THE SOJADUMOTA PHENOMENON IN THE PUBLIC SCULPTURE: AN ELEMENT OF MILITARY IMPERIALISM IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The location and erection of the cenotaph of the Unknown Soldier at Idumota, Lagos in 1948 was hailed by the public for being conceptually sound and ingenuous in art creativity. However, the effect of political crisis in Nigeria, particularly, the June 12 political impasse, disparaging relationship between the civilian and the military as well as the poor preservation of the Unknown Soldier images, led to the damage of many of the sculptures and subsequent decline in the commissioning of the art. Yet, the art and the associated events are not given critical art historical consideration; despite the gradual but steady decimation of the images. As a result of this problem, this study examines the origin and significance of the Unknown Soldier concept within the Nigeria military context and the socio-political context on the other hand. It specifically study the images of the Unknown Soldier located within the Southwestern Nigeria; significantly, the zone being the first to have the Unknown Soldier cenotaph in Nigeria, where many of the sculptures are located; and the most prone to the country’s political crises which often affect the art. The work is set in art historical order, hinged on the nation’s political problem, as well as the Unknown Soldier inferences in the Yoruba Language development.

Keywords: Military imperialism, Political Crisis, Public Sculpture, Sojadumota.

1. BACKGROUND

“The Lord knoweth them that are His Unknown and yet well-known dying and behold we live…” (Wikipedia 2012).

The solemn, yet forceful statement above is one of the epitaphs of a tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Britain “a British warrior who fell in the great war of 1914 – 1918 for king and country.” The statement although is rhetorical “… unknown and yet well known”. What then is unknown? The subsequent statement here lay bare the meaning to some extent:

“Beneath this stone rest the body of a British warrior unknown by name or rank brought from France to lie among the most illustrious of the land and buried here on Armistice Day 11 November: 1920 in the presence of His Majesty King George…” (Wikipedia 2012).
The two quotations direct attention to the soldiers who lost their lives while in action in the first World War. By definition the Unknown Soldier, refers to a monument dedicated to the services of an unidentified soldier of a nation, who died in a war while fighting for his fatherland. Although the services of soldiers who died in action have been variously recognized in some ways in the countries of the world earlier, the concept of the Unknown Soldier was only first conceived in 1916 by Rev David Railton (Wikipedia 2012). Railton a chaplain, in the army then, on the Western front, saw a grave marked with a cross with a pencil inscription that states: “An Unknown British soldier.” He then proposed to the Dean of West Minister in 1920 that symbolic funeral and burial of an unidentified British soldier who fell in war front in France be undertaken ceremoniously in West Minister Abbey. The idea was generally supported and officially approved.

According to Wikipedia (2012), an unidentified British soldier killed in a European war front in the First World War was buried symbolically, in West Minister Abbey in London with full military compliments on 11 November 1920 in memory of all British soldiers that died while serving their country. Similarly, such ceremony was simultaneously held in France at La tombe du soldat in connu (Wikipedia 2012), that is the tomb of a French Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Trouphe. Thus, the British and the French became the first to give state recognition and honour to the unknown dead soldiers of the First World War. The idea soon spread to many Europ-America; countries. The tombs of Unknown Soldier subsequently were unveiled in America, Portugal and Italy in 1921. Other tombs were later unveiled later in Ukraine, Chile, Australia, Argentina, Bulgarla and Canada, Countries such as Nigeria, Egypt, Zimbabwe, India, Japan, Iraq and New Zealand also identified with the idea.

Significantly, the burial conduct of the unknown soldier has a set order which was strictly followed at the emergence. Burial of an Unknown Soldier whose nationality was known, fighting for his country is fundamental and symbolic to the concept of Unknown Soldier tomb. A stately public places where commemoration religions service and military homage could be held every November 11, the day the First World War ended was chosen. The tomb decoration are often elaborate in architecture; in most cases, the tombs are accompanied with obelisks or figure sculptures of soldier(s), either in three dimensional or relief. Observation of a minute silence for the dead soldiers, twenty-one gun salutes and laying of wreath led by the very senior officers in government and the army at the foot of the Unknown Soldier tomb are fundamental in the order of commemoration ceremony, in addition to other activities. The Unknown Soldier in concept, order of commemoration ceremony and significance still subsist the world over, but with slight variations in some auxiliary ceremonial latitudes. For instance, there are variations from the generic name ascribed to cenotaph of Unknown Soldier across the world. There are also different types of cenotaph representations. In some places, cenotaphs were exquisitely made in single figure or composite figural sculptures mounted on elaborate pedestal. Elsewhere, simple obelisk architectural-sculpture cenotaphs were used.

