BOOK REVIEW

Title of Book: Stakeholders at War in Nigeria: From Lord Lugard to President Goodluck Jonathan (Volumes 1 and 2)
Author: Professor Tekena N. Tamuno
Publisher: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig) Ltd, Ibadan, Nigeria
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Reviewer: Isaac Olawale Albert*  

In his widely cited 1991 publication Peace and Violence in Nigeria, Professor Tekena Tamuno promised to publish another volume that would update his assessment of the security challenges confronting Nigeria. That promise has now been more than fulfilled in the volumes we are presenting to the public today. The 1991 publication is a one-volume book; what Baba Tamuno is presenting to us today is a two-volume book of 508 pages and the title, indeed, speaks volumes: Stakeholders at War in Nigeria: From Lord Lugard to President Goodluck Jonathan. Nigeria is at war and we can all feel it through cut the length and breadth of our country. What Professor Tamuno does in this book is to provide a dissection of this war or, rather, this multiplicity of wars and explain to us in socio-historical perspective the trajectory of their escalation.

Tamuno’s new book has to do with how Nigeria, a country that has all it takes to be amongst the best and greatest in the world, has always found itself on the verge of disintegration. Its plight is such that most of those born immediately after independence in 1960 do not know what it means to live in an orderly society. The book paints a diachronic picture of

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how different stakeholders contest the ownership of the Nigerian state by beating on ethnic and religious war drums. And as with all such enactments, the number of people who dance to the beat of these drums is often much larger than the number of the drums.

Tamuno reflects on the Nigeria-Biafran civil war, incidents of ethnic and religious conflicts, the military intrusion into Nigerian politics, elite fragmentation, political brinksmanship and security racketeering in Nigerian society. The author identifies as the foundation to all these problems the quackery of the 1914 amalgamation of the North and South by Lord Lugard. Since then, the Nigerian project has been one traumatic work in progress. The future is dark if not bleak.

The first volume of the publication comprises eight sections while the second is made up of four sections bringing everything to twelve sections. In the first section, the term “stakeholder” is defined as “a supporter, defender or protector with a stake”. But do stakeholders need to destroy what they claim to own? This question leads Tamuno into differentiating between fake and genuine stakeholders. He argues that the term “stakeholder” is today misrepresented in Nigerian society and this is the epicentre of our problems (p. 5). Tamuno delves into where and how Nigeria actually missed the opportunity for sustainable nation building. According to him, Nigerians oftentimes behave as though they reject Good own plan and blueprint, which is, in the biblical phrase, to make Nigeria a land flowing with milk and honey. Many so-called stakeholders in Nigeria even go as far as invoking false oaths in the name of God, not to mention the Constitution, only to keep themselves busy in activities that turn the “Nigerian project” into a veritable nightmare in which ordinary citizens are caught up in the deadly crossfire of real and surreal missiles being continually hurled by the elite class who are fragmented along egoistic lines.

Tamuno laments Nigerians’ big appetite for criminality and the egregious failure in law enforcement in the country. He deplores a situation in which secret societies are gaining more clout in Nigerian society, shrinking the space for people to live a civic existence in “open society”. He takes a
critical look at the sociology of violent cultism in the country. With focus on the Okija shrine reports in 2004, Tamuno wonders why Nigerian society seems helpless about dealing with the dangers posed by cultism. Part of the problem, according to him, is the fact that the courts of law still find it difficult to convict several of the people tried for cultism. Hence, most of those arrested at Okija in 2004 and 2005 never got convicted on the grounds that “Ogwugwu shrine is not a secret cult under the Nigerian law” (p.346). The Okija shrine is licensed by the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC).

Taking a critical look at the events in Nigeria since independence, Tamuno argues that the 1960,1963,1979, and 1999 constitutions seemed to have done nothing but provide official sanctions for the blind to be led by the blind and for criminals to be granted official protection. This led to the secessionist threats of the 1950s; the political crisis of 1966; the Nigerian civil war; and the insurgency of the likes of the OPC, MASSOB, Egbesu Boys, MEND and now the Boko Haram. So real is the problem for us that we cannot even take solace in the demise of that doomsayer, Muammar Gaddafi, who in 2010 made the suggestion that Nigeria break into two along religious lines as though there were a clear-cut North-South dichotomy in the country in relation to the location of religious adherents of whatever faiths. There is no such dichotomy and Gaddafi is dead, but our problems persist. Our history in relation to these problems, Tamuno reminds us, is that Nigeria learns no lessons from any of its past mistakes and it seems every new regime in the country works towards surpassing its predecessor in creating new problems for the nation. In the contest to monopolize power and the benefits that accrue from it, Nigerian politics has been reduced to mafia gangsterism, with the various security agencies in the country either looking the other way or putting up a theatrical performance in the form of legal prosecution of the destroyers of our commonwealth. Under the present situation, Tamuno says that only a few Nigerians and Nigerian leaders and “elder statesmen” opt to be on the path of righteousness. Yet, Nigeria aspires to be one of the best twenty
economies in the world by the year 2020. He argues that the Biblical manna stopped falling from heaven long before the Nigerian state was created: development does not come out of the blues, it has to be worked for. Nigeria does not strike him as a country that takes sustainable development seriously.

