

Literature and Nation Building in Africa

The central historical project in present-day Africa is nation building. Its ruling objectives are the defence of African societies and the renaissance of African civilization. These require the fostering of national spirit and the transmitting from generation to generation of the achievements of African civilization. In previous eras of African history, as in other parts of the world, literature and orature have made indispensable contributions to such objectives. Unfortunately, African literature of the late 20th century seems to lack an articulated awareness of such national and civilizational purposes, and so seems devoid of a vital focus.

A wilderness without signposts is a playground for misleaders; similarly, an African literature without a clear set of national and civilizational goals is open for hijacking by interests hostile to African civilization. If this unacceptable situation is to be remedied, African writers and critics need to meticulously examine the implications of nation building for their work.

First, the business of fostering national spirit. Western "universalists" are prone to decry African literature for being "ethnic", "local", "political" and what not, even though such attributes are vital in fostering national spirit. Since we are here in Sweden, at one of the centres of "universality", let me illustrate the value of ~~ethnic, local~~ ^{such} ~~and political~~ literature by an example from this northern European locality.

In his "Politics of Ethnopoetics", and American poet, Gary Snyder, illustrated how publication of ethnic literature reinforces a people's sense of identity:

A young doctor named Lonnrat set himself to walking widely through the northern parts of Finland, collecting the remaining fragments of songs and epics and tales that the people were still telling in the early 19th century. He strung these together in an order which he more or less perceived himself, and called it the Kalevala. It became overnight the Finnish national epic and helped the Finns hold up against the Swedes on the one side and the Russians on the other. It may well be that Dr. Lonnrat's walking around in the summer-time is responsible for the fact that there is a nation called Finland today.

A series of questions is posed for African writers by that example, namely: Are they consciously producing work that could similarly foster national spirit in Africa? If not, how ought they to set about doing so, and what ought they to desist from doing?

On the matter of a renaissance of African civilization, we ought to note that a civilization~~xxx~~ usually produces a body of literature, codified during some high point in its evolution, which transmits its fundamental values and outlook for the guidance of subsequent generations of its members. Even after a civilisation has vanished, this body of works conveys its spirit to whoever reads it. Apart from factual accounts, such a body usually includes creation myths, national and heroic epics, religious texts embodying the civilization's cosmography, treatises on political and personal conduct which embody its moral ~~xxxxx~~ temper, as well as poetry, plays, songs, and other imaginative works and entertainments.

Some civilizations, at some point, anthologise the best of such works, and hold them up as the flower of their intellectual life. Perhaps the most famous of such anthologies is the Old Testament Bible, which was compiled sometime in the 7th century B.C. to serve Judaic society and culture. Its influence has, of course, spread far beyond Judaic culture. Through Christianity, it helped to shape European civilization; and through its influence on the Koran, it helped shape Islamic civilization.

Similar compilations from other civilizations are the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Mahabharata, Ramayana and other fundamental books of Hindu civilization; the Kojiki and the Nihongi of Japan; the Book of Songs and the Confucian Classics of Chinese civilization; and the Greek Anthology which preserves the intellectual glories of Hellenic civilization.

If one attempted to compile an anthology that would similarly transmit the spirit and achievement of African civilization, would the contribution from 20th century African literature be up to par? And again, if not, why not? And what should African writers do to remedy that, and what should they desist from doing?

To answer these questions, we need to explore the relation between identity, consciousness and action, the role of culture in nation building, literature's contribution to national culture, and apply all that, and more, to the specifics of African history and civilization.

Identity, Consciousness and Action

In his long poem, Harlem Gallery, Afro-American poet Melvin Tolson retells a Zulu tale about a hunter who found an eagle eating dung, along with a flock of chicken, in a barnyard near a buffalo trail. The hunter picked up the eagle, carried it to a mountain top, and tried to teach it to fly. Throwing it into the air, he cried: "Aquila fly!

You are not a chicken but an eagle!" But the eagle, alas, tumbled to the ground. Several times the hunter tried; each time the eagle flopped to the ground. Then a falcon flew past them, crying and soaring in the breeze. Its dormant instincts awakened finally, the eagle stretched its wings and, after a few false starts, soared off toward the sun.

This tale makes two things clear for us: the supreme importance for action of a consciousness of one's correct identity, and the value of those who prompt us to overcome our false consciousness. It can also be applied to illuminate the challenges facing Africa and its literature. Explaining, prompting and supplying inspiring examples are among the ways in which literature, and orature before it, have affected human action. In contemporary Africa, though the acknowledged historical project is nation building, it is being hindered by a false consciousness of our identity, our history, and our capabilities. Therefore, the challenge for African literature today is to ~~act~~ play, as it were, the hunter to Africa's Aquila.

Nation Building and National Culture

In the context of nation building, it is useful to look at culture as that fabric of mental, emotional and physical activities whose threads hold a people together within and across generations. It does so by shaping their feelings, by ordering the routines of their days, by defining their interests, by determining and interpreting their experiences, and by inculcating in them the values and beliefs with which they conduct their lives. National culture defines the range of what they wear, eat, talk about, aim for, argue and fight over; it organises the memories they share, the games they play, and even the disputes they feel party to. It determines their religious rites, work procedures, leisure ~~habits, habits, culinary styles, economic attitudes, judicial procedures, manners, customs, and other behavioural regulations.~~

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habits, culinary styles, economic attitudes, judicial practices, manners, customs, and other behavioural regulations. Because national culture is the fabric which orders the life of a nation, it can be said that nation building is but the building of a national culture.

For example, when Chaka created a new nation, the Amazulu, out of fragments of the nations he conquered, he made them renounce their clans and languages, and he made them join his regiments and become Amazulu. He built a capital, instituted social reforms, trained his regiments in new arts of war, taught his nation ^{new} greetings, and gave them a new name. According to Thomas Mofolo, in his fictionalized biography of Chaka, Chaka's chief object was to make them Amazulu in heart and soul. He therefore composed many beautiful songs and praises, which caused his warriors when they heard them to weep and be carried away with enthusiasm.

As Chaka well understood, the fundamental task of the nation builder is to detach the primary loyalty of its members from all other groups (subnational as well as supranational), and to attach it to their new nation and its symbols. This has always required the making of new myths of origin, the invention of national heroes and heroic traditions, and the legitimation of the new national system of authority. Thereafter, preservation of cohesion among the members of the nation becomes a matter of reaffirming allegiance to the symbols of that national identity.

Literature and National Culture

Among the creators and preservers of national culture are, of course, those who fashion the national mind and shape the attitudes of the citizenry. Literary artists, who fictionally ~~re~~ rehearse the nation's history and experien-

ces, who exercise its imagination and direct its feelings, contribute enormously to national identity. But literature helps principally by serving as a medium for the dialogue among a people about their history and destiny; and by husbanding and keeping efficient a national idiom for communication and expression. The national idiom provides a system of attitudes, references, allusions, metaphors and images by which thoughts, feelings and experiences can be powerfully conveyed between the members of a nation.

Incidentally, this idiom is much more than a national language, in so far as two or more nations which speak the same language (e.g. Britain and the USA) ^{MO}almost invariably evolve different idioms to accomodate the peculiarities of their national histories. Over time, as their experiences diverge, even the same phrase would come to evoke different images, memories, attitudes, and feelings in members of the different nations.

Literature modifies and enlarges the national idiom, and helps teach it to members of the nation. Consider the basic texts of England's literature, from Chaucer, through the King James Bible, to Shakespeare and beyond. Those brought up on these texts absorb a ^mcompendium of images, attitudes, and values ~~with~~ which imparts to them the fundamentals of both the Judeo-Christian and the specifically British cultural heritage.

The case of the Jewish nation is perhaps the most spectacular. Their national anthology, the Bible, has helped hold them together in spirit and identity for millenia, despite their physical dispersal among hostile nations around the world. Their myths of origin, their ^hheroic epics, their religious poetry, their fundamental moral code, etc., are all included in that anthology. Through it, individuals are initiated into their Jewish identity, and indoctrinated in their national idiom.

Beyond the husbandry of national idiom, literature serves nation building by performing three functions: it makes affirmations, it criticises, and it explores.

Regarding its explorative function, it should not be overlooked that nation building is the willed enactment into history of some myth or idea of a nation. It is a creative enterprise, much like rebuilding, according to some new design, an old city going to ruin. It thus requires an exploration of the potentialities of the situation. Imagining what a nation could be like, what life in it might feel ^{like?} ~~like~~, would seem a natural task for persons whose stock in trade is the inventing of lives for individual characters, and of plausible worlds for sets of characters.

Regarding the affirming function, nation building requires that national enthusiasm be sparked and maintained for as long as the project lasts. The thoughts and feelings of the participants need to be kept keen by repeatedly affirming the attractive goals and the sense of destiny. This, it would also seem, is yet another task tailor-made for writers. After all, their stock in trade is the making of myths, the guiding of thoughts and the triggering of sentiments.

As to its evaluative function, one of the major obstacles to historical action is a divergence between the world and the picture of it we carry in our heads. If you believe that you are a chicken when in fact you are an eagle; or if you believe that you are in chains in a guarded dungeon when in fact you are unfettered and in a boundless plain, your sense of your possibilities will be drastically different from what they really are. By holding a mirror before us, thus enabling us to evaluate the actual workings of our lives and society, literature can help us to remove such impediments to desirable action as are placed by time-honoured beliefs, bad habits, delusions and confusions.