The origin of Unknown Soldier (known as sojadumota by the Yoruba) in Nigeria in 1948 is also based upon the platform of British Unknown Soldier concept. Commemoration order is also the cast of the same mould. This semblance should be expected especially as Nigeria is a colony of the British Empire. The Armed Forces Remembrance Day when the fallen heroes of wars in Nigeria are remembered and honoured. It was usually held every November 11, as observed in Britain. Later the commemoration day of the fallen hero was changed to correspond with January 15, 1970 when the devastating Nigerian civil war ended.

The first cenotaph of Unknown Soldier in Nigeria is a composite figures erected on a simple but well structured pedestal (plate 1). It was formally located at the boisterous commercial street of Idumota, in Lagos. Later, it was relocated to Tafa Balewa Square, Race Course, Lagos; apparently, a better place than the overcrowded Idumota area. In 1991, the Babangida Administration moved the cenotaph to Abuja when the city became the Federal Capital Territoty of Nigeria. It is important to note that the coffin of the Unknown Soldier
buried in the former Idumota tomb was also moved along the cenotaph each time it was relocated. After the erection of the cenotaph in 1948 by the British Government in Lagos, many of such cenotaphs have been erected across the nation.

The growth of the cenotaph of Unknown Soldier in Nigeria is unprecedented. After the civil war many cenotaph were made and erected in state capitals across the country. However, by the 1990s the cenotaph became more popular in intent and extent of commissioning. But, by June 12, 1993, it had already become a subject of condemnation and attack by the public. So severe was this condemnation that it affected the growth of the art within the nuances of the public outdoor sculpture in the country, particularly in the Southwest.

This development is of art historical concern, set here for critical investigation towards a concise documentation of evolving history in the art of the Unknown Soldier sculpture and the implication, in the development of the art, in the body of the Nigerian contemporary art. A study like this becomes imperative because of the present precarious state of the cenotaphs of the Unknown Soldier in terms of lack of proper documentation of the sculptures, direct human attack, various form of abuses and current low patronage in the production of cenotaph of the Unknown Soldier as well as poor management of the extant ones, across the Southwestern Nigeria.

Southwestern Nigeria zone has been chosen for the focus of this study because the zone is the location of the first cenotaph of the Unknown Soldier in Nigeria; and the most struck by the military repressive government. In the zone, civilians were severally attacked in a predetermined manner for being vociferous in the condemnation of military rule. The vilification by one party against another often resulted in various forms of attack on the cenotaphs and, even, the armed forces men. For this reasons, studies in the cenotaph of the Unknown Soldiers in the zone should be expedient to keep their records firm in the annals of Nigeria extant art.

This study examines the origin and development of Unknown Soldier cenotaphs in Nigeria, in art historical perspectives, situating it within the military imperialism actions and inactions. Military imperialism as used here, connote the harsh and oppressive military colonial imperialist Government of Nigeria before the country’s independence; a conduit by which the idea of the Unknown Soldier cenotaph was established in the country. The military government, who also ruled Nigeria for about thirty one years out of fifty three years of Nigeria nationhood, is also a bye product of colonial imperialism; even, more brutal, than the later in deprivation of the civilian quality life and maltreatment of the "bloody civilians,” as the civilian are being addressed by the military. The study determines the spread of the art, forms and styles of expression of the sculpture as well as the sub-themes, within the general conceptual theme codifies in the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It also look at the factor of strained social-political fluxes which often set “the unknown civilian” (the irate civilians who cannot be identified during attacks against soldiers and the images of the Unknown Soldier) against the cenotaph of the Unknown Soldiers. Factors of the Unknown Soldier images influence in the semiotic and Yoruba lexicology will also be discussed amongst other.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Available scholarly studies on the Unknown Soldier and related issues of military imperialism and the art associated with the concept of the Unknown Soldier in Nigeria provided a good background as the framework of this study. Wikipedia presented a historical insight to the emergence of the Unknown Soldier concept; the concept, conceived by Rev. David Railton and given to King George V. defines Unknown Soldier as an unidentifiable soldier of a known national, who died while fighting for his country in a war. Rev Railton believes the corpse of such soldier should be given a befitting military burial symbolically, as a commemoration to the selfless service and the supreme price all the dead soldiers of British origin paid while fighting for their country in the First World War. They were referred to as fallen heroes. The Prime
Minister gave approval to undertake the project. At this time also, France conducted service to the Unknown Soldier on the Armistice Day, 1920. Many nations of the world soon started the same practice.

