

Ethnic Imbalance in the Nigerian Army: The Missing Antecedents

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Abstract

At the time of independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a colonial army with an awkward ethnic imbalance in its composition and structure. The ethnic imbalance, which was unsuited for a federal army and which later had dire consequences for Nigeria as an emergent nation, is traceable to British military policy in Nigeria since 1863. For various reasons since then, the British recruited and developed a colonial military force, whose rank and file was consistently dominated by the Hausa-speaking peoples and whose African component of the officer corps was, since the late 1950s, dominated by the Igbo, without taking into account the multi-ethnic character of the vast territory that made up the Nigerian federation. Thus, the colonial army was built essentially on ethnic imbalance since 1863. A good grasp of these antecedents is a necessary tool for a greater and more objective analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of the complex military and political problems, issues, and conflicts that confronted post-independence Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethnic imbalance, Nigerian Army, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo

Introduction

Nigeria attained independence in 1960 with a colonially oriented and old fashioned army. No doubt, the army was well trained and disciplined in line with British standards, but it stood at the centre without national ethos. The army's most remarkable feature of our concern was its ethnic composition, which did not reflect the character of Nigeria as a multi-ethnic federation.

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By 1960 the officer corps of the Nigerian Army was about 50% Igbo, 25% Yoruba, and the other 25% was shared between the Hausa and other ethnic groups (Foster, 1982). On the other hand, the Hausa-speaking people constituted about 80% of the rank and file, while the rest 20% was made up of the other ethnic groups (Foster, 1988). In a multi-ethnic federation like Nigeria, where the need to balance the interests of the various component units and groups was paramount for nation-building and national unity, it was most unlikely that such an awkward imbalance in the ethnic composition and structure of the army would be left intact for a long time after independence.

Whether or not it was going to be short-lived, the ethnic imbalance in the Nigerian Army, which was sustained for nearly a century by British colonial military policy, was to become Nigeria's Pandora's box. It turned out to be so because, attempts made soon after independence by the Tafawa Balewa-led government to redress the imbalance in the ethnic disposition of the army through the introduction of regional cum ethnic quotas in the recruitment, training, and promotion of military personnel (Eminue, 2005; Ewa, 2013), bred misunderstanding, conflict, and suspicion among the political and military elite and polarised the army into antagonistic regional and ethnic cleavages. Within the next five years after independence, more crises, conflicts, and frustration from the application of the quota policy and the use of the army had occurred enough within the military to lay the foundation for the fateful *coup d'état* of 15 January, 1966.

It is obvious that in their analyses, evaluation, and interpretation of the ethnic question in the Nigerian military of this period, the existing contemporary and later works by scholars suffer from historical short sightedness, caused principally by a dearth of historical information on the subject in the long period of British rule. This observation animated the preparation of this paper, whose aim is simply to make available for greater information and knowledge the antecedents of the ethnic imbalance in the Nigerian Army at the time of independence. It is hoped that the information provided in this paper would enrich us for greater understanding and more objective analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of the complex ethnic problem and related issues in the Nigerian Army in the half decade that followed the end of British rule.

The Origins of Ethnic Imbalance in the Nigerian Army: The Raising of a Uni-Ethnic Force - The Lagos Constabulary 1863-1901

The final decision of the British imperial magnates and the Colonial Office to raise a colonial force in Nigeria came after the annexation of Lagos as a British colony in 1861 (Ewa, 2010). A colonial force was required for the defence and internal security of the new Colony of Lagos. The proposal for such a force was made in 1862 by Henry Stanhope Freeman, the Governor of Lagos. In his proposal, Freeman strongly recommended the use of the Hausa as soldiers. He considered the Hausa to be "the best fighting men" (CO 147/1, 1862) among the tribes found on the West African coast. He was informed in this conclusion by the fact, that the British occupation of Lagos in 1852 was stiffly resisted by the Hausa slaves in Lagos. Freeman further pointed out that the formidable Dahomean Army was composed of the Hausa. He argued that the Hausa, being in slavery in Lagos and the adjoining territory, would make loyal soldiers once they were freed from slavery by the British and recruited to serve with the colonial force. In fact, Freeman insisted that the colonial force should be composed exclusively of the Hausa. This proposal, which did not conceal Governor Freeman's pathological preference for the Hausa as a soldier, marked the beginning of a British military policy that endorsed the recruitment of the colonial army in Nigeria along ethnic lines and also the beginning of the application of the British concept of "martial races" (Adekanye, 2008) in the building of the colonial army in Nigeria.

