

BOOKREVIEW

Title: Governance and Development in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Prof. Billy J. Dudley

Editor: Prof. Oyedele Oyediran

Publishers: Oyediran Consult International, Lagos, 1996

Number of Pages: 168

Reviewer. Dr. Tony Edoh

The eight scholarly essays contained in the book are tributes, as the title indicates, to one of Nigeria's earliest Professors of Political Science, Professor Billy Oritsesaninami Dudley. Prof. Billy Dudley as he is popularly known, died rather prematurely in 1980 while occupying a chair in the Department of Political Science at the University of Ibadan, Since then, for reasons that are not now obvious, Nigerian scholars have continued to heap well-deserved accolades on the late scholar.

By all standards, Billy Dudley was not only a trail-blazer but came in his time, to constitute, as per the quality of his work, a benchmark against which the work of his colleagues and successors was assessed. Nor was Professor Dudley's expansive scholarship and the respect that went with it, restricted only to his home country - Nigeria. He was also known and respected outside the shores of Africa. As Professor Dennis Austin aptly notes, Dudley "was a scholar of international esteem whose work was rooted in the study of the politics and government of Nigeria."

As a scholar, Dudley left an enduring academic legacy which will only mellow with the passage of time. The standing of the scholars whose works are contained in the tribute, is clearly a pointer to the respect and reverence with which the memory of the late senior colleague is held. The list of the writers include Erne Awa, the late Claude Ake (themselves Prima Ballerinas of Nigerian Scholarship), Peter Ekeh, Bade Oniumode, and, of course, the editor, Oyediran among others. ,

Reviewing an edited work is, generally speaking rather problematic. There is, for example, the primary difficulties of selecting which chapters to focus upon, and relatedly, that of stamping some form of symmetry on what may well be just a list of disparate topics albeit tenuously strung together by a common title. Two options present themselves as ways out of the dilemma. The reviewer can, for example, do a general assessment of how the basic theme has been addressed across the board. This, prosaically speaking, is the look-at-the-forest approach to get a panoramic view of the issues. The obvious short-coming of this is the possibility of missing or glossing over the strengths of the individual constituent chapters. Concentrating on the forest, as the common wisdom goes, can make us miss the individual trees that make all the difference to the foliage. The second approach is to do a chapter-by-chapter analysis. This presents the opportunity to offer a more detailed examination of the issues raised by the individual authors but at the potential risk of missing the general trend. For maximum benefits, the two approaches shall be used here.

The opening chapter by Erne Awa is an extensive examination of the basis of democracy in Nigeria. Looked at in the Nigerian context, democracy is defined by the distinguished scholar as denoting the "availability of conditions, which ensure the expression of the general will of the community in matters of common interest. In the second place, this general will can be galvanized in such a way as to enable action to be taken by the community to promote the public good", (p.39). Identifying the major indicators of the democratic process as Justice, Freedom, Equality and Fraternity, the conclusion is that the possibilities of democracy in Nigeria, are indeed, bleak. The reader needs not bother that the selection of these indicators are no doubt, eclectic as they are elastic enough to accommodate any other parameters that could well be outstanding. The main obstacle to democratic

governance in Nigeria, Awa appears to conclude, is the heightened sense of political ennui on the part of the country's civil society.

This, obviously, is a disability imposed by the pervasive "ignorance, poverty, disease and squalor" to which the majority of Nigerians are exposed. Juxtaposed against a background of the accretion of power in the hands of a tiny self-serving minority, the inability of the country to develop along democratic contours is thrown starkly into an ominous dark relief. Robert Dahl's rhetoric question, "Who Governs?", in the Nigerian context becomes a matter of which group among the elite has captured power by whatever means. Control of political power and its benefits is purely and essentially an intra-elite affair. This crude appropriation clearly explains the disdain, the insensitivity and the cavalier manner in which these elites have treated the rest of Nigerians.