The formation of Nigerian Army constabulary was discussed by Nairaland Forum (2013a). The discussion succinctly presented comprehensive information on the development of Nigerian Armed Forces from the British colonial constabulary to a discipline corps who were dexterous in the First and Second World War campaigns. This fact also was corroborated by Crowder (1976:490-492). Other peace keeping mission the Nigerian Army served was also enumerated in the publication. The discussion further stressed the importance of the yearly Armed Forces Remembrance Day which basically is an archetype of the United Kingdom Unknown Soldier commemoration.

Olokor (2013) claims the formation of the Nigerian Armed Forces was a bye-product of partitioning and forceful occupation of African land by the Europe for their selfish economy interest in respect of the trading companies established in various African countries, in the pre-colonial period. In Nigeria the army constabulary was formed to protect the British colony’s territory and their economy interest from the attack of their European counterparts particularly, the French. The army constabulary was later developed and used to secure and protect their colonies later. Olokor in the following statements give a vivid account of how the European used coercion and force to colonize Africa:

…After the explorers came the missionaries, then the traders and the armed Bandits and finally the colonizers. The Berlin Conference of 1884/85 gave the invading colonial forces the final international authority to conquer and annex other ethnic populations (Olokor 2013:4).

In tandem to the facts in Olokor’s observation is the reaction of Ajai (1999:69-83) on the obnoxious military imperialism force deployed on the entire Yoruba towns. He captured the brutality, inhuman and disgusting manners which Robert Lister Bower cynically employed to suppress and oppressed the Yoruba, kings, chiefs and their people while appropriating their land for the British imperial government. Bower disdainfully stripped the Yoruba leaders of their rights and degraded them severally.

On the Brilliancy of the Nigerian Army, Olokor’s (2013) study holds well when placed against the constitutional duties of the army in Nigeria in their tenacity and gallantry during the civil war. Olokor observes:

“The Nigerian Army is a legacy of the British Army and its heritage is transferred from one generation to another since the origin of its formation (Olokor, 2013:8).”

Obe (1971) provided blow by blow account of the Nigerian Civil War. Obe’s discussion in the publication portrays Nigerian Armed Forces as a well-disciplined corps. He display photographs of some Unknown Soldiers killed in action during the thirty month war. Brigadier Hassans Katsina’s (1971:3) forward to Obe’s publication, point out emotionally; “Tributes is not only paid to our important personalities who were still living but also to those who fell so as to keep this country one”. Balogun’s (1973) comprehensive study on the Nigeria civil war was lucidly expressed. He noted, the political crises in the general election of 1963, and the ethnic hostilities against the Igbo in the Northern part of the country precipitated the civil war. The prosecution of the civil war the end of the war as well as the reconciliation, reintegration and reconstruction were issues of importance Balogun also discussed.

On discipline, Obe (1971:6) presented the military government of Gowon’s administration as uninformed, lacking in administrative competence and neck-deep in fraud. This he said led to the successful coup de ’at against General Yakubu Gowon’s Government in
July 1975. This fact was also well orchestrated by Muritala Ramat Muhammed who championed the coup that ousted Gowon in his maiden broadcast as reasons that make change in leadership inevitable.

The use of outdoor sculpture to complement man’s effort in environmental beautification in many cultures of the world were the thrust of Folarin (1981:28-13, 1998: 58-68, and 1993:125-132) studies. He expressed the functions of outdoor sculpture as being commemoratives of the good deeds of past heroes asides the aesthetic value in the art. Akintonde (2009) and Akintonde and Kalilu (2013a: 88-103) also opines that the lesson in the outdoor sculpture is beyond the beautification of the public environment. He reiterated that it gives civic instructions in patriotism and engendered by the images of heroes and heroines usually represented and their records are also interred in the images. This factor invariably makes the images become priceless treasure.

