

## Book Review

**Toyin Falola. *Cultural Modernity in a Colonized World: The Writings of Chief Isaac Oluwole Delano*. Pan-African University Press, 2020, 739 pages.**

**Toyin Falola and Michael O. Afolayan eds. *Isaac O. Delano A Dictionary of Yoruba Monosyllabic Verbs Edited with an Introduction*. Pan-African University Press, 2020, 538 pages.**

**Toyin Falola and Michael O. Afolayan eds. *Selected Works of Chief Isaac O. Delano on Yoruba Language Edited and Introduced*. Pan-African University Press, 2020, 644 pages.**

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### Introduction

Yes, the *Yoruba Studies Review* has asked me to write a “comprehensive review of the three books released on Chief Isaac Delano.” However, because Toyin Falola had already committed 739 pages for an unsurpassed chronicle and review of the times, life, works, and classics of Doctor Isaac Oluwole Delano, it would be pretentious of me to claim any attempt to do a *comprehensive review of the three books*. What I will do is to make a modest introduction

of Delanọ's long buried or an unheralded intellectual legacy. While Samuel Ajayi Crowther laid the foundation for the transition of Yoruba culture from oral to written literatures, Delanọ provided the guideline manuals, the methodological rubrics, and the compass and roadmaps for the studies and development of modern Yoruba orthography, linguistics, anthropological historiography, literatures, spirituality, and nation building. He was the first Administrative Secretary of the *Egbe Ọmọ Oduduwa*, a cultural organization that became a political party in Nigeria at the dawn of Nigeria's independence in the 1950s.

**Toyin Falọla. *Cultural Modernity in a Colonized World: The Writings of Chief Isaac Oluwole Delanọ***

Drawing on “Delanọ's numerous breathtaking contributions” (xvi), Falọla has in this book deployed his plethora of multidisciplinary dialectics and professional specialties to enliven Delanọ's “literary and nonliterary works” that “revolve around culture and pragmatic cultural revival” (page xvi) for our readers' delight and for posterity.

The book is organized in four parts and fourteen chapters—weaving together “all the topics into a theoretical template of colonial modernity to structure the multiple layers of conversations” (p. xvii). Part A: Prologue and Introduction contains two chapters on Delanọ's biography and a theoretical framework for analysis and the understanding of cultural modernity in a colonial and post-colonial world. Part B: Ontological Representations of Narratives is made up of chapters 3-8 interrogating the political and the socioeconomic worldviews that informed Delanọ's intellectual works and dispositions. Part C: Ideologies and Epistemologies, chapters 9-12 present the dynamics of the subsumed interface of the Yoruba culture and modernity on one hand, and the conflicting realities of “parochial patriotism” for sustainable socioeconomic and political development, governance, citizenship, and nationhood on the other. Part D: Conclusion, chapters 13 and 14 are an outlook and discourses on Delanọ and the Future of Yoruba Studies, and on A Legend and His Legacy with “its anomies and antinomies” respectively.

As a preview token of “the philosophy that undergirds his writings; and a robust contextualization of how to understand them as well as an epistemological guidance to their significance” (back page blurb), Falọla provides readers with fourteen appendices to the book (pp. 529-694). They are all from the private papers of Chief Isaac Delanọ in the possession of his son, Chief Akinwande Delanọ. They are reproduced exactly as contained in the files, i.e., without editing or corrections of typos. I had the privilege to view Chief Isaac Oluwole Delanọ's will in which he demonstrated his love for proper records

and documentation in devoting three paragraphs to authorize one of his sons, Chief Akinwande Delano, as the sole executor for his literary works.