Following the Colonial Office approval of his proposal to raise a military force for the Colony of Lagos (Tamuno, 1970), Freeman recruited about 25 Hausa, who were emancipated from their Yoruba slave masters, to form the nucleus of the colonial force in Lagos in February, 1863 (CO 147/4, 1863b). Thus, the other popular story, that Lt. John Glover formed the colonial force in Lagos in 1863 with some runaway slaves that escorted him on his journey from Jebba to Lagos (Nigerian Army Museum, 1987) is unacceptable, as it has no place in the sequence of the events, opinions, decisions, and actions that culminated in the formation of the force.

To ensure and demonstrate that the newly formed force was exclusively Hausa, Freeman officially gave it the name, "Armed Hausa Police" (CO 147/3, 1863a). The force combined both military and police duties. The term, "police", was used to describe the force, not because of the additional police duties it performed, but because of the preponderance of control which the civil, as opposed to the military, authorities exerted over it (CO 147/1, 1862).

On May 25, 1863 Navy Captain Glover became the governor of Lagos, taking over from Captain W. R. Mulliner, who left as Acting

Governor. By this time the force had increased to about 30 men, and in August, 1863, after receiving due approval from the Colonial Office, Glover further increased it to 100 Hausa, who were on permanent service (CO 147/3, 1863b). In 1864, following the Colonial Office approval of a Lagos Legislative Council Ordinance to that effect, Glover raised additional 600 Hausa (CO 147/4, 1863a). They were neither to be on permanent service with the force nor render regular military service. They were to be called up for duty only when they were required. In 1879 the Hausa Armed Police was amalgamated with the Gold Coast Constabulary because Lagos was at that time administered under the Gold Coast. Following the amalgamation, the Armed Hausa Police was renamed "Hausa Constabulary" and divided into two branches - military and civil - to reflect its military and police functions. The military branch, which constituted two thirds of the strength of the force, was referred to as "Hausa", while the civil branch was identified as "Civil Police" or "Constables" (CO 147/37, 1879; CO 147/54, 1885). In line with this division, the Hausa alone were recruited into the Hausa branch, which exclusively performed military functions; while the Yoruba were enlisted in the Civil Police branch, which carried out police duties only. As the Hausa Constabulary was now composed of two ethnic groups, the sobriquet, "Hausa", was eventually changed to "Lagos", and the force became known as Lagos Constabulary from 1892 (Shirley, 1950).

Even though the Yoruba were recruited into the Lagos Constabulary since 1879, their service was restricted to civil policing under the civil branch of the force. They were not allowed to render any military service. Owing to their previous resistance against the British conquest, occupation, and annexation of Lagos and their perfidy, generally towards British presence and colonial policies, they were not trusted as soldiers by the British. Such lack of trust and the notion that the Yoruba had no martial qualities, accounted for British reluctance to enlist the Yoruba for military service with the Lagos Constabulary.

However, in June, 1883, opinion on the admissibility of the Yoruba for military service began to change, when Sir Samuel Rowe, Governor of Lagos, requested for permission from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to recruit Yoruba for military service. Rowe stated: "I very respectfully ask for your Lordship's permission to recruit at once 100 men at [sic] Lagos from the Yoruba tribes" (CO 96/150, 1883a). He explained that the fear of a possible Yoruba uprising, which had dissuaded the British from enlisting the Yoruba

for military service with the constabulary was no more. He argued that there had been no uprising in the civil branch of the constabulary, which was made up of Yoruba. Rowe pointed out that some Yoruba, who were inadvertently recruited into the military branch of the force, were of good behaviour and had shown no sign of disloyalty. On these grounds, Rowe pleaded that the 100 Yoruba he was asking for would be recruited on experimental basis for a period of six months and separated from the Hausa until they were able to demonstrate a disposition for permanent employment. In July, 1883 the Earl of Derby approved the proposal but cautioned, that "the employment of the Yoruba will require to be carefully watched..."(CO 96/150, 1883a; CO 96/150, 1883b; CO 96/155, 1884b).