Odiboh (1987) claims that the cenotaph of the Unknown Soldier was the first figural sculpture to be erected in the Nigeria public sphere as a commemorative image to the Unknown Soldier who fell in the First and Second World Wars. Akintonde further, (2009 and 2013b: 29-30) claimed that the images of Unknown Soldier are part of outdoor sculpture which are common in the southwestern Nigeria public spaces. According to him, nearly all the major cities and towns of the zone have at least one Unknown Soldier image adorning the public environment. He however distinguished a class of images of fallen heroes who were killed in the first and second coup de‘tat in Nigeria. These are the images of Adekunle Fajuyi and Adeneulegun. The images were actual memoriam of known military personalities in the army, unlike the general cenotaph of the Unknown Soldier. Akintonde (2008: 17-39) put the various abuses and degradation the outdoor sculptures in southwestern Nigeria (images of Unknown Soldier included) are usually subjected to in art historical perspective. This he blamed on the negligence of government who as a matter of duty should maintain and preserve the monument. Nigeria Government should emulate the example given by Krementz (19897:n.p.). For instance, Krementz says, there is a changing of guard every half hour at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington. At the change of guard all the visitors are told to “stand and remain silent”. The whole environment and the soldiers on guard are always neat.

3. CENOTAPH OF UNKNOWN SOLDIER IN THE SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA: PROVENANCE AND ANALYSIS

As the cenotaph or tomb of the Unknown Soldier is known by different name (but, the same in concept) in the nations of the world, so is it known by a common name among the Yoruba; the main inhabitant of the Southwestern Nigeria. In Britain it is known as: tomb of the Unknown Soldier, in Sofia it is called; monument to the Unknown Soldier, in Egypt it is referred to as Unknown Soldier memorial and in Nigeria it is called cenotaph of the Unknown Soldier. Among the Yoruba, the common name for it is sojadumota. It was so named by the Yoruba, because Idumota, a major economy centre in Lagos was the first home of the cenotaph of Unknown Soldier in Nigeria. Soldier is pronounced as soja (as the word sound) in Yoruba language. Idumota is the street where the image of the unknown soldier was located. So, soja affixed to idumota (a suffix) becomes sojadumota. Since 1948, when the cenotaph was erected at idumota, Lagos, the local name has subsisted as sojadumota. The Unknown Soldier images produced after the idumota figure are also called sojadumota by the Yoruba irrespective of where they are located. Probably, the name may remain for long bearing in mind the dynamics of language in human culture.
3.1 ORIGIN OF NIGERIA ARMED FORCES

The Nigerian armed forces which grew out of the Royal Niger company constabulary and the forces of the old Lagos Colony and Niger Coast Protectorate became a well-organized disciplined corps by 1900, known as West African Frontier Force. All military forces in British West African colonies were of the same model and constituted into the West African Frontier Force. In Nigeria there were the northern Nigeria Regiment; the Lagos constabulary which grew to battalion and the Niger coast Protectorate Force, in addition to a part of Royal Niger Company Constabulary that later became the Southern Niger Regiment. But the two fused at the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria protectorates in 1914 to become the Nigeria Regiment (Nairaland 2013a) when the First World War started in 1914, the Nigeria Regiment were quickly drafted into action, to protect the colony and to lay offensive action against the neighbouring German colony of the Cameroons. The Nigeria contingent fought gallantly to protect the British colony as well as inflicting devastating blows on the German protectorate. The gallant Nigeria troops later fought in the East Africa severest war front, where they incurred heavy causalities, but they remained undaunted and they were highly honoured. In 1918, at the end of the war, they returned to Nigeria, triumphantly only to participated actively in the Second World War of 1939-1946. They also fought under severe conditions in many war fronts, in and outside African which include East Africa, Burma and India. In all the fronts the Nigerian troops and their West African counterparts became terror to the Japanese. They were resilience, daring and audacious, full with unfa[...](仅为展示，实际文本不会如此冗长和不连贯)
sokoto pempe (knickers) on and probably bearing the load of his master, somehow, a life jacket across his chest. Thematically, the European artist who made the work perhaps must have studied a traditional Yoruba soldier (jagunjagun) and his eso (young warrior who attend to valiant warrior). In theme, the work is very well conceived: it transcends any compositional ambiguity. It is meaningful as an art, and symbolically sensible. The bronze sculpture was said to have been made in England.

Erected on a high pedestal, the well-polished bronze reflects light of the extinguished lives of the heroes across the country. Other early Unknown Soldier cenotaphs, erected in Iwo, 1965 (plate 2), Akure, 1973 (plate 3) and Ogbomoso, 1976 (plate 4) are similar in the mode of expression. Apart from the Sojadumota at Iwo which is a two figure composition, the other two are a single figure composition like the rest twenty four in the other towns of Southwestern Nigeria. These three cenotaph figures have full combatant uniform (except two that are in camouflage) standing at ease, side by side; erect and still; but beneath the motionless figures, is exhibited, thoughtfulness in purposeful direction, mental alertness and boisterous agility of the valiancy they were during the days of their war actions. The audience of the works feels an instance sagacious breath of the patriots through the images and inters their patriotic deeds in the records of the immortal, in expression of the everlasting indebtedness of the living to their gallantry.

