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Trends. The Tale of the Tape: Coup Minimization in Nigeria

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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According to The New York Times, Nigerian president, General Sani Abacha, may be employing covert, clandestine, and even apocryphal audio and video tapes in an effort to minimize the probability of a successful coup.

After a recent purge of government and military officials, President Abacha even played some of these tapes for some political leaders, diplomats, and journalists. The tapes allegedly contained records of conspirators planning a coup.

There certainly are positive aspects of a tape approach to minimize coup plotting. (1) Conspirators can never be sure when they are being recorded. (2) Conspirators--even if believing that they are not being recorded--must consider that bogus tapes may be created with seemingly damning information against them. (3) Conspirators may be less likely to trust each other given the very comprehensive security monitoring system that the tapes seem to suggest.

There are negative aspects as well. (1) Conspirators can merely assume that they always are being monitored and act accordingly. That is, while engaged in conspiracy, they can take care to "look like" they are doing no such thing. (2) Conspirators can create and disseminate their own real and bogus tapes supporting motives for a coup. (3) Conspirators may be more likely and determined to engage in coup plotting given that the pervasive government monitoring program suggests phenomena similar to the French Revolution's Thermidor.

Also, the salience of taping can reinforce greater interludes of public self-consciousness--the focus on how one looks to others--leading to a false consciousness that can be a motivator towards revolution as well as the result of an oppressive or soul-stultifying regime. The tale of the tape in Nigeria has not yet run out. (See Borg, M.J. (1997). The structure of social monitoring in the process of social control. *Deviant Behavior*, 18, 273-293; Borg, M.J., & Arnold, W.P. (1997). Social monitoring as social control: The case of drug testing in a medical workplace. *Sociological Forum*, 12, 441-460; French, H.W. (April 4, 1998). Nigeria, a proud nation in a free fall, seethes under a general's grip. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Leary, M.R., Tambor, E.S., Terdal, S.K., & Downs, D.L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: The sociometer hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 518-530.) (Keywords: Nigeria, Political Psychology, Recordings, Sani Abacha, Security.)