

migrations—a theme that has been debated for more than a century and continues to be of major political relevance in Igboland today. In Nigerian political discourse, the precolonial ‘statelessness’ of Igbo society (that is, its lack of large-scale structures of political organization beyond the level of the village group) is often perceived as a deficit, placing the Igbo at a disadvantage, in terms of prestige, against other major ethnic groups. As a solid historian, Afigbo continues to reject popular views that identify—or rather invent—statehood and kingship in precolonial Igbo society. Instead, he presents a model of the migratory history of south-eastern Nigeria where the Igbo form of socio-political organization (characterized by small-scale organization with a very limited degree of social and political stratification, and organized around kinship and religious ritual) appears as the ‘original’ form—that is, the one that existed throughout southern Nigeria before secondary migrations from the Niger-Benue confluence area introduced state or state-like structures on a larger scale (i.e. the Yoruba states, the Benin kingdom and the Nri centre of religious influence) at some time in the second half of the first millennium CE. Afigbo even claims that southern Nigeria as a whole was originally settled by ‘Mega-Igbo’/‘greater Igbo’ (his terminology varies in different essays) who spoke a proto-Kwa language; and that out of this larger group, only the ‘Micro-Igbo’/‘lesser Igbo’ (i.e. the Igbo as known today) kept their original structures of socio-political organization in the longer run (‘The Idea of Igbo History’, published in 2000, MHS Chapter 1; ‘Igbo Genesis’, written in 2000, IHS Chapter 6; ‘Igbo Enwe Eze: Beyond Onwumechili and Onwuejeogwu’, published in 2002, IHS Chapter 28). It remains to be seen whether Afigbo will be able to develop this innovative idea beyond the conceptual level into a full-scale new theory about the history of migrations and the emergence of statehood in southern Nigeria.

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**French Colonialism Unmasked: The Vichy Years in French West Africa**, by Ruth Ginio. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. xx + 246 pp. \$65.00 (hardback). ISBN 0-8032-2212-2.

The fall of the Third French Republic in 1940 and the establishment of the authoritarian, right-wing government of Marshall Pétain in unoccupied Vichy France left one of France’s largest colonies, the federation of French West Africa (AOF), with a choice. The colonial administration in the AOF declared their loyalty to Pétain and for 3 years, from 1940 to 1943, AOF would be one of the few places where the new, patriotic-conservative Vichy ideology and the colonial reality collided. Only in 1943 did the Governor-General of the federation switch his allegiance to the allied side, a pragmatic change reflecting the dominance of US forces in North Africa.

In 1996, Catherine Akpo-Vaché published a study of AOF during the Second World War. That text describes the structures of Vichy rule in detail, though the author is primarily interested in the resistance and victory of the Gaullist side. Nevertheless, given that Akpo-Vaché’s account of the Vichy government in AOF is comprehensive (if descriptive), one has to ask if there is a need for another broad analysis. Ruth Ginio justifies covering this topic again by making three innovative

claims. First, she believes that under Vichy rule French administrators in West Africa dropped their mask because they were able to behave as they had always really wanted. Given the changed situation, they promptly started to treat Africans as 'primitives', without any reference to the 'myths' of assimilation or theoretical egalitarianism that had previously been central to French colonial policy. Second, Ginio considers the activity of the Vichy-led administration in AOF as part of a broader imperial project. The Vichy ideology had no lasting effects, but only because of the short-lived nature of the regime. Finally, Ginio argues that African anger about the Vichy experience motivated the elite to sever its emotional ties to the French state, and from 1943 onwards to seek independence. The abuses of the Vichy period were a trigger that permitted the African elite to attack colonialism, and they are seen by Ginio as providing a 'framework' for subsequent change.