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African Nation Building: Context and Constraints

If African literature is to discharge the above functions, African writers must be well acquainted with the specific context and constraints of African nation building. Otherwise, the dialogue conducted through them might stray from issues central to the African historical project. What then are these constraints, and what is the context of the project?

Today, Africa is in the ^{neo}~~eno~~-colonial phase of a transition from its non-industrial past towards some autonomous industrial civilization of the future. Among the disabilities imposed by the historical legacy of the past 500 years are the following:

1. A pulverised political and cultural landscape, with some 40 fledgling black nation states, and hundreds of ethnolinguistic groups, all sandwiched between white-occupied regions of the continent -- the Arab occupied North, and the European occupied south.
2. Economic poverty, with each under-productive and poorly integrated economy buffeted by natural and man-caused scourges like drought, famine, epidemics, inflation, cash crises, and the dislocations of wars.
3. Weak state-systems with under-defined, or even undefined national purposes; with confused identities, flimsy national sentiments, shaky loyalties, unformed national character, muddled national outlook, and no agreement on the fundamentals of national morality.
4. A population with false historical and cultural consciousness.
5. A hostile and contemptuous world which is determined to put disintegrative and impoverishing pressures on a continent already so divided and so poor.

Against that background, the cardinal aim of the African historical project is to produce, out of that mess, and as

quickly as possible, a civilization in which Africans can take justifiable pride; and societies which will be sufficiently strong that no other people or state could ride roughshod over them, let alone invade, rule or exercise hegemony over them.

Literature's part in the project.

Literature could help by supplying reminders of why the project is essential, what its ultimate goals and intermediate objectives are, and by continually assessing the state of the project. This it could do by relating its affirming, explorative and evaluative functions to the specifics of the project.

African literature's most important affirming task is to assert our African identity and bring out its historical significance. Essentially, the job is to din it into each of us that "You are an eagle, not a chicken!" Thus, against all non-African communities which would like us to adopt their identity, and so give our primary loylaty to them (Christendom, Islam, the Free World, the Socialist World, the Third World, the various European "Commonwealths", etc.) African literature must affirm, validate and give ~~arrant~~ concrete meaning to our Africanness, and proclaim the high destiny of African civilization.

The second affirming task concerns the African nation states. Since the sovereign unit within which each African lives out his life and serves African civilization is indeed some African state or other, his African cultural identity needs to be anchored on his national identity. Thus, each national-patriotic literature must promote loyalty to the nation state, to its institutions, and to the destiny of its people.

In its evaluative function, it is incumbent on African

literature to present portraits of African life as it is lived today, and as it was lived in the past, taking pains to expose the inadequacies, and to celebrate the triumphs.

Protest literature, that brand preoccupied with inadequacies, ought to help us see our barnyard life for what it is, and to show us ^{w?} why we should not continue with it. With that in mind, African protest literature would need to examine how we got into the historical mess, what keeps us bogged down in it, and how we came to accept it as our [#] natural condition. It would look into our experiences under colonialism and neo-colonialism, and cast light on the nature of the humiliations and amnesia Africa has endured under foreign conquerors. In particular, it would probe the enduring white racist antagonism (both Arab and European) to Africa, the psycho-economic sources of their antipathy, its modes of operation, and what the correct African responses should be.

In contrast to protest literature, celebrat^eive literat^ure would commemorate important events in African history and African life. Among them would be Dingaan's defeat of the Boers, Menelik's rout of the Italians, Ethiopia's long resistance to Arab ~~expansionism~~ expansionism in the Nile Valley, the victories of the anti-colonial struggles of the 20th century, and even African triumphs in sports -- such as Nigeria's stunning victory in the first Kodak world cup competition in Beijing.

Our history aside, evaluative literature must look into ongoing social transformations and illuminat^e the drama of clashing interests. It would have to present the emergent struggling to be born, and the decadent resisting demise. It would convey the moral crises which these struggles provoke in the lives of different sections of the population. It would have to make the reader see the issues, factions

and personalities; I make the reader feel the moral dilemmas, enthusiasms, anguish, pains, triumphs, tragedies, nostalgia, mistakes, disappointments, surprises, rage, horrors, as well as the joys of the adventure. It would have to probe the psychological recesses of individuals caught up in the drama. It would need, for instance, to make us feel the causes and cruelties of clan feuds; the atrocities of gang warfare between business and political factions; the duels between the intellectual and moral propagandists for conflicting interests. It would also lead us to the springs of motivation, individual and collective, from which these actions arise.

In its explorative function, African literature could help us probe the possibilities of our future by drawing out the implications of our historical identity and our circumstances. Just as the eagle could fly after its species instincts were reactivated, Africans could fashion a major civilization today if challenged by the cultural heights ~~first~~^{first} reached by the blacks who created the Egypt of the Pharaohs.

The attainments of Ancient Egypt, symbolised by the pyramids, were predicated upon the construction of a united kingdom out of the fragmented polities of the Lower Nile Valley. Once again, Africa is engrossed in the task of fashioning modern nation states by unifying pre-existing polities. If our African identity means anything to us, it should oblige us to make these modern nation states of a calibre comparable to the Egypt of the Pharaohs.

Similarly, for any modern nation state to identify with ancient Ghana, or Mali of Zimbabwe or Ethiopia of Merowe or Songhai or Nubia should have implications for the quality of civilization it sets out to build. It cannot be content with being a poor, crude, weak or anarchic nation state.

If we mean to rise to the challenge of our past and create a dazzling modern civilization, literature could help

us enlarge our sense of cultural possibilities. Such a literature would explore how nation ~~states~~ are built and sustained, how prosperity is created and maintained, and how the scientific outlook and technological ethos are made to permeate society. This would require African literature to become venturesome in spirit, not just nostalgic or protest ridden. It would have to ^acarry our imagination to mountaintops and challenge us to ~~at~~ stretch our wings by summoning possibilities before our imagination. In other words, African literature would have to invent alternative ways of life -- not just science fiction which addresses itself to technological possibilities, but also works of culture fiction, as it were, which image futuristic versions of society, both utopian and dystopian, for us to contemplate.

And if we are to cultivate the social and personal virtues indispensable for this renaissance of African civilisation, -- virtues such as courage, foresight, probity, integrity, steadfastness, prudence, thrift, inventiveness, loyalty -- then African literature would have to be consciously didactic. It would have to supply us with an abundance of appropriate fables, proverbs, exemplary tales of heroic and unheroic behaviour which, from being told and retold, would form the ethical fibre of the new African who would accomplish the African project.

But where is this revived historical adventure to take place? On what turf? Placing Aquila in ~~in~~ its proper environment would, for us, be equivalent to getting us to actually see with keen eyes the features of our continent. Our literature ought to put us in intimate touch with the [#]landscape on which our historical drama takes place. African literature should supply us with works through which we breathe and smell and taste the dust of our land; works which open our senses to our continent's flora and fauna, to its geology and ecology. To familiarize us with our patch of earth is

to deepen our sense of attachment to it, is to strengthen our bonds to others who have the same cause for attachment to it, and is to give us a psychological springboard from which to defend it against all invaders and expropriators.

Perhaps the most important explorative contribution African literature could make is by helping us realise that nation building, as well as the making of civilization, is a willed act, and not the product of fate or of immutable laws of history. It is probably useful to note ~~that~~ here the intense philosophical discussions of will, and the literary portrayal of strong-willed achievers in other societies when they were gearing themselves up for the enterprise of nation building and industrialism. The wilful achievers in Shakespeare's drama, for instance, were models to an age of Englishmen undertaking the building of Britain. These dramas were thus a psychological school to an age. So too were the myriad novels about rags-to-riches adventurers which came to prominence with the industrial revolution in England and France. Even the novels of romance, in which the wilful and designing female wins the manor and its lord, belong to the species of literature which cultivates a tradition of willed action. For an Africa undertaking nation building while spiritually smothered by all manner of fatalistic beliefs, lessons in the willed enactment of plans and myths would not be superfluous. This could stimulate the self-confidence and risk-taking which are necessary for spectacular achievement.

Carrying out the above tasks does not require imaginative literature to ~~d~~^egenerate into treatises. Literature would attend to these matters in the normal course of playing out before us the drama of human events and desires. After all, like the hunter and the falcon in the Aquila

tale, literature does its work through the seminal remark, the cataract removing statement or question, the provocative shift in viewpoint, the revealing image, the evocative and inspiring example, the allure of the beautiful, and the stirrings of vigorous emotions which prepare people for the catharsis of action.

Through stories of politics, war, love, peace, economic adventure, etc., literature would present us with a full repertoire of individual and group behaviour. It would direct our attention to our possibilities through historical novels, heroic epics, as well as through cautionary tales, satires, proverbs, dilemma stories, stories of exemplary lives, etc. By doing so, works of African literature can contribute to the dialogue among Africans about their history and destiny.

Euro-assimilationism in African literature

Having looked into what needs attending to if African literature is to do its duty by African nation building, it is time to turn to what needs to be discontinued.

I am presently involved with two anthology projects, one covering 50 centuries of pan-African literature and orature (from 3,000 B.C to the 20th century A.D.); and the other of 20th century African literature. From the evidence of the materials assembled, , the best of the surviving works from other eras seem significantly superior, both aesthetically and in nationalist spirit, to much of the works of 20th ~~er~~ century African literature.