Tamuno tracks down the relationship between the Nigerian civil war and the emergence of non-state armed groups in recent times. The historical connections that may have been lost on many of us are made to command central attention in order to drive home the thesis, to paraphrase Chinua Achebe that the rain started to beat us a long time ago. In every decade since the 1950s, Tamuno’s account shows that Nigeria has faced major crises one after the other. We may want to think to ourselves that it has survived these numerous crises and has thus grown stronger. But the opposite seems to be the case. What may have been occurring are periodic lulls only for the problems to rear their heads once more in more frightening intensity each time. The recurrence and worsening of our many crises only cast Nigeria in the mould of a failed state that cannot take care of itself.

Among other things, Tamuno is particularly worried about the present marginalization of the Igbo in Nigerian politics and argues that the much awaited light at the end of the dark tunnel might not come now as the Igbo are never united even on how to improve their condition. They act individually rather than corporately. This, according to him, would continue to fuel MASSOB’s secessionist threats and heighten the security situation in the Southeast. However, he argues that almost all Nigerian groups today allege marginalization or “internal colonialism”. The “colonialists” in this case are regional groups or ethnic neighbours. Nigeria lacks the peace architecture that can address the issues raised by these different groups or prevent future confrontations among them. This is why stakeholders prefer to settle their differences through war. The Nigerian state, which is supposed to be the umpire that can call these groups to order and bring them to agree on a settlement, seems now to have become overwhelmed. As President Goodluck Jonathan runs from pillar to pole to deal with the highly
challenging security environment, those eyeing the position of the President of Nigeria are indirectly warned to think twice as the job is becoming more nightmarish.

Tamuno takes stock of how Nigeria responds to all these challenges of nation building, particularly calling our attention to the use of force in dealing with youth militancy in the Niger Delta as well as the insurgencies of the OPC, Bakassi boys, MASSOB, and the Jos and Boko Haram crises. He argues that these management strategies create more fears in the society and raise questions as to the health of the nation. He gives quality attention to the discussion of the goals, insurgency tactics and the impact of the ongoing Boko Haram crisis and blames the situation on politicians’ penchants for empowering non-state armed groups as well as the poor capacity of law enforcement agencies to manage such groups. To properly balance the equation, he assesses the capacity of all the law enforcement institutions in Nigeria to actionably deal with the security challenges besetting Nigeria with particular focus on the police, civil defence, ICPC, EFCC and the judiciary. He concludes that a great deal is yet to be done by these organizations in terms of interagency collaboration, training and readiness to abide by the rule of law.

Among recent political actors at the national helm of affairs, Tamuno takes a critical look at Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as a problem solver. He combines exceptional military talents with controversial statecraft. His alleged “third term ambition” affects his image. OfAlhaji Umaru Yar’Adua, Tamuno says he did not have enough time to provide leadership but his successor, Goodluck Jonathan, now bears the burden of the uncompleted works of Obasanjo and the politics of Yar ‘Adua’s exit from office.

In the last section of this great publication, Tamuno reflects on whether Nigeria has made any progress since 50 years of independence or not. He starts his analysis with the speech delivered by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria’s Prime Minister on October 1, 1960 when Nigeria gained independence. It was a speech of hope and great expectations. He argues that this hope was dimmed shortly after the country’s independence to the
extent that successive celebrations of Nigeria's independence have only been a sheer waste of resources as Nigeria, self-acclaimed ‘Giant of Africa’, is now widely written off as a “crippled giant”. It is a country of many military coups, a country that finds it difficult to hold free and violence-free elections; a country where ethnic and religious groups fly flags of secession. It is a country where ordinary citizens express their daily fear, anger and wrath at the expense of one another. It is a country where the love of money has killed all the hormones of patriotism. It is a country in which leaders, or rather entrepreneurs of violence, aggravate the anguish of the maddening crowd they claim to be leading for the purpose of reaping dubious political dividends. To summarize the many biblical references in this book, Tamuno presents Nigeria as a country that needs to turn to God and the path of righteousness to avoid becoming a mere footnote in world history.

This publication speaks volumes about Professor Tamuno’s unusual energy at age 80; it speaks of his academic profundity and, above all, of his excellent ability to combine historical, philosophical, and social science analytical tools in presenting to his reader the objective realities of Nigeria since 1914. This is the real story of Nigeria. In the foreword to the book, Professor Eghosa Osagie, the former Director of Research, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Jos, pays glowing tribute to Professor Tamuno’s scholarship in this respect. He describes Tamuno as a “disciplined historian” who “exhibits a contemplative and philosophical approach to his subject matter”. The vastness of the issues covered in this book and the lucid way in which they are presented demonstrate why Professor Tamuno remains among the best historians that the modern world, and not just Africa or Nigeria, has ever produced. Professor Tamuno’s Stakeholders at War in Nigeria is a must-read for all those who seek to be properly educated on how Nigeria came to its present sorry state. I welcome the reader to delve into and dwell on what he has to say in these two volumes. They provide a picture that does not deceive.