

turbulent insurrection of a past which queries the present.

In the "Afterword" to the novel, John Callahan describes the "procrustean" path taken to signify on Book II of the potential 'three volumes' of Ellison's work, pruned to the story of Hickman and Adam Sunraider, as the most central and engaging of Ellison's prolonged creative motivation. He speaks of the interesting tedium of editorial silencing, re-arrangement, chapterization, restoration and excision, concluding with a promise that

"a subsequent scholar's edition will document my corrections and include sufficient manuscripts and drafts to enable scholars and readers alike to follow Ellison's some forty years of work on his novel-in-progress." Pause then, not cessation, is the immortal flare of a work of genius...still in progress. Partially liberated, *Juneteenth* has been brought to the public sphere, a work to be read and remembered as *the likeness of an incomplete masterpiece*. GBS

Running Splash of Rust and Words

By Reuben Abati

I *BADAN MESIOGO*, subtitled *A Celebration of a City, its History and People* is a most interesting book, in part, because of its impressive content presented by a broad array of talents, but even more so because of the concept that it has turned into subject and metaphor. It is the biography of a city delivered through the vehicle of poetry, history, other creative writings and the essay form. It is

an elaborate ritual performed by devotees of the city who commune with it as god, as place, as home, and who in various forms confess an indebtedness to, and an identification with the place as part of their identity and growth as citizens or writers. The contributors cover an expansive range of time: from the past when Ibadan was a mere war camp, to its evolution as a city, and an organized political entity; that is, the not-too-distant past when Ibadan played a major role in the politics of the nation and of Yorubaland. It equally reaches the present, now that the past is linked to the future in form of a continuing dialogue between the modern and the traditional, the religious and the secular, the individual and the communal. But the dialogue which contributors to this book begin does not end. What, however, endures is the image of Ibadan as a *fertilizing* spirit. Three generations meet in the book, and their reflections are animated, exciting and deep.

But still, *Ibadan Mesiogo* captures only an aspect of this mythical, evocative city of the seven hills: it draws attention to its value as material for various forms of creative expression. With their effort, the authors have managed to both demonstrate the linkage between the city and the imagination, and also depict the writer as essential molder of

the insights that the city offers. The offering from *Ibadan* is rich. Yet, Ibadan is also a major hub: a West African crossroads, a center of commerce and bureaucracy, of politics – both local and national; in a sense, it is the heartbeat of Yorubaland, meaning that explorations of its significance can only be a continuing process.

What is a city? A city is space, a locus, a spiritual center connecting man to geography. The writers in this book fasten onto these notions while probing into the entrails of Ibadan; but what does the city reveal from these encounters? How has it responded to modern fixations on development and growth? "The Two Hundred Snails" offered at the divination tray by the original founders of Ibadan have traveled in two hundred directions, but what does the city present – a confused urban sprawl, reduced by the limitations of Nigerian politics, governance, and chaotic regional planning. Or, should we be guided by the overt romanticism of the contributors to this book? After all, the artist engaging Ibadan at this day and time will not likely be as besotted with the city as those artists of the moments celebrated in the book. His/her present experience of the city is defined by poverty, chaos and the speedy disappearance of opportunities. The celebration of Ibadan compels an interrogation of meaning and essence almost inevitably.

In five different sections, classified as Parts One and Two, and a Prologue by Femi Osofisan, other Ibadan products, devotees,

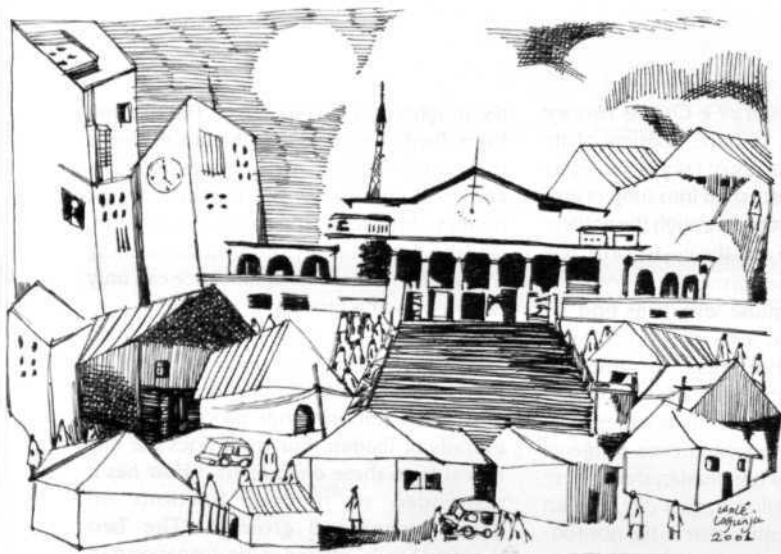
Dapo Adelugba, Remi Raji, Omowunmi Segun and Bankole Olayebi (eds.)

