

BOOK REVIEW

Judith Byfield. *The Great Upheaval: Women and Nation in Postwar Nigeria.*

Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press (New African Histories series), 2022. xiii + 334 pp. List of illustrations. Abbreviations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$36.64. Paper. ISBN: 978-0821423981.

The Great Upheaval: Women and Nation in Postwar Nigeria was written by Judith Byfield, a scholar well versed in Nigeria's colonial history. Rooted specifically in the colonial history of Abeokuta, the book has six chapters. The first chapter covers "The Birth and Demise of a Nation: The Egba United Government." The second chapter looks at "Abeokuta's Centenary: Masculinity and Nationalist Politics in a Colonial Space." Chapter Three examines "Race, Nation, and Politics in the Interwar period." The fourth chapter deals with "Women, Rice, and War: Economic Crisis in Wartime Abeokuta." Chapter Five focuses on "Freedom from Want: Politics, Protest, and the Postwar Interlude," and the last chapter is titled "Daughters of Tinubu: Crisis and Confrontation in Abeokuta."

Chapter One examines the growth of cultural nationalism and an emerging Christian state in Abeokuta during the nineteenth century, even before British colonialism. In this chapter, Byfield makes reference to women's work and economic independence (34), affirming how gender was construed in Abeokuta before colonialism. Yet, with the advent of colonial government, women were nevertheless excluded in the administrative setup of the Egba United Government (EUG) (39, 62).

As British colonialism scuttled the ideals which made the Egba nation exclusive, the emergence of King Ademola II, the Alake, changed the dynamics of state-making. The author analyzes how taxation created a colonial capitalist system, with funds from taxation being used to build the Centenary Hall (65). The power of the kingship institution and the centralization of authority would later be reflected in the economic crises and class struggles that led to the "The Great Upheaval." The Great Upheaval, according to Wole Soyinka, was the crisis that forced the Alake (the king) to vacate his throne, and it was aided by the alliance of market women and educated women in Abeokuta (2). Each of the chapters presents episodic events, revolving from the Abeokuta centenary celebration in

1930, as it revealed the interplay of power blocs in Abeokuta and the resultant emerging class conflicts (99). The crisis is manifested most sharply in Chapter Four (124), which deals with the period of World War II when the hardships of this era facilitated the creation of women's organizations and their responses.

Women's advocacy and their resentment of the capitalist and authoritarian Egba nation is discussed in Chapters Four and Five. This resentment led to crisis and confrontation (177). Byfield emphasizes how the memories of Madam Tinubu are enshrined in the agitations and success of the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU). Centering on how Madam Tinubu was memorialized in the AWU, the picnic held at her grave represents the gendered and nationalistic perspective in the history of Abeokuta (204). The AWU celebrated the nationalist ethos of the Egba Kingdom after the ejection of the Alake. This was in contrast to the 1930 centenary celebration of Abeokuta, where Madam Tinubu was not recognized as a hero.

Byfield adopts the historical method in her research, leaning heavily on newspaper reports of the colonial era, especially *Comet* and *West African Pilot* (1946–1947), which detailed women's experiences during the crisis (205). These newspaper accounts were not mere sources of history, but they were also agents of civilization, as the literati established newspapers to report on everyday life in Abeokuta. The author emphasizes that *The Great Upheaval* is about women, politics, and activism in Nigeria. The book weaves together traditional politics with cultural and state nationalism, revolving around the lives of women in Abeokuta and providing a strong connection between the life and times of Madam Tinubu of the nineteenth century and Funmilayo Ransome Kuti of the twentieth century. This connection brings to the fore the role of Abeokuta women in challenging colonial capitalism. However, in the schemes of agitation, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti's activist roles became unraveled. These roles were viewed differently, as it was argued that she had acrimonious interpersonal relationships with the Alake and that her family were connected to the slave past (214).

The tax revolt of the Abeokuta women was a defining moment, as it created new perspectives and approaches to state and society relations. Thus, reinforcing her position in the Introduction as it justifies gender and nationalism, Byfield admits that women of Funmilayo Ransome Kuti's generation did not succeed in many ways, but their initiatives enabled the creation of women-centered non-governmental and community-based organizations in contemporary times (225). The momentum created by the AWU in the late 1940s served as a model for the growth of other women's organizations in Nigeria, leading to the formation of the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU). The author makes a specific reference to the interest of women in Kano (northern Nigerian) in establishing a Union in 1948 (215–16). The AWU transformed into the NWU and the Federation of National Women Societies (FNWS) and ultimately defined how women engaged with local and national politics in Nigeria.

Byfield emphasizes that there is a need for further scholarly investigation into women and politics of the 1950s, although scholars within Africa have attempted to answer the questions which she has posed (221).

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Recommended reading:

Femi Eromosele. 2022. "Affective Capital: Lagos and Nigerian Music Videos." *African Studies Review* 1–22. doi:10.1017/asr.2022.93.

Patience Adzande. 2022. "Harnessing the Social Energies of Youths in Farming and Pastoral Communities in Managing Conflicts in Nigeria." *African Studies Review* 65 (2), 479–503. doi:10.1017/asr.2021.116.

Karmen Tornius. 2022. "Staying with the Culture Struggle: The African Union and Eliminating Violence Against Women." *African Studies Review* 1–27. doi:10.1017/asr.2022.68.