Except in the manner of poses which are slightly varied in the standing position and handling of firearms (guns), sometimes held rigidly with right hand to the ground, while some of the figures aimed at an imaginary target and one putting his gun into the sky with one hand, all the sculptures were rendered in the same way but in different artists’ styles. The Unknown Soldier figure at Igede Ekiti however presented a quite different pose of the lots. The figure was neither standing at ease not in attention. It was expressed bending in a pseudo-military posture (plate 8).

The entire cenotaph figures in the Southwest except for two, had element headdress which portrayed them as been combat ready in concept. The Lagos Sojadumota had Turkish fez-like headdress. The cenotaph figure at Ifon in Osun state (plate 9) is the only Unknown Soldier image represented in ceremonial uniform, with peak-cap headdress, taking salute. In good expression and technical proficiency, two Unknown Soldier figures are impressive. They are the Unknown Soldier images at Bode Osi and Ile-Ife (plates 5 and 7). The one at Ile-Ife is muscular and standing, very lifelike in action and expressed with precision in the correct body anatomy. The body shift and weight distribution in the body axis are quite interesting. The minute details of forms and draperies and all the contours are also breath taking. More impressive is the dynamism of motion in the rigid pose of the figure which is peculiar to military “stand at ease” posture; very alert, calculative and daring in strike, instantaneously upon an order. The Bode Osi Unknown Soldier is similar in expression. It is a life size figure, subtle and life-like.

Nevertheless, while the figures in plates 5 and 7 may be adjudged as good reminiscence of the Nigerian combatant soldiers; many examples of Unknown Soldier images are too frigid, naive and comical to be acknowledged as a good representation of Nigerian soldiers (plates 10 and 11). However, the images may not be strong enough in creativity and technical proficiency, since the concept of the Unknown Soldier subsist and paramount in the commissioning and conceptualization of the works; the sculptures are still symbolic in representation. Between 1992 and 1999 sixteen Unknown Soldier images out of the twenty eight found in the southwest were made. It appears that, the long rule of the military in Nigeria and their supportive influence on the ex-service men increased the tempo at which the Unknown Soldier sculptures were commissioned between 1992 and 1999. Although the proliferation of public outdoor sculpture prevalent in the period might have encouraged commissioning of new images of Unknown Soldier, the period marked the worse despotic military rule in Nigeria. At the period, the military tenaciously controlled the reins of Nigerian body polity. Supports were therefore given
to any programme that will orchestrate military presence. Ex-service men in many instances, agitated for erection of Unknown Soldier images in their various branches. The cases of the members of Ex-service men in Ife Central Local Government Ile-Ife, in 1995, Orolu Local Government, Ifon 1996, and Ipetumodu, 1998, when the three local government chairmen were persuaded concurrently to commission Unknown Soldier images for the respective local governments are good examples. Elsewhere in the Southwestern state, renovation of the cenotaph of Unknown Soldier were either being executed or new ones were being commissioned. The Armed Forces Remembrance days in the period were usually elaborate in budget and attendance, but brisk. There was however, a decline in the production of the images of the Unknown Soldier as from the second half of 1999 when democratic government was instituted through the ballot.

Since 2005, only one image of Unknown Soldier and the entire recreation space in front of Oyo State Government House, Ibadan was commissioned for seventeen and half (17.5) million naira by Governor Adebayo Alao Akala in 2007. It is a replacement for the one destroyed in 1999 at the wake of the nascent democracy in Nigeria. Akala being an Ex-service man might have been encouraged by en spirite de corp to promptly execute the replacement. Akala was blamed for destroying the statue of Awolowo which one of his predecessors in office, Governor, Lam Adesina commissioned in replacement of an Unknown Soldier that was there before in order to represent true democracy. Akala’s action was seen as contempt for Awolowo’s ignominious act, sacreligion and bastardization of the Yoruba symbol of unity which Awolowo is perceived to stand for. While Akala passionately believe there is nothing too much to give in remembrance of the dead soldier, the default ACN political party in Oyo State opines that it is a waste of money. This brought about the suspect fraudulent practice in the commission of the Unknown Soldier at the Government House, Agodi, Ibadan (Nairaland 2013b). A few other sculpture perhaps, have been made elsewhere in the zone now; it is however very doubtful.