Upon the approval for the enlistment of the Yoruba for military service, Assistant Inspector Kirby of the Lagos Constabulary recruited 46 Yoruba from the neighbourhood of Lagos in August, 1883 (CO 96/155, 1883a). The 46 men were enlisted under the condition of general service, which required them to serve in any part of the amalgamated colonies of Lagos and the Gold Coast. They were immediately dispatched to the Gold Coast, where they served under Assistant Inspector Stewart, who in October, 1883 reported on them as follows:

The Yoruba ... are making progress. They...are of fine physique and are, if anything, more tractable than the Hassas [sic]. I am unable to say whether they are making much progress in real discipline, for this reason, that from the very first they never showed disposition to commit offences or breaches of discipline, but seem to have a natural faculty for doing whatever they are told to do (CO 96/155, 1883b).

In spite of the good report on the conduct of the Yoruba, Governor Rowe was loath to engage them for permanent military service. When some of the Yoruba who had completed their six months service in the Gold Coast requested for an extension of their service, Rowe replied: "I am not yet prepared to enlist Yoruba recruits for a long term of service as a special company..."(CO 96/155, 1884a).

In 1892 the Yoruba soldiers who were with the Lagos Constabulary participated in the Ijebu Ode Expedition, where they gave a good account of themselves. Persuaded by the good performance of the Yoruba during the expedition and faced with the

problem of recruiting the good class of Hausa for military service, Acting Inspector General G. B. Smith recommended as follows:

If the difficulty of obtaining the proper class of Hausa recruits continues, I strongly recommend that Ibadans (Yorubas) be enlisted and a company of that tribe be formed. They did excellent work in the Ijebu campaign, and with training they will make as good a fighting material as the Hausa, and when not in Lagos could be stationed in either Western or Eastern Districts (CO 147/90, 1893).

To this recommendation Inspector General E. Stanley evasively responded, that "it would never do to have a company of Ibadans," and that the force would soon be brought up to its full strength, as it was short of 40 Hausa only (CO 147/95, 1894). The question of engaging Yoruba for permanent military service with the Lagos Constabulary was never settled until the force was reorganised and amalgamated with the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) in 1901.

We have so far shown, how the Lagos Constabulary, the earliest ancestor of the Nigerian Army, was, *ab initio*, raised and sustained as a uni-ethnic force (Adekanye, 2008), made up entirely of the Hausa ethnic group. The sociological explanation of the uni-ethnic composition of the Lagos Constabulary, as would be offered by Adekanye (2008:118), is that the British were of the opinion, that divergent ethnic interests were dysfunctional in military organisation. More to this, there was the problem of communication. The Hausa soldiers did not understand, speak, read, or write English. Hausa, therefore, remained the language of command and communication. Thus, the British were also reluctant to engage the Yoruba because, they were not ready to introduce a second language into the force. However, it must be pointed out, that while multi-ethnic military organisations may have such inherent problems as these, they are ultimately not dysfunctional. Dreisziger and Preston (1990), with Ubah and Osakwe (2013) in agreement, hold this view. Drawing from studies of polyethnic armed forces especially of the Hasburg Empire (1848-1918) in Central Europe, they argue that a polyethnic military organisation could be an instrument of national integration and unity.

Breaking the Uni-Ethnic Setting: The Niger Coast Constabulary 1891-1901

However, while the military authorities in Lagos were vacillating on the question of permanent military service for the Yoruba, the rise of the Niger Coast Constabulary in 1891 saw a change in British attitude towards the engagement of the Yoruba for military service. Encouraged by the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884-1885 and the treaties which Consul Hewett had negotiated and concluded with the chiefs of the entire coastal territory from Benin to the vicinity of the Cameroon Mountains (CO 40/46 No. 55, 1884; Gavin & Betley, 1973), Britain declared a protectorate over what was known as the Niger Districts in 1885. The declaration, which was conveyed in the *London Gazette* of June, 1885, spelt out the official name of the protectorate as Oil Rivers Protectorate, which was further changed to Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893. Among other agencies required for the administration of the protectorate was

a military force to enforce and maintain its authority, keep peace and order, protect European trade, and suppress indigenous leaderships, institutions, and communities opposed to the new protectorate government and its policies (Ewa, 2010; Geary, 1970; Mockler-Ferryman, n.d.).

