

that is closest to the ‘average Nigerian’, through self-managed initiatives and schemes for revenue generation as opposed to the often proposed ‘power-rotating’, ‘revenue allocation’ avenues which can only have the effect of fermenting ethnic divisions and deepening centre-based politics.

The implicit conclusion supports the empowerment of the ‘average Nigerian’ through a de-institutionalization of ‘ethnicization’. To re-visit the second paragraph of this review, it is Bah’s acknowledgement of the fundamental nature of poverty that not only sets his writing apart from much of the literature on the subject of ethnicity in Nigeria, but also brings a much needed ‘freshness’ to this part of the literature. In its economic, social, political, and psychological narratives, it is poverty and lack of proper representation that has led to the corrosion of Nigeria’s democratic struggle, regardless of ethnic diversity, and despite many of the concerted efforts by some in the political classes to achieve national cohesion and developmental progress. As Bah emphasizes, it is by reconstructing power closer to ‘the people’ that the democratic and nation building process in Nigeria may prove sustainable.

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The Military and the Nigerian State, 1966–1993: A study of the strategies of political power control, by Adegboyega Isaac Ajayi. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007. x + 188 pp. \$24.95 (paperback). ISBN 1-592221-568-8.

Adegboyega Isaac Ajayi’s book discusses the strategies used by the military in Nigeria to hold on to power between 1966 (when a group of military officers seized power from the politicians) and 1993 (when General Ibrahim Babangida was ousted and the most peaceful election conducted in the history of the country was cancelled). This book marks a departure from the works of well-known students of civil–military relations such as Bayo Adekanye. Instead of discussing the numerous clampdowns on opposition or dwelling on the over-examined discussion of how the military, through their national and international collaborators, stole the resources of the country, Ajayi turns to the numerous structures and strategies the military employed in order to remain in power and to present itself as a legitimate form of government – indeed, as the best form for the people as a whole.

Ajayi distinguishes between overt and covert strategies. The former involved the use and establishment of several military intelligence outfits, and the promulgation and amendment of legal decrees that were needed to position the military to achieve its goal of remaining in power even as times and circumstances changed. These decrees entailed the establishment and restructuring of educational institutions, which were needed to equip the military with the tools for dealing with civil society in a political framework. The best-known of these institutions include: the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, the Nigerian Defence Academy, the Nigerian Military School and the Nigerian War College. The curricula of all these institutions went through a series of modifications during the period in question. The Nigeria Defence Academy, for instance, was upgraded to university status, while the curricula of the others were fashioned to educate military personnel in areas outside their conventional training.

According to Ajayi, the military also saw the need to manipulate religion in order to satisfy some influential religious groups and personalities. He argues that

General Yakubu Gowon recognized Nigeria's observer status in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1976 in order to buy the support of the northern elites. He traces how Babangida then secretly changed Nigeria's status from an observer to a full member of the OIC in 1986. These changes infuriated Nigeria's Christians – led by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) – who felt that the government was trying to transform the nation into an Islamic state. While such quarrels initially seem inimical to the preservation of the *status quo*, the motive for any decision was based on its popularity among the class of civil society who had the power to allow the military to remain in government.

I find Ajayi's recommendation that the civilian government should 'reduce the numerical strength of the military to a manageable proportion' (p. 160) unconvincing. The most democratic nation in the world requires a good army for security against internal and external aggression. Indeed without a good army a democracy cannot effectively execute certain aspects of its foreign policies, which include but are not limited to warfare. And it is a truism that a country is sometimes accorded a desired place in the comity of nations because of the strength of its army. Military dictatorship, in spite of its recklessness, has contributed greatly to peacekeeping missions in West Africa since the 1960s.

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Constructions of Belonging: Igbo communities and the Nigerian state in the twentieth century, by Axel Harneit-Sievers. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006. ix + 388 pp. £40 (hardback). ISBN 1-58046-167-0.

The Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria have continued to fascinate Africanists of diverse interests. This is largely due to the paradigmatic levers provided by the group's pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial formations for conventional (and not so conventional) wisdom on Africa. These arise from and include the large numbers of members of the group sold into and freed from the slave trade; the relative success of Christianity in Igboland and the perception of the group as an African Christian group (a view that probably fed the 'lost Jewish tribe' myth and was certainly a major identity point in the Nigerian civil war); the dynamic construction and reconstruction of group identity (or the attempt to construct a monolithic identity) within the context of high population density, land hunger, massive migration, contested sub-group histories and identities and changing local, national and global circumstances; the centrality of the Igbo in Nigeria's big group politics, and its pioneering roles in secession and civil war nationalism as well as post-war integration in Africa; the strong traditions of self-help development, autonomy and local governance; as well as the vivid narratives of complex 'indigenous' encounters with colonialism and modernity in Chinua Achebe's classic *Things Fall Apart* and other popular art forms.

Clearly, the Igbo 'paradigm' is as extensive as it is multi-disciplinary. Although the primary focus of this book, set within a refreshing constructivist framework, is how Igbo identity is constructed and has navigated through its historical and contemporary settings, an encyclopaedic perspective emerges of Igbo studies in its multi-disciplinary (anthropology, linguistics, sociology, political science, religion, philosophy, history, geography, art) entirety. It is an exhaustive study that covers virtually everything that is of significance in Igbo ethnography and development. It ranges from efforts to reproduce hegemonic Igbo nationhood in the image of