

Proliferation and Abuse of Nigerian Army Uniforms Before 2016

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Abstract

The article examined the proliferation and abuses of Nigerian military uniforms in a democratic setting. It also looked at the attendant security implications of such abuses before 2016, when the Nigerian Military harmonised the No. 6 Dress, (camouflage uniforms) across the Services to check their proliferation. The article argued that although citizens recognised and respected the uniforms of the Nigerian military, some criminal elements procured them to commit crimes, sometimes using fake military identity cards. The historical method was adopted for this paper, utilising a rich collection of field interviews, official documents, and secondary evidence. The article argued that the proliferation and abuse of military uniforms, especially the military combat uniforms, further militarised the Nigerian State and posed serious security threats with attendant image damage for the Nigerian Military and a dwindling respect for the uniform. Consequently, the Nigerian Military High Command harmonised the combat uniform of the Armed Forces and addressed existing lapses in the procurement system, though with limited success at curbing its proliferation and abuse.

Keywords: Nigerian Army uniforms, Nigerian Military, Proliferation, Abuses, Harmonisation

Introduction

The origins of military uniforms can be traced to the emergence of large national armies in the seventeenth century and their primary function was identification.¹ The military uniform distinguished the members of armed forces from the rest of the population; soldiers from civilians, combatants from non-combatants targets from collateral. They are totemic for the military as they are used to secure the distinction required.² The military uniforms are attire used by the armed forces of a state and they symbolise the modern state's claim as the sole legitimate agents of violence, clearly embedding this in the national psyche. They are intended to demonstrate that their wearers belong to the armed forces of a state.³ Although they may differ in colour according to the particular branch of the armed services - army, navy and air force - they are mostly similar in style.⁴

Military uniforms serve several functions: they act as totems, by revealing and concealing statuses, certifying legitimacy, and suppressing individuality.⁵ The uniform reflects order and discipline, and calls for subordination by displaying a variety of insignia, including badges that indicate rank and emphasize the hierarchical structure of armies, besides attracting respect, fear and symbolizing strength and power.⁶ Uniforms worn on the battlefield are mainly designed to meet combat requirements by differentiating friends from foes.

The whole principle of uniforms is to create an illusion of uniformity, promoting discipline and *esprit de corps*, making them sacred and worthy of respect. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) took the important function of the military uniform for the armies into account when affirming in Article 44 (7) of Additional Protocol I the "generally accepted practice of States with respect to the wearing of the uniform by combatants assigned to the regular, uniformed armed units of a party to the conflict".⁷ One of the responsibilities of the Nigerian military, as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, is to ensure the security of the state by defending it against internal and external aggressions. The Nigerian Army is the oldest and largest branch of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, which fights land warfare and, in case of hostilities, is the first line of defence. The uniforms of the Nigerian Military signify their identity and role as custodians of national security.

Reports on mainstream and social media focus on crimes committed by "men in army uniforms." Such violent actors acquire uniforms and accoutrements, arms, identity cards, and other paraphernalia of military personnel and use the same to terrorise the citizenry.⁸ These crimes include, but are not limited to, armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, and insurgency. The illegal importation and proliferation of military uniforms enabled those entrepreneurs of violence to mount roadblocks and 'security checkpoints' to pounce on unsuspecting members of the public, leaving behind scores of dead and maimed victims.

The Nigerian Military Uniforms and Laws Governing Their Use

The Nigerian military uniform derives from a tradition with unique symbolism rooted in a traditional past. Each Arm of the military fosters allegiance through its own distinctive uniforms and its system of ranks and insignia. The laws governing the use of military uniforms have always been in existence since the formation of the armed forces. The lawfulness of wearing military uniforms as an element of identification is governed by national law of each state. Apart from Service laws, there are laws in the Criminal Code Act to protect the uniform from abuse. The laws forbid anyone not a member of the armed forces from wearing the uniform.

¹ Toni Pfanner, 'Military Uniforms and the Law of War,' *IRRC* Vol. 86, No. 853, March 2004, 123.

² War Planning and Training Division, Office of the Quartermaster-General (O.Q.M.G), "The Evolution of the Uniform," *The Quartermaster Review*, March-April, 1928, 1. http://www.old.qmfound.com/uniform_evolution.htm , Accessed 28/02/2015.

³ Pfanner, 'Military Uniforms and the Law of War,' 93.

