

**Akinwumi, Olayemi. *Crises and Conflicts in Nigeria: A Political History Since 1960*. Munster, Germany: LIT Verlag Munster, 2004.**

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at an important crossroads, but given its history of survival and adaptation it remains difficult to discount its future relevance.

The book contains perhaps the most exhaustive bibliographic essay on NATO's history published to date. The book's clear strength is its coverage of NATO's Cold War crises. No other work covers this history so succinctly and yet so completely. Kaplan is not as comprehensive in his coverage of NATO's post-Cold War crisis by comparison, yet all of NATO's internal problems, including the allied differences over the first Persian Gulf War, Bosnia, Kosovo, the St. Malo initiatives, up to Iraq, are considered. In sum, Kaplan's historical survey of NATO's dilemmas is outstanding and gives current analysts much to consider about the alliance's ability to adapt internally when the problems in Brussels appear to be insurmountable.

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At the dawn of its political independence in October 1960, international attention had shifted to Nigeria as a country that would possibly make giant strides toward sustainable peace, democracy, and development in Africa. Such hopes were not misplaced given the abundance of human and natural resources endowing the country. Paradoxically, Nigeria today remains one of the poorest countries in the world. In this important book, *Crises and Conflicts in Nigeria*, Olayemi Akinwumi basically seeks to illuminate the crises that have plagued the country by drawing attention to those conflicts, which according to him "have rocked the foundation of the country since independence in 1960." (p. 1)

Although the book does not provide an explicitly well-grounded theoretical foundation(s), it does situate its analysis within familiar analytical perspectives on Nigerian government and politics. First is the colonial origin of the Nigerian state, which laid the foundations as well as consolidated deficient social, economic, political, and developmental structures from the beginning. According to Akinwumi, the British colonialists squandered the "golden opportunity" available to them between 1914 and 1960 to build "a strong structure that could withstood the post-colonial shocks." (p. 2) Second is the prebendal character of the post-independence state and that of its predatory elites, whether civilian or military. It is to this second factor that Akinwumi attributes over 90 per cent of the

deepening woes of Nigeria since 1960 because they pursue their selfish and narrow interests. (p. 2)

According to Akinwumi, in pre-colonial Nigeria each of the groups that colonialism forcefully brought together under one administration had had their own unique political and administrative structures that best suited their society. This was amply demonstrated in the first chapter of the book. (pp. 9-22) Colonialism, however, altered and disarticulated the progress of these “states.” Beginning with the indirect rule system through the “mistake of 1914” (amalgamation), and several constitutional bargains to independence in 1960, the British failed in all ways to lay a solid foundation for the building of nationhood out of the disparate amalgam called Nigeria. This was evidenced by the divide and rule tactics, regionalism, and perverted federal framework bequeathed to the country. (pp. 27-50)

At independence in 1960, these contradictions had already taken firm roots. The opportunity presented by independence to redress the roots of these problems was, however, wasted by the new elites of power who took over from the colonialists. Rather, they saw the opportunity to further their selfish and parochial interests through the deadly manipulation of forces of identity, particularly ethnicity and religion. This presented the elites with the opportunity to plunder the national economy to a point of collapse, as successive Nigerian republics in quick succession crumbled due to a vicious cycle of coups and counter coups. The country, according to Akinwumi, had to pay very dearly for these developments. One area that receives attention in the book is the escalation of violent conflicts with attendant huge costs on the financial, material, human, and natural resources of the country. The country’s sole reliance on rent from oil complicated the matter, having turned oil into a curse rather than blessing. (pp.116-32) The return of the country to democracy in 1999, rather than ameliorating the situation, has continued to give faltering prospects. (pp. 169-70) This has taken a heavy toll on human life as over 100,000 people have been reportedly killed due to violent conflicts. (p. 182)

Akinwumi makes a modest contribution on the way forward. He recommends a review of the federal status of the country through devolution of powers, restructuring of the economy, educational system, judiciary and security sector, as well as the convocation of a national conference (pp. 189-93), but without dealing much with the “how” of these mechanisms.

No doubt, the book is an excellent synthesis of the crises and conflicts that have undeservedly crippled Nigeria since independence. Its deep historical insights, analytical simplicity, and concise presentation in straight forward prose mark it as a fashionable scholarly work. Its multidisciplinary approach is an added value. The book, however, suffers from some limitations. These are mainly factual errors and typos. For example, the Richard constitution came in 1946, not 1947 as claimed in the book (p. 35); the first republic ended on 15 January

1966, not 1965 (p. 61); the declaration of the Niger Delta Republic in 1967 by Isaac Boro was not under the first republic as it ended in 1966 (p. 64); Akintola formed UNPP after breaking from AG, not UPP (p. 66); the 1979 constitution did not at any place specify 13 as the two-thirds of 19 states as claimed in the book (p. 77) – if this was so, there would have been no basis for the litigation filed by UPN; Gideon Orkar's coup actually took place on 22 April 1990 (p. 102) but later was mistakenly cited as 1992 (p. 141); and on p. 189, “. . . in the power and responsibility. . .” was printed twice, giving the impression that proof-reading was not thorough enough.

In sum, despite these criticisms, the book, like Akinwumi's 2002, *The Colonial Struggle for Nigeria, 1886-1900: A History of German Participation* by the same publisher, stands out as a masterpiece on Nigerian government and politics. It is bound to register its presence powerfully among the students of the supposed giant of Africa. I strongly recommend it to all interested in the crises and contradictions of the political development of the Nigerian state. The book certainly offers comparative possibilities to non-specialists on Africa/Nigeria, who are interested in the dynamics of identity politics and low-intensity conflicts in post-colonial states, given its penetrating country-specific insights.

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