaduna at the prelude to the January 1966 coup.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Garba (1982; 57-63) talks of meetings among Northern officers in the prelude to the July 1966 coup.<sup>35</sup> Nigeria's army had a problem at the prelude of independence, Perlmutter described it as; “*satrapic*,” implying “...the aping of a superior, usually external culture...subordination to ‘higher’ foreign values” (Perlmutter 1977; 115-118).<sup>36</sup>

### **Pro-North Military Establishments**

Northern Nigeria, as seen in earlier part of this work, has over time been seen as favoured by the colonial authorities. Atofareti further buttresses this;

Either by coincidence or by design, almost all the military installations were concentrated in one area of the country - The North...There were no military units in the Mid - Western Nigeria and those in Lagos were either administrative or ceremonial (Atofareti 1991).<sup>37</sup>

He expands on this by listing the various units after independence, by region, showing that in all, 14 army units were in the North, 3 in the West and 1 in the East. With the number of military formations predominantly in the North, it was assumed, and rightly so, that Northerners will be more within the corps. This though was not to be so in the officer corps which had more of Southerners by the period of independence. These social, ethnic and regional divisions which were contained during colonial times reared their heads after independence.

### **Education, Opportunity and the Creation of the Nigerian NCO and Officer Corps**

The relevance of the Igbo in the military began to grow due to the fact that there was a need for educated NCOs in the army as clerks, warehousing personnel, secretarial staff and other service personnel to man the command centres. Apart from that, there had with time emerged a reasonable number of technicians from the South, and also, a large number of this sort of manpower who were of British extraction, had either ended their tour of duty in Africa, or had other reasons to leave, thereby encouraging the colonial office to demand for an increase in African NCO recruitment for within skilled groups, and Miners emphasises the fact that this primarily encouraged the emergence of Igbo's in the RWAFF:

Accordingly the G.O.C in Charge of West Africa lay down that every job that could be done by an African must be done by one. This policy led to the enlistment of many southern Nigerians into the army since the expanded army needed men with education and the bulk of the educated were in the South (Miners 1971; 21).<sup>38</sup>

By the late periods of colonial rule, the colonial army comprised of an NCO cadre categorized into two groups. The first group was that of artisans and clerks, mainly semi-educated or secondary school graduates (in almost all cases from the South). The second group comprised the hard adrenaline filled infantry and artillery NCOs who were predominantly from the North. The advantage of having Northern NCOs was based on the fact that it encouraged a smoothening of relationships within the rank and file. The men saw little of the white NCOs, let alone their officers and this created an air of higher authority for the British officers and NCOs, while allowing for a lower level of authority which subjected to them totally and at the same time held linguistic and (or) religious legitimacy amongst the men. The relatively large population of Northern men in the infantry usually had common knowledge of the Hausa language, this and the fact that a large number of these men were Muslims, encouraged the men to rally around those among them that the white man had elevated.

While Southerners assumed supremacy in rank and exposure, amassing themselves in the various unit offices and workshops. The Northerners held more martial positions in the field. Both groups held on to a rivalry of power and authority, and in many cases their rivalries were manifested within informal settings like the mess and the barracks. However, there were cases where it showed officially. In 1952, what was termed as a mutiny by some 100 clerks attached to the Command Ordnance Depot in Lagos, over poor living conditions, led to the mobbing of British officers in charge of the depot? Although the action was quickly suppressed by a detachment of Military Police and infantry riflemen, the identity lines became clear after the mutiny was quelled. The mutineers were all members of southern nationalities while the riflemen and military police deployed to suppress the revolt were all northerners (Miners 1971; 24-25).<sup>39</sup>

Access to education and artisanship by Southerners helped them gain access to the army from the 1940's. The needed manpower from Britain was depleting and the colonial military service was strained. Now this new crop of eligible Nigerian workers was ripe for the low and middle cadre jobs, many secondary school graduates who had found teaching or basic office work boring, chose to join the army. Most of them started their training at the depot for young enlisted soldiers. For the artisans, they were given basic instruction either in the depot or at the technical wings of the various units. While for clerical personnel, training involved clerical instruction at the Clerical Training School in Teshi, Ghana (Miners 1971).

