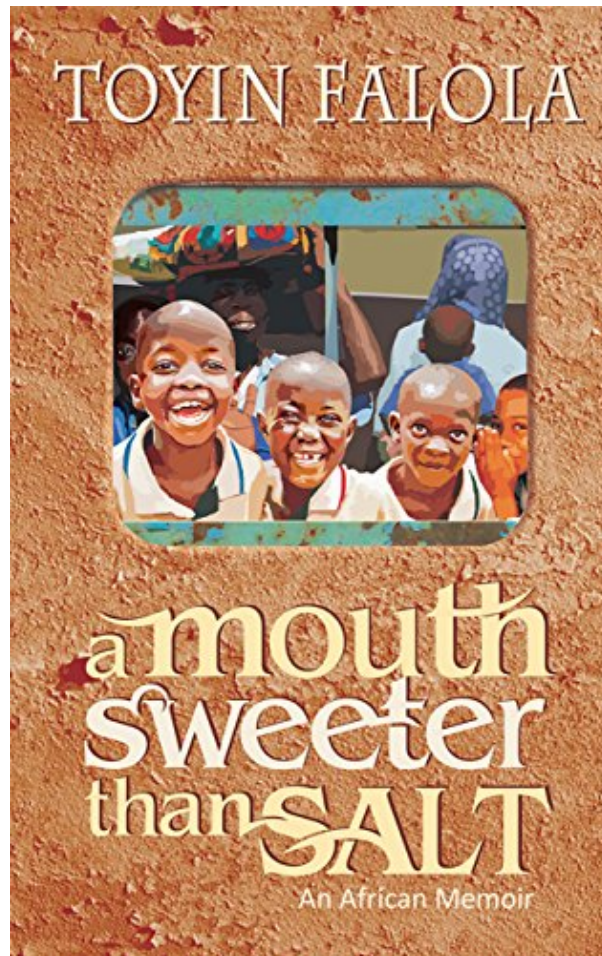


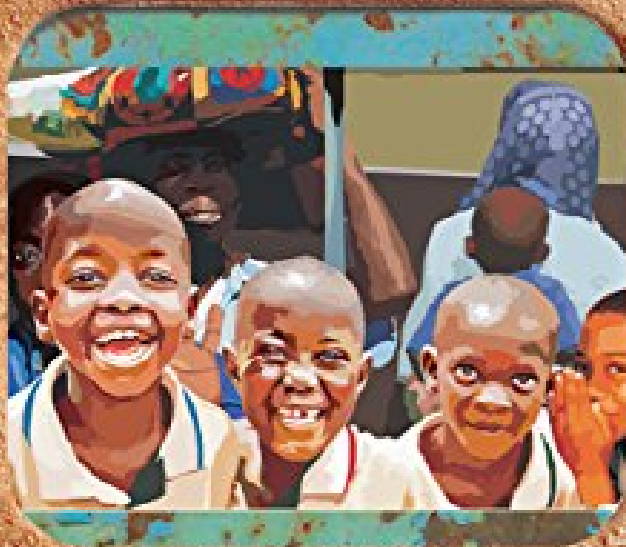
A MOUTH SWEETER THAN SALT: AN AFRICAN MEMOIR BY TOYIN FALOLA



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Review

"... a rich and often profoundly beautiful book.... There's little doubt that within the growing body of African autobiographical literature, this book is going to stand high." - Sunday Independent (South Africa)"

About the Author

Toyin Falola is Frances Higginbotham Nalle Centennial Professor of History and Nelson Mandela Professor of African Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Author or editor of over fifty books and countless articles, he has written extensively on subjects ranging from political economy, nationalism, development, and violence to religion.

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A Mouth Sweeter than Salt gathers the stories and reflections of the early years of Toyin Falola, the grand historian of Africa and one of the greatest sons of Ibadan, the notable Yoruba city-state in Nigeria. Redefining the autobiographical genre altogether, Falola miraculously weaves together personal, historical, and communal stories, along with political and cultural developments in the period immediately preceding and following Nigeria's independence, to give us a unique and enduring picture of the Yoruba in the mid-twentieth century. This is truly a literary memoir, told in language rich with proverbs, poetry, song, and humour.

The reader is irresistibly drawn into Falola's world. The prose is lucid. There is humour. This work is sweet. Period.

-Ngugi wa Thiong'o

This is Ibadan as only a true indigene can write or remember her, in all her voluptuous turbulence and ebullient eloquence. Truly, with this achievement, Toyin proves that the mouth can indeed be sweeter than salt.

