

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Nigeria: The Political Economy of the Bourgeois Restoration by Siddique Mohammed and Tony Edoh, Eds.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/80k4w225>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 17(1)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Iweriebor, Ehiedu E.F.

Publication Date

1988

DOI

10.5070/F7171016910

Copyright Information

Copyright 1988 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Siddique Mohammed and Tony Edoh (eds). **Nigeria: The Political Economy of the Bourgeois Restoration, 1979-83.**

This book is a collection of papers presented at a conference on the "State of the Nation" organized by the Department of Political Science of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria in November 1983. It was conceived as an assessment of the state of the country after four years of neo-colonial liberal democracy usually referred to as the Second Republic or, more accurately, the "civilian bourgeois restoration."

The book is divided into four sections dealing with politics, the economy, local government and foreign policy. The first section has five chapters with contributions by Kyari Tijani, A.R. Mustapha, T.A. Imobigbe, Ejembi A. Unofe and I.A. Ayua. These authors examine various aspects of Nigerian bourgeois political practice and behavior including electoral fraud, political repression, police violence, ethnic manipulation and judicial cynicism and impotence. (They highlight the continuities between earlier phases of bourgeois political practice in the 1950's and '60s and their substantial repetition in the '70s and '80s.) The conclusions reached by the various authors describe the events of this period as the "betrayal" and "subversion" of democracy. These conclusions suggest that the writers view Nigerian bourgeois political practice within its own terms of reference or framework. Since their investigations establish continuities between past and present political practice, their conceptual framework and conclusions are flawed.

What is required is an epistemological break which does not consider such bourgeois political practice as aberrant. Rather the continuities suggest that this constitutes a particular form of political practice--Nigerian-style neo-colonial politics. Consequently, it provides Nigerian radical social scientists with raw material for the construction of a theory of neo-colonial politics which is *sui generis* to Nigeria. Analysts can then go on to demonstrate the unviability and unacceptability of this form of "democracy" while simultaneously developing a theory of democracy that would address the consistently demonstrated desire of Nigerian people for popular participatory democracy. Otherwise, radical analysts stand the risk of falling into the delusionary trap of suggesting reforms, tinkering and modifications of a neo-colonial political system that is evidently satisfactory to the ruling classes even though unacceptable to the majority of Nigerians.

The second section titled "Economic Crisis and Agriculture" has seven chapters and is, not surprisingly, the longest section of

the book. Contributors to this section include: N.B. Iloabachie, A.S. Mohammed, Z.A. Bonat, Yusuf Bangura, Raufu Mustapha, Saidu Adamu, Bright Ekuerhare, Eskor Toyo and Okello Oculi. The various authors examine the structure of the economy, its management, the evolution of Nigeria's neo-colonial capitalist economy, the performance of the parastatals, the crisis in the agricultural sector and the general crisis that engulfed the economy from 1981 onwards.

From these well researched essays one gets an articulated picture of the operation of the Nigerian economy and the features of structural dependency inherent in a neo-colonial economy which makes it a prey to cyclical crises: it lacks an domestic base of productive activity. Instead what goes on in the economy takes the form of buying and selling and the repatriation of profits out of Nigeria by branches of trans-national corporations through the active and passive collusion of the political class, the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the various junior agents of foreign firms.

It is clear from the various essays that Nigeria's problem during the bourgeois restoration was not the lack of resources to perform credibly. During the four years of Shehu Shagari's presidency, the Nigerian state received over N56 Billion (fifty-six billion naira) into its coffers. Yet two years into this period Nigeria's economy was so badly mismanaged that the country slid into the worst economic depression of its post-independence period. To shore up the economy, the regime resorted to the unimaginative contraction of loans from the imperialist West. The consequences of these actions are still with us today with no fundamental solutions in sight - so deeply entrenched are the social forces which benefit from and sustain Nigeria as a neo-colonial dependency.

It should be evident that while the Nigerian ruling class in its NPN manifestation was unable to credibly manage the resources at its disposal, the basic sources of the recurrent crisis of the Nigerian economy lay deep in its structure. It is a dependent economy that is sustained by an unwholesome combination of transnational corporations, the political class, the comprador bourgeoisie and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Together, these social forces ensure that Nigeria remains a neo-colony geared to providing raw materials to the imperialist West and receiving finished goods.

Given this dependent economic structure, economic depression is virtually guaranteed to recur depending on the vagaries of the business cycle in the imperialist West to which Nigeria is an appendage.

From the analyses of the various authors, it is clear that the neo-colonial perspective does not enjoy uncontested ideological and intellectual hegemony. The implicit alternative posited by the

various authors is a socialist economy, autocentric in its orientation with the home market as its base.

The third section deals with local government. This section should probably have been put in the same section as the first part or arranged sequentially after section one since both parts in effect examine politics and administration at the national, state and local government levels. This section has two chapters contributed by H.N. Nwosu and Alhaj Shehu Musa (who was secretary to the NPN Federal government). The essays consider the concept of "uniformity" and the Federal government's financial contribution to that tier of government. The uniform system of local government is an important one and can be said to be one of the significant legacies of the Murtala-Obasanjo regime to the political evolution of Nigeria. However, as the chapter by Nwosu shows, there are still unresolved issues about the size and bases of the constitution of the local government units - with several communities seeking to be detached and constituted into separate local government areas. The essays make it clear that the systems of local government require further refinement and grounding on a firmer basis which on the one hand takes account of local wishes, but at the same time creates units which are politically and economically viable.