The 1954 establishment of the Boys' Company saw the army begin to develop a more promising outlook in Nigeria. The Boys' Company," as described by Ubah (1999; 320), was an important innovation of the post-war period and its essence was to create a continuous flow of NCOs and possible technicians through standard education and military training.<sup>40</sup> The Boys' Company was started on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1954, in Zaria, the reason being that Zaria had been the major military training centre; the Nigeria Regiment Training Centre (NRTC). The uniqueness of the "Boys School" was the fact that it portended both military and Western educational opportunities. Unlike the training school in Teshi Ghana, the boy's school brought up young boys from primary school. They were trained dually as secondary school students with proper basic military training. Although the initial idea was to provide a "continuous flow of NCOs," with time, these trained students were to join the officer corps, most especially when the Nigerian Defence Academy (then called the Nigerian Military College) was created. An example is seen with the likes of Joseph Garba and Jeremiah Useni, who eventually became Generals (Garba 1982; 25).<sup>41</sup> Preference was given to children of serving soldiers, ex service men and traditional rulers (Ubah 1999; 320).<sup>42</sup> Still though, some got into the school in their own merit (Useni 2009).<sup>43</sup>

The creation of the Nigerian officer began in the late 1940s. The drive for independence was heating up, the Nigerianisation of the civil service had started; and thus the Colonial army, saw the need for training and commissioning Nigerian officers. Though some verbal references have been made of temporary field commissions during certain campaigns of the Second World War, these were not recorded in official documents. The first commissioned Nigerian officers were Ugboma (1948), Bassey (1948 or 1949?). Wey, Aguiyi-Ironsi and Ademulegun (1949), Shodeinde (1950) followed by Maimalari, Lawan, Ogundipe and Adebayo (1953).

Luckham and Miners claim that Bassey was the first Nigerian that got commissioned in 1946, but Ubah, Obasanjo and Garba claim that the first commissioned officer was Ugboma in 1948. In fact, Obasanjo points out that Bassey's commission was close to that of Ironsi and Ademulegun, while Garba clearly puts it that Bassey was the "...second Nigerian officer to have received his commission in the army."

In Nowa Omoigui's interview though with Lt. Colonel M. O. Nzefili is the most detailed primary account of the first Nigerian commissioned officer. The colonel says:

I know that he [Ugboma] was commissioned Lieutenant in 1948. I know that he was instrumental in the recommendation of Sgt. W.U. Bassey, Sgt. J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi and RSM S.A Ademulegun for commission which effect was as follows:

W.U. Bassey, commissioned Lieutenant 30 Apr. 1949; J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, commissioned

Lieutenant 12 Jun 1949; S.A. Ademulegun, commissioned 12 Jun. 1949 in that order. As at June 1949, they were the first four Nigerians to be commissioned into the Army. I got all the above information from him [Ugboma] when he was invited by Army Headquarters, Lagos following a statement he made at a Reception at Onitsha, Anambra State, to the effect that he was the first Nigerian to be commissioned into the Army. He had bundles of publications, which he carried with him to the Military Secretary, AHQ Bonny Camp, Victoria Island, Lagos. This was around 1984 [shortly after the coup that brought then Brig. M Buhari to power]. The dates against the names of the officers mentioned above are self-explanatory. In those days we heard of Lt. Ugboma of Nigeria and Major Anthony of the Gold Coast, now Ghana and we hoped to be like them since Africans could become officers from then on (Omoigui 2007).

In an interview with Domkat Bali (2009), he points to the fact that they as new officers had once argued about this, and they had, either out of a lack of interest or the lack of official information concerning the first Nigerian officer continued to just gloss over the issue, more-so that the tensions of the coups and the civil war made it a trivial issue.

Most commissioned officers were from the South because there were few Northerners who met the criteria then such as having a basic educational qualification, at least secondary, with a reasonable amount of years of service in the army (Ubah 1999; 234-235).<sup>44</sup> As stated earlier, the North had more of non educated NCOs and thus, by 1949, there were no available candidates for officer training. With the later acceptance of young men from secondary school into the military academy in Sandhurst, there came a rush from the North (Ubah 1999; 235).<sup>45</sup> Prominent leaders and political actors, embarked on a targeted campaign to convince secondary school boys to enlist in the officer corps. In his speeches the Sardauna encouraged the young students by emphasizing on “the former martial glories of the jihads,” and called on students to “show that they were not women” (Luckham 1971; 244).<sup>46</sup> The North was more or less compensated in 1951, with the admission of two Northerners into the prestigious Sandhurst Military Academy.

