

house' (100). Most episodes familiar to readers from other versions of this tradition are included here, from the buffalo-woman, Do Kamissa, to Jolofin *mansa* and his horses. One memorable episode is absent: Sumaworo's seduction by Sunjata's sister, revealing his vulnerability to the spur of a white cock.

The narrative is accompanied by a wide-ranging and authoritative introduction (lacking only consideration of historical claims made for this oral tradition), helpful notes, a glossary, list of major characters, suggestions for further reading, and two maps. These sections are revised versions of those found in the 2004 edition. Together they create the best English-language introductory volume on Sunjata available today.

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NIGERIA'S TWENTIETH CENTURY

Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century.

By Richard Bourne.

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Richard Bourne, the author of *Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century*, straddles different worlds: for many years, he was a journalist; an administrator with the Commonwealth Institute; a research fellow at the University of London; and, a director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. This quick list of accomplishments explains the book in terms of the language of presentation, orientation, and key emphases. Bourne aligns himself with the aspirations of struggling people, while not minimizing the role of the state. Indeed, he dedicates the book to Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, an icon of human rights campaigns. Bourne is well read and knowledgeable about Nigeria, and the examples he uses to illustrate his key points, including anecdotes, show the extent of his contacts with people, both low and mighty.

The preface to the book starts with a startling confession: 'Anyone who claims to understand Nigeria is either deluded, or a liar' (ix). But Bourne understands Nigeria in this long book of 320 pages, full of wonderful information, cogent analysis, and bright insights. The history that he narrates here is clear enough, starting from the amalgamation of northern and southern provinces in 1914, through to the struggles for independence from 1939 to 1960, the disasters and civil war of the 1960s, and the political instability instigated and managed by the military from 1965 to 1989, to the period of the late 1990s when 'democracy' returned. As the book presents its data, the democratic moment since 1999 has seen a series of crises. The last section closes with what Bourne calls 'reflections', focusing on four elements that he regards as the most pervasive and destructive: the linkage between politics and money-making; the dangerous role of religion and ethnicity; the destructive impact of oil; and the difficulty of keeping a plural society together.

Bourne understands Nigeria both from the angle of power (those who make decisions) and citizens (those who bear the brunt of mistakes). His narrative is compelling and grounded in good evidence, including oral evidence collected in private. He successfully tracks the major historical phases, spelling out the characteristics of each in a digestible style. Specialists may not find much new in the narrative, but Bourne's intention is not to provide an original account, but an accessible one. In doing so, the book is a tremendous success.

One is not sure from the contents and tone whether Nigeria is making progress or declining. The book is forced to deal with this contradiction, as it narrates newness in terms of changes to the economy and politics. However, there are clear and disguised signs about elements that are vanishing, such as the non-corrupt values required to build enduring institutions. The book captures many great moments in the country's history, including the foundation of a modern economy and politics, vibrant nationalist politics, and great fights for human rights and democracy. All the major cities are bustling, as in the case of Abuja, Lagos, and Port-Harcourt. Everywhere seems to be in some kind of motion, with sprawling spaces. Discussions on culture are usually positive, just as elements of it are lived on a daily basis.

The country continues to grow and this much is evident in the book, suggesting that the future will be reshaped in ways that we cannot predict. The reality expressed in negative media coverage and the events on the ground do not always match. There is an economic and political slide, as admirably captured in this book, but there is social and cultural uplift as the country bustles with youthful energy with new films and music being produced on a daily basis. Renewed vitality can be seen in all the major cities, in the content and stories of Nollywood films, in new literature, and even in far-reaching fusions of new art and food.

Let me simplify how to read this fascinating book. If your time is short, it is best to read the last section (pages 241–65) to understand the conceptual framework that drives the long historical narrative and its politics, economy, conflicts and war. Then read the afterword, which is about the election of Muhammadu Buhari, the first time in the country's history that the opposition party won an election. Bourne praises the electoral victory of March 2015 that brought Buhari to power, a transition that promised change. The book closes with very cautious and optimistic words: 'With so many problems to be solved, it was unrealistic to suppose that a change of government alone would have magical results. What Nigerians had shown, however, was impressive resilience, with more confidence in the future of themselves and their state' (275).

Barely a year later, Nigerians are expressing disappointment at Buhari's management of the country, expecting changes that are slow to emerge. Rather than offering them change from Aso Rock, the presidential villa, Buhari is now calling on individuals to be the change agents. A number of Nigerians are even saying 'bring back corruption', if this will pump money into the economy, a rather strange call that ignores its damaging institutional consequences. With inflation and the fall of the naira against the American dollar, Nigeria has become ever more unpredictable and difficult to analyze. Alas! Maybe Bourne is right after all that 'Anyone who claims to understand Nigeria is either deluded, or a liar'.

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