In my view, taken as a whole, 20th century African literature displays a certain thematic narrowness, a certain stylistic unrobustness, a feebleness of rhetorical power, These deficiencies are due in part to ^{alien} ~~European~~ mentors who have narrowly and outlandishly defined both what African literature should concern itself with, and what is should sound and

like read. They are also due in part to the phenomenon of euro-assimilationism among African writers and critics.

Chief among these mentors are the bourgeois ^{ols} euromodernists who are determined to turn African literature into a mediocre mimic of Euromodernist literature, and the proletarian revolutionary internationalists who are buying for marxist agitprop.

The Euromodernists claim that didacticism in literature is un^aesthetic and out of date; their African wards go along and eschew didactic writing, even though African orature and pre-colonial literature are full of such, and even though contemporary Africa could use didactic literature. The ~~same~~ euro-modernists also claim to prefer obscurity and convoluted style; their African wards obediently devote themselves to serving such fare, even though African orature and pre-colonial literature are characterized by clarity, wit and eloquence.

The proletarian internationalists, for their part, demand marxist agitprop to the exclusion of virtually all else; their African wards serve it up and disregard, and even denounce, the many other themes drawn from African life which African literature could present. These proletarian internationalists, in their monomania for marxist catechism, deprecate style and technique; their African wards obediently neglect technique and denounce attention to it as the sin of "formalism".

But for all their differences and antagonisms, both gangs of cultural missionaries energetically denounce Afro-centric literature as lacking "universality", as being ethnic, sociological, topical, etc. And both groups are keen to reduce African literature to a tributary or overseas addendum to western literature. Their disorienting demands would

merit little attention but for the fact that some euro-assimilationist African writers and critics echo and try to satisfy them. As we have shown in Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature, these euro-assimilationists were spawned under colonialism. They have multiplied their kind through their entrenchment in the educational apparatus of Africa, and through the prestige manufactured for them by western critics. As a result, the number of African writers and critics devoted to pan-Africanist literature is ^{far} smaller than it should be.

What, it may be asked, distinguishes the euro-assimilationists from the pan-Africanists? Pan Africanist writers and critics make the African readers their primary audience; the African interest guides their choice of themes, treatment and critical standpoint; they defend African civilisation and the best of its values; they repudiate and combat western imperialist propaganda against Africa; and they accept that the mission of pan-African literature is to renew and extend the African tradition so it can serve African survival and civilization.

The euro-assimilationists, in contrast, make the western readership their primary audience; their themes, treatment and critical standpoint are decided by the tastes, interests and prejudices of their western audience; they malign African civilisation by ignoring its best values and concentrating on its worst aspects; they lend their African imprimatur to western slander against Africans ^{of African} and ~~their~~ civilization; and they are either unaware of, or ~~reject~~ reject the anti-hegemonist mission of pan-African literature.

The difference between the pan-Africanists and the euro-assimilationists was summed up the other day in Lagos by a journalist who said that there were those who wrote for us Africans, and those who wrote for Nobel! It is thus that the

~~interests, not of Africa, but of the west~~

interests, not of Africa, but of the west -- which is much like judging a game of okwe by the rules of draughts on the assumption that both are board games. Their cockeyed and jaundiced view of African literature results in startlingly odd judgements.

Some, for instance, have declared 20th century African writers geniuses for writing like Shakespeare. One would have thought that anyone writing shakespeareanisms in the late 20th century was not a genius but an anachronism of some Rip van Winkle sort. Some have ignorantly attempted to pick for us who we should consider the greatest representative of African literature. Their candidates have turned out to be those euroassimilationists who have pandered most to the tastes and prejudices of their western imperialist masters.

Some have gone as far as to tell us who is the most formidable literary force to have emerged from Africa. And they have ignorantly imagined that it is anyone born this century. Evidently, these alien literary kingmakers have never heard of the Africans who invented writing and wrote literature in the 4th millenium B.C. ; nor have they heard of the Africans who composed such glorious and still fresh classics as "The Hymn to the Aten", "The lion in search of man", "The eloquent peasant", and "The Satire on the trades", nor ~~are~~ ^{are} they acquainted with the power of ~~the~~ African epics like Da Monzon, Sundiata, or Amda Seyon.

Some have even been arrogant enough to fabricate pantheons for us, and to brazenly tell us who should belong ~~to~~ on it. Imagine how any African or Chinese would be received in the west if he should presume to pick for the West who they should regard as their greatest writers!

All in all, the performance of these western "authorities" on African literature may be likened to that of ~~some~~ ^{some} ignoramus who declares authoritatively ~~that~~ ^{that} tomcats are tigers. One feels embarassed, and a bit outraged, to realise that it is

nitwits who can say such things who have concocted literary reputations for Africans, and are ~~obediently~~ obediently followed by Africa's euro-assimilationists. But, of course, their authority derives, not from the excellence of their own minds, but simply from the ~~neo~~^{neo}-colonial structure of relations between African and the West. Overthrowing that bizarre authority is part of the tasks of pan-Africanism.

Bluntly put, these cultural sirens of the west are doing insidious damage to African culture . With their praises and prizes, they distract a significant number of African writers from their pan-Africanist obligations, and turn them into producers of an assimilationist literature that is the equivalent of airport art. By that I mean works which firmly belong in the European tradition, but are given enough africanesque patina and inlays to make them classifiable as African. Such airport art ~~is~~^{from} "overseas Europe" does not advance the African tradition; it bastardizes and exploits that tradition to earn foreign acclaim. When western critics and prize givers see them, they shower themselves with disguised self-praise; ~~praise~~ "Ah, we have taught some African monkey to mimic Shakespeare; some African primitive to contract the Hopkins' Disease. How extraordinary of us!"

You may well wonder why I have ~~come~~^{come} to Stockholm to raise these issues. Well, I can think of no better forum for addressing both those African euro-assimilationists who need most reminding of the nation-building obligations of African literature, and the western sirens under whose spell they are misled. After all, in Stockholm is the altar from where the most powerful of western sirens, the Nobel Prize, ~~is~~ calls out to African writers.

And what I have come to say is this: Africa does not need the cultural disorientation and subservience which western prizes promote. By its origins and operations, even the most ~~prestigious~~^{globally} prestigious of these prizes, the Nobel Prize, is a

local European prize, and should go back to being just that. If it wishes to become the international prize it gives the impression of being, it should stop lending itself to hegemonic uses. Its terms of reference, its selection procedures, and its award committees should then all be internationalized. Not to do so would continue the nonsense that a bunch of Swedes, who are parochially devoted to western hegemony, is competent to pronounce on intellectual excellence in all the diverse cultures of the world.

It is, of course, most unlikely that the West would agree to a genuine internationalisation of the Nobel Prize. That would end their control of it, and end their ability to use it for hegemonist purposes. But should that ever be seriously about to happen, one can expect the West to abandon the Nobel organ, and in much the same way that they have been abandoning UNESCO since, under its African Director-General, it ceased being an obedient instrument of the west. With that in mind, it is up to the rest of the world, in a bid to stimulate a long-overdue New International Cultural Order, to publicly withdraw allegiance from the Nobel Prize, and so reduce it to its proper minitide as a local European prize.

*To Bernard
with compliments
John*

S O Y I N K A : A F R I C A A C A N C T I O N A N D
A C O N T I N E N T

Portraits of Wole Soyinka show us a face with cheeks like heavy unploughed fields and a nose almost as broad as a hand. What does such a nose hide, what do these features hide - piercing intelligence, creative genius, a passion for justice, intense emotionality?

There are many things that Wole Soyinka from Nigeria has had time to perform during those thirty years when he has been active as a writer. He has written poetry, plays, political revues, and novels. He has been busy as a theatrical manager, a stage director, a university professor, and, with stubborn idealism, fought for liberty and justice. He was born in 1934 in Abeokuta, where he grew up with the Yoruba language as his mother tongue and he went to high school as well as to the university in Ibadan. At the age of 20, however, he came to Leeds in England where he became a student of G. Wilson Knight, famous scholar and professor. During his studies in Leeds he wrote satiric poetry and a couple of plays. After that he was awarded an appointment as writer and critic at Royal Court Theatre. He married an English girl and had a son. During this period, he had the opportunity to witness the performance of his delicate play The Swamp Dwellers which was ^{later} presented by the Radio Theatre in Sweden in 1970. In London he came in contact with original young dramatic writers, Osborne, Cresswell and Arden. He went back to Nigeria and founded a theatre group, The 1960 Masks.

Soyinka now appeared as an actor in a performance of Bertolt Brecht's famous play The Caucasian Chalk Circle and worked on his great drama A Dance of the Forests, a kind of midsummer night's play with elements of lyric poetry, discussion of environment problems, political and cultural satire performed in Lagos on the day of Nigerian independence in 1961. After a divorce from his English wife he married a teacher from his own country and during different periods worked as a professor of

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literature at the universities of Ife, Lagos and Ibadan. In the summer of 1960 he was back in London, where his play The Road was performed on the Theatre Royal. In the year 1967-1968, when the brutal civil war was agitating Nigeria, Soyinka was in prison, in a single cell under straining hygienic and psychic conditions and without access to writing paper; he was accused of having made efforts to bring about peace contacts between Nigeria and revolutionary Biafra. A frightful testimony of this period is The Man Died, an autobiographical document filled with a furious contempt for the tools of power and their conscious efforts to crush the prisoner's soul. During the seventies, when Soyinka was also visiting professor at the university of Cambridge England, he published among other things two novels, The Interpreters and Season of Anomy. The first is a somewhat over-sophisticated work which tries to catch the atmosphere among intellectuals in his country during the first years of independence. Season of Anomy is a description of the war, characterized by rude reality and terror. There exist a couple of English critical works about his writing, by Eldred B. Jones and Gerald Moore, but it has also been the object of Swedish doctoral theses by Stephan Larsen, Kacke Götrick and Wiveca Sotto.