Awa's handling of this all-important-theme, once again, confirms the old man's reputation as a master-craftsman. His arguments set the broad frame work into which subsequent chapters fit. Depending on the author, differing emphasis are laid on those institutions and or issues that over the years, have contributed to the paralysis of the democratic experiment in the country. Prof. Claude Ake's discussions on the Political Question for example, touched on one of the most vexatious nascent topics in Nigerian politics. Also dubbed "The National Question" by other analyst, the highly variegated issues for which the term has become a useful short-hand, have in recent times, elbowed their way to the forefront of our consciousness as a people. This pervasiveness notwithstanding unfortunately discussions of the National Question have tended to be barren of analytical clarity and objectivity. Quite often, sentiments and vituperations, generally of ethnic-cum-regional ancestry, vitiate an otherwise serious exposition.

Stamping analytical order on the issues, four major dimensions are identified by Ake as germane. These are;

- a. A form of Political Competition in which people seek power by all means, legal or not with the result that politics is debased to warfare and the political system tends to breakdown;
- b. The prevalence of ethnic and sectional loyalties which prevent the emergence of national identity and collective purpose;
- c. A political leadership alienated from masses which maintains power without mandate or accountability and,
- d. Political instability often manifest in disorderly and violent changes of the government, (p.220).

The “minority problem” is another important plank in the larger National question treated in the book. Indeed, quite a number of analysts would agree that the issue of the relationship between the minorities and the majorities in terms of access to the political power, developmental resources, etc. is the kernel of the question. Recent happenings in the Niger-Delta areas and in other parts of the country have tended to reinforce this perspective.

The minority problem is as old as the Nigerian State. It assumed a political identity when the British in the bid to create a larger entity grouped together a multiplicity of erstwhile a combination of force and manipulation as well as the fact that there were few political or economic plums for the indigenous groups to compete for, the British were to peremptorily bottle up the problem during the first fifty years of its control of Nigeria. However, as independence loomed larger on the political horizon in the 1950s, the minorities became more and more restless.

In 1958 the British appointed the Sir Boy Welinck Commission to take an in-depth look at the whole issue of the place of the minorities in the emergent federation and advise as appropriate. But this was how far the British were prepared to go. Reluctant to displease the three majority ethnic groupings through any form of regional restructuring, the geo-political status was allowed to stay, to the chagrin of the minority groupings. Various post-independence governments have grappled with the problem through the implementation of a number of policies and

programmes. The most important among these would include the breakdown of the old regional structure into states which have metamorphosed from the original twelve in 1 %7 to the thirty-six that is the reality today. Also important has been the "adoption and entrenchment of certain key principles as fundamental to the continued existence of Nigerian statehood in the nation's constitutions.

These measures notwithstanding, as Prof. Ekeh indicates in his beautifully written chapter, fee fears of the minorities vis-a-vis the majorities have remained like political sore fingers defying any soothing solutions. From the perspective of fee minorities - clearly where Ekeh is coming from, the key policy option applied in tackling the problem, i.e. states creation, has not succeeded in breaking the hegemonic control of the majorities especially that of the Fulanis. Ekeh's underlying argument is that the persistence of this protracted suspicion has neither been the product of political mediocrity or ineptitude on the part of the ruling Fulani elites nor that of an implacable or recalcitrant posture on the part of the minorities themselves, More directly it is a manifestation of a lack of genuine commitment to the promotion of national unity and development of the pot of the power elites. An interesting argument by the author is his postulation that it no longer makes too much sense to discuss Nigeria's power equations within the framework of losses-gains or minus-plus by the three major ethnic grouping versus the two hundred or so odd groups constituting the minorities. Through sheer political adroitness, Ekeh argued, one of the three - the Hausa/Fulani, has succeeded in diluting the power control of the other two while strengthening its own stranglehold on that vital resources.

The above thesis is one with which many, both within and outside the academic will disagree. While the Hausa/Fulani have no doubt, demonstrated unusual sagacity in the political arena, to imply that they have schemed out their erstwhile competitors, is another thing. In a similar vein, his conclusions that the Fulani

aristocracy has not shown over years serious interest in using its enormous power resources to pursue the democratic alternative in Nigeria will, certainly, ruffle a lot of feathers especially above the Niger-Benue confluence on the leeward side of the Plateau highlands. No matter whose ox is gored, however, the author's central argument that the long-lasting suspicions and disharmony among the various ethnic aggregates in Nigeria, have jinxed development aspirations is incontrovertible.