⁴ Pfanner, 'Military Uniforms and the Law of War,' 93.

⁵ Pfanner, "Military Uniforms..."

⁶ Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex, 'The Uniform: A Sociological Perspective,' *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Jan., 1972), 719-730.

⁷ Pfanner, "Military Uniforms..." 94

⁸ Timothy Bamidele, "Security Implications of Fake Uniforms and other Security Apparatus," *Radio Nigeria, Ibadan National Station*, November 28, 2016.

<http://www.radionigeriaibadan.org.ng/2016/11/28/security-implications-of-fakeuniforms-and-other-security-apparatus/>. Accessed 9/6/2018

The Nigerian Constitution in its “Criminal Code Act,” enshrined in the *Laws of the Federation* states various penalties for impersonating members of the Armed Forces of Nigeria (Section 109), unlawful wearing of the uniform of the armed forces (Section 110), selling the uniform of the armed forces to unauthorised persons (Section 111) as well as bringing contempt on the uniform (Section 251). Indeed, Sections 109, 110, 111 and 251 of the Criminal Code Act in the Laws of the Nigerian Federation of 1964 circumscribes the various laws that govern the use and abuse of military uniforms in Nigeria.⁹ Shedding light on the nature of uniforms, a senior officer had this to say:

Of course, the uniform has security implications. When we put on this uniform, we represent the country, we represent the Armed Forces, and we represent the service, so any negativity on our part affects the country, affects the Armed Forces too. Unfortunately, some have used the uniform to indulge in activities that are not palatable, all to make money, not really caring about the service.¹⁰

Most Nigerians are either unaware of the existence of the law or do not understand its provisions, or have little or no regards for the armed forces. The few citizens that are aware of the laws against illegal wearing of military uniforms wrongly cite the Nigerian Constitution as the source as this quote indicates: “Don’t you just hate it that you can’t wear camo because you are in Nigeria? Well, you have the Constitution to thank for that.”¹¹

Militarisation and the Proliferation of Military Uniforms in Nigeria

Militarization is the extension of military influence to civilian spheres, including the economy and socio-political life.¹² In such a setting, military values and frameworks tend to dominate state structures and public culture. Consequent upon the effects of militarisation in Nigeria, the prolonged duration of military rule made the glamorisation of military uniforms and culture a feature of the Nigerian society. The average Nigerian is obsessed with the military. A former Director of the State Security Services (SSS) puts it rather dramatically this way ‘if one goes to the central market and calls for a general salute, one will be shocked at the response as almost everyone will come to attention. Militarization has gone viral.’¹³ In Usman A. Tar’s view, even though Nigeria returned to democratic rule after decades of military rule, military dictatorship left a lasting scar on the Nigerian polity and society where a significant part of the Nigerian State progressively transformed into a militarised entity, eroding the traditional boundary between army barracks and civilian neighbourhoods.¹⁴

This unfortunate state of militarisation made Nigerians understand the ‘military language’ and *modus operandi*. As long years of military rule led to the entrenchment of military values and culture, Nigerians came to see the correctional behaviour of the military; shouting, beating, and kicking as acceptable norms.¹⁵ Even public institutions that were established by the military that were so authoritarian were subsequently retained in a democratic setting. For instance, the State Security Service (SSS) which used to be the National Security Organisation (NSO), was so retained under democratic dispensation. Civilians, thus, subconsciously celebrate and demonstrate military behaviour. As Tar noted: “everyday expressions – such as ‘Oga Sir,’ ‘I am loyal,’ ‘OIC,’ ‘2IC,’ are the order of the day amongst civilians. Years after military rule, Nigerians still glamorise everything military. They wear fake military uniforms and keep portraits of former military rulers.”¹⁶ Other phrasal expressions

⁹ See, Yves Sandoz, Christophe Swinarski and Bruno Zimmerman (eds.), *Commentary on the Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949*, International Committee of the Red Cross/Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Geneva, 1987, 542 (n. 1723).

¹⁰ Interview with a Nigerian Army Officer, Name withheld, Colonel, Aged 47, Kaduna, 21/6/2018.

¹¹ Ayomide O. Tayo, “Nigerian Army: The Silliness of the Nigerian Constitution on Civilians Wearing Camouflage,” 11/12/2016, <http://www.pulse.ng/gist/nigerian-army-the-silliness-of-the-nigerian/.../camouflageid5881524.html>. Accessed 21/6/2018.

