

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic by Richard A. Joseph: Elections in Nigeria: A Grassroots Perspective by William Miles

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of rigour. Some are certainly based on fresh research, notably 'Land and Peasants in Western Uganda: Bushenyi and Mbarara districts' by Nelson Kasfir, 'Political Transitions Since Idi Amin: a study in political pathology' by Dan Mudoola, and 'Museveni's Uganda: notes towards an analysis' by Michael Twaddle, and they do provide new insights, regardless of whether or not they adhere to the overall theme of the collection.

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Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: the rise and fall of the Second Republic by RICHARD A. JOSEPH

Cambridge University Press, 1987. Pp. xi + 237. £27.50. \$42.50.

Elections in Nigeria: a grassroots perspective by WILLIAM MILES

Boulder and London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988. Pp. 168. £21.95.

These two books are welcome contributions to the growing literature on Nigeria's tortuous search for stable polity and specifically for democracy. But although the authors adopted similar methodologies in their collation of data about the Second Republic, 1979–84, which involved personal interviews, reviews of literature, and direct observations, that is probably where their similarities stopped.

Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: the rise and fall of the Second Republic attempts to answer the following question: 'What is the nature of the fundamental processes of Nigerian political life?' (p. 1). This study of party and electoral politics has been divided into four parts: 'The Problem of Democracy', 'Nigeria's Social Dynamics and Military Rule', 'The Return to Tripartism in the Second Republic', and 'The Crisis of Nigerian Democracy'. Richard Joseph starts by recognising the difficulty in delineating ethnicity, viewed by liberals as an independent variable and as a dependent variable by Marxists, and emphasises its potency in African politics by linking his theoretical analysis to clientship and patrimonial relations in order to sharpen Max Weber's formulation of 'prebends':

a prebendal system will be seen not only as one in which the offices of state are allocated and then exploited as benefices by the office-holders, but also as one where such a practice is legitimated by a set of political norms according to which the appropriation of such offices is not just an act of individual greed or ambition but concurrently the satisfaction of the short-term objectives of a subset of the general population (p. 67).

Apart from overwhelming evidence, both theoretical and empirical, to prove the above point, there is also other evidence in the post *coup d'état* that falls in the same category. The popular explanation for the jailing of Colonel Obasa, who was found to have illegally amassed over seven million naira during his tenure as Director of the National Youth Service Corps, was because he did not share the 'loot' with the 'right people', including his fellow officers. Also during the régime headed by Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, key individuals appeared to have been less concerned with the 'justness' of jailing politicians adjudged to be corrupt than with their number

and ethnic group. It also needs to be pointed out that for many years the military leaders of Nigeria have suffered from the perception that the 'North' has dominated their ruling councils. Amazingly, there was the initial reluctance to accept President Ibrahim Babangida by the far North, probably because he was perceived to have come from one of the minority groups.

Joseph stresses the significance of the 'substratum', the major elements of which 'are the class, ethnic, military and economic structures of Nigerian society', and comes to the conclusion that 'The success or failure of any political system in Nigeria, however constitutional and intricately crafted, will depend on its capacity to control, harness and yet liberate the energies that flow through these channels' (pp. 30–40). However, the author appears to succumb to one of the most popular academic analyses, namely:

When the state itself becomes the key distributor of financial resources – and this in the absence of any socialist ideology – all governmental projects ... become submerged by the intense pressures for the conversion of these projects into means of individual and group appropriation (p. 73).

The tendency of 'campus socialists' is to believe in their slogan that 'socialism is the answer'. But, of course, there is no evidence that the mere presence of an imposed ideology, no matter by whom propounded, can arrest let alone solve socio-economic and political failures. It seems hard to negate the following conclusion in Joseph's book:

The major political challenge which confronts Africa in the next quarter-century of independent rule is to evolve forms of political order in which history is made relevant to the present in a positive way ... such a process is likely to occur less by prescription from above than by the maturing of modern economic and political processes in the towns and villages of African nations (p. 198).

One error that needs to be corrected concerns the statement that 'General Obasanjo declared the creation of seven more states' in 1976 (p. 97), whereas this was made by Murtala Muhammed, who did not live to see its full implementation. As regards the free education policy of the United Party of Nigeria (U.P.N.) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, this could hardly strike much of a cord in the Northern states because it had quietly been in operation there for a long time, with students even being paid transport costs and pocket money. Indeed, the success or failure of Awolowo's campaign must be seen within the context of the whole Federation. His response to why the Northern leaders rejected his overtures, and his rigid control of the U.P.N., are illustrations of how not to fight a national election that you wish to win, not to mention the miscalculations of his researchers. Without holding a brief for any of the political leaders, let me hasten to add that the office-seekers in the electoral campaigns in established and advanced democracies show few, if any, signs of intellectual superiority.

