



## A review of: *Soldier's Paradise Militarism in Africa after Empire*<sup>12</sup>

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Samuel Fury Childs Daly dedicated his studies and research to Africa; his main area of interest is the history of decolonization and development of the former British colonies. He primarily researches the history of Nigeria after its independence, as Nigeria is a crucial country in the region in many aspects (population, natural resources, economy, etc.), and it also helps to understand the development of other former British colonies.

He holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University and master's degrees from the School of Oriental and African Studies and the University of Cambridge.

In his previous book, the author published the results of his research on the Nigerian civil war; *A History of the Republic of Biafra: Law, Crime and the Nigerian Civil War*. With this work, he won many professional recognitions and awards.

When writing *Soldier's Paradise*, the author relied on written documents, legal notes, and memoirs instead of personal recollections and interviews, which significantly increase the credibility of his findings. At the same time, this method narrowed the scope of the research, since the successive military governments did not seek to document their activities.

For me, the greatest value of the book is its comprehensive approach to the circumstances that led to the emergence of Nigerian militarism and successive military dictatorships, with an outlook on other former British colonies. The author makes it possible to learn about the circumstances that made the rise of military power almost inevitable. In this way, we can conclude that military dictatorships can be considered a typical element in the process of post-colonial African development. The book introduces the most important military leaders and provides insight into their aspirations, ways of thinking and their real results. We can see that almost all military leaders and dictators aimed to strengthen national independence and unity. It is a different matter what means they used to achieve the set goals and how successful they were.

Following the author's detailed approach, it becomes obvious that despite the best intentions of the military power, it did not have the proper means to achieve its goals. In the absence of comprehensive political, economic and social knowledge and experience, they could only rely on the use of military tools and procedures. The military only used the tools it had and knew. The consequence of all this was that

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<sup>1</sup> DOI: 10.12700/jceas.2025.5.2.349

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Fury Childs Daly, *Soldier's Paradise Militarism in Africa after Empire*. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2024, ix + 275 pp. \$24. Paperback. ISBN: 9781478030836.

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militarism and discipline became an ideology and rose to the level of political objectives. As the author points out, the military leaders approached the management of the country as a military exercise. However, military wartime leadership contrary to civilian peacetime leadership and nation-building are significantly different from each other, so military forces and procedures could not prevail in peacetime nation-building. For example, demanding almost military discipline from the civilian population had the opposite effect. The larger part of the population felt all this as oppression and lawlessness and turned away from the military power, whose support base was thus significantly reduced.

In the second part of the book, the author presents the attempts and pitfalls of creating and operating the legal system of militarism. Militarism regarded law as the second pillar of the system, with which it could govern the country and exercise military power in a decisive and internationally acceptable manner. At the same time, he also points out that the civil legal system is not a natural component or support of military power. Although it can be shaped to some extent for the sake of power, it does not mean full compliance. The establishment of the legal system and the exercise of law also proved to be a point of conflict between the military leadership and the legal community, and tensions arose regarding the roles played in legislation and the way of exercising law. One expressive example of this power struggle and uncertainty is the presentation of the case of Kuti Fela (musician and political activist). The army destroyed and burned down Fela Kuti's residential area, abusing many people and causing significant material damage. At the court hearing, their claim for compensation was rejected several times, referring to the old colonial law, "the King can do no wrong", (p. 164) in other words, military power was declared to be above the law.

We can understand from the example and the author also points out in other chapters that the British colonial legal system played a decisive role in the formation of the legal system of Nigeria and other former British colonial countries. Since the same legal system was applied to all colonies, after gaining independence the nations considered this (being no other) the basis of their national legal system, therefore revised it to a certain extent, modified it, and applied it in accordance with their national interests and characteristics. This explains the common path of development followed by the former British colonies and the unusual practice in which judges could be exchanged between nations and some personalities (Sir Egbert Udo Udoma), (p. 106) could play a prominent role in the legal system and the life of other countries.

For me, the book reinforces the approach, according to which we must examine everything in its context, considering its real circumstances, and we must not judge based on the "superiority" of the Western values.

From a European point of view (due to historical experience), militarism and military dictatorship only mean oppression and terror, which must be rejected under all circumstances. At the same time, in the former colonial countries, we should consider this as an almost inevitable step in their development process. Before we judge, let's not forget that after independence, there was no other example of the seize and exercise of



power than the example of the colonists and the structures (military, legal, etc.) they created. However, these were by no means aimed at building a democratic society and country. This resulted in a very controversial situation, using the tools of the oppressors to build an independent, democratic country. Therefore, we cannot be surprised that the political and social concepts and terminologies used in Western culture have a different meaning and content here, like "...we enjoy the most liberal military democracy in modern history..." (p. 82).

I especially recommend *Soldier's Paradise* to anyone who wants to explore Nigeria's post-colonial history based on authentic documents. The book offers an excellent opportunity to have an insight into the military dictatorships (circumstances, personalities, ideologies, practices) of Nigeria and partly of the former British colonial countries. I believe that through the author's findings, we can better understand the current situation in Africa, since political-economic instability and military dictatorships still determine Africa's everyday life even in the 21st century.

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