

Book Review

Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History, Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto. University of Rochester Press, Rochester, 2010. Pp. xvi + 333. ISBN. 978 1 58046 358 4 (hb). £40.

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This book is a successful attempt to map the Nigerian historical historiography since the middle of the twentieth century. Nigerian historiography is incredibly rich; so rich that not many authors such as Saheed Aderinto and especially Toyin Falola would be able to digest such a wide range of literature. This book is thus first of all a formidable exercise of historiography where Falola's hand is unmistakable. In four different parts, it explores the broad themes but also the individuals who have scrutinised Nigerian history. In this volume, Falola and Aderinto posit that it is possible to draw a parallel between historians and nationalism in Nigeria.

Falola and Aderinto acknowledge the intellectual origins of Nigerian historiography. They stress the importance of nineteenth-century historical literature but also recognise the significance of the birth of the Nigerian National Archives in the 1950s. The section about the Nigerian archives particularly analyses the rise and fall of this institution. Their personal comments about the archives are particularly revealing as they do not hesitate to describe their current "state of ruin" (p.35).

The second part of this book deals with political, economic, social and gender history, one after each other, in an attempt to describe the evolution of the preoccupations of the historians of Nigeria. It could be suggested that when the authors have tried to insert Nigeria within a wider African context, they do not demonstrate that Nigeria is not totally disconnected from the rest of the continental historiography. It would have been interesting to understand the links between the School of Ibadan and the followers of Cheikh Anta Diop (p.223).

The strength of this study can be seen in the level of details achieved in the second and third parts. For Nigerianists, the precise study of authors such as Afigbo, Ajayi, Atanda, Awe or Ikime is invaluable. According to the authors, nation-building was central to their project at the point of independence. These historians were eager to burn the "colonial library" to foster a Nigerian national identity. This argument is a perfect illustration of Eric Hobsbawm's perception of history as "raw material" for nationalism.

In addition, Falola and Aderinto explore the development of the "neo-Marxist" and the "Islamic Legitimist" Schools to explain the fragmentation of Nigerian history. They stress that competing versions of history were written by ethno-religious groups to suit their specific interests. In their quest for political power, Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa historians disagreed on the origin of the

"calamities which have befallen Nigeria" (p.239). As a result, historical research became regionalised and ethnicised.

Even if totally logical, this last argument about the subjectivity of Nigerian historians can undermine the role of objective historians. By seeing all Nigerian historians as manipulating history for their own religious or political benefit, Falola and Aderinto do not leave much space for objectivity. According to the latter, Nigerian historians seem to be doomed as they cannot write about their own country. Do they imply that Nigerian historians have to live abroad to be freed from any political influence?

More interestingly, both authors provide a list of recommendations in their conclusion. Historians should go beyond nationalist historiography whether it be for Nigeria or their own ethno-religious group. Instead they should focus on: "science, technology, sexuality, the body, desire, children, domestic slavery, sport, leisure, urban history, Nigeria's place in world history" (p.263). Knowing Falola's influence on Nigerian research, this list of recommendations could become a blueprint for the following research agenda in some Nigerian universities.

If one is not a specialist of Nigeria, this text could seem over-crowded with names and references to very specific political debates. However, for historians of Nigeria, this volume can become an excellent tool as it can help them assess the political and historiographical debates underpinning the publication of Nigerian historical studies.

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