IBADAN MESIOGO: A CELEBRATION OF A CITY, ITS HISTORY AND PEOPLE.

Bookcraft Ltd, Ibadan, 2001, 201pp.

<< loyalists, residents, visitors – Nigerian, expatriate, Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw, “something else” – pick up the chant and re-state the song one after the other. They extend another stanza of the song, re-creating the feeling of uniqueness of a city. Osofisan describes Ibadan, for example, as “Queen Mother-genteel and genial and maternal – all grace and calm, a woman past puberty but, because of that perhaps, wise, patient and understanding” (p.2). Osundare takes us on a tour of the city, from Mapo Hall to other places. “Ibadan”, he writes, “is a place made up of other places... that crowded collage of streets without shoulders, roads with a thousand orita, the town planners’ nightmare but also a roomy haven with a seat for every comer, an accommodating story in a lore of contending tongues... a city thronged, complex, and relentlessly plural”.

In a section entitled *Memories/*



Reminiscences Alain Ricard, Wale Ogunyemi, Femi Fatoba, Wole Soyinka, Mabel Segun, and Adelani Ogunrinade present pictures of Ibadan, as seen, as experienced, as felt, conveying part of the energy and diversity of the city as they watched it grow through time. Ricard states matter-of-factly that “Ibadan is an ancient city” and ends up re-creating the student riot of 1971 at the University of Ibadan campus. Wale Ogunyemi grew up in Ibadan and recaptures part of the innocence of his youth, even if his last paragraph on page 28 reads like the product of a computer virus, produced in a moment of distraction. Wole Soyinka’s “Quacks and quasi-quacks” is excerpted from his *Ibadan: The Penkelemites Years*, his narrative of night-life in Ibadan of the sixties, which also speaks of the twisted politics of the emerging

Nigerian nation and the loss of the autonomy of the university system. This is further complimented by Mabel Segun’s anecdotal recollections of some of the more memorable scenes from that past. In *Essay/Articles*, a poorly served section of the book, Remi Raji recaptures the tone established earlier in Adelani Ogunrinade’s “A King and His Wit”, on the humor that can be extracted from the ways of Ibadan, its people and history.

In the section entitled *Prose* we encounter eight stories located in Ibadan dealing mainly with existential themes — sacrifice, living and death, urban commotion, quackery, the loss of innocence. The quality of these stories is uneven, and this can be said, in general, of the entire collection. Some of the contributors either end their offerings at the point which they begin to show evidences of talent, or for the most part, merely present intuitive insights into their subject. Some of these stories seem to have been written out of the compulsive need to be part of the *Ibadan* project. This perhaps is the problem when writing is conceived as a project, rather than an honest, natural expression of creative impulses. To explain this point differently, the editors appear as if compelled to use part of the material because they could not afford to kick some persons out of the project. In *Poetry*, seven contributors give readers a taste of Ibadan, its transformations through time, and cultural resources. The references are both ancient and contemporary, as each poet pays tribute to the city of many hills. *Part Two* which is a more general section of the book offers specific information about the city : its sociology, traditional institutions and chieftaincy system.

Ibadan Mesiogo is richly illustrated with photographic shots of scenes, personalities, images which convey the mystique and grandeur of the city. Regrettably, many of these photographs are untitled, meaning that only people closely associated with the city can immediately figure out what they represent. Equally important, who are the actual artistes these works belong to? H.K. Adams and the Oyo State Ministry of Information are the ones given credits for the photographs, on page 201; but in real terms, this does not say much about the specific contribution of photographers to the book. What are the particular contributions of H.K. Adams? We do not know. Perhaps, it could be added that the Oyo State Ministry of Information is neither a photo shop nor a photographic agency. In Nigeria, photographers are usually shortchanged in publications, even when their efforts fall squarely within the province of creative arts, appropriately and assuredly. This book repeats the same mistake of treating photographers

shabbily.