¹² Marek Thee, “Militarism and Militarization in Contemporary International Relations,” *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 8, Issue. 4, 1977, 296.

¹³ Oral Interview with Abayomi Zamba, Retired Director, 62 years, State Security Services, Kaduna, 1/9/2018.

¹⁴ Usman A. Tar, “Koboko Culture: The Militarisation of the Nigerian Polity and Society,” <http://saharareporters.com/2011/07/17/.../-dr-usman-tar>. Accessed 12/9/2015.

¹⁵ Tar, “Koboko Culture,”

¹⁶ Tar, “Koboko Culture,”

such as “with immediate effective,” ‘with immediate alacrity,’ ‘yes Sir,’ ‘officer’ among others add to the explanation of the sustained obsession of most Nigerians with military culture consequent upon a sustained period of militarization. Tar attributes this behaviour to a “*Koboko Culture*,” which is deeply rooted among Nigerian masses.¹⁷ Another feature that advertises the manifestation of militarisation is the pejorative reference to civilians as “bloody civilians” which points to a ‘second class and indeed a low-class composition of citizenry of the Nigerian society. This militarised social hierarchy – a foisted superiority of the military – led to the decimation of self-esteem among civilians, making them crave for military identification. Consequently, military personnel expect civilians to treat them with awe and obedience, and failure to do so could attract “a faceoff”.¹⁸

Proliferation through Illegal Importation of Military Camouflage Uniforms

In Nigeria, the office of the National Security Adviser (NSA), is vested with the sole authority to import any military gear and hardware. However, military uniforms, especially the camouflage, are frequently imported into Nigeria through unofficial sources. Occasionally, there have been reports on the mass media on the seizure of military camouflage uniforms by the Nigerian Custom Services (NCS). For instance, in 2017, the Kirikiri Lighter Terminal Command of the NCS intercepted a forty feet (40ft) container of army camouflage uniforms. According to the Comptroller General of Customs, Lami Wushishi, the container was imported into Nigeria by a company based in Kano that deals in logistics. She further revealed that:

the consignment which originated from China and arrived in Nigeria on July 14, and contained 732 rolls of plain Army uniform, 666 rolls of camouflage, and 129 rolls of polyester material and another 5 bags of polyester was falsely declared.¹⁹

These discoveries and seizures have become commonplace.

Proliferation of Military Camouflage by Paramilitary Agencies

The proliferation of military camouflage increases its abuse. K. C. Dixit notes that in many countries’ kings and national leaders habitually wear military uniforms to honour men and women in uniform and to show the importance of the soldier as the saviour of the nation.²⁰ In Nigeria, there is a palpable attraction to the military uniform by members of paramilitary agencies. They randomly use military camouflage in ways that aid its proliferation. The situation prevailed until June 2015 when the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) announced the prohibition of the use of the camouflage uniforms by various security agencies other than the armed forces. All paramilitary agencies using various military “fatigues” were given up to January 2016 to withdraw such materials from their inventory.²¹ A statement by the Director of Defence Information, Major General Chris Olukolade, added that the police would only use the uniform when in a joint operation with the military or on a special operation such as specific anti-riot missions. The new policy followed the directive of the National Security Council (NSC) which approved the recommendations of a committee on measures to streamline the use of camouflage uniforms. The measure according to Olukolade was “in view of the security implications and concerns raised on the clamour, duplicity and proliferation of camouflage uniforms in Nigeria.”²² Consequently, the Ministry of Justice and relevant law enforcement agencies were tasked to ensure that extant laws guiding the use of uniforms in Nigeria were strictly enforced. The office of the National Security Adviser became vested with the authority to vet and clear any production and supply of camouflage uniforms in Nigeria.²³ The military also

¹⁷ Tar, “*Koboko Culture*,”

¹⁸ Tar, “*Koboko Culture*,”

¹⁹ *Daily Trust*, “Customs Impounds Army Camouflage Uniforms,”

August 22, 2017, 4:4PM,

<https://dailitrust.com.ng/news/business/...uniforms/211142html>. Accessed 20/6/2018.

²⁰ K. C. Dixit, “Soldier in War-Positive Perspective,” *Institute for Defence and Analyses*, January 08, 2010, 1.

http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/Soldierin/WarPositivePerspective_kcdixit_080110?=&print/4826. Accessed 18/12/2015.

