

Nina' Mba's Insider / Outsider's Account



Posthumous Biographies

BIOGRAPHIES may be written of living or dead subjects: it is only the biographer who needs to be alive- at least until the biography is completed!

I have written published biographies of living and dead subjects: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Ayo Rosiji, who died after publication. Irrespective of whether the subject was alive or dead at the time of writing or publication, their lives may continue after death and after the publication. They continue to live through their works, their children, through their achievement and what their lives symbolized.

In the past month, both of my 'subjects' have resurfaced into our collective consciousness. The manner of death of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti has been made into a cause by the petition presented to Oputa HRVIC by Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti (as I discussed last week). As this case involved the reappearance of President Obasanjo before the panel, its implications and repercussions may be of profound significance. So FRK, in death, has in life, continues to impact dramatically on Nigerian history.

As for Chief Ayo Rosiji, on the 9th of August, the Ayo Rosiji Computer Laboratory in the Kola Daisi Foundation Computer Centre, University of Ibadan, was inaugurated by the Pro-Chancellor of the university, Chief Kola Daisi. The chairman of the investment promotion commission, chairman of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and industry, Chairman of Foundation Trust Bank set up a fully equipped laboratory in the Kola Daisi Foundation Computer Centre and dedicated it to the memory of Chief Ayo Rosiji Computer Laboratory.

As Chief Daisi explained in a poignant tribute:

"In his lifetime, Chief Rosiji was a colossus in every sense of the word: intellect, charisma and personal charm. In death, he remains a hero. He radiated love and benevolence throughout his life and was devoted and loyal to his friends and protégés to the end. To show appreciation for how Chief Rosiji's life has affected my own and to immortalize the name and memory of this great mentor and friend of mine in a manner that would permanently link us together in the minds of both contemporaries as well as the generation unborn."

Readers may not know that when Barrister/economist Kola Daisi

returned to Nigeria from the UK in 1960, he joined Ayo Rosiji's chamber in Lagos, then in Ibadan. Daisi soon took charge of Ibadan chambers as Rosiji was based in Lagos and ran it very competently until 1964 when he was appointed Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Chamber of Commerce, at which point Rosiji closed his Ibadan chambers. I can confirm that Chief Rosiji had the highest regard for Chief Kola Daisi and as a lover of history, Rosiji would have appreci-

"The idea of MUSON originated from Mr Akintola Williams and Chief Ayo Rosiji, not with me.... The credit for the conception of MUSON must go to Chief Rosiji and Mr. Williams who were the founding chairman and vice-chairman of the society."

ated Daisi's act of commemorating his role in Nigerian history.

Chief Ayo Rosiji's role in the history of the Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON) has been the subject of recent contretemps in the Guardian, thus also evoking his legacy. For several months, the Guardian has featured discourse on the founding of MUSON. On Sunday, August 12, it published two letters from Mrs P. A. Ogundipe (OON) and Mrs F.Y. Emmanuel (CON) which documented the differences between the brochure on MUSON's history which they and Mr Akintola Williams drew up in October 1993 and the final version of the brochure released by Mr Williams on the day of the MUSON centre's inauguration, 24th February 1994.

The crux of the difference is that the first version attributes the founding of MUSON to a group of Nigerians (unnamed) who, inspired by Sir Mervyn Brown, (the outgoing British High Commissioner), met in October 1983 to form the musical society. The published version, which has been amended by Mr Williams, attributes the inspiration and initiative to Mr Akintola William who approached

Sir Mervyn for advice, then contacted Chief Ayo Rosiji, Mr Louis Mbanefo, Mrs Francesca Emmanuel and others. Rather belaboring the point, the brochure states "the formal establishment and success of MUSON are due mainly to Mr Akintola Williams who did all the spadework.

Since both versions refer to the pivotal role played by Sir Mervyn Brown, may I just quote Sir Mervyn's own words in a five-page he wrote to me, dated 28th March 1992:

In the biography of Ayo Rosiji, I record the invaluable contribution to the founding of MUSON made by Rosiji, Akintola Williams, Louis Mbanefo, Francesca Emmanuel, Rasheed Gbadamosi, J.K. Randle, Oye Williams, Helen Travers, Olga Miller, Oto Lijadu and Walter Hagg, the founding trustees. I would now like to add a name not then known to me, Duncan McKellar who designed the MUSON logo and the cover for the concert programmes. The correct historical records of any organization must be preserved for posterity.

At the end of my biography of Ayo Rosiji, I complained about a "live subject who insists on getting on with his/her life and thus refuses to stay still to be captured irrevocably in print."

That was in 1992: by the time Rosiji died in 2000, he had indeed "got on" with his life. Of course, those actions/achievements are not recorded in *Ayo Rosiji: Man with Vision*. They could in another (posthumous) biography, which also comments on my biography, (regardless of whether I, the first biographer, am alive or dead!).

And so on.

While it is beneficial that the influence of some history markers operates posthumously, it is also essential that others remain sealed in their tombs forever.

Abacha is one such Nigerian example which always reminds me of the poem by the famous Russian poet, Yev-tushenko, about Stalin and his heirs:

So, I ask our government

To double

To treble

The guard

Over this tomb