

AFRICA ■ IN RHYTHM ■ AND LITERATURE sketches ■

MAKERA MUSIC BESSIE HEAD

... "They thought what other people only sing in songs," said Zhivago of his love for Lara. He could not have meant the run-of-the-mill but the songs Miriam Makeba chose for her repertoire. Who else sings of love and life that has a long thread of continuity and purpose?

I have said so many tentative things about her, out of surprise. I once said that the human voice must have power and authority to be heard and she has this - because of the demands she makes on the concentration. I also came around to the view that she has a great soul and this made her transcend the achievements of anything run-of-the-mill. She could never be cheap entertainment.

That two unlike artists like Pasternak and Makeba eventually said the same, eternal, everlasting things to my heart, appears to me that they travelled a similar road where everything was a mass of pain, confusion, loss and human stupidity. They recorded it all with silent eyes, possessively keeping the beauty in their hearts to themselves, knowing it had no place where false ideals were set up whereby people had to live or be shot dead or imprisoned.

We were thinking about other things when wading through the bleak terrain that makes up so much of 'Doctor Zhivago' - there were those detailed, precise recordings of what one peasant said and what another peasant said and the recording goes on and on with ruthless precision. The heart of the writer is not involved and that is half the pain of the book. He was just looking and looking and simply not liking anything he looked at. He was a man slowly having a nervous breakdown because of all the things he had been born with in his heart, that he had been born to have a great love affair, in spite of the revolution that a love affair conducted amidst total collapse, was going to be the only worthwhile achievement of his life. Because nothing prepares you for the shattering beauty of the last pages of the book.

The references to Lara are always small, abrupt sentences tagged onto those eyes which silently watched a hateful and inhuman world. They teeter at the end of a terrifying description of Moscow, overrun with the plague and rats, the secret police, where things like fresh vegetables have gone on the black market and are only obtained at the risk of being deported to Siberia. It is those agonies which dominate. There can't be people there anymore, only terror and insanity. In all this Lara says: "Yura, I want to tell you something." He knew, says the author with quiet amusement, she thought she was pregnant.

It holds you for some time, the man's heart which he keeps such a secret, as though he is conducting a silent conspiracy of his own against all those things which are not truth but evil. It's as though his heart and what was in it would eventually acquire the power to make the universe whole and sane again. It has that effect, because once the man breaks down and shows you his secret heart, you can't remember or care any longer what one peasant said or the other peasant said - only those eternal lines: "Oh, what a love it was, how free, how new, like nothing else on earth!"

The voice of Makeba breaks in on the ear in the same way: Oh, how free, how new, like nothing else on earth!

I think it's the shock of the contrast. This same precise, ruthless recording is going on in Southern Africa of life on a bleak, terrible terrain. One black man said this about losing his family and home overnight and another black man said this and you know that the white man who said that can only increase the terror and insanity because his way of life which coddles him and sets him apart from the rest of mankind, needs it. You know Makeba lived through all of this and recorded it with still, silent eyes but when you turn to her music, some other world reaches you where in all, all this a mother sang a song to her baby about a canary.

It is more than just a song when Makeba sings it. It is her whole life and secret heart which she kept to herself throughout all those years she was a recorder of everything that amounted to rubbish - because that's what evil is: Rubbish. It is almost with relief that one listens to her music because it says the true things about Southern Africa, that the children who made up the game song about the pretty new dress are going to survive, that there are people here too, black people, born to have great love affairs, full of wonders and things, which will be more important than our revolutions.

I have no logical argument as to why those things are more important, except that I believe in the contents of the human heart, especially when that heart was a silent and secret conspiracy against all the insanity and hatred in mankind. In this context, the heart of Pasternak is the true liberator of Russia and Makeba music is the liberator of all black people.

They could have said other things because we were thinking of other things. But they are greater than others because the end products of both their gifts to mankind is only what they were born with in their hearts.

A decade of television

Olu Ogunsanwo

The beginnings of television date back to the twenties of this century but it was not until 1936 that the British Broadcasting Corporation started the first regular public television service in the world. Since then some of the remarkable developments that have taken place include telerecording, colour television and transmission by satellite.

When the first service was to be established in Nigeria some cynics criticised it as a luxury which an African government could not afford. However, conscious of the impact and immediacy of this mass medium, the authorities went ahead as projected and the first TV station in Africa South of the Sahara was established by the Western Nigeria government in Ibadan in 1959 just a year before Independence. Within five years of its operation, three other stations were established viz ENTV at Enugu by the former Eastern Nigeria government, NTS (now known as NBC-TV) by the Federal Government and RKTU in Kaduna by the former Northern Nigeria government.

For instance NBC-TV (known as Nigerian Television Service until 1966) was established in April 1962 under an agreement between the Federal Government of Nigeria and NBC of America. This influence was reflected not only in the Management but also in the preponderance of American films in NBC-TV's programme schedule. When, however, the contract expired in 1966, the Federal Military Government refused to renew it because it was convinced that the station must be run by Nigerians to suit the needs of Nigerians. It was then annexed as the TV arm of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. The three other stations were established under similar contracts with foreign television establishments.

After ten years of television broadcasting in Nigeria, one may venture to ask how far the institution is succeeding in fulfilling the motives for which the stations were founded. All of them were established as statutory corporations and therefore receive government subsidies in addition to commercials.

