

**BOOK REVIEW**

**TITLE: ILE-OLUJI: TRADITIONS, GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURS,  
LAGOS: ADELIN VENTURES, 1994 (366 PAGES)**

**AUTHORED BY: ABIMBOLA MOBOLANLE AKINFEMIWA**

**Reviewed by:**

**Ezekiel Oladele ADEOTI**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY, OJO, LAGOS, NIGERIA**

This is an all embracing study of Ile-Oluji as the title indicates – Ile-Oluji: Traditions, Growth and Neighbours.

*ILE-OLUJI: Traditions, Growth and Neighbours*, is undoubtedly an ambitious and wide-ranging book covering the entire history of *Ile-Oluji* from the period of unknown antiquity through colonial rule to the present, highlighting the various traditions, the indigenous and modern institutions, in the various socio-politico-economic spheres of the town. It also highlights the relationship between *Ile-Oluji* and its neighbours from the earliest times to the present.

Even though the book is addressed to the general reading public it cannot but appeal also to specialists and academic historians. The author has done a great deal of home work judging from the range of sources she has used. Indeed, the book does not only add substantially to our knowledge of history of *Ile-Oluji*. It is an important addition to the literature on the history of the ancient town.

She has collated and analysed a good deal of data. Consequently, she presents a brilliant account of *Ile-Oluji* and its neighbours. We have to admit that the assignment which Miss Akinfemiwa

set for herself or which was set for her by the *Ile-Oluji* Development Council to write the history of *Ile-Oluji* from the pre-colonial era to the present time – is a most daunting one. It is to her credit that she has succeeded in writing a concise account of this history. This she has expressed in prose of exceptional lucidity and grace. And in tune with the current multi-disciplinary trend in reconstructing the early history of pre-literate societies, Miss Akinfenwa has had to employ the skills of a sociologist, ethnologist and linguist in order to give a clear picture of the *Ile-Oluji* society in the–colonial era. Thus, the first and second parts of the book appear to be a more sociological than purely historical account. These parts are devoted to a discussion of themes like *Ile-Oluji* traditions of origin, indigenous socio-politico-economic and cultural settings, peopling and dialect of the town. All these constitute a rich mine of information on the rise of *Ile-Oluji* Kingdom, the people’s world-view, their customs, usages, conventions, religious beliefs, totems, taboos, etc.

Part one is quite stimulating and revealing. It discusses the relative position and location of Ile-Oluji within the Nigerian polity, its size, population, physical features and industries. It also examines the three main traditions of origin of Ile-Oluji. Thus, certain facts come to light: *Ile-Oluji* is one of the largest towns in *Ondo* State and it is one of the oldest Yoruba Kingdoms which trace their origins to *Ile-Ife* – the cradle of the Yoruba race; and, of course, one of those traditionally entitled to wear beaded crowns. It also comes out as one of the leading cocoa producing towns – an economic crop on which *Ondo* State in particular, and Nigeria in general, used to depend for economic survival.

Parts three and four of the work encapsulate the major events of *Ile-Oluji* history from about 1900 when the ‘fog of colonialism’ descended on the town, as it happened in most parts of Yorubaland, to 1994, the terminal date of this study (pp. 128-274). These parts examine the issue of social change and *Ile-Oluji*’s relationship with its neighbours. Part three, in particular, discusses the political, social, cultural and economic transformations that took place in the town following the advent of Europeans in the late nineteenth century. With attendant colonization and modernisation, *Ile-Oluji* has never been the same again. This has been most pronounced in the area of politics, particularly as it affects *Ile-Oluji* and its neighbours. The political structures of *Ile-Oluji* and its neighbours. The political structures of *Ile-Oluji* and its neighbours were re-

shaped. While *Ondo* had her political status enhanced by the new arrangement *Ile-Oluji*, like the other communities in the area, was made subservient to *Ondo* in the scheme of things. This was to bring about a strained political relationship between the two erstwhile peaceful neighbours for most of the colonial period. *Ile-Oluji* finally regained its political independence when the *Ile-Oluji* Local Government Council was carved out of *Ondo*, in 1955 (p. 139). However, much damage had been inflicted on the political relationship between the two communities – a development which in recent times made many people on both sides to have recourse to history. It is this that gives this work its greatest significance.