The Nigerian army although desirous of a professional outlook, one which had all the character of their progenitors, had a problem; the British had created a partitioned military with the intellectual aspect dominated by the South and the non intellectual and more martial aspect dominated by the North. The desire to strike a balance in this came in too late. Relatively, the French had started earlier, introducing African officers within the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Ubah 1999; 234).<sup>47</sup> The British on the other hand, only toyed with the idea in 1946 and started the initiative proper in 1949, just eleven years to independence, with a plan for gradual Nigerianization.

### **The Growth of Indigenous NCOs and the British Sense of Cohesion; the North-South Divide**

As discussed earlier, the British had established a mode of recruitment which was built upon a unification of regional and ethnic groups in the early periods, giving some groups a false impression of being *martialistic* and so therefore powerful and acceptable to the colonial military. Loyalists were accorded ceremonial prestige (Barrett 1976; 113).<sup>48</sup> The indigenous NCOs from the North grew in the various campaigns that the British pursued, starting from the East Africa campaigns. Many of the people from the Northern minorities most especially, were taught basic verbal comprehension of the English language for communication in the field. Barrett (1976; 113-114) talks of a desperate but “grudging” grant of promotion to African as NCOs. In fact during the East Africa campaigns, Lugard preferred that Indian Nursing NCOs be brought to the field to superintend health issues, even though there were capable Africans to take up the task.

This brings us to a crucial issue in the maintenance of cohesion in the British colonial army. The issue of ethnic superiority. In the early periods of the colonial military or as called then “constabulary,” there was a conscious attempt at maintaining ethnic stratification and designation by purpose. What this means is that the colonial office realised later on that time and circumstances had created value in some initially neglected parties, and in order not to “rock the boat” there was a need in keeping the various bands as far away from each other as possible, and in some cases, create more inducement for some than others.

The infantry, which comprised of the largest in the corps, composed mainly of Northerners, because as Coleman and Bruce (1962; 374) suggest, the Northerners, “were more politically quiescent and less nationalistic,”<sup>49</sup> and so the British preferred them to predominate the lowest rank of the army because the North would be the least likely to be involved in uprisings and disturbances.<sup>50</sup> Also, the fact that the rank and file of the colonial army had relatively little prestige in the eyes of the emirs and noble men in the North, most of the Hausa-Fulani drafted were generally of poor modest background, while in contrast, among some of the minorities like the Taroh of Plateau state, sent children of the palace (Garba 1982; 48).<sup>51</sup> Other minority groups like the Berom usually allowed and encouraged delinquents to join the colonial army (Pam, 2009).<sup>52</sup>

Although official numbers and classifications of Nigerian troops in the colonial army are difficult to come by, perspectives by soldiers of these times show the different partitions that obtained in the colonial army. Domkat Bali for instance, states that “most men from the South that joined the army were likely to go to the

technical side, while Northerners would toe the line of general duty” (Bali 2009).<sup>53</sup> This then led to two different layers of NCOs as Martin Dent points out; Northern general duty NCOs and Southern technical or clerical NCOs. Of these two, he says the Northern NCOs comprised 75% of the indigenous NCO cadre, by the terminal stage of colonial control, while the remaining 25% was divided between the South-East and South-West (Dent 1969; 177).<sup>54</sup> The sharp separation was of advantage to the British in two ways. First, it kept the two distinctly different groups at bay, thereby averting ethnic or religious tensions which might have arisen due to their histories of scepticism of each other. Secondly and more importantly, in building cohesion within ethnically or religiously homogenous groups, the British created divisions of loyalists they could use to their convenience. With their specific NCO hierarchies and the pride of place they were given, the Hausa for instance felt obligated to protect British interests, even if it meant going against other Africans. These NCOs were held in high regard by their men, and in most cases the men were highly loyal to them. This was powerful because the NCOs, if loyal to the military authorities, were used as stabilizing influences upon the men. Therefore the chances of one being an NCO were brighter if he had an extensive following within his regional or religious group. This served as the tool which the British used in building cohesion within groups. Thus, the NCOs served as the major gateways for command and doctrine. While the men saw their NCOs as demagogues, the NCOs held forte for European officers and helped to build the impression of them (European officers) being superior. It was a convenient relationship on all sides, the NCOs served as intermediaries, pacifying the men and maintaining order, while giving priority to the white colonial NCO or officer. This mode of cohesion though was not always perfect, as there were instances where even the loyal NCOs rebelled. This is seen in the previously discussed mutiny where Southern men and NCOs had cause to rebel, and Northern infantrymen were used to suppress them.