²¹ Nuruddeen M. Abdallah and Ronald Mutum, “Paramilitary Agencies Still Use Camouflage Uniforms despite the Ban,” *Daily Trust*, May 21, 2017, 2:00 AM, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/feature/paramilitary/.../198591.html>. Accessed 22/8/2018.

²² Abdallah and Mutum, “Paramilitary Agencies...”

²³ Wale Odunsi, “FG Bans Police, Other Paramilitary Agencies from Use of Camouflage Uniforms,” June 12, 2015. <http://dailypost.ng/2015/12/fg...> Accessed 9/6/2018.

received the directive to adopt only two types of camouflage uniforms for the three arms of the armed forces – the Woodland camouflage uniform for operations in the forest belt of Nigeria, and the Desert camouflage for operations in the North-East and other parts of the North. This became necessary in view of the proliferation and imitation by criminals and impostors using uniforms especially the camouflage which had been generating some concern in national security circles.²⁴

However, there has been a significant gap between the directive and its implementation as some paramilitary agencies kept wearing military camouflage uniforms months after the directive. Such non-compliance by security agencies became an attraction to non-security agencies to flout such directives and extend the proliferation of military uniforms. The decision to clamp on the proliferation of military uniforms was needful to avoid public confusion. In Dixit's view, "the Police and other departments including private security agencies should not be allowed to wear uniform or badges of rank even remotely resembling those of the Armed Forces."²⁵

The Abuse of the Military Uniforms in Nigeria

The abuse of military uniforms implies the unauthorised use of the uniform by persons who do not have the authority to do so. This suggests intent to use the uniform to deceive unsuspecting members of the public usually for the purpose of glamour, showmanship with intended or unintended security implications such as kidnapping, insurgency, terrorism and armed robbery. Below are some of the abuses:

Abuse through Impersonation

Impersonation is the act of pretending to be, or copying the behaviour and appearance of someone, especially to entertain, deceive or defraud other people. It is one of the most enduring problems authorities deal with as it affects the abuse of military uniforms in Nigeria. To the undiscerning, the fake military personnel could pass off as a real and serving military personnel. With their military kits and accoutrements, impersonators easily blend with official military personnel to deceive unsuspecting members of the public. Such acts of impersonation could be carried out either by a civilian who has no grounding in military ethics or by retired military personnel who has gone through the military drills at one point in time. For instance, in 2016 a woman was arrested by the members of the Guards Brigade of the Nigerian Army in Abuja. She posed as a medical doctor with the rank of Army Major and operated an illegal clinic in the Dutse area of Abuja since 2014. In a statement signed on behalf of the Guards Brigade, Major Abdullahi Abba stated that 42-year-old woman had been operating an illegal facility identified as Sone Clinic and Maternity.²⁶

The Nigerian Army Military Police recovered a pair of Nigerian Army camouflage uniform, Nigerian Army rank insignia of Major, a pair of combat boots, a jungle hat, a fake outdated as well as a current Nigerian Army identity card which she had produced at a business centre. On further search, a camouflage T-shirt, a pair of camouflage trousers, a pair of handcuffs, passport photographs and pictures of her in military uniform were recovered from her. It appeared that the impersonator, without any military background, had a fair knowledge about the accoutrements of the Nigerian military. This makes it difficult to disagree with Joseph and Alex's assertion that, "ironically, the explicit symbolism of the uniform facilitates its counterfeiting."²⁷

The rising cases of abuse of military uniforms through impersonation by either retired military personnel or those who had gone through some form of preliminary military drills, such as graduates and drop-outs of the Nigerian Military School (NMS) Zaria, known in popular Nigerian parlance as Ex-Boys, necessitated a ban on its use by the Nigerian Army. A statement from Army Head Quarters read:

The illegal practice of wearing Nigerian Army uniforms and kits by Ex-Boys apart from obvious security implications, impacts negatively on the image of the Nigerian Army. It is pertinent to reiterate that wearing of military uniforms or kits on campus by anyone is unlawful. More worrisome, is the fact that most of the offenders are ex-students who have deserted the Army and are not legally entitled to have military uniforms or items within their possessions.²⁸

²⁴ Odunsi, "FG Bans Police,"

²⁵ Dixit, "Soldier in War,"

²⁶ Fidelis Soriwei, "How Army Arrested Fake Major Who Runs a Clinic as a Medical Doctor in Abuja," *Punch Newspapers*, Abuja, November 28, 2016, <http://punchng.com/army-arrests-fake-major-operates-clinic-abuja/>. Accessed 6/7/2018.

