

ing a piece of our land but he wants the fruit of the soil and the animals on it, and doesn't want us to have anything...This was all ours before he came here with his guns...soon we will fall off the edge of the earth.

Unfortunately, the racial and cultural tensions are left largely unresolved at the end of

the novel. Roeloff eventually marries one of his kind and goes back to join his people. Can this apparent failure of hybridity have deeper implications for the post-apartheid polity of contemporary South Africa?

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Women of the South

Ayo Olukotun

Nina Emma Mba, **NIGERIAN WOMEN MOBILISED: WOMEN'S POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA, 1900-1965**, International and Area studies (IAS), University of California & Crucible publishers, Lagos, 1997, 344pp

HISTORY may be a sloppy teacher, in that historical parallels are fumbling or inaccurate guides for the more complex challenges of our generation, but it certainly does cast a long shadow over today's giddy events. History may not explain the present, but it does help to situate it in perspective.

In a world in which

Ibadan history school. Mba fills several gaps in our understanding of the role-definition and self-image of women in Nigerian society, as those roles and images have evolved through the rapid flux of the colonial experience and the early postcolonial period.

Anchored solidly on primary sources in the shape of painstaking interviews with major compatriots such as Mrs Olufumilayo Ransome-Kuti, and Chief (Mrs) Janet Makelu as well as archival material and the private papers of women activists, the book conducts a detailed investigation into the many battles fought by several women organisations and shows us the connecting threads. It delves into the organisational character, leadership styles, mobilisation frameworks and the concerted factors which informed such women unprisings as the *Nwaobiala* -the anti-taxation protests, the water rates conflict and the political party involvement of women in Eastern and Western Nigeria. In focusing specifically on the role of women in well known anti-colonial protests, she uncovers a fresh perspective which she employs to retell the social and political history of colonial southern Nigeria. For example, although much of the history

of political parties has been ably condified in such monumental works as Richard Sklar's *Nigerian Political Parties* this is the first book I know that extensively treats both the problematic and unfolding of women's participation in colonial politics. In this way it shows up the gender bias of the male-dominated accounts upon which our knowledge, until now, is based.

Mba shows as well, through case histories that women activism, as exemplified in Miss Adunni Oluwale and Mrs. Ransome-Kuti, while it sometimes dovetailed with male protest, often ran deeper, and had autonomous sources even as it employed innovative techniques of mass action. Equally valuable are her sketches of the place and prestige of women in the pre-colonial social milieu, in which she seeks to demonstrate that women's representation in politics at the highest levels was institutionalised, and therefore, conferred with more power and influence than the succeeding colonial and postcolonial period. Some may quip at this startling conclusion, which could only be arrived at, I feel, if we

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women's empowerment and gender parity have become not just buzz concepts but the resonant slogans of a call to arms of an omnipresent struggle, a scholarly search for the roots of activism is a much valued undertaking. Dr. Mba's prodigiously researched book reflects on exacting standpoints of the

know more about the less well documented social life of the rural populace at this time. I am not convinced that the picture she draws of institutionalised women participation in precolonial Nigeria, holds true across society and variegated political structures.

Reading through the book, one is pleasantly shocked by prescience and

perceptiveness of the women political activists, who, far more than their descendants of the 1990's, grasped the strategic advantages of organisation and mobilisation, what we see today is a myriad of groups and splinter groups sometimes working at cross purposes. Among the many delights of the book, are the lessons which it offers, in the area of strategy, to the empower-

ment activists of today - the significantly altered terrain notwithstanding.

I warmly recommend the book for the striking contemporaneity of its theme, its judicious scholarship and lucid prose style.

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Truth Before Reconciliation *Wole Ogundele*

W.P.B Botha, A DUTY OF MEMORY, Heinemann, Oxford, 1997.

THE question, what would post-apartheid South Africa be like has now changed to: what is post-apartheid South Africa beginning to look like? Three years into the new era, it is no longer a speculative question though there are no definitive answers yet. In many respects the whole of the decade-if not also the next-will clearly be a transition period between apartheid South Africa and democratic South Africa-the South Africa without the compound prefix

made things easier. For one thing, there is a feeling among the Black population that the Afrikaner National Party has been let off too easily. Could just dismantling apartheid alone, as laudable as it was, atone for half a century of deliberate, systematic sins, political evils and crimes? Thinking that it had done enough by just letting go of power, the National Party did not see any reason to apologise for all those crimes. Clearly, some form of confession followed but apology was needed to heal the wounds, and also to make the necessary social and moral transition. The device now being employed to bring both about is of course the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Judging by the harrowing truths that several of those-white or black-who have been testifying

before this Commission have been divulging, it has so far been a useful device serving a very psychological as well as social and political purpose. But long after the Commission would have forgiven all those forgivable, wound up its business and dispersed, memories and mutual suspicions would still linger. Especially memories of the seemingly gratuitous violence committed between 1989 and 1994. For apartheid in this period of its death throes was a wounded snake biting anything and everything within its range, blindly, mindlessly. Perhaps the Truth Commission's most difficult task so far has been how to separate genuine politically motivated crimes from deliberate crimes against humanity - i.e, morally reprehensible and politically inexcusable ones.

Even if the commission were juridical rather than political, it would still probably never be able to neatly and satisfactorily make the distinctions, talk less of squaring their truths into circles of political and moral reconciliation.

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Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Alex Boraine at the inception of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Cape Town

'post-apartheid', the South Africa no longer weighted down by the terrible burden of two centuries of wars, racial hatred and 'separate development.'

That apartheid did not end in a cataclysmic war but in a negotiated democracy has not