### **British Economic Policy on Salaries of the Military**

Other methods of maintaining loyalty in the colonial army were the systems of deferred pay and differential pay. These were simple economic systems of ensuring the continued loyalty of troops. Deferred pay ensured that the troops were at all times owed by the colonial government. They were only paid allowances while in service, and were only paid their full entitlements when they left service. By this, the soldiers were always expectant and would toe the line of loyalty due to the fact that at dismissal, if the soldier was found to have committed a grave offence, he lost his deferred pay, and so the troops were careful not to do anything that will lead to their sack (Barrett 1976; 113).<sup>55</sup> Differential pay on the other hand, was applied within the rank and file. The whole idea was to pay individual NCOs based on levels of competence. It was applied from the 1940's due to the fact that there was an emergence of literate men from the Southern part of the country, and these men needed better inducement. In contrast however, Northern troops received relatively lower allowances because there was no need for inducement. The Northern rank and file were paid an everyday average subsistence allowance of 6*d* and the Southern rank and file were paid an average 9*d* (Barrett 1976; 113).<sup>56</sup> This differential pay extended up to the late colonial periods when there was an obvious disparity between the two types of indigenous NCOs. The Southern men and NCOs who had technical or clerical knowledge had a slightly higher remuneration than the general duty NCOs (Barrett 1976; 114). This though was not an issue that was widely broadcast, however it was known among them, and it left an impression on both parties. While the Southern NCOs saw themselves as superior due to higher pay and linguistic access to officers. The Northern NCOs, although not necessarily happy about this, still maintained their respect and loyalty to the colonial authorities. This loyalty, as described earlier, really endeared the colonial military officers and NCOs to the Northern men and NCOs, whom they saw as more reliable than the Southern educated clerks and technicians, who would rub minds with them, and in some cases even seem brighter than them (Luckham 1971; 186). Education and the English language was initially the preserve of the colonialists who maintained an intimidating posture with it. As it came to be, missionary education, primarily in the South encouraged education using the English language as the language of instruction. Therefore, as early as the first three decades of the twentieth century, there was a good number of educated and eligible Southerners for cerebral responsibilities in the army, and being that the need for them increased due to the Second World War, there grew a sizable number of Southern NCOs who were ready to fight for rights which their Northern counterparts wouldn't. Thus in referring to the 1952 mutiny, the clerks had accused their British officers of neglect of their basic living conditions. These Southern NCOs were aware of their right to better standards of living than they were availed. Unlike their Northern counterparts, these NCOs had access to information which probably gave them insight to their rights, which were being infringed upon. Northern men and NCOs felt obligated to the colonial officer and NCO, and even when they chose to be disobedient and unruly, the numbers were relative few and far from a size that would be of any significance. As Barrett noted;

It had been classical British policy to recruit troops from among the “politically innocent” peoples of the colonies in order to obviate any danger of mutiny or rebellion in the armed forces (Barrett 1976; 113).<sup>57</sup>

By “politically innocent” Barrett implied that people from these areas in the colony were generally naive to political intrigues, primarily because they were either from a politically oppressed society, and had built



within them a mentality that they were always subservient to a higher class, or they were of a very “primitive” class that was intrigued by the maxim gun and its capacity to kill that they had pledged unalloyed loyalty. Either one or the other encouraged a self abasement by these “lower classes” and a high perception of the white colonialists. In interviews with men of Northern extraction who served under the colonial army, one thing they had in common was their respect for their British NCOs and officers. Even though, these NCOs and officers might have been at one time or the other harsh, they would excuse their actions as being a military factor and not necessarily racial or degrading (Moses Nyam Rwang 2006; Mohammed [African Banana] 2008; Mallam Mimashi 2009; Bulus Pam 2009).<sup>58</sup> In contrast, a Southern NCO that was interviewed for this work felt that the British NCOs most especially, were quite uncomfortable with Nigerian NCOs, most especially Southerners, who in most cases were as equivalently educated as they (the British NCOs) were (Ozor, 2009).<sup>59</sup>

The argument from the above is that cohesion in the British sense was based on loyalty achieved through divides created between Northern and Southern soldiers. This could be described as a *Partitioned Cohesion*. These two partitions were based on incidental value. Where for instance, an engineering corps was needed, the corps would be populated by Southerners, while for rifle or artillery brigades, Northerners dominated. These partitions grew with the army up till independence.

