

of a broader readership. The linkages between his thought and Táíwò's critique also speak to his contemporary relevance.

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Judith A. Byfield, *The Great Upheaval: Women and Nation in Postwar Nigeria*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (pb US\$36.95 – 978 0 8214 2398 1). 2021, v + 320 pp.

Judith Byfield's *The Great Upheaval* is a multilayered endeavour. It is at once the history of a city, a history of colonial rule, a history of African women and gender, and a local history of nationalist activism. These threads are skilfully woven together, presenting a new and richly documented history of Abeokuta as well as an impressive revision of how we should understand the complex relationship between anti-colonial protest and the emergence of nationalism in Nigeria. Byfield deploys a neat narrative technique by beginning at the end in July 1948, when the paramount chief of the Egba, *Alake Ademola II*, abdicated as a result of a tax revolt led by the Abeokuta Women's Union. Readers soon learn that this event was the tip of the iceberg, and the book uncovers a much deeper history in painstaking detail. Women are located at the heart of the story, and we hear their voices loud and clear. We also witness their innovative forms of political action, and indeed their effectiveness, which powerfully and usefully decentres the role of better-known male Nigerian nationalists. Further, Byfield also decentres the 1929 Women's War from narratives about women, tax and protest in Nigeria, precisely by constructing a history that is similar and different in important ways.

The book's subtitle – *Women and Nation in Postwar Nigeria* – is something of a misnomer, since two-thirds of the text focuses on the period up to the end of World War Two. Nevertheless, this emphasis on historical background is a strength. Fundamentally, what Byfield achieves is to help us see the post-war moment in Nigeria through fresh eyes, while keeping our feet firmly planted on the ground in the shadow of Olumo Rock, Abeokuta's well-known natural landmark. She embraces rather than flattens the contradictions that such a project entails, and her commitment to and deep care for the people who have made the history of Abeokuta leap off almost every page.

Two themes frame my response to the book. The first of these is how we conceptualize the boundaries of the nation, since part of what Byfield reveals is how and why the boundaries of Abeokuta were pushed outwards and ultimately into Nigeria. In the first two chapters we learn about the making and assertion of a civic identity alongside a local sense of belonging, as well as about how these ideas intersected with notions of 'the nation', which was at that time conceived as 'Egba' – more so than Nigerian.

A tension emerges between a modernized 'civic-ness' and 'nation-ness' in the constitution of these collective identities, and, in common with many other African contexts, history was the discourse through which these political debates were conducted. By mapping the boundaries between Abeokuta, Egbaland and colonial Nigeria, Byfield shows how political space became gendered as male and 'affirmed the singularity of nation and masculinity' (p. 97). Importantly, this was not a linear progression in which civic identity gave way to national identity; rather, Byfield's concern is to show how ideas of civic community continually disrupted and complicated the making of the nation. However, since similar processes characterized many other towns and cities in Yorùbáland (for example, Şagamu, Ìbàdàn and Iléşà), it would have been interesting to engage a more explicitly comparative analysis in this context, which explored the porous boundaries of Yorùbá ethnicity. By eliding the civic and the nation, and generally viewing the region from within Egbaland, Byfield tends to merge local and regional identities rather too easily. The highly contested process of constructing 'Yorùbá-ness', which was a crucial level of nation building in Nigeria during the first half of the twentieth century, is at times rendered strangely invisible.

All the same, Byfield's assertion of locality as the boundary relevant to defining the political arena in Abeokuta during the first half of the twentieth century is convincing. In Chapter 3, she shows that another boundary was supra-territorial, by examining the involvement of Abeokuta women in protests against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. An important contribution of Byfield's book is to trace in a very fine-grained way how politics shifted from the local and supra-territorial levels to the level of territorial nationalism, while simultaneously asserting that shift as a gendered process. As a result, when the tax revolt exploded in November 1947, it was simultaneously local, national and gendered.

This points to a second theme, which is that of taxation, representation and citizenship. Right through the book, Byfield examines how taxes generated political constituencies who demanded representation and citizenship rights. She devotes much attention to exploring how women intervened in and challenged the colonial state while making political claims about taxation. Her work thus parallels studies of the 1929 Women's War in Eastern Nigeria; however, by giving closer attention to discourses of masculinity, Byfield extends our understanding of the gendered forms of tax revolts. Many scholars have emphasized how women protesting against taxes behaved in ways that challenged discourses of femininity; Byfield shows how Abeokuta women sustained a critique of masculinity as well, particularly in holding *Alake Ademola II* to account.

After reading *The Great Upheaval*, one is left in no doubt that the history of Abeokuta was instrumental to the making of Nigerian nationalism, and that Abeokuta's women were at the heart of this enterprise. More might be said in the conclusion about what this case study contributes to the history of African nationalism more broadly, but this is an enjoyable and enriching book from which I learned a great deal.

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