The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at: http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/

Available through a partnership with

Scroll down to read the article.
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 ten-
sions 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 im-
plications for the post-apartheid polity of con-
temporary South Africa?

•Adesanmi, poet and critic, is of the department of
modern European Languages, University of Ibadan.

Women of the South

Ayo Olukotun

Nina Emma Mba. NIGERIAN WOMEN MOBILISED: WOMEN'S
POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA, 1900-1965, Interna-
tional and Area studies (IAS), University of California & Cruc-
cible 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

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 re-
searched book reflects on ex-
acting standpoints of the
Ibadan history school. Mba
fills several gaps in our under-
standing 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 pri-
mary 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 con-
ducts a detailed investigation
into the many battles fought by
several women organisations
and shows us the connecting
threads. It delves into the
organisational character, leader-
ship styles, mobilisation
frameworks and the concerted
factors which informed such
women uprisings as the
Nwaobiala -the anti-taxation
protests, the water rates con-
lict and the political party in-
volvement of women in East-
ern and Western Nigeria. In fo-
cusing specifically on the role
of women in well known anti-
colonial protests, she uncoers
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 confided in such monu-
mental 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 poli-
tics. 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 exempli-
fied in Miss Adunni Oluwole
and Mrs. Ransome-Kuti,
while it sometimes dov-
tailed with male protest, of-
ten ran deeper, and had au-
tonomous sources even as it
employed innovative tech-
niques 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 demon-
strate that women's repre-
sentation in politics at
the highest levels was
institutionalised, and there-
fore, 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
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 empowerment 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.

Olukotun is deputy director of the Times Journalism Institute, Lagos.

**Truth Before Reconciliation**

Wole Ogundel


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 judicial 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.

---

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