It devolved on Major (later Sir) Claude Macdonald, the first Commissioner and Consul-General of the protectorate, to raise such a military force. In 1891, Macdonald assisted by Mr. (later Sir) Ralph D. Moor, hired ten trained soldiers from the Gold Coast Constabulary to form the cradle of a force that became known as the Niger Coast Constabulary (CSO 2/1/1/1, 1891). Moor was appointed commandant of the force. He worked expeditiously to find suitable material for the force, and by December, 1892 he had recruited 165 men (Geary, 1970) for the rank and file. The men were trained by the ten soldiers that Macdonald brought from the Gold Coast. The force was increased to 350 in 1893 and was commended for its drills and discipline, which compared favourably with those of any native troops either in India or elsewhere in Africa (CSO 2/3/1, 1893). From 350 the force grew up to 450 in 1896, and by 1899, the eve of its integration with the WAFF, the rank and file had gone up to 548 men (Killingray, 1882).

As it was with the Lagos Constabulary, recruitment into the Niger Coast Constabulary was influenced by the British notion of

martial and non-martial tribes. It was still held that the inhabitants of the southern parts of the Niger Coast Protectorate were non-martial nationalities, with virtually no fighting or warlike qualities. They were, therefore, considered to be unsuitable for military service with the Niger Coast Constabulary. On the other hand, the Yoruba were deemed to be a soldierly nationality, even more so than the Hausa, that could be engaged for military service. Captain Alan Boisragon, who had served as commandant of the force, pointedly noted his preference for the Yoruba as follows:

Yorubas are supposed generally to be individually inferior to the Hausas in the way of pluck, but personally, I don't think there is much difference, and as a body of men I prefer the Yorubas as they are steadier and more easily kept in hand and consequently men better suited to the close bush fighting of the country than the merry Hausa, who is apt to get a bit out of hand at the close quarter and delights in charging in with his knife individually (Boisragon, 1897: 25).

Thus, the 548 men of which the Niger Coast Constabulary was composed were, as Boisragon (1897:25) stated, "mostly Yoruba, with a fair-sized minority of Hausa." This was the state of the ethnic composition of the Niger Coast Constabulary by 1901, when it was merged with the WAFF.

Between late 1897 and early 1898 the British quickly assembled a two-battalion force called the West African Frontier Force (previously referred to as WAFF), which was to be used immediately as a counterpoise to French threat to British possessions in West Africa. The two infantry battalions, designated as "First Niger Battalion" and "Second Niger Battalion," were organised in November, 1897 and March, 1898 respectively (CO 879/54 African [West] No. 565, 1898; N. A. M., 1898).

While the proposal for the WAFF was afoot, Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, had agreed with Governor McCallum of Lagos, that the two battalions should be composed of Hausa. McCallum, who was averse to the enlistment of the Yoruba whom he described as "deficient in personal courage", assured Chamberlain that he could raise the 2,500 Hausa required for the force (Ewa, 2010). He started the recruitment of Hausa in July, 1897. By August the Hausa were being obtained in trickles, and it had

become obvious, that McCallum was failing in his assurance that he could enlist Hausa to the strength of two battalions. In his bid to look for an alternative ethnic group for military service, McCallum discussed the fighting capacities of different ethnic groups with Sir Ralph Moor, who convinced him that the Yoruba were a good martial nationality (CO 147/116, 1879). He was further convinced of the martial qualities of the Yoruba when he discovered, that the French colonial soldiery in Dahomey was composed mainly of the Yoruba. McCallum thus wrote to Chamberlain, stating as follows:

They [the Yoruba] did excellent service [during the Bida and Benin expeditions] and were amongst the steadiest of the troops employed. Sir Ralph Moor said that he was sure that both Colonel Bruce Hamilton and Major Arnold would testify to this fact. The former is now at home and could be consulted. If therefore the new force [WAFF] is to be employed outside the confines of Yoruba, I venture to submit that we should not depend on the Hausa entirely but make up one battalion of the Yorubas who have a remarkably fine, smart, appearance and learn their drills rapidly. If you have authority to engage Yoruba to the number say 700 to 1,000 I believe I could recruit them almost entirely from the Ibadan Warboys, who do not like an agricultural life after being so long engaged in Warlike operations against the Ilorins (CO 147/116, 1897).