²⁷ Joseph and Alex, "The Uniform, "722.

²⁸ *Vanguard News*, Kingsley Omonobi, "Insecurity: Army Warns on Use of Uniforms," Abuja, October 3, 2015. <https://vanguardngr.com/2015/10/insecurity-army-warns-use-of-uniforms/>.

This is rather unfortunate as ex-students of the Nigerian Military School are supposed to be cleared upon either graduation or dismissal from the school and the uniforms returned to the appropriate authorities. This indicts the military authorities of negligence in the line of duty.

Abuse through Showmanship and Glamorisation of Military Uniforms

One significant security issue that the Nigerian military had to contend with is the glamorisation of its uniforms by musicians and celebrities for the purpose of showmanship. Arguably, this is a global phenomenon and not peculiar to Nigeria where some fashion designers have developed military fashion couture. Military designed jackets and the three-quarter shorts are mostly used by youths for music showmanship. Celebrities and important figures play a key role in promoting fashion.²⁹ In Nigeria, popular celebrities and musicians called out by the Army who were in the habit of wearing the camouflage uniform, included musical stars like Iyanya, Wizkid, Davido, Tekno Miles, Chidinma, Ice Prince, and Terry G. In July 2015, the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, issued a warning to Rapper M. I. and singer Charass to desist from wearing the camouflage uniform. The wearing of a piece of camouflage uniform by celebrities, symbolises coolness and “badassness” showing off as both cool and rebellious.³⁰ The Nigerian military has on many occasions clamped down on musicians and celebrities who wear the military camouflage and warned them to desist from the use and abuse of the Nigerian military camouflage. The military noted that several investigations carried out showed that the revered camouflage uniform is being used to shoot music videos, photoshoots, and concerts in a bid to portray gallantry. The military further observed that some of the artists like Jesse-Jagz smoked marijuana while putting on the Nigerian Military camouflage, making it shameful and intolerable. The only time the law allows civilians to wear the uniform is “in the course of a stage play or in any *bona fide* public entertainment after taking permission from the military authority.”³¹ Although the military personnel indulge in highhandedness when dealing with such abuses of military uniforms, in most cases, they tended to take laws into their hands, meting out humiliating punishment to civilians who were unfortunate to fall into their trap by wearing the camouflage uniform. There were horror tales of how civilians caught wearing a camo cap, shirt or pants were made to do “frog jumps” and flogged in the public. This appeared to have been a practice carried over from the years of military rule in Nigeria into a civilian dispensation.

Illegal Use of Military Uniforms and Security Breaches

Criminals have used military uniforms to gain access to restricted facilities and locations and to strike at soft targets. For instance, in November 2015, men in the uniform of the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Navy stormed the Marine Police Command at Onikan, Lagos State and the attackers were suspected to be pipe oil vandals.³² After sporadic shooting, the attackers made away with a gunboat leaving four policemen dead in the process. In Logumani, nineteen miles from Cameroon, terrorists used the Nigerian Army uniforms as identification to commit atrocities. Disguised as soldiers, they set up a checkpoint and slit the throats of nineteen people whom they stopped for a cordon and search. Although the terrorists wore Nigerian Army uniforms, one of the survivors of the attack said, they knew that it was *Boko Haram* from their appearance since “soldiers don’t wear beards, but some of the gunmen were bearded.”³³ The Nigerian Army, on some occasions, had cause to alert the public on the acquisition of fake uniforms by the insurgent group. An instant noted, was April 25, 2016, when troops of 22 Brigade Garrison and elements of 3 Battalion went out on a long-range fighting patrol to Gima village, in Ngala Local Government

Accessed 6/7/2018.

²⁹ Xurong Kong, “Military Uniform as Fashion during the Cultural Revolution,” *Intercultural Communication Studies*, XVII: 2, 2008,

³⁰ Tayo, “The Silliness of the Nigerian,”

³¹ Sidewap, “Nigerian Army set to Deal Ruthlessly with Artists for Use of Uniforms,” <http://sidewap.com/forum/nigerian-army-set-to-dealruthlessly-with-artistes-for-use-of-uniforms>. Accessed 12/11/2015.

