Falola, Toyin, Editor. 2014


Edited by University of Texas-Austin Distinguished History Professor Toyin Falola, _Osu: Yoruba God, Power and the Imaginative Frontiers_, is a collection of intellectual reflections about one of the many Yoruba Gods. The volume, made up of well-researched contributions by similarly distinguished scholars, starts with an invocation that Osu is the ‘divine messenger’ with a message that holds the belief system of Yoruba people together. In essence, if one dares remove this deity, the experience will be the collapse of the pillar that holds a people’s spiritual super structure.

In his opening Editor’s chapter, Professor Falola wrote that Osu is the God without boundaries. In spite of the assertion, Professor Falola does not claim to be an Osuit (in the fashion of Jesuits) but simply a historian of diasporic movements and memories. He is not only concerned with where Africans have been but, also, with concepts that define the African being like this one about Osu. Subsequently, Professor Falola _inter alia_ states: “Osu becomes part of transatlantic history, but more so of tension between relocation and history, between the violence that led to the forced migrations of people and the long healing process of reconciliation with living in strange lands that became new homelands,” (p. 3).

Users of the 392-page publication, including specialists of African Studies, pleasure readers, students and mainstream researchers, will soon realize that there is a hidden tension between the translation of the language of acolytes of Osu and the academic language of scholars. Therefore, a reader must be very attentive to detect the voices within the narration. For example, there are those who speak on behalf of worshipers of Osu as well as those, who have moved close to the shrine of Osu. Fortunately the diversity in this book allows readers to design their journeys carefully without losing anything in the long run.

In the Yoruba pantheon, there are gods and, also, there are Gods. That is why if those who believe in traditional cosmology claim that Ogun is in seven parts, and that there is Ogun of the road, Ogun of the forest, Ogun of the battle ground and so on, then the query will be the many parts that Osu is to be divided into. These are burdens that the twenty articulate contributors to this collection of intellectual exercise are expected to assist their readers unfold. For example, in the accounts of the contributors, there appears to be an emerging Osu of the academia, Osu of the three-way crossroad and Osu of the inner sanctum of diviners.
Also, the eventual knowledge constructed or the perception developed depends on where the learner or practitioner first encountered Esu and, subsequently, each of these three knowledge-spaces will, of course, yield totally different perspectives to readers. To help with understanding the multiplicity and complexity of Esu, the chant below should be of assistance to readers; in fact, after the preface, and then armed with a simple textual apparatus for analysis, the innards of this collection shall be laid bare for examination, as the chant underscores below:

If you go there
and there is no road
come back to the point of the (w)hole

If you come here
and you see no path
please return to the place
where tree parts fill the space

If you decide to make
our origin the home
and Ori jin sîlé
is the song you hear
Look no further but
direct your gaze deeper
into the thick forest of our memory,
where fruits of the past will sprout,
leaves of the present in mid-air
will dance.
The fear that shook your roots will fly
and YOU will no more
be a bird at the crossroads
feeding on remains
accepting a rename
hoping for reclams
in lands where our future is defaced.....

If you go there and dare their gods
provide them wine in gourds,
hold your rod to part their sea,
seal the hole in your soul with verses