McCallum further thought that if the Yoruba were given military training by the British officers, they could make as good soldiers as the Hausa and pleaded, therefore, "to be allowed to raise a regiment of from 800 to 1,000" (CO147/117, 1897a). In response to McCallum's submission, Chamberlain sent him a telegram, dated September 9, 1897, sanctioning the enlistment of Yoruba to the strength of a battalion (CO 147/117, 1897b).

This development marked, for the first time since 1863, the admission of the Yoruba by the Lagos government for colonial military service on the same terms as the Hausa. The WAFF could now be composed of both Hausa and Yoruba. The recruitment of men from the two ethnic groups was carried out simultaneously from September, 1897. By the end of December, 450 Hausa had been obtained, while Yoruba recruitment recorded 360 men by mid December 1897, and 453

by January 1, 1898 (CO 147/121; CO 445/1, 1898; Ewa, 2010). By 1901 the Yoruba had been firmly established in the WAFF, and the uni-ethnic setting of the colonial army in Nigeria was broken.

The Shift for a Multi-Ethnic Force: The WAFF Dispensation 1901-1960

In 1901 the various colonial military forces in British West African possessions were reorganised, renamed, and amalgamated under the name, WAFF. In each British West African territory, the WAFF had one or more branches which corresponded more or less with the existing colonial military forces (Ewa, 2010; Haywood & Clarke, 1964; Ukpabi, 1987). The branches of the WAFF in Nigeria included the Northern Nigeria Regiment (made up of the original 1st and 2nd Battalions of the WAFF), the Southern Nigeria Regiment (comprising the former Niger Coast Constabulary), and the Lagos Battalion (made up of the former Lagos Constabulary).

Each of these three forces recruited its own military personnel. Generally, the notion that the Hausa was the best material for military service continued to hold sway in the new WAFF dispensation. But the increasing scarcity of Hausa recruits and the expanding frontiers of colonial military responsibilities compelled the colonial military authorities to make colonial military service open to other ethnic groups in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa considered to possess martial qualities. Thus, the Lagos Battalion recruited Hausa, Yoruba, Nupe, and Bariba but with preference for the Hausa. By 1903 the Battalion was composed of 344 Hausa, 87 Yoruba, 41 Nupe, 1 Fulani, and 1 Bariba (CO 445/14, 1903). The Battalion lasted for only half a decade, as it was merged with the Southern Nigeria Regiment in 1906, following the amalgamation of the Colony of Lagos and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.

The Southern Nigeria Regiment was composed of men from numerous ethnic groups. At various times between 1901 and 1914, the regiment enlisted recruits from such ethnic groups as Yoruba, Hausa, Nupe, Efik, Igbo, Bini, Itsekiri, Mendi, Igala, and from ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, Cameroon, and Liberia (CO 445/17, 1903; CO 445/30, 1910). However, the Yoruba formed the bulk of its men, with the Hausa following far behind. The ethnic dispositions of the regiment in 1903 and 1913 are, for example, shown in tables I and II below.

Table I: Ethnic Representation in the Southern Nigeria Regiment 1903

| Ethnic Groups/Source of Recruits | Number Enlisted |
|---|--|
| Yoruba | 959 (This number includes Yoruba-speaking men enlisted in the Western Division of the protectorate near Lagos and Northern Nigeria boundary) |
| Hausa | 256 |
| Ethnic groups within the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria | 88 |
| Nupe | 32 |
| Sierra Leone natives | 10 |
| Gold Coast natives | 12 |
| Cameroon natives | 4 |
| Liberians | 4 |
| West Indian | 1 |
| Total | 1,366 |

Source: CO 44/17, Inspection Report of Inspector General on Southern Nigeria Regiment, 1903.