However, certain images run through the entire book: the first set is that of Ibadan as an ancient, mythical city which though beginning as a war camp, has since acquired a cosmopolitan edge without losing touch with its ritual roots, traditions, masquerades, taboos and superstitions. The second set of images depict a university town, specifically in terms of how the presence of the University of Ibadan has imbued the city with a distinctiveness in the peculiar mix of the intellectual and artistic, the rustic and popular. The third image group is that of a city of many historic places: the topography of hills and valleys, Cocoa House, Mapo Hall, Dugbe, Gbagi, Bodija – each with its own significance. The fourth set of images signifies

the fount of a cultural renaissance, and first laboratory for many of the principal artists working across the many genres of contemporary art: Demas Nwoko, J.P. Clark, Mabel Segun, Wale Ogunyemi, Tunji Oyelana, Chinua Achebe, Imoukhuede, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka etc.

The more enduring image however is the fifth type, metaphorically referenced from J.P. Clark – Bekederemo's almost legendary poem on *Ibadan* and its contrapuntal use of the imageries of *rust* and *gold*, *value* and *dissonance*: "Ibadan/running splash of rust/ and gold - flung and scattered/among seven hills like broken/china in the sun". This particular poem, the poet, and the city of Ibadan seem locked in eternal embrace as evidence of the romance between the city and the imagination. *Rust, Gold, broken china in the sun*: Ibadan itself is paradox.

Ibadan Mesiogo is a rather intriguing title. It forces a dialogue between the insider who knows some of its references, and the outsider who is compelled to insist on a roadmap. For all its eloquence, it is essentially a book by university wits, a story from the Ivory Tower, and as such covers only one angle to the story. The bigger story involves the many, unrecognized folk artists for whom Ibadan is also home and creative spring: the drummers, masqueraders, plastic and visual artists, the raconteurs whose art is shut out from expression in this forum due to its primary orality. Beyond this, it is worth noting that Ibadan has also served as home and creative source-point for the raconteur and dramatist, Adebayo Faleti; the fabulist, Amos Tutuola; the folk poet Olanrewaju Adepoju; scores of Fuji musicians, notably Akande Abass Obesere, the Funky Fuji exponent – these are people excluded from this celebration, whose voices are neither heard nor represented, since they fall outside the umbrella of the university system.

What creative writers have attempted in *Ibadan Mesiogo* can also be essayed by historians, scientists, politicians and civil servants for whom Ibadan has always held a special meaning. The Ibadan story is in that sense long and varied. The politician, Lamidi Adedibu has written an instructive book titled *What I Saw in the Politics of Ibadanland*; there also used to be a journal known as *IBADAN*; Tekena Tamuno has edited a book called *Ibadan Voices*; film-makers, and other artists have also paid tribute to this city of many possibilities. The harvest then is rich and it promises to be richer. In *Ibadan Mesiogo*, both the editors and contributors lift the veil on a significance aspect of that harvest. In writing about the city, they write about themselves, ourselves, our lives, our fears, and the politics of our land. In as much as their effort is worth the trouble, the product is worthy of attention. **GBS**

Digging up Maroko's Bones

BY CHUX OKEI OHAI

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Y friend, Maroko is the great Nigerian novel writing itself" says Prinzi, a principal character in Maik Nwosu's award-winning novel, *Invisible Chapters*.

But, the book focuses not so much on the redefinition of the so-called great Nigerian novel, nor the writing of it (as the author would want to make the reader believe), as it does on the unearthing of a particularly significant past event.

There are two Marokos in the novel: the old and new. Beyond these, there is an historical Maroko, now a mere speck in the sands of time, which Nwosu has appropriated as paradigm for his reconstruction of the Nigerian social-political experience. Evidently, the story of the two active Marokos is a rehash and extension of the original one.

Once upon a time, Maroko was a bristling settlement of the poor and less privileged, a shantytown on the fringe of the Lagos lagoon. In spite of attendant vices and squalor, it was home to thousands of Nigeria's down-trodden who had drifted there in search of succor from a system that was increasingly riddled with vast inequalities and life-threatening contradictions.

Nonetheless, wrapped in the warmth of their exciting but lowly world, the residents of Maroko were oblivious of the anguish their existence caused their rich and influential neighbors living in nearby highbrow Ikoyi. Ironically, they provided the work force that

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Maik Nwosu,
INVISIBLE
CHAPTERS, House of
Malaika and Tivolick,
Lagos, Nigeria, 1999,
322 pp.