Falola's ambitious aim for this volume "is to bring to the fore, from his [Delano's] first publication in 1937 to the last one in 1973—which was a chapter contribution in Saburi Biobaku's *Sources of Yoruba History*—the intellectual compass of Delano, which is no doubt very relevant to the current realities of Nigeria" (p. xvii). According to Falola, "In this book, it will be seen, *inter alia*, discussions on the people of Nigeria and their intricate cultures; the root of the current porous political culture from the account of a man who was actively present as the first Administrative Secretary of the Egbẹ Omo Oduduwa and a Chieftain of the Action Group; the changing influence of the traditional institutions; the role of the Christian missionaries in the transformation of Nigeria; and the impact of modernization on the Nigerian space. Many other themes are represented within these larger bodies. Accordingly, his [Delano's] views on Christian marriage doctrine, the Nigerian Church, Agroecology, Western civilization, and what progress means for a nation are all represented" (page xvii).

Beyond his primary specialty as a historian, in Parts B and C, Chapters 3-12, Falola exhibited his sterling dialectic creativity to provide theoretical frameworks, methodological toolkits, and to showcase a catalogue of future research themes and to signpost potential book publications on Delano. This book will serve as a monumental research template for several potential research themes, including ontology, narratology, ideology, epistemology, cultural archives, and the dynamics of modernity for a primordial culture. Thus, Falola has laid the scholarly foundation not only for the interpretation and critical analysis of the Yoruba worldviews but for the general readers' understanding of Delano's "many records, letters, documents and over a dozen publications, spanning from 1937 through to 1973" (back page blurb). More importantly in a manner of speaking Falola has exhumed, dusted, and breathed lives into Delano's times, and scholarly heritage of the epoch-making "transition hours" (p. xvi) from colonization to Nigeria's political independence.

Distinguished scholars, including Emeritus Professor Anthony I. Asiwaju and Emeritus Professor Akinjide Osumtokun, have provided advance praises for this book (pp. iii-viii). I would like to close with this beautiful writeup by Emerita Professor Pamela Olubunmi Smith:

Great expectations from one suited to and capable of undertaking such a monumental task of (w)riting the omissions of history. There are no surprises here: Toyin Falola leads by example, and this is TF, true to his commitment to ensure the rediscovery/reawakening of the generation once

silenced or inconveniently lost. At once the work of intellectual rigor, and a gripping story, lyrical in its telling. A gift to scholars of Yoruba cultural history and for future generations (p. v).

Professor Şegun Ogungbemi is unequivocal to say in his praise for this book that, “This unjust oversight [what Professor Smith has described as “the generation once silenced or inconveniently lost”], has made Professor Toyin Falola, a foremost contemporary African historian to exhume the tomb of knowledge production by Chief Delano, a poet, linguist, historian, journalist, devout Christian, and a cultural and traditional revivalist to the core” (p. viii).

The secret of a genius is the uncommon discerning creative ability and the visionary capability to perceive, to understand, to envision, and to see beyond the surface! Dr Isaac Oluwole Delano perceived and understood the power of cultural imperialism and the enduring ominous multifarious enslavement tactics and strategies of colonialism. Consciously or unconsciously Delano and his Pan-Africanist/nationalist cohorts such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. J.E.K. Aggrey and Herbert Macaulay, knew the power of cultural history and stories, and the powerful role of language and journalism (sometimes yellow and jingoistic journalism) for public enlightenment, cultural revival and modernization. In 1937, Nnamdi Azikiwe published *Renasant Africa* and Isaac Delano published *The Soul of Nigeria*, both proffering the theses for cultural reimagining. Unlike the infamous Willie Lynch, a British slave owner in West Indies, who developed an enduring programmed method for a perpetual enslavement of the black people and was invited to the colony of Virginia in 1772 to teach his methods to American slave owners there, Chief Isaac Delano espoused his visionary treatises of how to free the Africans of colonial mindset and cultural imperialism. Consequently, the most intriguing of the unheralded Dr Isaac Delano’s works that inspired Falola and will definitely enchant “anyone closely or remotely interested in the social and intellectual history, language and culture of the Yoruba race” (p.viii), is his (Delano’s) perceptive understanding of colonial mentality and his proffered visionary discourses for cultural reimagining, imperial emancipation, and reclamation of African culture and identity. In commending this book, may I reecho Professor Michael O. Afolayan that, “This book is a must-read for anyone closely or remotely interested in the social and intellectual history, language, and culture of the Yoruba race.”

