

REVIEWS

It Can Now Be Told By Maimunatu Dadasare Abdullahi
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The last four decades were made lively for people with special interest in the reading of personal histories that are auto and biographies, as well as personal reminiscences through occasional publishing and release of such books to the reading public. These writings were accounts by people who were eye-witnesses, or participants in the events of the early and late colonial periods in 'Northern' Nigeria. It also includes similar accounts covering the first two decades following independence in 1960.

Some of the outstanding of such publications include J.D. Muffet's (1960) *Concerning Brave Captains* along with Ahmadu Bello's (1962) *My Life* together with Sherwood Smith's *But Always as Friends*, Treavour Clark's (1991) *A Right Honourable Gentleman* and all other titles belonging to such genres¹. There are

¹Muffet, J. D., *Concerning Brave Captains* (London: Andre Deutch Limited, 1960), Bello Ahmadu, *My Life* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), SmithSherwood, *But Always as Friends: Northern Nigeria and the Cameroons, 1921-1957* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969).

other such auto-biographies, which have been written in line with this tradition, more recently, by public office holders in Nigeria such as Obasanjo and Shagari². When the last of these works was published, it marked both the end of an era and seems to have represented what might have been the last testaments on the colonial experiences, but just as it begins to seem that the last word has been written about the 'doing' of some of the prominent figures of the colonial rule and administration in Northern Nigeria, Maimunatu Dadasare's revealing not to say shocking and scandalous book jostles its way into the list of the most current publications. Aptly entitled 'It Can Now be Told', the 108 paged book published by Informart Publishers issued with an introduction and afterword by Aliya Adamu Ahmad is a simple narration of the life story of Maimunatu Dadasare Abdullahi as written by herself. Fallen short of being a hefty standard autobiography, the book of eleven chapters may pass for a personal reminiscence by a person who was privy to the event; she saw and heard a great deal in addition to her personal intimate experiences of the people and events about, which she wrote.

Born in 1918 to a Fulani family, Dadasare's story begins at a town called Gola, which is located at the north-east end of Adamawa Province in Northern Nigeria. At the age of eleven or twelve according to her, while running away from a forced marriage, she was kidnapped by her cousin and sold into slavery to a British colonial officer whom she describes as a 'white official who was feared by the people' and 'had intimated his desire of acquiring a Fulani girl as an unofficial wife' (p.p. 26-27). Before this incidence, she reveals that her early childhood days were happy and eventful (p. 13).

Dadasare later bore a child to the *Bature* (white man) before he finished his colonial service and went back to his family in Europe. Though the baby later died, she met another British colonial officer popularly known as Rupert M. East whom she addressed as *Jaumu Sāre* (Master of the House) and describes as tall, athletic, handsome and attractive (P. 31). Later, she came to Zaria on the invitation of East whom she loves dearly and argues that 'this time I did not have

Treavour, Clark, *The Right Honourable Gentleman: The Life and Times of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa* (Kaduna: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1991).

² Obasanjo Olusegun, *My Watch* (Nigeria: Kachifo Limited, 2010), Shagari Shehu, *Beckoned to Serve* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2001).

to be kidnapped' for it seems by then she had decided of her own free will to go to a man she could love and who also has a special feeling for her (p. 33). Dadasare's relations with East seem to have been happy and eventful even though the two have never been married. It was from him that she learned how to read and write in English to the extent that she was helping him with some record keeping as she discloses. The circumstances of her conversion to Christianity are not known since one cannot definitely attribute it to the kindness of East who was not known to be a devout Christian even though she later reverted to Islam and performed a pilgrimage to Mecca.

In December, 1949 with East's support, Dadasare got an opportunity to study nursing at Horton General Hospital, Banbury. She later transferred to London where she continued with her training at the Plainstow Maternity Hospital until 1955. Upon the completion of her medical training in January 1956, she finally sailed for home. In Nigeria, she did not only serve as a nurse, but also established an adult literacy class (*Yaki da jahilci*), especially for the married women in Zaria. She started with just five purdah women and five not in purdah, all local (p. 73). Among the courses offered were; English, hygiene, arithmetic and midwifery. Through this process, she facilitated the dispensing of health service delivery, as well as the spread of western education and culture in Northern Nigeria.

This also touches on the centrality of the position of the colonial 'community' of Tukur-Tukur and its role in the creation of the myth of a mono-cultural Northern Nigeria or the idea of one North one people, which orbited around Northern Literature Bureau, Gaskiya Corporation, Northern Nigeria Publishing Company just as did the other satellites of the larger colonial institution such as the European Trading Companies at the GRA in Zaria (The famous PZ Sabongari Complex) and the Christian Missionary outpost at Wusasa, the Native Authority Central Office at Babban Dodo, a theme of the early history of colonialism in Northern Nigeria of which up to the present, relatively little has been written and needs to be further 'investigated'. Now coming to think about it, Maimunatu Dadasare seems to be the nearest thing to the ideal archetype of the Muslimo-Christian identity, which British colonial cum-Missionary enterprise wished to impose on the people of Northern Nigeria of their dream.

The book *It Can Now be Told* an interesting early life adventure story sadly ends on a somber note: 'as I reach the end of the book, I feel as if I have been standing

on a hill of years looking back on the road I have traversed' (p. 97). Chapters ten and eleven of the book are a lamentation of a disillusioned author regretting a lost youth and an ended career as the request of the author's relatives to return to Adamawa to settle among her people seems to indicate (p. 120).

On the whole, the work is well written. A comprehensive report of events of a lifetime is achieved in a simple language and entertaining prose. Yet, the book is not without its flaws: there are numerous events on which more information could have been provided by the author such as the names and addresses of her cousin abductor and colonial master buyer. As it is, the autobiography only wetted the appetite of readers more than it satisfies it.

There is also the deficiency which has to do with the way the autobiography was presented to the public. For example, in the introduction and afterword sections of the book, the presenter, Aliya Adamu Ahmad raises more questions on the life of the author, which the autobiography cannot have answered: the death of the author in mysterious and yet to be discovered circumstances. As Aliya indicates Dadasare left two letters under her pillow, one of which was a will and the other probably a suicide note. When Aliya pressed Aishatu Dikko, the adopted daughter of Dadasare to divulge the content of the second letter, Dikko burst into tears. This speculation on the author's possible suicide seems to have been supported by the hint in the afterword to the book when it is reported that near to the time of Dadasare's death, she invited her adopted daughter Aishatu Dikko to come to Gombi so that the two might meet as Aliya narrated 'If you come and do not meet me, look under my pillow, I'm going to leave a message for you there' (p. 121). She also told her house boy, Malam Tukur Yola 'From tomorrow you will see me no more' (p. 121). Having observed all of this, one wishes the book was published by some reputable London publishers perhaps Hodder and Stoughton, or failing that, at least, the Northern Nigeria Publishing Company if it still exists.

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