4. BEYOND THE CENOTAPH OF UNKNOWN SOLDIER

Definitely immortalization of the fallen heroes encoded in the cenotaph of the Unknown Soldier was a laudable idea and very well accepted by the civilian between sixties and early eighties in Nigeria. But, apathy, rejection and confrontation against the military despot soon set in, and a direct attack against the cenotaph of the Unknown Soldier started across the zone beginning from 1993, until now. The colonial imperialist tactically used the military forces extensively to gain total control of their colony. The brutality and constant harassment of the civilians had been very well noticed and protested against. Thus the enmity between the military and the civilian as soon as the country became the colony of the British imperialist began. The case of captain Robert Lister Bower a travelling commissioner for the interior Yoruba land recalls the barbaric and callous imperial military actions in Yoruba land during the colonial era.

Ajai (1999:69-83) discusses the military imperialism from the time of colonialism in Nigeria. His discussion is also similar to paradigm of imperialism which Atanda (1980:47) captured in the manner captain Robert Lister Bower repressed the people of Ibadan and cowed them to submission for the colonial obnoxious rule. Ajai also recalled that; the whole Ibadan went still; no drumming and market activities were standstill during an episode where Akintola the Balogun of Ibadan who was unjustly arrested in 1894 for a trivial perceived sin he never committed. He was deliberately incarcerated for four days bullied and battered to produce a perceived culprit believed to believe to have engaged in an act of insubordination against the colonial officer. The suspect was thought to be Akintola’s subject. Ajai mentioned several of this type of opprobrium’s and the dastardly acts of the imperialist in Ibadan and how they devastated the Ijebus in an expedition in 1892.

Similar injustice and even worse than those mentioned were meted out to other Yoruba provinces. For instance Ogedengbe the veteran warlord of the Ekiti parapo War was arrested
humiliated and detained for two weeks in Ibadan with his boys, before he was exiled to Iwo. The mighty Oyo was not speared either. Alaafin of Oyo (king of Oyo) had his bitter pills, when he was indignantly vilified, diatribed and asked to publicly prostrate to Bower at Akesan market in 1895 over a purely infidelity case of Aseyin’s wife. The case however, was dispensed off justly, for Aseyin whose wife was caught in adulterous act with man by Alafin earlier. But the judgment infuriated Bower. Bower having slapped Aseyin publicly on the matter also ordered him to be tied to a tree and be flogged. He also proceeded to bombard Alafin’s palace when he refused to assuage Bower’s anger by prostrating to him publicly. Bower eventually razed the palace and all Oyo chiefs’ houses down. Alafin had to run for his life. In the mist of all the humiliation suffered from army of the imperialist, it is not surprising that the Yoruba had to submit to their oppugnancies’ and disdainful military actions.

The military rage against the civilians did not abate after the independence. Infact the military government used the same apparatus as the British imperialist, to oppress and brutalize the civilians. The military officers being over enthusiastic on duty and proud, often despised and deliberately punished civilians at will to exhibit class supremacy. They portray themselves as “above the law”. In some instances, they beat up traffic officer who dear challenged any member of the military who contravene traffic rule. A case of traffic offence committed in May, 2012 by a naval officer elicited a banner headline in the Photo News (2012) caption “Nigerian Navy Mad Dogs Brutalize Traffic Corps in Sango Ota”. Okosun (2008) also expressed the agony of the Nigerian civilians under the reign of terror of some military personnel who have not yet overgrown the era of imperialism in the colonial time. Okosun recalled the scandalous story of the Rear Admiral Arogundade escorts. The officer’s escorts humiliated brutalized, beat and stripped a lady naked in broad day light at Victoria Island in Lagos upon a flimsy excuse. At another occasion, a naval officer asked Peter Edeh to open his mouth, the armed man then tackled his gun into it and shot him dead point blank. The officer adjudged Edeh not fit to live because he dear hit his car from the rear (Damilola: 2013).

The massacre of Odi town also portray the use of force even by the civilian government in collaboration with the armed forces in other to punish the entire community for the sins of few youths who was said to have killed twelve police officer. Priye (2013) observes that the case should have been left for the police force to investigate rather than punishing the whole community. Similar events like this and the collaboration of oil companies particularly the Shell Oil Companies who used military personnel to suppress the Niger Delta militants protest against deprivation and impovarization of their land usually pitch the civilians against the military in prolong attack and counter attacks.