³² Anurika Onyelemelam, “Four Policemen Killed as men in Military Uniforms Attack Marine Command,” November 15, 2015, www.theeagleonline.com.ng. Accessed 27/11/2015.

³³ Harriet Alexander, “Massacre at Fake Checkpoint as *Boko Haram* Slit throats of Travellers,” 20 Oct 2013, 10:41BST, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/africaandindianocean/nigeria10392610/>. Accessed 30/11/2018.

Area of Bornu State and made a startling discovery that “*Boko Haram* terrorists now have new means of identification.”³⁴ It was a new styled uniform of green colour with ropes on their legs and necks.

The Use of military Uniforms in Kidnapping for Ransom

The Nigerian Army camouflage uniform has been used by criminals to kidnap Nigerians and used the hostages to demand ransom from family members and government. One such kidnapping that made headlines nationally and internationally was the Chibok kidnappings. On the night of the abduction, April 14, 2014, *Boko Haram* insurgents wearing Nigerian military uniforms stormed a Government Secondary School in Chibok, a town in Borno State, and took well over 200 girls away.³⁵ One of the girls who escaped, while narrating her ordeal said: They told the girls that they were there to take them to safety. They said, ‘don’t worry. Nothing will happen to you. ‘The men took some food and other supplies from the school and then set the building on fire. They herded the girls on to trucks and motorcycles. At first, the girls, while alarmed and nervous, believed that they were in safe hands. When the men started shooting their guns into the air and shouting ‘*Allahu Akbar*,’.... they realised that the men were not who they said they were.³⁶ Arguably, without the impersonation using the uniform, the students would have suspected the premonition of danger at the first instance. However, they were deceived by the uniforms and became victims of the abuse of the Nigerian military uniforms

. In a swift response to the Chibok kidnap and the attempt to curtail the proliferation of military uniforms, the erstwhile Nigerian Senate President, David Mark, during a visit to China appealed to the Chinese authorities to initiate laws to ensure the documentation of Nigerian buyers and sellers of military hardware and uniforms from China. Mark made it clear to the Head of the Chinese Parliament, Mr. Zhang Dejiang, that the proper documentation would go a long way in curbing the activities of *Boko Haram* and insurgency as the identity of buyers could easily be traced and this would help Nigeria trace the sources of military uniforms and hardware available to these terrorists.³⁷

The Harmonisation of the Combat Uniform in Nigeria in 2016

Prior to 2016, the combat dress was the most abused, most proliferated among other paramilitary agencies and the most glamorised of all the Nigerian Army uniforms. However, the Nigerian Military high command in March 2016, decided to harmonise the camouflage combat uniform for all three services: the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Air Force³⁸ to checkmate its proliferation and abuse. This was needful since all three services took part in joint operations. The new development had all the arms of the Nigerian military wearing the same camouflage and having a common system of identification and was reminiscent of the Danish Armed Forces, which in 1923 clad its members in *khaki* with badges as the only means of regimental identification.³⁹ Launching the new uniforms on behalf of the Chief of Air Staff, the Air Officer Commanding (AOC), Logistics Command of the Nigerian Air Force, Air Vice Marshal (AVM), Muhammadu A. Muhammed, opined that the introduction of the new harmonised camouflage uniform would help control its proliferation. According to him:

Over the years, the various armed services in Nigeria had used different shades of the camouflage for military operations and exercises. Akin to this was the proliferation of the camouflage among several security, paramilitary, and civil security outfits. This development has dire implication on our national security. It is the recognition of these consequences that the higher management of defence adopted the Desert Camouflage and Woodland Camouflage for our Armed Forces. While the Desert Camouflage is designed to blend with the terrain in the northern part of Nigeria, the Woodland Camouflage is adopted for the terrain in the south. The Harmonisation is also expected to promote joint-ness among the Armed Forces, as well as foster comradeship and inter-service co-operation.⁴⁰

³⁴Alexander, “Massacre at Fake Checkpoint”

³⁵ Alexis Okeowo, “Nigeria’s Stolen Girls,” *The New Yorker*, April 29, 2014, 1. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/nierias-stolengirls> Accessed 29/05/2018.

³⁶ Okeowo, “Nigeria’s Stolen Girls,”

³⁷ *Vanguard*, “Mark Urges China to Document Sale of Military Uniforms, Hardware,” May 12, 2014, 9:42PM, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/05/> Accessed 10/2/2015.