Africa as a notion and a continent, its religion and culture occupy a central place in Soyinka's works. But he has a critical attitude towards Léopold Senghor and the "negritude" movement, characterized by its mysticism and its opposition against the Western world. In a speech in Uganda in 1962 Soyinka made fun with negritude, hinting in a bantering tone that "a tiger does not preach his tigritude, he just pounces on his prey": like his English-speaking colleagues in Africa but in opposition to the francophones he wants, without feelings of inferiority, to use the language of the European peoples and their cultures for his own purposes as a writer.

In the 1940's, Jean-Paul Sartre in his inspired programmatic booklet Orphée Noir had drawn a vision of the black singer who is

obliged to fetch back his original identity from the underworld of the soul just as in the myth Orpheus fetches his beloved Eurydice. In Season of Anomy Soyinka depicts counterparts to the love couple from the Greek myth in a new couple with the africanized names of Ofeyi and Iriyise. But here, in the terrible reality of the civil war, his Eurydice is so shaken by the violence in her inmost vital nerve that it is doubtful whether she will be able to survive. This is a pessimistic rejoinder to Sartre as concerns the future of African identity.

In the center of Soyinka's personal philosophy is African mythology, particularly the god Ogun, a character corresponding to gods from classical antiquity as Prometheus, Apollon and Dionysos; a god of creation and destruction at the same time. In his plays the tunes and music of Africa are always present, by way of drums, choirs, songs and dances. Africa as an environment to grow up in fills Soyinka's tale Aké, where his precocious childhood self is the main character. Through its exotic character as well as its brutal methods of education, ~~this story~~ reminds the reader of Maksim Gorky's books about his childhood and youth. Even the similes are coloured by Soyinka's African experience, e.g. in the question directed to a dramatical character condemned to death, in the play Death and the King's Horseman: "Why do your eyes roll like a bush-rat who sees his fate like his father's spirit, mirrored in the eye of a snake?"

Soyinka in his dramatic writing shows obvious impressions from Europe, from symbolists as Maeterlinck and Synge and from dramatic writers as Brecht, his "particular teacher". The plays reveal a striking tension between two moods, one lyric and religious, one political and satirical. Soyinka has characterized his ritual theatre in the book Myth Literature and the African World: through physical and symbolical means it wants to mirror the archetypical fight of the mortal being against outside powers. To this ritual theatre belong both The Swamp Dwellers from the sixties and Death and the King's Horseman from the

Seventies. This is excellent dramatic writing, and the ^{distinguished,} theatre critic Martin Esslin has characterized him as one of the finest poetic dramatic authors that ever wrote in English.

The Strong Breed is a drama of sacrifice, playing in a small village, where a stranger who is a doctor sacrifices himself as a scapegoat on the last day of the year when according to the old cultic tradition evil and sin are to be purified. In this play there are certain tableaux reminding of dream plays and of Pär Lagerkvist's dramatic writing of the twenties.

Death and the King's Horseman takes part during World War II in an African town where Elesin, the horseman, is obliged to commit a ritual suicide because he is not supposed to survive the King who has just died. Mr. Pilkings, the well-meaning representative of the colonial power in this place, has persuaded Olunde, Elesin's son, to go to England in order to have an education and become a medical doctor. Conscious of his father's trial, Olunde returns immediately from England, travelling with the same boat as an English prince who is going to pay the colony a formal visit. For the masquerade arranged as a welcome feast to the royal person Pilkings and his wife ^{unsuspectingly} dress in old African death costumes, and this is a frightful affront to the religious traditions of the country.

In vain Pilkings tries to prevent Elesin's suicide by locking him into the English residence. But Olunde happens to violate the taboo rules and suddenly stands eye to eye with his father, and now also he, according to the old rite, is addicted to death. Thus Pilkings' clumsiness causes Olunde's end. The cultic sacrificial death as a moral constraint is a central item in the play but the collision between the cultures is not a main theme, only a trigger of conflicts.

This play is constructed as a formal Greek tragedy in five acts, with superb control of esthetic means as peripeteia, tragic irony and catharsis. The play is also built upon violent

changes between intoxicated sensual joy, a jolly ~~sense~~ of humour and committed tragic earnest, accompanied by choirs, funeral songs and dances. A play that makes such a strong impression already when you read it ought to be able to be very instigating when performed on a scene. When will a Swedish theatre dare to introduce it?

Among Soyinka's political and satirical plays Kongi's Harvest and A Play of Giants are the most striking ones, both of them filled with hatred against the dictators of this world and their violence, their lies. Sometimes, Soyinka's murdering satire may change into good-natured irony, as in Kongi's Harvest when the totalitarian state starts a rehabilitation of a group of prostitutes who while graduating are nominated members of "Women's Auxiliary Corps".

As a lyric poet, as well, Soyinka is on a level with the ^{foremost} ~~the~~ international writers. His finest qualities as a poet are the suggestive use of the words and his capability to out-distance an immediate experience through the use of expressive metaphors. He has been compared to older English poets as Donne, Marvell and even Shakespeare in his ability to squeeze a rich meaning into the narrow frame of a poem.

Soyinka's collections of poetry have the following titles: Idanre, Poems from Prison, A Shuttle in the Crypt and Ogun Abibiman. The title poem in Idanre depicts a pilgrimage made by the poet to a mountain consecrated to the god Ogun. The poet demonstrates a capability to make notions contain opposite meanings. Thus, at the same time he shapes the rich gifts of the god's nature as well as the destructive powers in his disposition when blinded by blood and wine he kills his own men and afterwards sinks into the despair of remorse, and this summarizes the whole myth of Ogun. At the same time and as a parallel, the most essential metaphor of the poem - harvest - tends to mirror on one side richness/happiness and on the other destruction/death.

In the collection Idanre the reader also notices a poem about

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a road accident, when a friend of the writer becomes a victim of the instinct of destruction characteristic of Ogun, who is ~~also the~~ god of the roads.

In Poems from Prison, which were smuggled out from Soyinka's prison cell, ~~the~~ violent political reality is sharply alive. One poem deals with a song of protest and peace from a distant country, a song singing of flowers. This calls forth echoes from the writer's own geographic reality, but in stead of flowers only ruin and death will be sown. In another ~~one~~ the poet depicts the desperate situation of a prisoner, buried alive in his isolation, in ~~the~~ struggle against a crushing political authority; this is a central theme of Soyinka's. Oguri Abibiman, whose cover is decorated with a popular sculpture of Ogun's ceremonial axe, is a work inspired by Mocambique's declaration of war in 1970 against Zimbabwe when it was still white Rhodesia. Ogun as the god of war is marching on, side by side with a hero who belongs to both history and myth in Africa: the Zulu chief Shaka of the early 19th century, who has by the way also a place in Léopold Senghor's poetry and in earlier African epic literature. Once again Soyinka deals with that set of problems which violence constitutes: at the same time as he regards it as a creative factor, he also emphasizes the consciousness that it has to be conciliated through reconstructing and healing powers as soon as the struggle is over. This is political poetry which goes down to deeper levels in the human mind than such poetry generally does.

Two statements by Soyinka respond to the opposite sides of his nature. One is a satirical cue from A Play of Giants where the brutal dictator Gunema in his primitive English describes his own evil: "I do my own execution, take over gun, pull lever to hang condemned man. I use the garrot myself but still, I do not taste this elixir. I watch when my zombies torture lesser zombies. I love their cries of pain, the terror before the pain begins."

The other one interprets Elesin's gratefulness when he is doomed to death, for what life has given him: "The world I know is the bounty of hives after bees have swarmed, No goodness teems with such open hands even in the dreams of deities."



VIEWPOINT

A jubilating solo

PROF. WOLE SOYINKA

*Against the lumbering conscience of the world
She stands, cast-iron figurehead,
Buffeted by winds she raises with her breath
To boast a stormy passage...*

ONE of the most durable workhorse phrases of African journalese is "a jubilating crowd". Miracle workers, faith rejuvenators of all persuasions geared up for their Faith Expo. International, Christ's Mission Spectacular, Allah's Sword Brotherhood Bazaar, Hare Krishna Inner Sanctum Outer Rally, etc., seem guaranteed in advance to arrive to the embrace of a "jubilating crowd". The glum faces of school children, the smouldering resentment of impoverished farmers, the disciplined curses beneath the obsequious tuned visages of school teachers, unpaid for a full year or more, the aggressive, placard-brandishing factory workers defying police lines — all these somehow get translated into "jubilating crowds" which spill out "spontaneously" to welcome a Cabinet Minister, a State Governor or even a Head of State — depending of course on the degree of terror currently in operation. And — need we add? — the well organised politician can be trusted to ensure his welcome by a frenzied jubilating crowd, even when, as was the case in recent times, his hands outspread in condescending acknowledgement display what were once imagined as the indelible stigmata of secession.

