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BOOK REVIEWS


These two books are on aspects of Nigerian politics. Both are published by a budding Nigerian Publishing House and reflect one direction of scholarly work on Nigeria in the past two decades. African politics in general and Nigerian politics in particular reflect the recent crisis of the relations between the African states and the people because by and large colonialism excluded the broad masses from elements of formal political organisations. Within the state the elementary efforts by social groups to engender political parties and electoral forms excused intellectual interest. This interest was most pronounced in the modernisation school of thought of the American Political Science Association. Modernisation theory as theoretical construct was the guide post to study African states for the students of African politics were to help to shape the intellectual tradition of modernisation to guide African Scholars. In a sense the two books, one by an American scholar and the other by a Nigerian political scientist reflect this trend. Unfortunately modernisation theory remained a grafted product for the liberal democratic forms of government on which the new political institutions were to be build were never in place. So even before Sklar's book on parties was being read the violence and militarism of Nigerian Society had already dictated the urgent need for new tools of analysis.

Sklar's work dramatised the crisis of modernisation theory for not even with a new introduction of this massive book of 578 pages was the reader prepared for the brushing aside of civilian political parties by the coup and bloody civil war of 1966-1970. After five military coups by 1984, students of Political Science need to be able to understand the political process beyond the ambitions of leading personalities in society. Rigorous analysis is required to lay bare the processes which give rise to political forms including political organisations such as parties or non party forms such as military rule. Such analysis enable the students of politics to penetrate political forms and hence not to be surprised by changes of personalities at the helm of state power.

These questions have become more urgent in a period when the structuralism of the behavioral school of American political Science seeks to rear its head again after the period of military rule undermined the ideas of nation building and modern political institutions. Is it possible to say that the process of political change in Nigeria in the past twenty years has rendered Sklar's work superficial if not out of step with the social reality? Some may want to make this conclusion but it may best be done by historians. In one way it is fair to say that the massive documentation on the leading personnages of Nigerian politics in the heady days of anti-colonialism does not prepare the reader for the forms of political arbitration which were later entrenched in Nigeria.
The organisation of the book follows the structural functional methodology of the author. The book is divided into three parts. Part I ‘Rise of political parties’, Part II ‘Studies in power and conflict’ and part III ‘Party structure and social structure’. These formally divided parts do not draw from the political economy of the society to be able to shed light on which social forces were at the forefront of the parties and whether they could sustain these parties. Hence while the reader could hardly disagree with the wealth of background information on intercommunal links, one may question the relevance of much of this information.

A rigorous analysis of colonial rule would have been necessary including the effects of colonial political divisions and colonial ideologies. This is a necessary recourse for one of the underlying assumptions of the book was that colonialism was a modernising force. Such theoretical clarity would help one to digest the wealth of empirical data marshalled for the book. As a documentary evidence of a period of Nigerian political history, this book is without rival. The problem is how this evidence argues the case for political parties.

A crucial question which can be legitimately posed is, to what extent did, a generation of Nigerian politics scientists internalise Sklar’s method of studying the politics of personalities and centralising the politicisation of ethnicity? This question arises from the way in which the second book attempts to follow the method of Sklar, in the theoretical frame and in the analytical form. Remi Anifowose’s book on violence and politics brought out the violence which was not present in Sklar’s work but without a proper explanation of why this violence developed. An analytical introduction on violence was contradicted in the main body of the book which demonstrated the theoretical muddle of the work. In the end all forms of violence, whether by the oppressor or the oppressed, are presented in the same way. Hence the anti-colonial workers revolt is presented as similar to the intra-class violence fomented by the petty bourgeoisie. Tracing the political turbulence in the Tiv division and Western Nigeria, the author utilises the formal techniques of polling and surveys to draw up his analysis of violence in politics. Unfortunately there is no coherent thread which shows why violence should have occurred. In terms of organisations, the book follows from the theoretical explanation of violence to give a background to the Tiv and then a chapter on the explanation for the violence. The same formula is followed for the Yoruba.

Like Sklar’s work the book brings together some of the behavioural tools on belief system traditions and voting patterns but without elucidating the class basis of these facts. In Nigeria the evolution of class differentiation has been a long and deep process. The book does not show to what extent the violence was orchestrated by emerging forces. Without this the reader has to fall back on the image of the tradition of the societies where tribal loyalties superseded other class ties. Even if this were the case, the author does not analyse the relationship between class formation and ethnic identification. Yet by default the author hinted at some of the contradictions when he alluded to the causes of electoral conflict (pp. 238) the struggles over scholarship, contracts, loans to farmers and the issue of licences to traders.

The author in the preface of his book gives credit to the work of Sklar. This showed up in the body of this work. However, while Sklar’s book was written before the carnage of the civil war of 1966-1968, Anifowose’s work was written after the war and three coups de tat. This should have afforded the author
some time to reflect on the tools of analysis of Sklar and its inability to see beyond personalities. Moreover the squandering of the petro-dollars and the chaotic capital accumulation in Nigeria may now lead other students of Nigerian politics to seek to develop new tools of analysis. Both books under review expose the limits of bourgeois theory. They show that idealist conceptions of politics must be linked to the social reality of the forms of class struggle arising from the location of Africa in the international division of labour.

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Studies of migration in Africa abound in the literature these days, with very few such studies revealing anything new. This small volume, a report of research conducted in Eastern Zambia in the mid-1970's, approaches the topic yet again, but with a difference. Instead of focusing on migrants (and their activities, etc), Hedlund and Lundahl reverse the focus and ask how migration has effected those who remain behind in the rural areas!

Chapter 2 is a discussion of theoretical models which have been used in the study of migration. Despite raising some interesting issues concerning the rural poor and women, the authors apparently accept a modified version of the Harris-Todaro migration model (which stresses the economic rationality of the migrant) and the utility of static models in general to explain an extremely complex situation in which the nature and scope of economic opportunities have changed dramatically over the last 50-60 years in Zambia.

Chapter 3 then attempts to briefly set out the relation between traditional agriculture (chitemene) and patterns of migration. The system of reserves created by white settlers and discriminatory market practices (affecting corn) had the effect of concentrating too large a population on too small an area with a consequent decline in household production and rural malnutrition. At the same time, however, the Copperbelt was developing as a major centre for wage labour and ushered in massive rural-urban migration which has, over the decades, changed in nature from temporary to permanent migration.

The pressures for migration out of Chipata (the area studied) were considerable and have resulted in a rural population in which men of productive age are absent and one third of all households are headed by women. In general, the authors have made a case for the development of small-scale rural producers which is taking place within the context of rapid social differentiation of the rural areas. Chapter 5 attempts to present a static model predicting the consequences of rural-urban migration upon the district. While interesting, this model contains too many simplifying assumptions (which the authors note) and overly formalises what in fact is a complex process by which capitalism has penetrated pre-capitalist agriculture creating the basis for rural underdevelopment and rural poverty. The data used to illustrate the model is very interesting and demonstrates their hypothesis that rural-urban migration has resulted in declining per capita incomes because of the shortage of male agricultural labour.