³⁸ Jerry Lenbang, “Nigerian Armed Forces Launch New Harmonised Camouflage,” March 1, 2016, <https://www.360nobs.com/2016/03/nigerianarmed-forces...camouflage/> Accessed 22/06/2017.

³⁹ A. N. Hvidt, “The Danish Infantry Uniforms and Equipment throughout The Past 200 Years,” *Per Finsted*, 22 March, 2003, 1. <https://www.chakoten.dk/Danishinfantry...pdf> Accessed 08/08/2015.

⁴⁰ Lenbang, “Nigerian Armed Forces”

The new camouflage uniforms displayed a uniqueness designed with the maps of the 36 states of Nigeria and Abuja with a security seal of the Nigerian coat of arms. Personnel differentiation wear tags on the left side of the chest and the rank insignia on the chest to determine whether the officers or men were in the Army, Navy or the Air Force.

Historically, the uniformity of a group is often directly affected by the strictness to which a uniform code is enforced.⁴¹ However, almost two years after the camouflage uniform was harmonised in 2016, Nigerian soldiers are still seen wearing other patterns of the camouflage uniform. A soldier, when asked why he was wearing the “bomb blast” pattern of the camouflage uniform said since the harmonisation, he had only been issued one Woodland camouflage, (no Desert), so he uses it when they have any official parade.⁴² One lapse observed after the harmonisation was the inability of the military to issue uniforms to its personnel. Soldiers in combat and the services have the greatest wastage rates and they more than other personnel in non-combat units are required to be issued with more uniforms.⁴³

Sensitization of the Public on the Use and Abuse of Military Uniforms

It was in a bid to sensitise the public about the activities of imposters in military uniforms that a press conference was called to keep the public abreast with the developments of criminals. Briefing newsmen at the Headquarters of the 9 Brigade, Ikeja Cantonment, the then Commander, Brigadier General Adeniyi Oyebade said it was only through vigilance that members of the public could identify tell-tale signs that often come with impersonators.⁴⁴ He explained that the military authorities sought to enlighten members of the public on how to distinguish the real personnel of the military from those who are impostors by getting them acquainted with the different uniforms, camouflages and accessories worn by military personnel and at what occasions such uniforms could be adorned.⁴⁵

Oyebade further explained that:

From experience, such persons who are real military personnel often obliged the inquisitive members of the public with their identities, in the instances where such people have refused to identify themselves, they have turned out to be fake. With the aid of technology, members of the public can take photographs with camera phones and even walk up to the nearest police stations to report suspected cases of impersonation. If such evidence is produced to confirm that such a person is indeed military personnel who is improperly dressed to warrant being suspected of being fake, he will be identified and sanctioned according to military laws.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Carrie Hertz, “The Uniform: As Material, As Symbol, As Negotiated Object,” *Midwestern Folklore*, 32 (1, 2), 2007, 50.

⁴² Unpublished comments made by a soldier on the 01/11/2018.

⁴³ Oral Interview with an Officer, (Name Withheld), 48 years, Colonel, Nigerian Army, Kaduna, 03/03/2017.

⁴⁴ *African Examiner*, “Nigerian Military Move Against Imposters in Military Uniforms,” Wednesday, September 18th, 2013.

<https://www.africanexaminer.com/nigerian-military-move-against-impostorsin-military-uiforms/>

Accessed 22/10/2015.

⁴⁵ *African Examiner*, “Nigerian Military Move”

⁴⁶ *African Examiner*, “Nigerian Military Move”

Conclusion

The proliferation and abuse of military uniforms in Nigeria reveal a complex intersection of symbolism, law, and societal order. While military uniforms are intended to represent discipline and national security, their misuse by impostors, entertainers, and criminals undermines these values and threatens public trust. The Nigerian State's increasing militarisation after long years of military rule further blurs the line between military and civilian life, making regulation more challenging. Although legal frameworks and military measures, their effectiveness depends on consistent enforcement, public awareness, and respect for the uniform's symbolic weight. The efforts made to arrest the situation, like the 2016 harmonisation of the combat uniform of the Nigerian military, have not been very effective as the abuses have continued and, in most cases, worsened. Ultimately, preserving the integrity of military uniforms is not only a matter of law but a reflection of national discipline and cohesion.