Fela Anikulapo Kuti in the late 70s and early 80s had also exposed the military predetermined and well calculated brutal attack against the civilian. The lyrics of his song: “Unknown Soldier,” apparently captured the power corruption, repression brutalization of innocent civilian by the military junta; tinkering and brutally reconditioning the civilian psyche into somewhat “zombies,” and then, treacherously consigning them into toremnts and damnation (Wikipedia 2012b). The song vividly portrays how Fela’s Kalakuta Empire (his residence) was totally destroyed, in the process of a well-planned military bombardment of Fela’s abode, Fela’s mother was maimed and later died as a result of the excruciating pains of the injury she sustained. Many people including Fela were also fatally injured. The military commando type of incursion was perceived by the public to be against Fela’s fundamental human rights and a showmanship of military power drunkenness.

When enquiry to the injustice done to Fela was made, the whole punitive action was blamed on “Unknown Soldier” that is, the military men responsible for the act cannot be identified for required punishment. Yet, no compensation was paid to Fela as damages by the military. Fela exposed the fallacy of the “Unknown Soldier” claims and other unresolved army and police brutality of the civilian in the country sarcastically but brazenly in an emotion soaked of the “Unknown Soldier” titled album.
Given this fact, the public as from then audibly heard and discerned succeeding military attacks on civilians as; a monstrous military orchestral, playing a complex symphony of cancerous injustice in governance. The military intimidation and persecution of the civilians’ actions were provocative enough for the civilians to clamour for the end of a rhapsody of destruction, called military rule and its accomplishments. Arising from this problem is attack, and counter-attack of civilian/military men or military men/civilian in guerilla attacks. Occasionally the police are not also left out in the attacks. All investigation on the incessant imbroglio usually end in the “Unknown Soldier”, “unknown civilian” or “unknown police” (none identifiable culprits). This phrase instantly gains currency in the cliché of the Nigerian public, particularly in the Southwest, where most of the actions were taken place, before, during and after the 1993 Presidential Election in Nigeria.

Against this background, when the result of the June 12, 1993 election toward the much cherished democratic government was annulled, by a “soldier-president”, Ibrahim Badamosi Babagida; his action became chagrin and satanic to the civilians. The annulment of the election results, generally adjudged, the most free and fair election in the country, was seen as another affront to the Nigerian public, even beyond the shores of the country and perceived as destruction of the country’s democracy and a mortgage of the people’s future. There was restiveness in the entire country. As the restive youths were attacking anything military, so were the cenotaph of the Unknown Soldier came under siege. Many of the images of the Unknown Soldiers in Osogbo, Ibadan, Aramoko, Ado Ekiti, Ikere, were either destroyed or defaced. For instance, the Unknown Soldier at Oke-fia Osogbo was partially destroyed at the heat of June 12 crises. It was repaired immediately by Akintonde at the request of Osun State Government but later destroyed completely. The one at Government House, Agodi Ibadan, was completely destroyed in 1999 shortly after the inauguration of the Administration of Governor Lam Adesina, Awolowo statue was later erected on the same pedestal where the Unknown Soldier image had been before, probably in condemnation of the military government era. Apparently the action ushered in the new democratic government into the state. The Unknown Soldier at Oke moli Ibadan (plate 12) was partially destroyed it was not repaired until 2013. In Aramoko and Igede Ekiti, civilian agbada garments and sokoto were craftily put on the Unknown Soldiers images for a long period of time signifying the triumph of democracy over military despotic rule.

5. THE CENOTAPH OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER IN THE YORUBA LEXICON

The erection of the image of the Unknown Soldier in Idumota in Lagos immediately added another lexicon and idiomatic expressions to the Yoruba language. Yoruba language is very dynamic; the language can quickly adapt from, or borrow words used for certain things of interest in other languages as well as action of a thing or an experience. For instance, suya is a Hausa word for roasted meat known as asun in Yoruba; the word is interchangeably used with asun and also used in many Yoruba idiomatic expression. From the then, colonial police constabulary kit, baton is the word olopa (policeman) formed. Then, the police were mostly allowed to arm themselves with baton. The baton equivalent in Yoruba is opa, a short tick stick or a staff that can be used as a weapon. There are other variations of opa. They are: ogo (club) oduro (a heavy club). These types are however, not in the same category with the police baton. The full statement in which olopa was formed as a Yoruba word for policemen is Eni ti o ni opa; conscripted to olopa. But the word soja was formed from the sound in the pronunciation of the word soldier. The word was made brief in the Yoruba pronunciation to read soja.