### **Divisions within the Officer Cadre from 1960**

Due to the variation in officer creation and metamorphosis, there was rivalry and dichotomy within the officer cadre of the Nigerian army. Perlmutter points out that the growth of the Nigerian army after independence and the subsequent effect of "Nigerianization" led to the "...rise of the Sandhurst “boys” alongside the “satrapic generals” (Perlmutter 1977; 102; Peters 1997)<sup>60</sup> While the Sandhurst trained officers saw themselves as military progressives, who were trained to recreate the true Nigerian army from an old British army, the NCO commissioned officers saw themselves as successors and purveyors of the Nigerianized British West African Frontier Force, which had with its experience, something the others (Sandhurst, Mons and Graduate officers) did not have. The most obvious contrast within the groups was the fact that while some were encouraged to see themselves as professional soldiers or graduates, others came out feeling inferior. The NCO officer for instance, had to cope with the fear or early retirement and also the rapidly changing structure of the army. They were not termed as professional or highly competent by the Sandhurst officers. Quite a number of actions and reactions pointed to this. A clear example is seen in the relationship between Ironsi and Maimalari during the Peace Support operations in the Congo. Obasanjo describes how Maimalari disagreed on the rules of engagement as given by Ironsi. While he saw the need to protect his troops by firing early at anticipated rioters (who in many cases were armed), Ironsi preferred restraint in order to avoid a backlash of collective rioters and the possible labelling of the contingent as a common enemy (Obasanjo 1978).<sup>61</sup> While their argument lasted, Maimalari was quite recalcitrant, even though he was well aware of Ironsi’s double seniority as a Nigerian officer and as a commanding officer of a UN battalion. Ironsi, in order to avoid a series of disobedience to self initiative as done by Maimalari, sent him back to Nigeria, replacing him with Captain Largema (Obasanjo 1978).<sup>62</sup>

Another example of this rivalry is cited by Luckham in which an NCO commissioned officer lashed out at two younger officers for what he termed as attempting to leave the Officers’ mess before him and he ordered them to sit down till he finished his drink. Although mess norms required that senior officers made the move to leave before junior officers, Luckham point out the tensions which arose. “...the junior officers became angrier and angrier, the atmosphere more and more unpleasant” (Luckham 1971; 38-53)<sup>63</sup> Coupled with Ademulegun's earlier diatribe on lieutenant Ezedigbo, one could see the apathy between officers of the different groups.

Lastly, to show how much contempt existed in the air, the alleged words of Nzeogwu in his last interview with Dennis Ejindu, crowns it all. Nzeogwu, in his interview with Dennis Ejindu, in May, 1967 made a sharp retort to the question on Ironsi’s competence: “...But he actually joined the army as a tally-clerk and was a clerk most of the time” (Ejindu 1966 in Siollun 2008)<sup>64</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the problem of cohesion in the Nigerian army. The fact that the creation of the Nigerian army began with colonialism, introduced a pattern of cohesion, described in this work as partitioned cohesion, a situation in which a group although seen as one, is subtly separated into units in which some are shown certain preferences. This partitioning, in the case of Nigeria saw the North being first preferred for its martial peoples, while at later stages the South, showing promise in terms of education, gained prominence in the corps of the NCO and officer cadre. This transitory preferences, although advantageous to the British colonialists, was of gross disadvantage to the new Nigerian army. With different perceptions about themselves, a gunpowder keg was left, just waiting to be lighted to blow.

The NCO cadre saw a partitioning of corps. While the infantry and artillery was predominantly Northern, the technical and clerical corps or units composed mainly of Southerners. The groups were at various times placed in situations that they had to confront each other at the orders of their British colonial officers.

Also, the different officer types created with time between 1946 and 1966 also saw a salient but obvious partition due to the fact that they were created in different ways, this differentiation in officer types, was worsened by the fact that they were a newly created group. The officer corps was not only new, but inadvertently immature to the process and so they exuded varying traits; the various officers, those who rose from the ranks, Sandhurst trained, Mons Trained, Indian, Pakistani and Canadian trained officers; and university graduates on short service commission. This dichotomy in officer creation also evoked dissension.

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