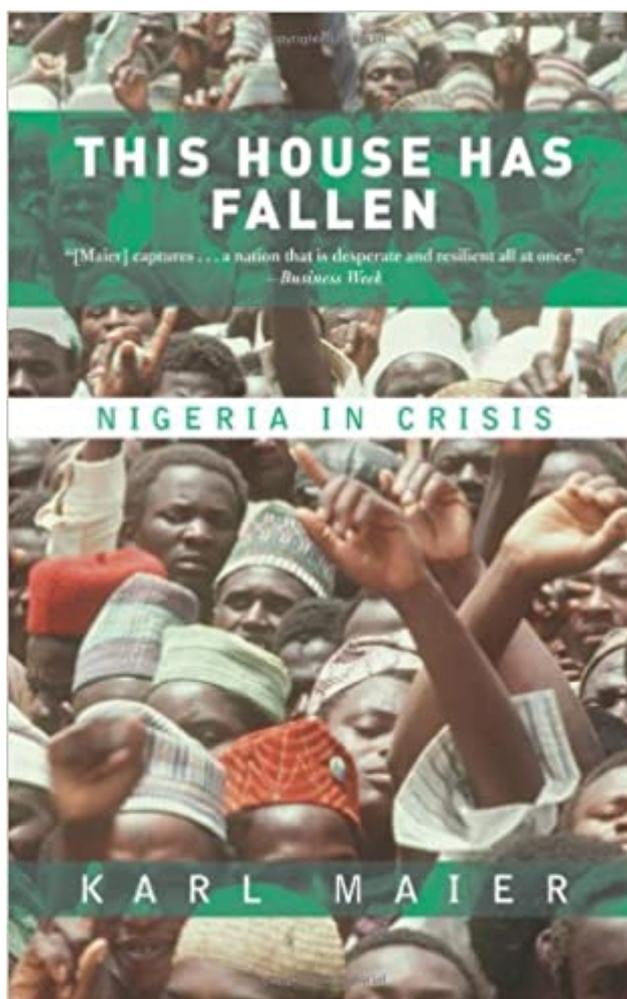


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This House Has Fallen: Nigeria In Crisis



Synopsis

To understand Africa, one must understand Nigeria, and few Americans understand Nigeria better than Karl Maier. *This House Has Fallen* is a bracing and disturbing report on the state of Africa's most populous, potentially richest, and most dangerously dysfunctional nation. Each year, with depressing consistency, Nigeria is declared the most corrupt state in the entire world. Though Nigeria is a nation into which billions of dollars of oil money flow, its per capita income has fallen dramatically in the past two decades. Military coup follows military coup. A bellwether for Africa, it is a country of rising ethnic tensions and falling standards of living, very possibly on the verge of utter collapse; a collapse that could dramatically overshadow even the massacres in Rwanda. A brilliant piece of reportage and travel writing, *This House Has Fallen* looks into the Nigerian abyss and comes away with insight, profound conclusions, and even some hope. Updated with a new preface by the author.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Maier puts a human face on a disheartening situation that seems remote and impersonal to most Americans. -- Publishers Weekly

Karl Maier has been the Africa correspondent for London's Independent newspaper and a contributor to *The Economist* and the *Washington Post*. His previous two books on Africa, *Angola: Promises and Lies* and *Into the House of the Ancestors*, received glowing reviews internationally.

He lives in London.

First of all, I should say that this book is marred by a horrible title: "This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria" (previous edition). Quite a poor choice for the title of a book that isn't as half as dark as you'd expect from its name. In this case, you literally shouldn't judge this book by its cover. The title of this review, however, refers to an apt quote that comes in the last chapter of the book. The quote would have been more appropriately presented in the introduction, because the entire book is seemingly built on its theme. The theme is that Nigeria is essentially a collection of very proud, insulated societies and cultures that desire independence but are held together by a government based on strictly colonial boundaries. With my knowledge of Nigeria and Nigerian history, I really agree with that. There is no such thing as Nigerian nationalism except in Nigerian communities outside of Nigeria. Even then, a Yoruba is always a Yoruba and a Hausa always a Hausa. Doing ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana, a group of migrant Hausas warned me against traveling to Nigeria: "Nigerians are wicked, wicked people!" This book explains crises in Nigeria in several different areas. First, the book spends a few chapters quite appropriately on the Niger Delta crisis and the Ijaw. It articulates the argument quite well that the responsibility for this crisis falls right in the lap of oil companies and the Nigerian government. The book then deals with northern Nigeria and the rise of fundamentalist Islam. It rightly portrays the friction as between ethnic groups, and NOT between Muslims and Christians *per se*. The end of the book is a patchwork of chapters on the Yoruba, the Igbo, and the Middle Belt minorities. A great read. This book is a good alternative to "A History of Nigeria" (Cambridge University Press) because it is highly readable and focuses on pressing issues. It is essentially a piece of good journalism, but not as egocentric and cynical as a lot of the "poverty and danger tourism" writing typical of "Untapped: The Search for Africa's Oil." It doesn't exoticize Nigerians nor portray them as dangerous the way a lot of literature on Africa does. It balances political economy, indigenous liberation movements, and environmental issues all in one breath. It's amazing what Maier managed to pack into less than 300 pages. Read it.

Living in Nigeria leaves one drained, confused and fascinated. Nigeria is like watching a car crash every day; you cannot help but to watch despite the blood and carnage. Mr. Maier's lively account of daily scenes in Nigeria is an accessible read for anyone, even those who never set foot in Nigeria or could care less about Africa's problems. A case in point is Maier's visit to former military President Babangida. The President sat in his chalet a few hours drive from Nigeria's capital Abuja, charming, sly, friendly and happy with the billions of dollars he stole from the Nigerian people. In fact,

Babangida is set to make another run for President in 2007. Maier allows the former President to talk and expose the underbelly of most Nigerian leaders, avarice, self-righteousness and the ability to buy people off with the money taken from government coffers. In fact, be it Obasanjo, Abacha, Buhari or any other military leader or newly minted democratic leaders, they are all the same people, in the same big seats, stealing the same people and country blind. Sad, but Nigeria. Maier allows the reader in to see Nigeria from Abuja to Minna to Lagos; it is a great read and essential for anyone coming to Nigeria. You are Welcome!! Nigeria, what a country and what a mess.

A nice book that touches on key aspects of Nigerian society. For a foreigner, Mr. Maier does a nice job in writing about the diverse ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. However, I have chosen to rate this book with three stars for the following reasons: At some point in time, I got the feeling I was reading a newspaper. Being well versed and current with affairs in Nigeria, I found most of the stories recounted by Mr. Maier to be very familiar. What Mr. Maier failed to do was provide significant in-depth analysis into the problems besetting modern day Nigeria, or better still, present likely solutions to some of these problems from his point of view. There are quite a few typographical errors in the book. I also disagree with a historical event stated. This has to do with the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914. Mr. Maier says it was done because Northern Nigeria was running a deficit, while the South was economically sustainable. This is definitely not true. The Northern and Southern protectorates were merged to form Nigeria in 1914 to serve the interests of the British Empire. Mineral resources obtained in the North were shipped to ports in the South to be sent to Britain. It made economic sense to Britain and had nothing to do with deficits or the economic state of the Northern and Southern colonies. Generally, it is a very good book and one that touches on several aspects of modern Nigerian society in its 300 or so pages. It is definitely worth the read if you are interested in understanding the complexity and diversity of Nigerian society as well as its history, economic state and recent return to a democratic system of government.

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