The role of the military is a very important element in the whole debate on governance and political development in Nigeria. Professor Dudley's work would have scored a serious deficit if he had failed to pay attention to this aspect of the nation's problems. Happily as the editor himself noted, the late scholar was, indeed, very preoccupied with the understanding of the place of the military in Nigeria's political development. It was pointed out that two of Professor Dudley's three books were devoted to the subject matter. These were supported by over a dozen scholarly articles. Dudley's examination of the theme dealt, *inter alia*, with the historical development of the Nigerian military, its ethnic composition, its politicization, military leadership, etc.

The editor's discussions of these issues largely, however combined conjecture with the projective analysis of what Dudley would have said about particular military governments in Nigeria, if he had been around. This is particularly true of the discussions provided on the policies and programmes of the Buhari and the Babangida administrations. The situation, therefore, provided the editor a rather unique opportunity to convey his intellectual feelings about military rule in general and the Babangida's regime in particular. Four areas of the administration's policy programmes come under his analysis. These are issues relating to the administrations dilly-dallying on hand-over dates; its installation of what was obviously an administrative weak-straw-the transitional council; its "ad hoc or fire-fighting approach" to governance; and lastly, its annulment of the June 12 Presidential

election. The score sheet provided for the level of performance in these eclectically selected issue areas are, not unexpectedly, low. But are there any other areas where the verdict could be otherwise? One is tempted to ask. Is it really possible to look for areas of positive changes during these periods without sounding like an apologist?

These and other related issues about the role of the military in Nigeria get a further extensive treatment in chapter six written by Julius Ihonvbere. Ihonvbere was quite unequivocal in his assessment of this role; he stated bluntly.

We contend that military intervention has been a major setback for development and progress in Nigeria because it prevented the politicians from learning from their mistakes strengthening their constituencies and forging the sort of political alliances which can contain crises and instability. As well military rule closes existing democratic spaces, promotes sycophancy and mediocrity, encourages wastes and corruption and more importantly, encourages political arrogance, intolerance and general undemocratic attitudes. The advent of the military in Nigerian politics has done a major dis-service to the nation's political development, (p. 115) Indeed, the role of the military in stifling democracy, in spreading the miasma of corruption, in emasculating the civil society, and in stunting the overall development of Nigeria, cannot be gainsaid. The extensive treatment the subject has received here and in countless other places notwithstanding, a lot of gaps still persist in our understanding of the kaleidoscopic issues involved in military coups, military rule, military regimes and, of course, military disengagement. In the work under review 1, for example, the editor criticized Dudley for not sufficiently distinguishing between the book, the divide is not necessarily clearer. Through-out, no efforts were made to identify these differences even if only for the sake of analytical clarity. What one would have really loved to see (not necessarily in this work per se) is a detailed comprehensive analysis on the totality of effects of

military rule, military regimes and, of course, military disengagement. In the work under review, for example, the editor criticized Dudley for not sufficiently distinguishing between military governments and military regimes. Yet at the end of the day after reading the book, the divide is not necessarily clearer. Throughout, no efforts were made to identify these differences even if only for sake of analytical clarity. What one would have really loved to see (not necessarily in this work per se) is a detailed comprehensive analysis on the totality of effects of military rule on all aspects of the Nigerian society - economic, political, social, etc. Answers on how key issues of National development like freedom, nationalism, equality, etc have been affected by many years of military dictatorship are urgently desire. What tends to be available generally here and there, do not, it would seem to us, provide sufficient basis for the type of conclusive observations needed.

The popular tune is the view that the military in government has been generally bad for the political development of Nigeria. True, military rule in Nigeria cannot be whitewashed even by the longest stretch of the brush but we must also guide against the all-too-easy tendency to gloss over some of the momentous development changes put in place by the military. Many of these, deserve more than the parenthetical recognition accorded them by Ihonvbere.

The Babangida years in particular, came in for some really trenchant criticisms in the book. True as Oyediran aptly captured, during the last years of the administration, there was ample evidence that the regime had boxed itself into a political cul-de-sac. Nobody - not even the three intellectual musketeers (Jinadu, Oyovbaire and Olangunju), who operated as Babangida's alternative advisers, can sweep under the carpet the grime and the murk that characterized those days. But can we really deny the poignancy in the man's rather stoic belief in democracy and in his hops, if not determination, to leave behind a better tomorrow?