Elections in Nigeria: a grassroots perspective 'tries to explain what Nigerian democracy has meant through Hausa eyes' – namely, those of the 4,000 or so inhabitants of the Yardaji *gunduma* or village area – by providing us with 'an anthropological perspective to the political scientist's domain' (p. 13). William Miles did not set out to conduct 'an electoral study of any nature', but just 'happened' to have settled in Yardaji on the Northern frontier with the aim of making a comparative study of two neighbouring Hausa villages in Nigeria

and Niger. He notes that prior to 1983, only the National Party of Nigeria (N.P.N.) and the People's Redemption Party (P.R.P.) were represented in Yardaji, and this information seems to have suggested the thesis that it looks as if he is sometimes trying to prove:

If the politics of ethnicity were as supreme as often contended, then Yardaji would have been exclusively NPN and/or PRP territory. In fact, not only were the 'non-Hausa parties' represented in the village and the emirate, but their themes and platforms were 'Hausafied' to generate local popularity and acceptance (p. 53).

Miles does not define ethnicity and may have underestimated its salience in Nigerian politics. Given the lag between 1979 and 1983, the following statement would have been a more credible thesis to pursue: 'To assert that Yardaji support for NPN was a simple matter of "ethnopolitics" is to oversimplify, and distort, a more nuanced reality' (p. 63). Within the period, as rightly noted, local rivalries surfaced and people realised the personal benefits to be derived from the celebrated 'decampings'. Moreover, the only non-Hausa party with a credible showing in Yardaji – the Nigerian People's Party (N.P.P.) – was 'Hausafied' by the same Daura-Kano connections emphasised in the book. It must be pointed out that the N.P.P. somehow discouraged its Presidential candidate, Nnamdi Azikiwe, from too much exposure in the far North for fear of enhancing the ethnic factor.

According to Miles, 'the hierarchical basis of Hausa social and political relations, as manifested in *barantaka*, remains fundamental', and although local jokes may be made about the 'big shots' or 'fat cats', 'the legitimacy of their status, prestige, and power...is hardly questioned' (pp. 73–4). He reports that the Emir of Daura 'appears to have faithfully discharged his duty to encourage electoral participation in a relatively nonpartisan manner', even if he 'did exhibit a degree of regionalist preference' (p. 92). Here it should be noted that the latter reference is only a sophisticated way of maintaining the illusion of the homogeneity of the old Northern Nigeria. Although a glossary of Hausa words is provided at the end of the book, certain translations in the text are not given in their spoken context. As a native Hausa speaker, I consider that some of the interpretations and conclusions drawn from reported statements have been overstretched to prove a thesis, and that a number of circular arguments might have been avoided if the concept of *barantaka* clientship had been explored in greater depth.

As a matter of fact, Miles eventually ends with an illustration of the significance of what can best be described as the 'prebendal politics' of Nigeria. After the Second Republic had been terminated by the Nigerian military high command on 1 January 1984, the 'most revealing attitudes' of the inhabitants of Yardaji were not expressed until the day following the *coup d'état*, when the news was received that the new Head of State was Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, a native of nearby Daura: 'Not only did Nigeria have a new ruler, celebrated the people of Yardaji, but this time he was truly one of "theirs"' (p. 117).

How is it that so many non-Nigerian writers, including both Richard Joseph and William Miles, are able to get 'secret'-conscious leaders to offer the kind of frank interviews which are not so readily available to Nigerian

researchers? In any case, it seems clear that the key officials in the Babangida régime have read a great deal of recent literature in this field, as evidenced by the preparations that have been made for the inauguration of the Third Republic. But both *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* and *Elections in Nigeria* ought to be read by anyone concerned with African problems and the need for stable polity. Whereas the former handles the issues faced by the Second Republic in a rather sophisticated way, with a number of theoretical explanations that will be of interest to many social scientists, the latter is written in a more anecdotal style that ought also to appeal to a wider lay audience.

Surprisingly, neither of the authors has touched on the average Nigerian politician's conviction that 'priests' and other allegedly reliable spiritual figures must intercede with God – or a variety of gods, for that matter – on his/her behalf. Sometimes as much as half of the campaign fund of candidates has gone to these metaphysicians. Is this more evidence of 'prebendal politics', where the *Mallams* and *Babalawos* get their share of the national cake, or just a plain belief in the Supreme Being?

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