I doubt however if any of these imaginative (or simply pragmatic) journalists have ever considered the possibility either of a one-man or woman jubilating crowd or, even more dramatically of a reversal of roles. In other words considered the possibility of having the visiting or arriving dignitary, alone, constitute the entirety of a "jubilating crowd", small or large. I confess that either phenomenon was totally beyond my own quite fertile imagination also — that is, until I heard of a certain performance by Dame Margaret Thatcher. This unique exhibition was provided by the Iron Lady, in person at Heathrow Airport to an assembled world Press Corps immediately after the Nassau

Commonwealth Summit.

The image was not arbitrary, nor was it new inspired. A foretaste of Thatcher's histrionic talents in its direction had been provided right at the beginning of the Falklands War.

Falklands, (or the Armada spectacular) was one thing however; Apartheid South Africa is another. The meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of States in Nassau was, unarguably, as humiliating a defeat for African representatives as the Falklands debacle was for Argentina and, in her now distinctive graceless style of statesmanship, Margaret Thatcher could be trusted to rub plenty of salt in the wound. It was not enough that she saw herself as a commission-salaried Victorian poorhouse matron confronting a nerveless bunch of Oliver Twists, rapping them on the knuckles

The Commonwealth heads of states must be made to accept the truth that no jubilating crowds were truthfully produced by their performance at this last summit

with her ladle whenever they held out their bowls for more concessional helpings. It was not enough that the assembled Heads permitted themselves to be hog-tied by the one-sided protocol of "consensus", forgetting their own urgent mandate of immediate and universal sanctions against Apartheid South Africa. The shabbiness of the result of this particular conference is best appreciated when one compares the anaemic agreement with the totally unexpected resolution adopted, about the same time, by both legislatures of — of all sources — the United States of America! By contrast, Dame Thatcher was able to depart from the conference, land at Heathrow still suffused by the euphoria of a personal achievement, exult and jubilate to her audience. "We conceded just a teeny weeny bit, no more. And definitely NO SANCTIONS".

Dame Thatcher did play scrupulously fair of course. She took no one by surprise. Before she left her country, she had announced to the whole world that sanctions were simply "not on". The

queen of banality (in language, politics, gesture and presence) had, paradoxically avoided all cliches on this occasion.

The only event of dramatic interest for us, the observers, therefore centred entirely on the protagonist herself — since there was not the slightest shred of conflict in the encounter. Would she recognise a need to "spare the blushes" of her colleagues and help them put the best faces on a shabby deal? Afterall, they had to report back to their various domains where "jubilating crowds" were waiting to receive (or in a few cases, interrogate) them. Ogun be praised, Thatcher performed true to type. She arrived back in London with drill-majors and drum-majorettes, a one-woman parade-squad, cheerleader and brass band. One visualised, a blowsy animation of the statue of Britannia cast out of time and place on the landing steps of a jumbo jet.

No matter what their various journals wrote — and in Nigeria we must vouch for reactions of total disgust with the Summit — the Commonwealth Heads of States must be made to accept the truth that no jubilating crowds were truthfully produced by their performance at this last summit. But the experience need not be a total loss. For instance they can take a cue from Margaret Thatcher for a solution to the perennial problem of organised jubilating crowds for their necessary public appearances.

For the rest, for whom the liberation of Southern Africa remains an enduring, realistic goal with or without the help of super or spent powers, we shall address the consolation of the concluding lines of the love poem to Margaret Thatcher which prefaced this preliminary communication (for we shall return again and again to this imperative):

*No Madame, you have nothing to concede.
The bailiffs are preparing, what is due
And overdue will be extracted. Since you scorn*

*Persuasion, jerk your knee in iron reflex
To gentle pressure of the hand, your estates
Are here hauled upon the block, for savage auction.*

• Professor Wole Soyinka, is easily one of Africa's best-known writers. He retired recently from the University of Ife.



VIEWPOINT

Give Me Omar Khayyam

BY WOLE SOYINKA

MY contribution to a Poetry Reading night at the University of Ife some years ago included a piece titled, "To B — S.U. — Gone." S.U., for those who have been miraculously shielded from its existence, stands for Scripture Union. The poem was a light-hearted, yet wistful statement, designed to induce a sense of balance in the desperately aggressive developments which a number of religious activities had begun to manifest, not merely in Ife, but on most Nigerian campuses.

The extreme christian sects had the most domineering profiles. They took a heavy toll on the academic progress of some of their victims, turned them into bores in their homes and in their hostels. In some extreme instances, these students were transformed into programmed zombies who automatically switched on the same cracked record of christian salvation at the slightest provocation.

A week or two after the reading, I was approached by a group of students. They confessed that they had also been long preoccupied with the epidemic nature of these extreme cults and had considered one scheme after another in the effort to contain and counter the menace. The result of our discussions was a decision to launch a new university association — Crusade Against Religious Extremism (CARE). Accepting to be their Staff Adviser, I proceeded also to recommend that they adopt a patron saint whose philosophy neatly paraphrased the antithesis of what the S.U. and its variants stood for.

Did I know of any such being, they demanded? Of course. I even happened — most conveniently — to have a copy of the most recent translation of his works. As I reached for it, I provided an impromptu reading from the *Rubai 'yat* of Omar Khayyam:

I do not know whether he who shaped me

Made me for heaven or for grim hell.

A cup, a lover, and music on the field's verge

These three are my cash, heaven your I.O.U.

Regretfully — due to more pressing preoccupations — CARE has not really done much to propagate its ideas.

Beyond designing a much-envied calendar for a well-known insurance broker, and foisting some *rubai* of Omar Khayyam on the Ife chapter of the Palm-wine Drinkards Club, CARE has been pretty dormant since its inception some three or four years ago. This is a great pity because if ever a nation needed the ministrations of a movement like CARE, and in particular the earthy philosophical stance of an Omar Khayyam, that nation is Nigeria, and I need not add that I am no longer thinking of the S.U. and allied groups. Was it not only last year, and within the hallowed instincts of rationality, that a

"Now, my recollection (and that of many others I have spoken with) is that in the Nigeria we grew up, the same households contain moslems, christians and followers of the traditional religions who all minded their own, and their neighbours' businesses, in their most relaxed, taken-for-granted amity"

minor religious war was nearly provoked at the University of Ibadan by some moslem extremists? At issue was their complaint that a christian cross, which had long peacefully existed, defiled their gaze whenever they turned to bow towards Mecca! They demanded its immediate removal — no less — and issued ultimatums to the vice-chancellor.

Now, my recollection (and that of many others I have spoken with) is that in the Nigeria we grew up, the same households contain moslems, christians and followers of the traditional religions who all minded their own, and their neighbours' businesses in the most relaxed, taken-for-granted amity. Christmas, Ileya, Easter, Id-el Fitr and all the traditional festivals brought everyone out in a spirit of celebration as one interrelated community. Indeed, the only

quarrels arose if a christian individual was somehow overlooked by his or her moslem neighbour in the distribution of Ileya meat or the obverse took place at Christmas or Easter. Even now, I know of the moslem colleague of a friend who celebrates Easter unflinchingly with him and even arrives armed with a dish for take-aways. Come Ileya, needless to say, and the moslem's fried mutton or goat-meat never fails to report. So the question in the mind of most well-meaning Nigerians today is: what has gone wrong? What is this ill-wind blowing across the nation and who is fanning it? What is their deeper purpose?

Declarations like that of Sanni Abacha do not help matters; they merely complicate the problem by extending its parameters in unsought-for directions. When Abacha announces that the Army recognises only two religious forms of worship — Christianity and Islam — within the barracks, he throws the whole question of religion wide and universally open. Nobody suggests that the Army should sponsor or provide facilities within its grounds for all the practised religions of the world. But Sanni Abacha has dared what even the christian colonial powers dared not do — provide exclusive rights to two foreign religions for the nation's army!

Is this, in any case, different from the Iranian exclusivist legitimization of those two religions? What we expect of the armed forces of a modern Nigeria is that it should keep off the subject of religion altogether. It should simply declare: Religion is the private business of individuals and voluntary groups. Organise your own forms of worship as convenient — as long as this does not conflict with your military duties — FULL STOP!

It is also necessary to recall Sanni Abacha to the fact that the Nigerian courts recognise the right of witnesses to choose their own forms of oath — by the koran, the bible, a metallic symbol of the traditional procurator of oaths, Ogun, or simple affirmation.

• Wole Soyinka is a Columnist with *The African Guardian*

• This is the first in a two part view ending next week.



VIEWPOINT

Give me Omar Khayyam (2)

BY WOLE SOYINKA

LET us seize this opportunity to place religion in its true historical (and evolutionary) perspective. Christianity and Islam, no matter how elaborately structured today, are newling infants in the history of religion. Humanity is billions of years old; to suggest that Truth came to man only within the immediate fractional two thousand of those billions of years is to confess that infant gums are no match for the accumulated muscle and bone of universal truths. And on this soul, within present-day Nigeria, there do exist religious faiths and teachings which, pre-dating Christianity and Islam by millenia on millenia, provide both religions with insights which are complementary to their own tenets and are even acknowledged to exhibit a superior humanism.

Regarding that last claim, let me just point out, for a start, that these religions I refer to are non-belligerent religions. They have never attempted to dominate or enslave others in the name of a Crusade or a Jihad. There is a moral in all this, somewhere.

Of the many non-sequiturs seriously put forward to justify Nigeria's entry into the Organisation of Islamic Conference, the prize surely goes to the pair of Nigerian mullahs who, writing in nearly all the Nigerian media, claim that Moslem culture has been grossly underprivileged in Nigeria and that taking the nation into the OIC is the obvious way to redress the imbalance. As one of the proofs of this imbalance, they point to the use of the christian calendar by the nation!

