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BOOK REVIEW

Nnoli, O. (2011) *The Struggle for Democracy in Nigeria*. Enugu: Pan Africa Centre for Research and Conflict Resolution (PACREP). 332pp. Price: Not stated

Anthony-Mary Chukwudozie AMALI

Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, NIGERIA

The book, *The Struggle for Democracy in Nigeria* is a masterpiece account of democratic experience in Nigeria, written by Okwudiba Nnoli, erudite scholar and renowned professor of political science. Published by Pan Africa Centre for Research and Conflict Resolution (PACREP), Enugu in 2011, the book contains ten chapters in three hundred and thirty-two (332) pages. The book traces the roots of the current challenges of democracy in Nigeria to the country's colonial past. The colonial state, he argued, was authoritarian, oppressive, repressive, unjust and illegitimate, hence, was not acceptable to the people as a result of which struggle ensued between it and the various classes it created.

The peasants were the first to confront it. But they were crushed by the colonial occupiers. The petty bourgeois succeeded the peasants. But they only wished to indigenize colonial occupation, not end it as the peasants had wanted. Hence, when in power, the author argued, they interpreted democracy merely as governmental illegitimacy, to be solved by electoral reforms but on the other hand; they intensified the anti-democratic nature of the inherited state. Using social struggle theoretical perspective, the author shows how new pro-democratic forces have emerged from the working people and the left wing of the petty bourgeoisies to confront this indigenized anti-democratic state (chapters 2, 3 and 4). But regretted that their struggle has been plagued by organizational inadequacies, absence of an appropriate ideology, philistinism, lack of initiative in setting of political agenda, isolated struggle, top-down rather than bottom-up approach to mass mobilization etc.

In chapter one, the author raised three questions he set out to answer in the book which are what is the status of democracy in Nigeria? How has it come about? And what is its future? To achieve this, the author traced the historical character of this democracy, particularly the forces that shape it and others that have constrained it. He agrees that democracy has become the world accepted form of government because its appealing to

the oppressed peoples of the world whose yearnings for freedom, equality and justice are daily being frustrated. He further extols the invention of Democracy which according to him is the highest achievement of mankind in social and political relation. He was optimistic in saying that it is a product of sweat, toil, creativity, blood and sacrifice of millions of people across space and time in the human struggle for a better life (pp2).

The author identified two epistemological approaches to the understanding of democracy which are philosophical idealism and philosophical materialism. He averred that they have different consequences for political action, especially political engineering. The philosophical idealism according to Nnoli is the tradition of analysis from Plato to Hegel and beyond. It is metaphysical in character, presuming a certain immanent order in nature, which stands above society, and which serves as an ideal that all societies should strive to attain. Such an order does not vary in time and space and, therefore, can be transposed from one historical epoch to another; and from one part of the globe to another.

More importantly, those societies which approximate this ideal order more closely than others the author argues are superior to these others, and in fact have duty, if not a right, to spread their pattern of life to the rest of mankind (pp 6). This kind of thinking underlines Hegel's and Nazi concept of the master race, and the rationalization of colonialism and other forms of imperialism. The metaphysical character of this intellectual and analytical tradition, the author opined is the basis for foreign economic, cultural, ideological and political domination of one society by another. The deficiencies of philosophical idealism the author remarked makes it unsuitable for understanding democracy in Nigeria.

Philosophical materialism rejects the metaphysical conception of social life purveyed by philosophical idealism. Instead, it sees social life as beginning and ending with concrete human beings whose needs lead them to production. Therefore, there is no human order outside that created by the laws of social interaction, which manifest themselves only through human activity (pp11). In this way it incorporates Hegel's dialectics but asserts that the dialectic occurs in matter not idea. In this respect it always considers the relation between social being and social consciousness. This enables it to explain the laws of history not as the effect of some mysterious forces directing human affairs, or the result of some fortuitous movement toward an ideal state of affairs, but as the effect of recurrent patterns manifesting themselves through concrete human activity, through people's struggles to attain specific goals.

Historical materialism insists that ideas arise from society, are anchored in social realities and service the society. Therefore, they must be understood within the context of local conditions. They cannot serve as ideal imposed on local conditions, which are then forced to conform to this ideal. In other words, social, political, cultural and religious relations organized on the basis of such ideas cannot be set above society, or understood in isolation from the material basis of society. Thus democracy must be understood within

the context of the local situation, particularly the material conditions of that situation. It is in line with this philosophical materialism, that Nnoli defined democracy as “that political society in which social struggle are leading to decreasing domination, oppression, injustice and exploitation, as well as increasing legitimacy” (pp21). The impact of this his definition is that domination, oppression, injustice, exploitation and illegitimacy may never be completely eliminated in society.

Chapter five discusses the Response of Civilian Regimes to democratic struggle where the author argued that the petty bourgeois civilian regimes failed woefully to confer legitimacy on their governments. Their approach to legitimacy was the organization of free and fair elections. It was generally understood that independence should translate, in part, to democratic government, and that this should give the citizens the right to choose their representatives through a voting process. In the event, petty bourgeois civilian elections not only produced illegitimacy governments, they also spilt the politicians and their supporters into hostile factions that used violence against one another in what the author called “the corruption of the electoral process”. They failed to create the structural conditions that would enable the masses to make effective and appropriate choice during election. These explain why we have ethnic and religious politics in Nigeria political culture. The lack of structural conditions explains also why we have fraud and political illusion. It is not surprising, therefore, that the petty bourgeois civilian regimes collapsed and gave rise to the emergence of military rule in Nigeria which the author discussed in chapter six and seven under the title “Military Rule as Anti-Thesis of Democracy and Military Rule and the intensification of the struggle for democracy”. The Military is the antithesis of democracy with regard to its norms, values, purpose and structure. It addresses the extreme and the extra-ordinary, while democracy addresses the routine. The military thrives on discipline and hierarchy, democracy on freedom and equity. The author quoting Ake, (1996) further stressed that military entails chain of command, while democracy is anarchy of diversity. Democracy presupposed human sociability; the military is total absence and inhuman extremity of killing the opposition. One is a tool of violence, the other a means of consensus building. The military is oriented to law and order, democracy to diversity, contradiction and competition. Nnoli, concluded that like petty bourgeoisies, the military which he described as the militant petty bourgeois also failed to promote democracy because by their nature they cannot consolidate democracy. In his presentation on the impact of globalization on the struggle in chapter eight, the author argued that from 2011 Arab spring, the world witnessed a successful struggle of the people for democracy in Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, Bahram, Syria and Egypt. But he was quick to add that Globalization in itself in advanced world continued exploitation using capitalism, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism hence cannot ensure emancipation of the people and productive democracy that will empower the people for better life.

Finally, in chapter ten, the author in conclusion suggested a radical change of the method of struggle, which must be non-violence and mass oriented and the need for the civil societies to awake to their responsibilities to ensure that elected petty bourgeoisies account for their action and inaction. The democracy that must bring development for the people must be productive democracy that looks inward for solution of third world countries like Nigeria.

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Biographical Note

Anthony-Mary Chukwudozie AMALI is doctoral candidate in the Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, NIGERIA. [Email: anthonymary58@gmail.com](mailto:anthonymary58@gmail.com)