Table II: Ethnic Representation in the Southern Nigeria Regiment, 1913

| Ethnic group /Source | Number enlisted |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Yoruba | 1,113 |
| Hausa | 56 |
| Bini | 66 |
| Nupe | 48 |
| Igbo | 32 |
| Mendi | 12 |
| Igala | 12 |
| Various | 34 |
| Total | 1,882 |

Source: CO 44/30, Report of Inspector General, WAFF, on Southern Nigeria Regiment, WAFF 1913.

The regiment relied mainly on the Yoruba because of the inability of the military authorities to identify other martial ethnic groups in Southern Nigeria. This also explains the low representation of Southern Nigeria ethnic groups in the regiment. As the search for martial nationalities in Southern Nigeria continually became illusory, the British dismissed the region as inhabited by:

numerous tribes of a cowardly, unwarlike, and feeble nature, which have been forced southwards by more virile neighbors, and have had any fighting spirit, which they may have possessed, knocked out of them by centuries of slave raiding and oppression (N.A.E., 1911).

The result of this dogmatic notion was the radical search for recruits from the various ethnic groups shown in the tables I and II.

The composition of the Northern Nigeria Regiment was also multi-ethnic, with the Hausa highly dominating other groups. There was a remarkable change in which the Northern Nigeria Regiment was departing from the long tradition of enlisting mainly Hausa for military service. The reasoning on which this shift in policy was founded was clearly stated by Sir Girouard in 1909. He wrote:

On examination of the races dominating in the Northern Nigeria Regiments [sic] it will be found that the Hausa element forms the bulk. I think this is regrettable as we are placing too much reliance upon one race, and one which might give us the most trouble in a combined effort. I therefore support as far as possible recruiting from the pagan people in various parts of the protectorate (N.A. K., 1910).

However, the colonial military authorities were still censored in their search for men by the notion, that the Hausa were the best fighting nationality. They also thought that the ethnic groups inhabiting the land, north of the Niger, along with the Hausa, could also make good soldiers, especially those that were Hausa-speaking. For these reasons the regiment, in addition to the Hausa and Yoruba that were already on enlistment, recruited men from other nationalities within the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The result was the multi-ethnic composition of the regiment, which, by 1912, stood as follows:

Table III: Ethnic composition of the Northern Nigeria Regiment 1912

| Ethnic group/ Source of recruits | Number enlisted |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Hausa | 1,171 |
| Yoruba | 61 |
| Nupe | 63 |
| Fulani | 39 |
| Beriberi | 397 |
| Senegalese | 16 |
| Dakkakeri | 145 |
| Zamberma | 172 |
| Arewa | 8 |
| Asbenawa | 4 |
| Shua Arab | 34 |
| Pagans | 432 |
| Total | 2,917 |

Source: CO 445/33, Report of Inspector General, WAFF, on the Northern Nigeria Regiment, 1912.

Following the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914, the Northern and Southern Nigeria Regiments were integrated into one military force known as the Nigeria Regiment. Thus, the Nigeria Regiment, which still operated as a branch of the WAFF, took off in 1914 as a budding national force. In spite of its standing as a new national force, the regiment's leadership still held on to the notion of martial and non-martial races as of old. The practice of composing the rank and file of the regiment with drafts from ethnic groups believed to possess martial abilities became the *locus classicus* of military recruitment policy in the regiment up to the time of independence in 1960. Although in principle, the regiment maintained the legacy of the multi-ethnic composition of its rank and file, which came in the wake of the reorganisation and amalgamation of the colonial military forces at the beginning of the 20th century, it operated, in practice, as a "one-ethnic dominant" (Adekanye, 2008:22&73) infantry force.

The Hausa and other Hausa-speaking peoples in the northern provinces of Nigeria were preferred as soldiers because of the primordial belief, that they had the best soldierly qualities. In contrast, the peoples of Southern Nigeria were generally seen by the colonial military authorities as a despicable lot. In 1919 Brigadier-General Cunliffe, commandant of the WAFF, dismissed soldiers from the Southern provinces as worthless, particularly noting, that:

Ibos, Ezzas, and the Niger Cross River tribes are not, as a general rule, of any value" (CO 445/47, 1919). Earlier, in 1917, Lt.-Colonel J.F. Badham, commander of the 3rd Battalion, Nigeria Regiment, had complained that "it will undoubtedly be necessary to stop recruiting Yoruba... The majority of the recent Yoruba recruits... are unsuitable as soldiers... (Co 445/47, 1917).