The transfix manner of the Unknown Soldier at Idumota, Lagos being the first figural sculpture in the Nigeria public environment was quickly studied by the Yoruba and used as simile in Yoruba language as idioms, either to describe the psyche or physical composure used to cast aspersion on a person, eulogize calmness or describe the posture of a person in a
particular circumstance. For instance, the statement; *o duro gbín-in bi sojadimota*, (he stands erect like *Unknown Soldier* of Idumota) refers to the manner of posture of the person the statement referred to. But *o gbe wan to bi sojadimota* (he is as frigid as sojadumota) may be used in the context of disparaging remarks to the coldness of a person. Several of these idiomatic expressions coined from the *Unknown Soldier* image are abound in Yoruba language which are freely used.

6. CONCLUSION

Perhaps, there may not be a better way to honour and immortalized the heroes of wars who died in the battle field while fighting for their fatherland, than the symbolic burial, and commemoration of the Unknown Soldiers in specific manner. David Railton’s thoughtfulness on the presentation of a proposal, on immortalization of the Unknown Soldiers and the prompt approval given the proposal by King George has apparently gone down in history, in appreciation of the fallen heros’. Immeasurable love for their countries Nigeria like several nations of the world similarly responded to the celebration of her fallen hero in annual commemorative service and the rituals of laying of wreath.

The erection of the composite images of the Unknown Soldier in 1948 at Idumota, Lagos as part of the tomb of the *Unknown Soldier* grandeur in Nigeria is a land mark in many respects. For instance, it accorded honour to the noble military profession and apt to stir up instantaneous patriotism in the military personnel and the civilians who also sheared in the sentiment of the Unknown Soldier concept. The location of the figure at Idumota area became vivid road furniture that made the Idumota Street proud. Given this circumstance, the two images became favoured in art patronage providing new iconography and further statements in of the contemporary Nigerian art. Variation of *Unknown Soldier* images forms mainly expressed in realism in individual artist style produced either in reinforced concrete or fibre cast techniques have adorned the landscape of the Southwestern Nigeria. However, the current socio-political problem in the country has begun to affect the sustainability of the art.

The Yoruba language was quick to make profit from the adaptation of new words from the *Unknown Soldier* image’s factors of location and erection as well as the inference in it, which was whimsically drawn from the manner of postures of the images. This inference helped Yoruba language semantically, to gain more lexicon and idioms.

Whatever gap the torturous long military rule in Nigeria might have created between the military and the civilian as observed in the study, somehow, it has not been enough to obliterate the concept of the *Unknown Soldier* and its significance in nation building. The commemorative services and the laying of wreath ceremony is still been held every year during the Armed Forces Remembrance Day and the entire nation will perhaps continue to honour their fallen heroes; even at the feet of the extant cenotaph of the *Unknown Soldier* images (plate 13) and the twenty one gun salute continues to boom; honouring the patriots.

REFERENCES


PLATED FIGURES 1-13

Plate 1
Cenotaph of Unknown Soldier (Sojadumota), bronze, 1948, Idumota, Lagos. Courtesy of Ajayi Oladele, 2007

Plate 2
Cenotaph of Unknown Soldier cement, height: 220, c.1968, Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2005

Plate 3
Cenotaph of Unknown Soldier cement, height: 1973, Akure Photograph by Musa Zaynab, 2005

Plate 4
Christopher J. A., Unknown Soldier, cement, height: 190cm, 1973, Ogbomoso Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2005
Plate 5
Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2004

Plate 6
Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2008

Plate 7
Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2003

Plate 8
Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2008
Plate 9
Cenotaph of *Unknown Soldier*, cement, height: 180cm, c.1992, Ifon Osun
Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2007

Plate 10
Cenotaph of *Unknown Soldier*, cement, height: 180cm, 1992, Aramoko
Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2006

Plate 11
Cenotaph of *Unknown Soldier*, cement, height: 180cm, 1992, Ikere Ekiti
Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2006

Plate 12
Damage part of the Cenotaph of *Unknown Soldier*, cement, height: 180cm, 1992, Oke Moli, Ibadan
Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2007
Plate 13
Wreath laid at the base of Unknown Soldier, cement, height: 120cm, 1990, Fajuyi Park, Ado Ekiti.
Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2006