Now these mullahs should be careful; they run the risk of providing the opposition with an unshakable argument. They should recall that it is the christians who claim that Jesus died to save mankind. By implicitly suggesting that Nigeria should run the risk of self-immolation to right a universal "wrong", they are canvassing a christian ethic for the nation. This, I am certain, is not their intention.

In any case, what of those of us — a fair percentage of Nigerians who, after all, do follow the traditional deities or simply insist on being atheists? Where do we come in? Personally, I would support a movement to install a pharaonic calendar, preferably dated from the

fourth dynasty (the so-called Old Kingdom) where we do have the most unambiguous evidence of the uncompromisingly Black, negroid identity of the pharaonic rulers. And of that lot, I would pick the fourth in line, Khafre (sometimes spelt Chefren), 2520-2494 B.C.

Here is why: His name. No other reason. Just that name Khafre which was later corrupted into a derogatory term — Kaffir or Keferi — first by the Hyksos, and later the Moslem-Arab invaders of negro Egypt.

There is even one prominent clown of commercialised religion in Ibadan who has given himself the provocative title of *Ajagbemokeferi* (He who snarls at the

"My intention, when I started this piece, was to make it a light-hearted relief from the intense polemic aroused by the news that Nigeria had joined the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). I must confess that I have myself succumbed to the sense of real danger that provoked the passions being fanned in all directions by the enemies of Nigerian unity."

unbeliever). Whenever I encounter his self-vaunting advertisements in the dailies or his complacent face on television, I can afford to smile, for I know this is only an ignorant Black who has chosen to insult his own kind. But imagine other *Keferis* who are daily provoked by this man's antics. Imagine that one of them finally sets up camp on the other side of the road, brands himself *Adanrifunmale* (He who shaves clean the Moslem's head) and proceeds to match him (apologies to Nzeribe) megaphone for megaphone, Mercedes for Mercedes, *suya* for *suya*, et cetera. What then? We get into a situation of preliminary religious skirmishes.

With all due sense of national and racial commitment therefore, I beg to

propose a Khafrean calendar which will take the bone away from these two problematic religions and, at the same time, educate their members, not so much about their origins — as that is still in academic dispute — but about the very continent to which they claim such contradictory allegiances.

In any case, should Nigeria also abandon our present numerical system if the christians complain that it is Hindu-Arabic (some claim purely Arabic) in origin? Do we, to satisfy them, return to Roman numerology? Well, good-bye all developments in the mathematical and physical sciences. Good-bye computer technology and welcome back the dark ages of man!

These absurd exercises must stop. Since they are so obviously irrational, their only purpose is mischief-making. Those who whip up dangerous emotions should be firmly prohibited from further exercises in this direction — for all our sakes.

MY intention, when I started this piece, was to make it a light-hearted relief from the intense polemic aroused by the news that Nigeria had joined the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). I must confess that I have myself succumbed to the sense of real danger that provoked the passions being fanned in all directions by the enemies of Nigerian unity. So, let me redress the tone by another *rubai*, slightly adapted, from Omar Khayyam:

*The captives of religion and of the nice distinction
Worrying about Being and non-Being, themselves become nothing
You with the news, go seek out the juice of the vine,
Those without it wither before they are ripe.*

Nations should learn from Omar. His own birthland Persia (now Iran) failed to do so, and how many on this wide Earth envy their predicament? Even the Moslem world is divided on the subject. Omar's message to the Nigerian people, and to this government reaches out with common-sense clarity across the ages: Handle with CARE.

• Wole Soyinka is a columnist for *The African Guardian*

will be shared by two scientists at the IBM Zürich Research Laboratory—Gerd Binnig, 39, a West German, and Heinrich Rohrer, 53, a Swiss—who between 1979 and 1981 designed a new and entirely different kind of electron microscope.

Ordinary microscopes provide sharp images of most bacteria but cannot distinguish anything smaller than about eight-millionths of an inch—the tiniest bacteria, for example—because the wavelength of visible light, which is in the hundred-thousandth of an inch range, is too long. Ruska found that a magnetic coil could focus electrons, which have a wavelength that is roughly 100,000 times shorter. Substituting magnets for lenses and electrons for light, he built his first electron microscope. Improved versions, by providing images of viruses and even large molecules, have revolutionized such disparate fields as biology and electronics.

The scanning tunneling microscope, invented by Binnig and Rohrer, records the position of a needle that rises and dips to keep constant height while moving across the tiny irregularities on the surface of a specimen. The ups correspond to the bumps of individual atoms, and the downs to spaces between them, producing an atomic-scale contour map.

Controlling the needle's height is a minute electric current that should not flow at all, according to classical physics. Reason: there is nothing to conduct electrons, the carriers of electric current, across the insulating vacuum that separates needle from surface. But modern quantum theory says that a few electrons will jump anyway. Indeed they do, and since the number that jump depends on the size of the gap, the microscope's circuitry can continuously readjust the needle's height by monitoring the amount of current flowing between its tip and the object. The device "is completely new," said the Swedish Academy, "and we have so far only seen the beginning of its development." —By Michael D. Lemonick.

Reported by Wanda Menke-Gluckert/Bonn



LITERATURE

Despite its tendency to distribute awards along geopolitical lines, the Swedish Academy of Letters waited 85 years before bestowing the Nobel Prize for Literature on a black African. Yet when the laurel finally passed last week to Wole Soyinka, 52, a Nigerian playwright, poet, novelist, essayist and indefatigable polemicist, the justice seemed more than demographic. Discriminating theatergoers in London and New York City, as well as in Africa, have known for two decades that Soyinka is a writer worth watching and hearing. An evening in the presence of his words might bring anything: *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), a dreamlike, ritualistic celebration of Nigerian independence edged with satire; *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), a biting attack on an Nkrumah-like dictator. Soyinka has

found widespread favor without ever courting it. His writings have charged the West with soulless materialism and his fellow Africans with barbarisms and corruption. He has staked his art in a no-man's-land between conflicting cultures.

This troubled area was Soyinka's birthright. His parents, members of the Yoruba tribe in southwestern Nigeria, were also Christians and thus at some remove from the native life around them. In his memoir *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), Soyinka portrays the divided realms of his early impressions: the beliefs handed down by his mother and father vs. the animism of village rituals, particularly the tradition of the *egúngún*, the ancestral spirits who can be summoned whenever their masks are displayed at local festivals. For a time, the boy had the best of both worlds: the sensuous, imaginative life of Africa and a Western education,



Soyinka: having the best of both worlds

first at college in Ibadan near his village and then at the University of Leeds in Britain, where he earned a B.A. in English literature in 1957. After graduation he worked as a teacher and scriptwriter for London's Royal Court Theater, where some of his early sketches and short plays were performed.

But he returned to Nigeria in 1960, the same year his homeland gained independence from British colonial rule. Soyinka's adult career coincides almost exactly with the brushfire of nationalism that swept across Africa, a phenomenon that filled his writings with bursts of hope and despair. He eloquently expressed the ideals of black nationalism and spoke out harshly whenever they seemed in danger of being compromised or betrayed. In 1967 he was arrested by the Nigerian government, charged with assisting the Biafran rebels in their struggle for a separate state and held for 22 months. Soyinka later recounted this ordeal in the scathing prison memoir *The Man Died* (1972).

Although he has become a folk hero in his native country, controversies have attended his career. Noting his fondness for Western literary forms (all of Soyinka's work is written in English), some African critics have accused him of shunning his ethnic origins. Such com-

plaints may continue, but the Nobel Prize is likely to make Soyinka an even more formidable spokesman on his continent. The day after it was announced, Nigeria awarded him its highest national honor.

—By Paul Gray



ECONOMICS

Economists have traditionally shied away from theorizing about the public arena, ceding the terrain to political scientists. But not James McGill Buchanan. He reasons that politicians and public servants act primarily to promote their own self-interest, not to serve some higher public good. They behave, he declares, much like consumers in a marketplace. For work stemming from that basic theory of political economy, Buchanan, 67, last week won the 1986 Nobel Prize for Economic Science. The Tennessee-born professor at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., is the 14th American to win the economics award since it was first given in 1969.

Buchanan is one of the leading spokesmen of the "public-choice" school, which applies the discipline of economics to the study of political decision making. Governments reflect the actions and choices of politicians, Buchanan argues, just as markets operate through the decisions of consumers who buy and sell goods. His theories help to explain the growth of budget deficits. Members of Congress are primarily motivated by a desire to get re-elected, Buchanan assumes. "Their natural proclivity is to spend more and not tax," he says. The result: a "regime of permanent budget deficits." The cure, Buchanan contends, is to change the rules of the game. Says he: "We must impose a constraint on politicians when it comes to spending." Accordingly, he supports a constitutional amendment to require Congress to balance the budget.

Buchanan has several admirers among members of the Reagan Administration. James Miller III, director of the Office of Management and Budget, was a doctoral student of Buchanan's in the 1960s. Another Buchanan supporter: Manuel Johnson, a former George Mason professor who is now vice chairman of the Federal Reserve Board.

