

to reevaluate federalism may lead to the disintegration of the nation along ethnic or tribal lines. But they overlook the gross injustice of one or two ethnic groups taking others hostage through the monopoly of State or economic power. Our cohabitation has not been based on core values, mutual interests and objectives emanating from frank dialogue where the freedom of each group is respected.

The time is ripe for all segments of the Nigerian society, all regions and ethnic groups, all associations - religious, professional or otherwise - to assemble and discuss the national question, in order to lay the firm foundation for the emergence of a Nigerian nation. Eboussi has shown us in his book that such a conference, whose agenda must vary in accordance with the divergent situations and histories of the amalgamated societies, has the potentialities of carrying Africa forward. Those who oppose it, and deny the voice of the majority because they hold military power, are the real enemies of progress. Progress in Nigeria and in post-colonial Africa must be built upon the firm foundations of truthfulness and liberty.

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2. Olusegun Obasanjo and Akin Mabogunje (editors), **Elements of Democracy**. Abeokuta, Nigeria: ALF Publications, 1992, xi+212 pages.

General Obasanjo's farm is useful to Nigeria for at least two reasons. First, it helps feed a hungry nation. Second, it provides a haven for creative thinking in the service of the nation. **Elements of Democracy** is a fruit of such a creative thinking. It is the outcome of a number of dialogues, by intellectuals of international fame, on democracy. These dialogues took place when Nigerians were trying to make sense of Babangida's program for transition to democracy. The circumstances of the time dictated the topics discussed by the participants in the Farm House Dialogue; informed the

conclusions they reached, and determined the recommendations they made to the government. Their overriding concern is to secure a stable democracy in Nigeria. This concern is the guiding thread of the arguments of the book. It makes it easier to appreciate the many recommendations by the book.

The book contains eleven chapters, a detailed and very useful index, and a complete list of the names and addresses of the participants in the Democracy Dialogue. The contents of the eleven chapters form a very good analysis of the dynamics of a once-colonized African nation struggling to define its identity, and to articulate a vision of its future, using the ideal of democracy as a guide. While maintaining that democracy is the way out, the book insists that democracy as defined by the West is not for Nigeria given: the prevailing level of poverty and illiteracy; the resilience of traditional institutions; the dominant presence of an over-politicized military which has subjected the nation to so many years of government by decrees with its attendant flagrant abuse of human rights; and the peculiar nature of Nigeria as a multi-national nation characterized by religious pluralism.

It is clear from the book that the Nigerian terrain is an over-determined one. Any meaningful project of building a political democracy in it must take into account the insights gained from a thorough analysis of this terrain.

For at least three reasons, the book will outlive the establishment of a viable democracy in Nigeria. First, future historians will always find it a useful reference material in their bid to reconstruct the period in Nigerian history when a starving nation was ruled by decrees by an over-politicized military which lacked the will to effect a change in the direction of greater freedom for all. Second, the penetrating and insightful analysis of the different forces at work in Nigeria will always make it easier to appreciate the difficulties involved in governing a complex nation. Third, its insistent demand for an African-styled democracy will always be seen as prophetic. Its warning is unmistakable: to be rooted in its traditional values is the most effective way of securing a nation's identity in the family of nations. For these reasons and more, the book is destined to reward any reading, no matter how casual.

To be more rewarding, however, a number of issues raised in the book needs to be fine-tuned by a future edition. Four of these come readily to mind.

First, a future edition should tidy up the concept of African democracy. Present attempts to define "democracy" in the book are, at best, only restatements of some of the very many definitions available in the West (see pp. 2, 12, 118). It is not enough to insist that Western-styled democracy is not for Africa (pp. 30, 40, 98 and 179 for example). A coherent concept of African democracy is necessary to guard against the concept becoming so fuzzy that forms of government like gerontocracy qualify for membership in a summit of democracies.

Second, the book urges a radical transformation of the electoral attitude of the populace (p. 7). This transformation is seen as necessary for establishing democracy in Nigeria. But if the Nigerian situation is as corrupt as the analysis leads one to believe, the reader needs to be told how the transformation will hopefully be effected. Who, for example, is the subject of this transformation process? The corrupt military? The inexperienced politicians who exploit ethnic and religious sentiments for their selfish ends? This is the thorny question Karl Marx raised years ago: Who educates the educator?

Third, a future edition should reproduce, in the interest of the readers, a good chunk of the arguments of the Dialogue. Most of what we have in the book (apart from the papers presented by some of the participants) are conclusions reached by the participants and recommendations made by them. This explains the copious use of such expressions as: "The Dialogue noted", "The Dialogue agreed", "The Dialogue observed", etc.

Fourth, a future edition should examine more critically the link between human nature and democracy. In its present form, the link is simply asserted, not argued (p. 106). It will be interesting to know which of the many theories of human nature should ground the theory and practice of democracy in the African context.

In spite of these and similar gaps to be filled by a future edition, *Elements of Democracy* remains a significant contri-

bution to the project of building a stable democracy in Nigeria. It is a book that has to be read by all interested in moving countries like Nigeria in a direction that resounds with more freedom for all.

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