This brings us to Shehu Musa's contribution. The importance of this essay is the financial statistics presented detailing the Federal government's financial allocations to local governments between 1979 and 1983, which amounted to over 4.3 billion naira. The essay also shows that the Federal government adopted a formal and legalistic approach to the local governments. For it is well known that much of the funds constitutionally due to that tier of government did not, in fact, reach them because these funds were hijacked by the state governments for their use, with dire consequences for the performance of the local governments.

This issue makes it clear that it is not enough for the local governments to be recognized as separate tiers with access to funds from the Federation Account. It is also imperative that they should get their allocations directly from the national account through a joint Federal-Local government account. Happily, this issue was recently resolved when the current Minister of Finance and Economic Development announced that the local governments would henceforth get their allocations directly from the Federation Account. However in order to ensure that this and subsequent Federal governments do not maintain a posture of formal commitment, but practical, moral and political indifference to the local governments, it is imperative to define adequately a structure and format of relations between the Federal, state and local tiers of governance which does

not routinely undermine the stability and performance of the local governments.

A major aspect which was not examined is the nature and character of politics at the local level. While all the state governments sabotaged the local governments during the bourgeois restoration, it is also clear that even with their limited resources, this is an arena in which new ruling classes founded on the appropriation of local resources are emerging. In short, class politics at the local government level is a subject worthy of exploration.

The fourth section examines the conduct of foreign policy during the "bourgeois restoration". The first essay by Ibrahim Gambari notes, but does not develop, the theme of the bureaucratization of foreign policy formulation. However he calls on interest groups to contribute to the making of foreign policy. The remainder of the essay examines various areas of foreign policy activism including Chad, Western Sahara, the disrupted OAU conference of 1982 and the liberation struggles in Namibia and South Africa. In general, Gambari notes the contradictions in the rhetoric and practice of foreign policy by the Shagari administration.

The second essay by Sonni-Gwanle Tyoden explores these themes in a critical survey of the various foreign policy initiatives. He focuses his critique against the backdrop of Nigeria's constitutional foreign policy objective which requires Nigeria (in effect any regime in power) to "promote African Unity as well as (the) total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa ...". Against this background, he examines Shagari's responses to the Chad Question, Western Sahara, the OAU issue and the liberation of Southern Africa. Tyoden also examines Nigeria's economic and military relations with the various power blocs. He notes the general decline in the relationship with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, he highlights Nigeria's deepening dependence on Western imperialist states especially Britain, France, West Germany as well as the United States, all of which garnered substantial economic benefits and military contracts.

What emerges from this insightful analysis is two-fold. The first is that the Shagari administration systematically colluded with Western imperialism in its various African policy initiatives. The second point, and a corollary of the first, is that the Shagari government blatantly negated the constitutional foreign policy prescription to struggle for the political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa. Although he points out various ways in which public pressure compelled the government to change its rhetoric, it still remains true that foreign policy during Shagari's tenure was substantially a return to the earlier days of subservience to Western imperialism.

The foreign policy orientation of the Shagari regime was of course not surprising. As a conservative regime committed to the sustenance of Nigeria's neo-colonial status and composed of the junior partners of Western imperialism and its transnational agencies, a subservient foreign policy was inevitable. In fact, it can be said that but for the attentive Nigerian public, Shagari's regime might simply have had its foreign policy made in Washington and London and merely implemented by his appointees. Like its political practice and economic management, Shagari's conduct of foreign policy manifested the worst dimensions of the unregenerate practices of the bourgeois restoration: subservience to imperialism, indifference to the genuine expectations of Nigerians and inept management of the political economy. Nigeria never had it so bad.

At a general level, the book is particularly gratifying because it is written by a group of Nigerian social scientists using Nigerian empirical data and seeking to understand the origins and character of the Nigerian neo-colonial order so as to contribute to its transformation. It is important because it signifies the progressive emergence of a Nigerian radical social science, which is firmly committed, activist and as much as possible free from the ritualistic invocation of irrelevant and distractive theoretical constructs of Western Africanology - bourgeois or Marxist. Hopefully, these social scientists will proceed to formulate original theoretical constructs with which to better understand the workings of Nigeria's neo-colonial society so as to liberate it. This book is highly recommended.

Ehiedu E.G. Iweriebor

Nzongola-Ntalaja (ed.) **The Crisis in Zaire**. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1986. 327 pp., Cloth \$32.00, Paper \$11.95.

The Crisis in Zaire is an impressive collection of scholarly papers, examining the continuous social and institutional crisis of this resource rich country (Zaire), marked by the chronic inability to generate and sustain economic growth and development since its independence in 1960. It seeks to examine the reasons for this apparent failure, to chart a new course of more adequate explanations of the crisis, and to generate new ideas and approaches with regard to problem-solving research. According to these articles, Zaire is a name virtually synonymous with crisis. In this case, a major