When not teaching, Buchanan runs a 400-acre farm near Blacksburg, Va. He was rumored to have been a candidate for the Nobel award in 1984, but this year, he says, "I had no premonition this would happen. I was shocked." So were some mainstream economists who have paid little attention to Buchanan's work. One M.I.T. professor last week called public-choice theory "unsophisticated." Buchanan admits that his ideas are "not standard" but points out that many of his theories are "simple applications of common sense that the academics all forget about."

—By Barbara Rudolph.

Reported by Jay Branegan/Washington and Bernard Baumohl/New York

March of the Nobel Laureates

From peace to physics

If there were a Nobel Prize in public relations—and perhaps, just to keep pace with the modern world, there really ought to be—then surely one of the first winners should be the Nobel Prizes themselves. Somehow these \$290,000 merit badges, which are pinned each year on men and women whose achievements sometimes seem great and sometimes only various, have achieved the cachet of an international order of nobility. Other people may become prize winners; only Nobelists become “laureates.” Last week, the laurels for 1986 were announced in Stockholm and Oslo.

Nigerian playwright and poet Wole Soyinka was awarded the prize for literature—the first black African writer to be so honored. Soyinka, a member of the Yoruba tribe, writes in English and has published more than 20 books. He is now a visiting professor of theater at Cornell University in the United States and last year was elected president of the United Nations-sponsored International Theater Institute. His plays have been produced in London and New York.

Soyinka, 52, left Nigeria in 1954 to study at the University of Leeds in England. He later worked at London's Royal Court Theatre, then returned to Nigeria in the 1960s, where he fell into several confrontations with the government. Soyinka, who describes himself as a leftist, was arrested in 1965 in connection with a pirated radio broadcast protesting disputed election results. (He was later acquitted.) Two years later, after publishing an article that called for a negotiated end to the then-raging Nigerian civil war, he was accused of conspiring with the Ibo rebels who had broken with the government to form the short-lived state of Biafra. Soyinka spent the next 22 months in jail—mostly in solitary confinement and always writing, often on toilet paper.

Tribal heritage: Since his imprisonment, Soyinka's writings have focused on Black Africa's political failures, the most glaring of which, in his view, is the lack of basic freedoms. But it is more his tribal heritage than his political ideology that informs his work. Though he moves easily within the cultures of the United States and Europe, most of his plays, poems and memoirs, in-

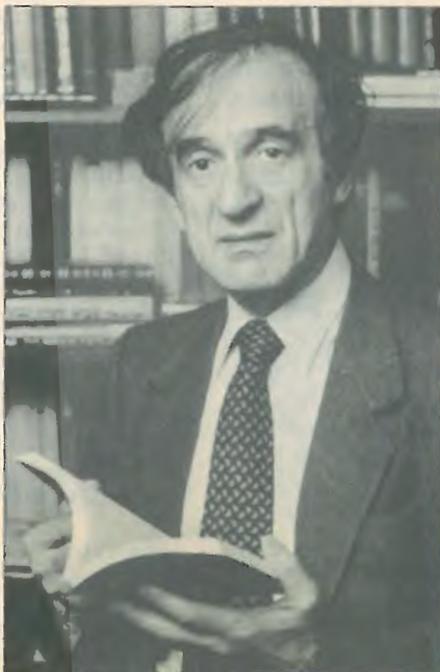


PLATIAU-REUTER

Steeped in Yoruba mythologies: Soyinka

cluding his most recent work, “Ake, The Years of Childhood,” are steeped in Yoruba myth, mysticism and ritual.

Elie Wiesel, this year's Peace Prize winner, was hailed by the Norwegian Nobel Committee as a “messenger to mankind.” A survivor of the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps, Wiesel, 58, has reshaped that personal experience into a mission to keep alive the world's memory of the Nazi Holocaust. Through more than 25 books, his lectures and his classes at Boston University, Wiesel has warned his audiences about the dangers of forgetting past violence.



ALLAN TANNENBAUM-SYGMA

Keeping Holocaust memories alive: Wiesel

Born in Romania, Wiesel and his family were deported to Auschwitz in Poland in 1944; he and his father were later sent to Buchenwald. Wiesel lost both his parents and one sister in the camps. After he was liberated, the 16-year-old Wiesel settled in France, where he studied philosophy at the Sorbonne. He later became chief foreign correspondent for an Israeli newspaper and then, following the 1958 publication of his first book, “Night,” he dedicated his life to writing and speaking about the horrors and hopes of humanity. The first to use the word “Holocaust” to define the period of Nazi atrocities against Jews, Wiesel is now chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

A marriage of two disciplines: This year's choice for winner of the prize in economics surprised many in the field's mainstream. James McGill Buchanan, a 67-year-old American who teaches at George Mason University in Virginia, is the leading researcher in the fast-growing field of “public choice theory,” a marriage of economics and political science. His work attempts to define the forces that determine government spending by applying mathematical and economic methods to the study of political institutions and problems. A key proposition in his theory is that politicians and bureaucrats are much like the people they represent: they are motivated by self-interest, usually in the form of winning reelection or acquiring greater power. From his work, Buchanan has concluded that lowered government spending or tax reform first requires fundamental changes in politicians' incentives; he is thought to be one of the intellectual fathers of the Gramm-Rudman automatic budget cuts in the United States.

The Nobel Prize in Medicine was awarded to 77-year-old Rita Levi-Montalcini, a developmental biologist who is both an American and an Italian citizen, and American biochemist Stanley Cohen for their studies in cell growth and the development of tissues. American chemists Yuan T. Lee and Dudley Herschbach, and Canadian chemist John C. Polanyi won this year's prize in chemistry for their contributions toward the first detailed understanding of chemical reactions. And three Europeans—Heinrich Rohrer of Switzerland and Gerd Binnig and Ernst Ruska of West Germany—shared the Nobel Prize in physics. The 79-year-old Ruska was honored for his 1931 invention of the electron microscope, which the Royal Swedish Academy of Science called “one of the most important inventions of the century.” Rohrer and Binnig were awarded the prize for their work on the scanning-tunneling microscope, which yields detailed views of individual atoms and the bonds that connect them.

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Workers from two rival Bangkok charities fighting for the body of a road accident victim. Police arrested 12 of the workers, whose charities compete for bodies so that they can appear more efficient and thereby attract bigger public donations.

Nigerian wins Nobel literature prize

By Philip Howard
Literary Editor

The Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded yesterday to Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright, poet, novelist and Professor of Literature. He is the first African and the first black to be awarded the prize, worth \$290,000 (£193,300).

The Swedish Academy, which this year celebrates its 200th anniversary, describes Soyinka as "a writer who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence" — which may sound more perspicuous in Swedish.

Soyinka, aged 52, has published 20 books of plays, poetry and fiction. He writes in English with a rich mix of his native Yoruba imagery and idiom. He was educated in Iba-

dan and at Leeds University, where he read English. He then worked as a teacher and a reader and script-writer at the Royal Court theatre in London, where his first dramatic sketches and poems were performed. When he returned to Nigeria he formed a theatrical company.

He was imprisoned for two years during the Nigerian Civil War, and then spent six years in exile in Europe and Ghana. In 1976 he went home to Nigeria and became Professor of Comparative Literature at Ife University, periodically returning to Europe and the United States as a visiting professor.

His first plays, written in London, were *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Jewel*. Later satirical comedies were *The Trial of Brother Jero* and its

sequel, *Jero's Metamorphosis*. He rewrote *The Bacchae* of Euripides in an African setting; and his opera *Wonyosi* is based on *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Threepenny Opera*.

He is a man of two worlds,



Wole Soyinka: first African to win literature prize.

obsessed with the theme of the oppressive boot, whether worn by whites or blacks. In his account of life as a political prisoner, *The Man Died*, he gave his political credo: "The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny."

He is a radical who wants to change the world, and declaims passionately against apartheid and colonialism. At the same time he writes powerfully against the corruption of Nigeria by oil money, and the abuse of human rights throughout Africa. He is a wordsmith, a punomane indulging in complex word-plays, and often scatological: a Yoruba James Joyce. He is a true writer, obsessed by language and by his tragic vision of his native land.

Economics prize, page 21



Education undermined Turkey

the Ottoman Turks.

With the establishment of the Republic, a policy for reconstruction was for Turkey to follow a Western path of capitalist development. The main feature was the development of private industry, with direct assistance provided by the state. This policy is called etatism, the ideological framework of the political regime being known as Kemalism. The old Medrese style institutions of higher education were transformed into universities modelled primarily on the French and German systems. The policy was that education should be secular.

Professors of international repute were invited to set up faculties and institutes. Educationalists were asked to devise a system which would meet the needs of Turkish capitalism and provide the nation with expertise and skilled manpower, but the development of the social sciences was given special emphasis. The production of social knowledge was rightly conceived to be of fundamental importance for the successful operation of the rest of the system, and it was therefore very closely supervised by the state. Kemalism provided guidelines for the development of science and education, and Kemalist educational principles formed the basis for political and secondary school control throughout society.

Kemalism is a very loose and imprecise concept, this very imprecision giving it a certain strength. It is, however, interpreted to exist today, still having a clear meaning by the establishment, and is used to justify every conceivable act committed by the Turkish state, since by definition it is considered to be pure, and devoid of any alien influences. Usually conveniently, any deviation from the official policy of the day can be announced as being against the principles of Kemalism.

Under this broad policy the universities functioned for many years until 1968. By then Turkish universities had made enormous progress in creating the new educated class which, by and large, fulfilled its intended function. The state had also implemented a policy of giving tied scholarships to deserving graduates to go abroad for post-graduate research, and appointing them as lecturers in various universities around the country when they returned.