Following such adverse reports as this, the Yoruba lost their martial reputation and were, before the outbreak of the Second World War, declassified as a martial nationality (Ewa, 2010).

In the Second World War years, military recruitment policy also deprecated the enlistment of men from the southern provinces of Nigeria as soldiers, except those with cognate experience in fighting. In June 1940, a circular, which conveyed this policy to all Residents in the Eastern Provinces and the Cameroon, noted that "it was the policy of the commandant, Nigeria Regiment, to recruit men of the hunter type only" (N.A.E., 1940). In 1941 a manpower conference was held in Cairo, Egypt, where it was decided that African colonies should supply a quota of pioneers, medical orderlies, clerks, auto drivers and mechanics etc for military service in the Middle East "in order to relieve British personnel who were urgently required elsewhere" (CSO 26: 0690/s.1, 1946). In order to implement the Cairo decision, it was stated as a rule by military policy, that the Nigeria Regiment should draw its combatant men from Northern Nigeria and recruit noncombatant soldiers from Southern Nigeria, which had a burgeoning body of literate citizens (R.H.L.O., 1942-46; Colonial Office, 1947). Given its preconceptions and notions on the martial standing of the different ethnic groups in the northern and southern parts of Nigeria and the concordant military policies and decisions, it was not likely that the Nigeria Regiment would consider the important question of ethnic balance in the recruitment and composition of its rank and file. It was indeed obvious that military policy in general during the entire colonial period was to develop an infantry army predominated by Hausa-speaking people from Northern Nigeria (Carfae, 1985; Colonial Office, 1947; Ewa, 1993; Haywood, 1926; Reagan, 1979). The composition of the Nigeria Regiment as shown in the tables IV and V below is reflective of the institutionalised ethnic imbalance, which was maintained by the British up to the time of independence.

Table IV: Ethnic Groups Represented in the Nigeria Regiment in 1917

| Ethnic Group | Numerical Strength |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Hausa | 927 |
| Yoruba | 454 |
| Nupe | 25 |
| Fulani | 218 |
| Berberi | 140 |
| Senegalese | 5 |
| Dakkakeri | 53 |
| Zabermas | 121 |
| Bagarmis | 19 |
| Arewas | 14 |
| Asbenawas | 2 |
| Shua Arabs | 36 |
| Kanuris | 63 |
| Munchis | 7 |
| Yergum Pagans | 1 |
| Beddi | 11 |
| Tera | 1 |
| Fanti | 1 |
| Cameroons | 11 |
| Buzu | 5 |
| Mendis | 8 |
| Efik | 9 |
| Benin | 4 |
| Igbo | 50 |
| Bende | 4 |
| Bali | 11 |
| Gerra | 2 |
| Hausa-speaking pagans | 9 |
| Unclassified pagans | 200 |
| Total | 2,410 |

Source: CO 445/44, Annual Report on Nigeria Regiment, 1917, Appendix "C"

Table V: Ethnic Groups Represented in the Nigeria Regiment in 1929

| Ethnic Group | Percentage of Numerical Strength |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| Hausa | 35 |
| Fulani | 11 |
| Yoruba | 5 |
| Shua Arabs | 3 |
| Dakkakeri | 3 |
| Berberi | 7 |
| Zabarma | 5 |
| Bagarmi | 6 |
| Miscellaneous | 25 |

Source: War Office, *Military Report on Nigeria 1929*: 355.

We are still in want of hard statistics on the trend of the ethnic composition in the army beyond the period so far covered by the tables above. However, the following statistics from the House of Representative debate in 1959 on army recruitment from 1946 to 1958 tend to confirm the continuity of the same old pattern of ethnic imbalance in the composition of the rank and file of the army up to the period of independence.

Table VI: Percentage of Recruitments into the Nigerian Army 1946-1958

| Region/Ethnic Group | Percentage of Army Recruitment |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| North (Hausa-speaking) | 62.5 |
| East (mainly Igbo-speaking) | 25 |
| West (Yoruba-speaking) | 11 |
| Southern Cameroons | 1.5 |

Source: (see Miners, 1971:25).