Ginio's conclusions are striking, but are they correct? The author glances at the careers of French administrators under Vichy rule, and admits that there are complicated cases, but she does not really capture the ambivalence of the position of an administrator in the late colonial state. A deeper look at some individual careers of administrators would have given her much rich material on which to speculate. Christian Lambert, administrator in Touba in Ivory Coast, is a typical case for example. Lambert was obviously a supporter of the *Légion*, the popular movement founded to celebrate 'Pétainist' virtues. Nevertheless, he later fled to British territory to join the ranks of the 'Free French' and became the director of the cabinet office for André Latrille in the Ivory Coast. Latrille was the most liberal of the governors in the aftermath of Second World War and Lambert eagerly helped him to introduce reforms. Shortly afterwards, Lambert was targeted by supporters of the Résistance in the AOF and was dismissed for his earlier Pétainist behaviour despite his subsequent liberal activity. This type of career was common. French administrators had to live with competing loyalties and this made for lives full of ambiguity. They could be socialists, reformers, conservatives, paternalists and Vichy supporters within a short space of time. They could support 'tradition' and the 'mission to civilize' in one breath. This is even true for the 'villain' of the story of Vichy AOF, Governor-General Pierre Boisson, who betrayed his former commitment to the anti-German struggle by deciding to support the Vichy regime. As Jean Koufan has shown, Boisson had been an agent of the Popular Front seeking to implement socialist reforms in Cameroun in the late 1930s, so he too was a more ambiguous figure than some accounts suggest. It is difficult to claim that the administrators in the AOF dropped their masks to reveal their underlying ideology when they supported Vichy, because their attitudes and histories were more complex than such a narrative suggests. This brings me to Ginio's second key point: it is hard to see a coherent, empire-wide programme behind something which was as make-shift and improvised as the administration in the AOF between 1940 and 1943. Finally, it is questionable to say that the Vichy experience in itself was a major stimulus for decolonization. By the second half of the 1940s, the abuses of the Vichy period had ceased to be a recurrent subject in the political rhetoric of African elites. On the contrary, they were enthusiastic about the new rights and privileges they obtained in the aftermath of the war: liberation appeared to happen in the colonies just as it appeared to happen in the metropolis. It was only when the process of introducing those rights was slowed down by opposition from settlers and by the ambiguities of colonial structures that voices for emancipation became louder. Even then they did not refer to the Vichy experience of the 'wrong France', but to the unfulfilled promises of the 'Free French'.

Though Ginio's conclusions can be questioned, her book remains valuable. It significantly extends our knowledge about the Vichy period in AOF. Some parts, particularly the discussion of the ways in which colonial subjects, including marabouts and chiefs, utilized the new situation for their own ends are particularly useful. However, the book overstates the role of the Vichy period in France's African experience—change in the relations between Africans and French colonisers was not a product of AOF's three-year Vichy period.

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**A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the destruction of Sierra Leone**, by Lansana Gberie. London: Hurst & Company, 2005. xvi + 224 pp. £16.50 (paperback). ISBN 1-85065-742-4 (paperback).

Recently, there has been a string of publications seeking to explain the cause of the 11-year-long bloody civil war in Sierra Leone. A number of the authors and contributors are Sierra Leoneans who, as insiders, bring 'a nationalist perspective'. While this constitutes an invaluable contribution to the debate of state, conflict and conflict resolution, it can (in some cases) produce a problem of 'mechanistic praxis': we were there, so we (alone) have the knowledge to chronicle the course of events. Methodologically, this approach fails to accede to the caveat of Robert Merton about the potential subjectivity of insiders, while not underestimating the strength insiders could bring to the field of research.

Gberie has managed to transcend this pitfall, while at the same time producing a text, which has brought new insight into the deceit and machinations of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leadership and the hopeless attempts of a failed state to confront a small, but determined group of fighters. The latter's defeat was only possible with external intervention: initially from mercenary outfits, such as Ghurkha Security, Executive Outcomes and later from regional peace-keeping forces, such as the Nigerian-led ECOMOG, and friendly governments, such as the intervention by the British Government.

Gberie's book is premised on two fallacies: the first is common in nationalist circles, namely that the RUF destroyed Sierra Leone through its long campaign against successive civilian and military regimes in that unfortunate country. The truth is that by the time war broke out in March 1991, Sierra Leone was an infrastructural wreck, thanks to 23 years of misrule by the All Peoples Congress peppered by a series of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) sponsored by international financial institutions, which pauperized the vast majority of the populace. By the time rebel leader Foday Sankoh and his rag-tag army started their pogrom against the people of Sierra Leone, the Bonapartist Siaka Stevens and his phlegmatic successor, Brigadier Joseph Saidu Momoh had managed to transform a country with tremendous developmental potential into the laughing-stock of the world. They had obliterated any semblance of democracy in favour of kleptocracy through the dictatorship of Congress. The second fallacy is Gberie's 'double talk' on the aetiology of the war. On the one hand he spends a considerable time berating 'the scrofulous APC one-party state...' (p. 11), and on the other hand he argues that it is not possible to locate the motivation behind the RUF war. In his view, the RUF was a mercenary outfit whose *raison d'être* was to