Part four takes a perceptive look at the relationship between *Ile-Oluji* and its neighbours since the pre-colonial times. The author throws her probing searchlight on the historical socio-economic and political links between *Ile-Oluji* on the one hand and *Ondo*, *Idanre*, *Ipetu-Ijesa* and *Oke-Igbo* on the other stressing the issues of continuity and change in their relationships; and the negative or disruptive influences of colonialism and modernisation on the politics of *Ile-Oluji* vis-a-vis the others. This section also deals with the various wars in which *Ile-Oluji* was involved (pp. 265-272).

Chapter 13 of the book is most stimulating and informative and it makes the whole text a “book of revelation”. It shows the real historical nexus between the *Ile-Oluji* and its big brother, *Ondo*. It is a fact that *Ondo* was the largest political edifice that arose in *Igbo-Ijamo* area. For this reason, the British colonial officers deliberately or mistakenly reached the conclusion that other rulers, including the *Jegun*, the traditional ruler of *Ile-Oluji* were subject to the *Osemawe*. This conclusion was responsible for the role assigned to the *Osemawe* in the period 1913-1955 (p. 128-139). This chapter proves with convincing force that *Ondo*'s assumed primacy over *Ile-Oluji* was a colonial creation that lacks the support of tradition. The controversy as to who is the *Kehinde* (senior) or *Taiwo* (junior) –both are regarded as twins – between *Ile-Oluji* and *Ondo* has been put to rest. It is clear that *Ile-Oluji* is the *Kehinde*. Up till today, every new *Osemawe* must come to *Ile-Oluji* during his “*unojo*” (seclusion period) to perform certain rituals without which he cannot be enthroned as the *Osemawe* (p. 229). The historical significance of this ceremony cannot be ignored. History, according to E.H. Carr, is an unending dialogue between the present and the past. Accordingly, this story has a past which bears connection with the present. It looks

like a re-enactment of the past when *Ondo* accepted the primacy of *Ile-Oluji*. It presupposes that the *Jegun* by right, logic and tradition deserves to be accorded necessary respect from his big brother. That this has not always been the case should be regarded as part of the price of modernisation and peaceful co-existence with its neighbours. However, the purpose of history is there and whoever wants to controvert it will have to contend with the evidence so clearly put together by Miss Akinfemiwa.

One complaint of the reader will be the lack of tone marks on the Yoruba words, personal and place names especially. The non-indigene of *Ile-Oluji/Ondo* is likely to face the problem of how to pronounce the names of people, places and events written in the local dialect. Considering the importance of the meanings that those words are meant to convey, one would have expected the author to assist with tone marks. Failure to do this means that the importance of tonal word play is obscured. Moreover, some issues will require further amplification in future editions. For example, the payment of *Isakole* by *Ile-Oluji* to *Oyo* (p.216). Does the payment suggest political subservience of *Ile-Oluji* to *Oyo* at a certain point in time? What does the author think about the “*sunwen*” voluntarily surrounding sovereignty to the *Jegun*? Then there is the issue of the *Idokos* and *Ifores* willingly surrendering the government and administration of *Ekun-Ijamo* to the *Jegun* (p.216). What connection does this have with the derivation of the title – *Jegun*? If these groups voluntarily surrendered their freedom and sovereignty to the *Jegun*, how do we explain their separatist tendencies even up till today?

These observations notwithstanding, this is a good book and no reader will go away from it without an imprint of Akinfemiwa’s personal characteristics of hard work, moderation, dedication, fairness and impartiality. It is a work that researchers, teachers and students will find invaluable. It is a distinct contribution to the effort being made to indigenise the study and writing of Nigerian history. The book also adds substantially to our understanding of the colonial and post-colonial phases of an important part of Yorubaland. By its publication Miss Akinfemiwa has proved herself as one of the worthy apostles of oral tradition as a valid and authentic source in reconstructing the history of Nigerian peoples. This is in tune with the whole philosophy of the Ibadan School of History of which the author can confidently claim to be a worthy offspring.