Sati U. Fwatshak. Editor


N. Oluwafemi Nimiko


Professor Sati U. Fwatshak of the Department of History and International Studies at University of Jos, Nigeria, has edited a book to honor Distinguished History Professor Toyin Falola of University of Texas in Austin. As Editor, Professor Fwatshak utilizes his own sterling scholarly attainments to showcase the overarching and distinguished scholarship of Dr. Falola, who holds two Endowed Professorships on the flagship Austin campus of University of Texas, and he is also a recipient of not less than seven honorary degrees from universities in Africa and the United States. These and other well-respected accolades, garnered by Professor Falola, who is also a Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters, made him a candidate for the honor. For example, the New Jersey-based Africa World Press is the publisher of the edited volume, which covers a wide spectrum of the history of Central Nigeria, the geo-political area of the oil rich country that is variously referred to as either the north-central zone or the Middle Belt of the country. Among Professor Falola’s published books, issued by Africa World Press, are _Yoruba Gurus; Nigerian Cities and Yoruba Warlords_. However, his well-received memoir, _A Mouth Sweeter Than Salt_, which has unusually seen a second published volume (with the title, _Counting the Tiger’s Teeth: An African Teenager’s Story_), was published by University of Michigan Press.

In a very useful way, Professor Fwatshak has used his 12-page introduction (pp. xiii-xix) to enlighten his assortment of readers on several aspects of the region, which has often been referred to as Central Nigeria. In fact, tracing the rich history of the area to the 19th century, the Editor, inter alia, promptly informed his various readers – possibly, among his international colleagues – that in its pursuit of trading opportunities in the 19th century, the Royal Niger Company (RNC) did know “the area as the Niger and Benue River areas,” (p. xiii). However, in fulfillment of his own assertion that Central Nigeria did conceptually and generally connote different things to different people, Professor Fwatshak did spell out the various descriptions provided for the area...
by a variety of groups: for example, the Jihadists of the 19th century described Central Nigeria, in the words of the Editor, “as the Kasashen Bauchi (the lands of Bauchi), while the early Christian Missionaries and colonial officials described it as ‘pagan areas’, [while] European geographers and scholars described it as the ‘Middle Belt’ (this description was adopted by the region’s elite and has remained the popular name of the area among its peoples),” (p. xiii).

Indeed, Professor Fwatshak added that the late General Sanni Abach’s military regime did have its own geo-political restructuring of Nigeria, one of Africa’s most populous nation, during which Central Nigeria was supposed to have been described, instead, as a North Central zone. In elaboration, the Editor added: “As a geopolitical zone, North Central Nigeria comprises six states: Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Nigeria, and Plateau. The federal capital Territory, Abuja (FCT) is also in the zone,” (p. xiii).

Most certainly, astute and active scholars – who are familiar with Professor Falola and his distinguished scholarship – would agree that he is such a cosmopolitan scholar, with no visible intellectual limitations, that the assembled essays do true honors to his well-established and grounded scholarship. For, as the Editor has promptly pointed out, “the essays in this volume satisfy the two concepts of ‘Middle Belt’ such that, although a majority of them focus on the peoples of the North Central geopolitical zone, a few are on the minorities of Southern Bauchi and Southern Kaduna, respectively,” (p. xv).

Apart from the brief preface, acknowledgements as well as the detailed introduction by the Editor, the list of contributors and the four pages of abbreviations (pp. xxix-xxii), the impressive publication is divided into four parts (Parts I-IV), with very topical subject areas, all of which touch on very useful areas of Professor Falola’s scholarly interests. Part I, for example, deals with economic, political, and religious transformation; Part II has essays discussing infrastructure; Part III is the section, where contributors concentrated on a variety of other topics, including languages, and cultures; and the final section, Part IV, handles the last seven chapters of the total of thirty-four chapters, which discuss such relevant topics as conflict and security. In all, not less than three dozen scholars, ranging from lecturers to full professors, with distinguished records, contributed to the edited volume. As variously underscored, the main achievements of the publication include the obvious superb analyses of both continuity and change from the colonial British period to the present day of Nigeria’s republican status.

Meanwhile, in the second impressive monograph, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Political Science Professor N. Oluwafemi (“Femi”) Mimiko has utilized his rich scholarship and very distinguished five-year university administrative experiences to offer what Pan-African University Press has