As the trend to open the system to Western intellectual traditions increased, it became more and more difficult for the state to maintain control over Turkish intellectuals. Both left-wing and right-wing infiltrated the educational system and created a climate in which the flexible assumptions of Kemalism could no longer be taken for granted. Clashes developed between intellectuals (of various political

persuasions) and the state over the direction which education could take. This was not simply an academic argument, it was a disagreement over the role of higher education in the development of Turkey as a modern nation.

In 1968 the student unrest which erupted over much of Europe also spread to Turkey. The student protests, however, soon became polarised along left-wing and right-wing responses to state policies. The entire student body was very quickly drawn in, with the result that both students and their teachers were politicised and became divided into factions. For a variety of reasons the universities, and later many schools and colleges as well, became literally the battlegrounds on which the struggle for the control for state education was fought, with a considerable loss of life. The issue at stake was much broader than control of education. The left on the whole was fighting for the abolition of capitalism in Turkey, and the right for the establishment of a more authoritarian capitalist state. The violence with which this conflict was waged left little room for any middle ground and resulted in the polarisation of academics between left and right.

This polarisation continued until the coup of 1980, by which time much of the educational system had effectively broken down. The new military regime faced a situation in which the educational system,

originally created to serve the needs of a modern Kemalist state, had manifestly failed to do so. The regime's response was to reaffirm the principles of Kemalism in support of their own policies and to set about dismantling all the possible channels of criticism — not just the direct attacks on the state which came from the left or right, but also any support for democratic principles which would give people the right to question the policies of the regime.

The regime has acted in two main ways. They have detained, dismissed or otherwise silenced key individuals who represent a threat from right or left, or who can articulate the need for democracy. Secondly, they have set about the reconstruction of higher education as a state-controlled system. It now seems clear that the military regime does not intend to allow a free flow of ideas in Turkey in the foreseeable future.

Dismissals and resignations of university lecturers throughout the country have been so extensive that many courses can no longer be taught (see *Index* 3/83, p 47). Ironically the regime is now attempting to import British academics to fill the vacancies.

The regime has clearly decided that their priority must be economic change with political stability, and in order to achieve this, it will silence opposition and, in the name of Kemalism, sacrifice the accumulated knowledge and skills which Turkey so urgently needs. ■

Nigeria

Wole Soyinka

Electoral fraud and the Western press

The Nigerian 1983 elections were a disaster for democracy

Wole Soyinka — Nigeria's leading playwright, novelist and poet, Professor of Literature at the University of Ife — wrote this 'interim statement' on the Nigerian 1983 elections when he passed through London in late August. The official FEDECO (Federal Election Commission) results for Ondo State have since been challenged by the judiciary and reversed. Those for Oyo State still stand, after a panel of judges dismissed an election petition by the defeated incumbent governor.

In another month or two, the detailed, incredible story of the Nigerian exercise in democratic elections, 1983, will be

published. This is only an interim statement. The actual figures compiled from the Returning Officers' forms at the polling booths and counting centres will be published side by side with the figures announced by the Federal Electoral Commission, (FEDECO), which awarded the Presidency to the incumbent Alhaji Shehu Shagari, and a number of state governorships to candidates of his party. The discrepancy in these figures, running in millions, will startle the democratic world, they will startle even nations which are effectively one-party states. Yet even these figures will not have told the entire story. [See box 'State Governor election results']

Nigeria Electoral fraud

For instance, will the figures reveal that in Sokoto, the home state of the incumbent President, there was hardly any voting except by his own party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN)? Shagari's credibility as a leader had to be saved at all costs in his home state where the little support he ever enjoyed had been eroded by four years of neglect and manifest corruption, not to mention traumatic events like the police massacre of peasants at Bakolori, right on Shagari's doorstep. It was saved by the simple process of flooding his home state with the fearsome Special Units of the anti-riot Police who savaged would-be supporters of the opposition parties, arrested their party agents on sight, and even baton-charged lines of voters in obvious strongholds of his main opponent, Dr Audu Bayero.

Hundreds of booths were starved of ballot papers, so that queues of would-be voters waited in vain from seven o'clock in the morning to six o'clock at night when polling officially ended. Photographs taken of such scenes in the Nigerian newspapers, plus television coverage, more than testify to the reality, not merely in Sokoto State, but in at least fifteen of the nineteen states where the NPN knew that it faced certain defeat.

The ignorance of the outside world regarding this Nigerian 'democratic' reality is only to be expected; correspondents from other nations continue to present their audience with a primitive image of democratic understanding in Nigeria. For example, *Newsweek* magazine, in its pre-election coverage, blithely informed its global readership that no programmes covering issues of any importance — economic, political or social — were presented to the electorate. The economic conditions — the death-seizure of large and small businesses, development projects, social amenities; the scarcity of commodities and the upward spiral in the cost of all essentials of day-to-day living, including basic food stuffs — all these were attributable to the financial mismanagement and rampant corruption of Shagari's government, widely and consistently publicised, yet none of these featured at all in the campaign manifestoes of the various political parties. What would decide the elections? Tribal allegiances, claimed Mr *Newsweek*!

Discredited, rejected, even loathed by the majority of Nigerians, the National Party of Nigeria, buoyed by the image-building of its leader Shagari by the Western Press — meek, unassuming, de-tribalised, the guarantor of peace and stability — went confidently ahead to commit the most breathtaking electoral fraud of any nation in the whole of Africa. At every level — from acts of brutal ejection of the opposition at

agencies to the simplest but most daring motion of all, swapping the figures at the very point of announcement — the scale of the robbery is unprecedented. Where all other measures failed, the Secretaries to the States Electoral Commissions simply announced the wrong figures; alternatively, the Federal Commission in Lagos announced the forgeries, claiming that these were the figures passed on by the state offices.

I have brought with me two sets of results (incomplete) for Oyo and Ondo states in the governorship elections. They were compiled from the form known as EC 8, that is, the forms for each polling booth, signed by the party agents and the Returning Officer. By the time of my departure from Lagos on Thursday 18 August no such compilations were available from the Federal Electoral Commission, yet both governorships in these states had been awarded to the NPN. The final figures for the NPN had simply been inflated by over a million votes. In

'Positive' reporting

A New York public relations firm with international experience of promoting political parties in the foreign media was discreetly engaged by President Shagari's National Party of Nigeria (NPN) for last month's general elections... Its Lagos agent was Mr Jerry Funk, national security council adviser on Africa to ex-President Carter and, more recently, a member of the Western banking consortium which helped to ease Nigeria's short-term trading deficit. With a British aide, his job was to encourage what party and government officials called 'positive' reporting of the elections and NPN efforts to secure victory. It was a new departure in Nigeria's relations with the foreign press...

The NPN preached 'one nation, one destiny', and, with its landslide victories in the series of five elections, seemed to confirm its predictions that Nigerians wanted a distinct break with their fractious past. And there is a vestige of truth in this. President Shagari certainly believes it, and many educated Nigerians yearn for an end to the old tribal rivalries.

But the NPN analysis, carefully nurtured for foreign journalists, is a travesty of the real power relationships in the country. The corruption, mediocrity and inefficiency blighting the higher echelons of the NPN — and, it must be said, the other main parties where they hold power in the states — have become notorious and are at times extraordinarily blatant.

David Pallister, *The Guardian*,
23 September 1983

FEDECO's attempt to build up a credible accumulation of votes towards the final, pre-programmed figure, that method was uniformly applied all over the country, and particularly to the Presidential elections. Throughout the electoral areas, five copies of the form EC 8 held by the opposition parties will be found to contain identical scores while the sixth and seventh, held by the NPN and the FEDECO will be found to have the figure one — or two or three — in front of its correct figure.

A death-toll of 83 during the elections has been estimated by the Western press. That figure does not account for the total casualties in Oyo state alone. And it is wishful thinking to report, as did *The Observer* on 21 August, that only the Yoruba states were involved in the violence. The first act of violence ironically began in Niger, a Northern state, long considered an impregnable bastion of the NPN. *The Financial Times* of 20 August appears to be one of the few journals so far in possession of this fact.

There has been violence in Borno state where a policeman fired on a crowd of protesters and was promptly lynched, and in Bauchi, Anambra, Gongola. In several states the election results have been rejected outright by all five non-NPN parties. In Sokoto, Cross River and Bendel, where no answer could be found immediately to the unexpected and brutal partisanship of the police and some of the army units, three, four or all five parties have jointly resolved to boycott all future elections. Yet normally responsible newspapers such as *The Observer* continue to delude the world that a normal, peaceful, even democratic event is going on in this populous nation of the African continent. The irrepressible Shagari even went so far as to hope that ours would serve as an example for other African nations to follow!

While FEDECO delayed the results meeting frantically with NPN leaders and law-enforcement officers, it was the state-owned radio and television stations which kept up a poll-by-poll announcement of results, leaving the arithmetic to its listeners day and night broadcasts alerted the electorate and urged constant vigilance. For example, during the second week of elections — that is, during the preparatory week for the governorship elections — Ogun State Broadcasting Service repeatedly broadcast a secretly taped conspiratorial meeting between the NPN hierarchy and top officials of FEDECO. There was no anonymity — names were named, with official positions, assigned roles, methodology of rigging and contingency plans. It was a dramatic catalogue of human greed, lust for power, abuse of position and felonious conspiracy to subvert the law and the