

LARAY DENZER, *Folayegbe M. Akintunde-Ighodalo: a public life*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman Publishers, 2001, 329 pp., ISBN 978 048 012 9 (hard covers), ISBN 978 048 005 6 (paperback).

The 1990s were a particularly memorable period for Nigeria, then in the throes of political and economic uncertainties and military dictatorship. It was not surprising that the book market during the period witnessed a flurry of biographies and autobiographies of notable (and not so notable) individuals. These were not only life histories but also exercises in public relations as the mass of the people began to pinpoint those who led the country down the drain. *Folayegbe M. Akintunde-Ighodalo: a public life* is a unique exception. Written by a social historian and professional biographer, and the subject seeing bluntness as an article of faith, the book is a classic 'life and times' account. Through Akintunde-Ighodalo, or 'FMI', we have a better appreciation of some of the changing socio-economic and political situations of Yorubaland and Nigeria in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the spread of Christianity and Western education, post-war nationalist agitations and women's empowerment.

On the local level, the unsettled state of nineteenth-century Yoruba politics forced Aderinsoye, the subject's great grandfather, to relocate to Okeigbo near Ondo in the 1840s. Owing to deep-rooted parochialism, Ondo regarded Okeigbo as a stranger/enemy territory, so it was not too surprising that nearly a century later, the debate continued over whether Okeigbo's cocoa tax should be paid to Ondo or Ile-Ife. In spite of this difference, Aderinsoye and his followers welcomed Christian missionaries, based at Ondo, and this group later introduced Christianity, cocoa cultivation and Western education. Born into a Christian/cocoa family, FMI came under the influence of mission agents, some of whom helped her through her educational career. As she grew up, she was faced with the clash between what she wanted for herself and what the society expected of her. This dispute came out clearly as she fashioned a life career. Her desire to acquire higher education cost her the prospects of early marriage and near ejection by her relations. Determined to succeed, she traveled to Britain where she encountered not only the problem of acculturation but racism, poverty and loneliness. This led her into taking up active roles in student and nationalist movements.

With a degree in economics and a child, FMI returned to Nigeria and joined the Western Nigeria Civil Service. Even though she occupied one of the best jobs and a high position for a woman at that time, racism and gender discrimination continued and indeed haunted her throughout her career. With a resolve not to give up, she overcame many of the obstacles and rose to becoming the first female Permanent Secretary in Nigeria.

By examining the life of FMI, the author leads her readers through several aspects of Nigerian socio-political, economic and cultural life. These include—among others—attitudes towards marriage and women, the nationalist struggle, the search for economic development, the role of expatriate workers and investors, military rule, and civil service reforms. For instance, one reads about the interplay between the process of decolonisation and the changing politics of African students unionism in Britain. As Ghana made rapid progress towards autonomy, her students were psychologically prepared to take control of WASU. Similarly colonial political reforms and the Nigerianisation of the civil service led to gender reforms. Military rule and the inexperience of military administrators gave more power to civil servants, hence the emergence of 'super-permanent secretaries'. The biography also highlights some behind-the-scenes discussions between politicians and bureaucrats and the debate over the role of the state in industrial development.

Since her 'retirement', FMI has been involved in several boards of inquiries, cultural clubs and religious and women organisations. The damage inflicted by military dictatorship on Nigeria has fundamentally changed people's perception and attitude. Beginning in the 1980s, Nigerians, as part of their 'coping' strategies, have increasingly turned to religion and 'kinship' organisations for survival. This might explain FMI's transformation from a liberal to someone who now sees 'Islam', 'Northerners', '*oriṣa* worship' and young Nigerians as the country's problems. In 1886, Aderinsoye told Christian missionaries that he had nothing to learn from their new religion; now FMI is saying there is nothing to be gained from *oriṣa* worship, which is an interesting paradox.

The most glaring gap in the book is the inadequate attention paid to FMI's family. Apart from the long discussion of her courtship, issues surrounding her husband and children are mere footnotes to the book. There is also confusion on p. 179, which puts Ghana's independence date as 1 October instead of 6 March 1957 (obviously a mix-up with that of Nigeria). Otherwise, the book is flawlessly written and well-illustrated. The pictures, spanning a near seventy-year period, summarise the book, and for those interested in fashion, they highlight the changing faces of female fashion and textiles. The bibliography reveals that this is the largest known collection by a Nigerian woman. One hopes more writers will follow the author's lead and continue to examine the evolution of women's studies in Nigeria.

OLATUNJI OJO
York University
Toronto