Even though these statistics were mere intakes on which we cannot entirely depend in determining the exact numerical strength of each ethnic group in the army, they significantly point to the continuing trend of a one-ethnic dominant army. However, we can rest on the evidence provided by Major General Foster (Foster, 1988), the British General Officer Commanding (GOC) the Nigerian Army at the time of independence, in ascertaining the veritable ethnic composition of the Army at that time. He indicated that at the time he assumed office as the GOC of the Nigerian Army in May, 1959, about 80% of the

infantry was Hausa-speaking North, while about 20% was shared between other ethnic groups in the South.

Officer Corps

The officer corps of the Nigerian Army was similarly not ethnically balanced at the time of independence. The origins of the officer corps is traceable to 1948, when, for the first time, Lt. Lord Victor Ugboma, a Nigerian of Igbo nationality, was commissioned as an officer in the Nigeria Regiment (Ugboma, 1992; Nigerian Army Education Corps and School, 1992). It is important to note, however, that as early as the late 1870s, African native officers were appointed. Native Officer Yakubu was the first African to be appointed native officer in 1879. But these early officers were not commissioned, and their appointment was discontinued at the turn of the 19th century (CO 147/38, 1879; Ewa, 2010). The commissioning of Nigerian officers since 1948 was very slow. By January, 1956 only 17 officers had been commissioned, and most of them were passed out as short service officers from the ranks.

The concept of martial races was not applied in the development of the officer corps. The ethnic composition of the corps up to the time of independence was rather dictated by the circumstances of history. British policy was simply to train Nigerian soldiers in the rank and file with appropriate educational background for commissioning. The policy also encouraged educated Nigerians outside the army to enlist as officers. As a result of this policy, which encouraged individual rather than group competition, the ethnic composition of the officer corps did not follow any predetermined pattern, as was the case with the rank and file. Thus, by January, 1956, out of the 17 officers that had been commissioned so far, there were 5 Yoruba, 5 Igbo, and 5 Hausa, leaving the other two for the Eastern Region minorities (Ewa, 2010). However, by 1 October, 1960, the balance in the ethnic composition of the officer corps had been remarkably tilted in favour of the Igbo.

This can be explained. The educated Yoruba were generally reluctant to join the army. On the other hand the educated Hausa were inclined to join the army; but they were scarce, and it was difficult to find them for the army. The educated Igbo within and outside the army took advantage of the educational requirement for officer training to enlist as officers. The result, as already indicated in the preamble, was that by 1 October, 1960 the Igbo had constituted about 50% of the officer

strength, the Yoruba 25%, and the Hausa, together with other ethnic groups, 25% (Foster, 1988).

Conclusion

The ethnic imbalance in the composition of the Nigerian Army at the time of independence in 1960 was not a departure from the past. Its antecedents go back to 1863, when the British raised the first colonial force, the Lagos Constabulary, which developed as a uni-ethnic force of the Hausa-speaking people until 1901. In 1892 another colonial force, the Niger Coast Constabulary, recruited predominantly Yoruba with a smaller proportion of Hausa to break the uni-ethnic trend. Following the amalgamation of the colonial military forces under the WAFF in 1901 and the resultant formation of the Nigeria Regiment in 1914, more military personnel were required. The pressure for more military manpower compelled the colonial military authorities to go beyond the Hausa and Yoruba for recruits from other ethnic groups. Although the Nigeria Regiment developed as a multi-ethnic force, British military policy, which was founded on the concept of martial races, sustained the predominance of the Hausa-speaking people in the rank and file of the regiment up to the time of independence because of the dogmatic belief in the martial superiority of the Hausa.

Meanwhile, from 1948 the British began to raise an officer corps, whose ethnic composition was eventually dominated by the more educationally, advanced Igbo. It would seem that the Igbo were reaping the uncalculated benefit of a discriminatory military policy since the Second World War, which required a basic educational qualification from the citizens of the southern provinces for enlistment in the army. Thus, at the time of independence, the Igbo alone formed about 50% of the officer strength, while the Hausa-speaking people made up about 80% of the rank and file. This development, which was unsuitable for Nigeria as a new federation in search of unity and national integration, must be understood as a consequence of her historical experience.

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