.There appeared a sincerity of purpose, at least, when it all started, in his expectations that his government would be the last military -one in the country. His modus operandi, of course, boomeranged in his face forcing him to foist on the nation an inchoate political contraption called "Interim National Government". More than any other leader, Babangida sought to locate and seek solutions to the nation's development problems within the intellectual framework. To this end, he surrounded himself with the best and the brightest of the nation's social scientist; his failure, is therefore, clearly a shared one. In any case, Nigerians were soon to discover, after he "stepped aside" that the worst was yet to come.

There are other articles by Akindele, Onimode and Dudley himself in the book. Akindele examines the consistency, progress and constraints of the nation's foreign policy against the background of the mercurial international environment. Onimode's application of the games theory and the quantitative methodology to the study of governance in Nigeria, is refreshing. He applies the theory to explain the formation of political coalitions and their consequences for Nigeria. The selfishness and the lack of interest in the general public welfare that have characterised the posture of members of the ruling coalitions, have been bad for the masses of the nation generally and the economic growth of Nigeria in particular he concluded.

Conclusion

Clearly, the book is a most fitting honour to one of the national leading social scientists. The eight articles together with the introduction contained therein constitute some of the most seminal in the study of Nigerian government and politics in recent times. From the credentials of the scholars Oyediran got to contribute articles one would, of course expect nothing but the best.

The subject matter - political development, the role of government, the place of the Nigerian citizen and his legitimate expectations from those who ostensibly exercise political power

and authority on his behalf, continue to be highly relevant. More so now as the country is once again, foot-loose in the search for a democratic arrangement that can survive, a revisitation of the issues examined in the book is therefore, heuristic for the academia, the practicing politician and the general public.

Of course, neither Dudley nor Oyediran could have written or said all there is to write or say about the problems of governance and development in Nigeria. The subject is just too wide and no matter how expansive an author is, some things will always either get left completely or, at best, receive only a cursory attention. As the common wisdom goes a work that contains everything, contains nothing.

One such topic not fully addressed in the work, is the issue of corruption and its place in the whole debate of progress or retrogression in Nigeria. More and more observers of the Nigerian political scene are in agreement that a major obstacle to the nation's ability to elevate the quality of lives of its citizens, to provide functional utilities and to even get its citizens to put their acts together politically, is the massive looting of the nation's treasury by elites. We do not agree with Lord Acton that we should not worry about whatever form of government is in place; the fact remains however that whether under the military or civil authority corruption has denied the country billions of dollars that would among other things, have gone not only to accelerate the development process but by extension, strengthen our cohesion and resolve as a nation.

Indeed, what is becoming more and more disturbing is the pervasiveness of corruption, in addition to the unbelievable amount of national resources looted is the hydra-like regeneration process inherent in the practices. From all indicators, corruption is being passed from one generation to another. The unfortunate dimensions to this recycling phenomenon, is the apparent emergence of Nigerians who know no other way (and, apparently do not want to know) of legitimately rendering or receiving services.

AH too quickly they have become enamoured with cutting corners, getting the better of the gullible while jettisoning the values of equity, fair play and patriotism. What appears to be emerging, is a rather frightening Orwellian society where evil is passed as good, injustice as justice while the Shenanigans of the privileged class in concert with those of the charlatans and the counterfeits are celebrated in news headlines and ego-boosting chieftaincy titles. Also worrying, is the view that the rest of us appear to be on the threshold of a kind of collective amnesia - where we forget that the miasma is not and should not be, a way of life.

Among other things Oyediran's book confirms one outstanding feat long ignored, which is that, really no foreign scholar can understand both the dynamics and the problematic of Nigerian politics better than Nigerian scholars. Professor Billy Dudley was a pioneer in this tradition. The publication of this book is a great honour to the quantum of his work but more to the quality of that work Equally it is also attribute to Dudley's lofty but subterranean ideal; this was to liberate, and then indigenise, social science scholarship in Nigeria.