

“Small by Small, Nigeria dey Burn”

Sanya Osha

This House has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria by Karl Maier
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A feature that most commentators would not fail to discern about Nigeria is its legendary resilience. One always marvels at how the dysfunctional country manages to stumble from one crisis to another without experiencing a decisive debacle or irreversible slide towards genocidal conflict like other African nations such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Sudan and Somalia.

All the ingredients that could cause the final dismemberment of the nation are present in copious amount: virulent ethnicity, massive governmental corruption, an over-ambitious and undisciplined military establishment, religious intolerance, widespread crime leading to a breakdown of law and order, acute pauperisation of large segments of the population, collapsed social services and many more minuses.

Karl Maier's *This House has Fallen* is certainly one of the most interesting

accounts of what may be termed the Nigerian crisis in recent times. Maier's journalistic expertise and lengthy sojourn in Nigeria, coupled with an easy and convincing familiarity with the country's actual antecedents and intellectual history, have combined to produce, for the most part, an engaging if somewhat off-beat chronicle of contemporary Nigerian history.

Even more importantly, Maier's effort offers new theoretical insights for reading the Nigerian situation. Nigeria's geographical and demographic largeness, its cascading pluralisms and its multiple nexuses of undoubtedly problematic cohesion are perhaps some of the reasons that prevent it from going in the way of former Yugoslavia and Somalia. Where there is no literal centre, in a way that Benedict Anderson might have recognized, that centre would never be at great risk. Such is the nature of the theoretical dimension one is forced to acknowledge.

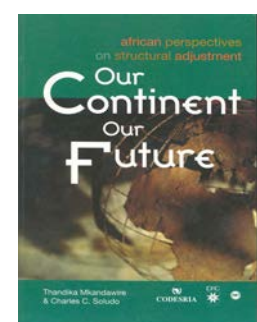
Being the fifth largest supplier of petroleum in the world and the most populous black nation on the global map, it is not in anyone's interest to see Nigeria disintegrate. The civil war in Liberia had been a very costly affair in terms of human lives and U.S. taxpayer's

money and yet the country has less than half the population of Lagos. Maier lists some of Nigeria's intractable problems:

Ethnic and religious prejudices have found fertile ground in Nigeria, where there is neither a national consensus nor a binding ideology. Indeed, the virulent spread of virulent strains of chauvinism in Nigeria is part of the world wide phenomenon playing out in Indonesia, the Balkans, the former Soviet Union (xx).

Applying this broad explanatory blueprint, Maier goes on to supply an impressive array of detail and evidence on how these various problems hinder Nigeria from assuming what is regarded as its rightful place among the comity of nations. When talking among themselves, Nigerians usually cynically conclude that the country's problems are so countless and endless there is no point dwelling on the issue.

Maier's book presents a discursive model of the diverse elements that give Nigeria its present gnarled formation, and that model needless to say is deeply disturbing and in most cases unsavoury.



Despite two decades of Structural Adjustment programs imposed on African countries by the Bretton Woods Institutions, African countries are still plagued by extreme poverty and underdevelopment. *Our Continent, Our Future* is the very first publication to present the African perspective on the Bretton Woods approach to structural adjustment, and it does so with the input and support of top economists and scholars from every corner of Africa. The book calls for a much broader policy agenda and for a much more active role of the state within what is largely a market economy. This important book should be read by all those concerned with the future of Africa and with issues of sustainable and equitable development.

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