-Femi Osofisan

A splendid coming-of-age story so full of vivid colour and emotion, the words seem to dance off the page. But this is not only Falola's memoir; it is an account of a new nation coming into being and the tensions and negotiations that invariably occur between city and country, tradition and modernity, men and women, rich and poor. A truly beautiful book.

-Robin D. G. Kelley

It is difficult not to read A Mouth Sweeter than Salt as another IBADAN, but a more nuanced imaginative village, in the throes of creation. The reader, aware of that other masterly history book, salivates at this story book.

-Kole Omotoso

Winner of the 2004 Association of Third World Studies President's Distinguished Award, the West African Oral History Association Award, and the 2005 Herskovits Finalist Award by the Association of African Studies.

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Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Phenomenal

By Jackson Twain

Wow. Just, wow. In short, this is a great read for anyone who wishes to understand the context and culture surrounding the greater African independence movements of the last century.

To be honest, I wasn't too keen on this book at first. I thought it was cumbersome and almost redundant. The more I read, however, I realized that the style which Falola writes is something to be savored. Too often do we read books simply to get to the next word, sentence, page, chapter. Sorry for the corny cliché, but I think it applies here: The whole is greater than the sum of its parts when it comes to this book.

At first, the only parts of the book I enjoyed were the periodical African idioms and sayings. When I finally reached a point to where I could examine the totality of the message, I realized that interspersed in these memoirs is a much deeper understanding of Africa during a time of abrupt transition from a traditional culture to a foreign/forced modern one.

If at first you start to lose interest, keep reading. It's definitely worth it.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Listening to the elders

By Friederike Knabe

Growing up in Nigeria in the years around independence provides good material for a personal memoir. These must have been extraordinary times, full of hope and expectation for the emerging new country. For a growing teenager though, the issues were closer to home. Falola, well known scholar of African history, has used his personal experiences to create a rich innovative kind of memoir that combines his growing up during that time with events in his community and the country as a whole. The resulting book gives the reader vivid insight into a complex society with its intricate traditions, in particular those of the Yoruba culture. Falola writes an easy accessible style, often addressing the reader directly. He demonstrates his narrative skill and an ability to impart local events with gracefulness and humour. He demonstrates how the use of proverbs, idioms and traditional imagery has remained part of everyday discourse by interweaving sayings into his narrative. "A proverb is regarded as the 'horse' that carries words to a different level, investing them with meanings...".

Falola's account suggests that he was already at the age of 10 a curious youngster and an astute observer of people, relationships and events. His early fascination with trains led him to experiences beyond his age level that were to influence his standing in his family and community. After an unplanned train ride and its aftermath, that created upheaval in the family, he was transplanted to another branch of his family in a more rural sector of Ibadan, the city-state in Nigeria's south-western region. Not having taken notice of the hierarchical structure of his polygamous family, he realized only then which of his "mothers" is his birth mother. There he also learned to connect with the rich traditions of the local people who have maintained much closer links to their past than those in the urban centre. For example, children are given an additional name by the family, a praise name (oriki). This name should establish a link to a real or imaginary hero of

the past. Such names should enhance the young person's deep character and his ambition to emulate the past bearer. Like a young detective he tracks an old woman, different from any he had seen in the neighbourhood. When he is finally confronted by her, the outcomes are an important lesson for his life and future. These early influences shape his thinking into his adult life.

While the chapters stand as independent stories or essays, they flow together easily as a portrait of a person in his time and place. He merges the memories of his childhood with his comprehension of circumstances as an adult. Understanding of his roots and the culture instilled in him led him to study the cultural traditions of the Yoruba people and the history of the land. His reflections on how the two religions, Islam and Christianity managed to co-exist with the rich African traditions are as pertinent today as they were during the sixties. So is his criticism of the trend among the younger generation to denigrate their own culture in the face of western influences. [Friederike Knabe]

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

What A Great Piece!

By Mike Olaf

Falola's memoir, *A Mouth Sweeter Than Salt*, is a "must read" for anyone seeking to gain deeper and serious insights into the mind of the true African child. The author gives the reader a breath taking, bird eye view of the cultural panorama of the Yoruba society, and the implications of growing up in its most complicated and sophisticated city of Ibadan. The uniqueness of this book lies in its ability to transcend academic and cultural boundaries. It is as good a history book as it is a novel; social scientists will find it valuable and educators will find it to be of great relavance. It is a story of life and of living. It is indeed a celebration of youth and its rites of passage. Humor, wit, and readability add color and lucidity to all pages of this book. Wild, weird, wide, and even scary at times, this is a memoir that will stand the test of time.

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