**Toyin Falola and Michael O. Afọlayan eds. *Selected Works of Chief Isaac O. Delano on Yoruba Language Edited and Introduced.***

The works and life of Chief Isaac Delano underscored his invaluable conviction that language is the software for the creation and development, processing, storage, retrieval, and for the preservation and use of culture. The Yoruba say, *Ibadan l'omo, o mo layipo*, and Delano's compendium of Yoruba language, history and anthropological chronicles is also a signifier to knowing the "*layipo*" of the Yoruba people. Language plays an indisputable role for the understanding, interpretation, and deciphering and decoding of the Yoruba cultural values and beliefs that are obscured in proverbs, sayings and conversations, unique grammatical structure, and their family system, gender equity, and democratic political culture and communal philosophy but not communist governance and governmentality.

In this volume Toyin Falola and Michael Afọlayan have selected five of the numerous works of Dr. Isaac Oluwole Delano:

1. *Delano and the Essence of Yoruba Grammar*;
2. *Conversation in Yoruba and English*;
3. *A Modern Yoruba Grammar*;
4. *Agbeka Oṣo Yoruba*; and
5. *Atumo Ede Yoruba*.

Accordingly, their aim is to present readers with "the intellectual compass of Delano, which is no doubt very relevant to the current realities of Nigeria" (page xi), focusing Dr Isaac Delano's pioneering works on Yoruba grammar, orthography, lexicography, and cultural education.

As earlier noted in the section on Toyin Falola's *Cultural Modernity in a Colonized World*, in the above-mentioned selected works, readers "will see discussions on the people of Nigeria and their intricate cultures, the root of the current porous political culture from the account of a man who was actively present as the first Administrative Secretary of the Egbẹ Omo Oduduwa and a Chieftain of the Action Group; the changing influence of the traditional institutions; the role of Christian missionaries in the transformation of Nigeria; and the impact of modernization on the Nigerian space. Many other themes are represented within the larger bodies. Accordingly, his views on Christian marriage doctrine, the Nigerian Church, Agro-economy, Western civilization and what progress means for a nation are all represented" (page xi).

Toyin Falola and Micheal Afolayan had in a manner of speech archaeologically excavated or exhumed and brought alive the erstwhile buried works and life of Chief Delano for us all to enjoy and learn from. As a treatise on decolonization of the Yoruba mindset and a corpus on the modernization and preservation of the endangered Yoruba language, cultural values and beliefs, I commend this must-read selected Delano's encyclopedic work to students of language in general and to those interested in the reimagination of the Yoruba culture.

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Clarence Shepard Day Jr (1874-1935) an American author and cartoonist, best known for his 1935 work, *Life With Father*, once said "The world of books is the most remarkable creation of man. Nothing else, that he builds, ever lasts. Monuments fall; nations perish; civilizations grow old and die; and, after an era of darkness, new races build others. But in the worlds of books are volumes that have seen this happen again and again, and yet live on, still young, still as fresh as the day they were written, still telling men's hearts of the hearts of men centuries dead." Chief Delano has with his *Dictionary of Monosyllabic Yoruba Verbs* written one of those books and led us into the "magic world of books". As Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) is known as the father of modern English language dictionary, so has Isaac Oluwole Delano been the father of Yoruba language dictionary.

But more importantly, Toyin Falola and Michael Afolayan have not only been our guardians into the heart of Chief Delano, but have led us out of the long era of darkness over Chief Delano's legacy and have guided us into the remarkable everlasting world of books where everything is alive, young, and fresh. I am a living memory of the truth that a book can change one's life and set us on a new path in life because my life has never been the same since a friend of my illiterate father bought me a Yoruba and English dictionary in the late 1950s and I acquired my first biggest word: ancestor---*awon babanlawa*. With the reissue of Chief Delano's book, the lives of the Yoruba as a language, a nation, and a people will never be same again. I commend the book to all students and lovers of etymology.