There are many problems confronting the executives of television in Nigeria, problems which are financial, technical and administrative. For instance owing to transmitter problems, NBC-TV can only be viewed in and around Lagos to a paltry viewership of about 50,000 during peak periods. WNTV from Ibadan covers that area and also overlaps NBC-TV in the Lagos area. One phase of the development of WNTV (in the initial programme) was to cover the Mid-West but the creation of the state brought this

to a standstill. RKTU can be viewed only around Kaduna while ENTV transmits around Enugu and Aba. All this is due to the fact that the most powerful transmitter can only supply effective viewing within a radius of 100 miles and each of the stations cannot foot the colossal expenditure of a network. As a result of the paucity of the transmitters, the medium as at present run in Nigeria, is not yet serving even five per cent of the population which can at present benefit from this organ of mass information.

Moreover, there is such keen rivalry between WNTV and NBC-TV because of transmission overlap and WNTV seems to dwarf the image of NBC-TV which can be viewed only in the Lagos area. Besides there is such parallel programming which results in the use of the same material and artistes and dissipation of energy and man-power and that in a developing country. Television is an expensive medium if it must be run properly. Even though these stations earn from commercials in addition to government subsidies yet they all run on shoe strings. The studios are below standard size generally and are ill-equipped for ambitious productions.

Nigerian television now has a core of well-trained personnel who are compelled to work in a circumscribed atmosphere with poor equipment which do no credit to their creative genius. What chance has a show directed on only two or three imperfect cameras in international competitions or a programme that cannot be edited to make for a neat finished professional job? NBC-TV now has a plan to purchase four new studio cameras.

The field of local documentaries is one in which television has not delved into much. Nigeria, and in fact Africa, has a wealth of documentary material that would find suitable overseas markets if well directed. TV owes it as a duty to project the culture of the country not only to foreigners but also for the enlightenment of the citizens. The TV and cine-cameras must be brought out a lot more frequently to report more local news and produce exciting documentaries. In the last decade, a lot of useful and valuable material had been transmitted whether 'live' or recorded, which, with some foresight and sacrifice should have been kept in archives and even made into films for resale to other networks outside the country.

Because of the meagre funds available to TV stations in Nigeria, it has not been possible to develop a core of professional artistes and talents and hence that professional standard of production is still elusive. The lack of rehearsal rooms or adequate studio space makes detailed planning and rehearsals almost impossible. There have been programmes that went 'on air' unrehearsed and, as a result, direction has come off the cuff.

In Nigeria, the TV set is classified as a luxury item in the import tariff and as a result only well-to-do families can afford to own sets. In view of the importance of TV as a medium of information, entertainment and education, it may be necessary for the government to consider encouraging industrial concerns with highly developed electronic technology to establish industries to manufacture low-cost TV sets for the average family in Nigeria. This is bound to increase viewership and also enable TV

to fulfil its functions fully for the advantage of the community for which it was established.

The creation of more states in Nigeria may in some way help to solve the dilemma of TV. Even if resources are available to establish separate TV stations for each state, it is unnecessary and the Federal Military Government must stem any such move by unifying all existing stations to form a single network. The case for TV has not been helped by the Ani Report on Statutory Corporations which sees a broadcasting corporation as a non-essential corporation. In addition, the bureaucracy and red-tapism of the Civil Service have no place in broadcasting and those concerned with the management of TV must assert their claim to freedom under which creativity can only flourish. Yet one may say such freedom can be difficult to attain since the stations are run on government subsidies but if the BBC attained this status, it can be done in Nigeria as well.

It will therefore be advisable for dynamic and progressive steps to be taken to improve the lot of TV in Nigeria in the next decade that may well usher in the glamour of colour television.

GROWING AWAY FROM THE SHADOW WILLFRIED FEUSER

A corner of the blackboard in Auditorium I had been forgotten by the cleaner when the delegates flocked in; some left-overs from the last class in Educational psychology before the Christmas vacation stared them in the face: Experience or practice ... Change in Behaviour ... Normal Growth, Maturation.

A fitting bit of shorthand for the Ife Conference on African Writing in English. The sun over the brand-new campus with its Israeli-designed architecture was at its resplendent best before the coming of the Harmattan dust. Only the sandflies failed to observe a truce, and one American novelist was later said to have fled back to Chicago two days after the opening. The Vice-Chancellor of Ife University, Dr. Oluwasanmi, who had been rushing from one opening speech to another - he had the Ife Festival of the Arts to cope with as well, while flowing robes and anthropologists' moustaches indicated that a Conference on West African Chiefs was about to start in Auditorium II next door - made a fervent appeal to the critics' sympathy for the young writers, some of them sitting with open-eyed wonder among the undergraduate audience.

Four days of hard work followed, not only for Michael Crowder, Ife's Director of African Studies, who had synchronized the two conferences with the Festival, and H. L. B. Moody, Head of Ife's English Department, who bore the brunt of organizational detail.

Eastern Africa was strongly represented. A tough and vulnerable-looking James Ngugi rejected

the white outsider's view of the African from Rider Haggard to Alan Paton and ended somewhat abruptly on a socialist profession of faith. David Rubadiri reminisced about the first novel by an African that had come his way and kindled the spark in him - Ekwensi's 'People of the City.' Now he made his audience aware in his detached ironical manner, with Okot p'Bitek and others, East African Writing in English is firmly planted on its own feet.

The West African writers were conspicuously absent, Achebe and Soyinka for obvious reasons. J. P. Clark had stayed in Lagos nursing a recent illness. Kwesi Brew of Ghana was kept away by an ambassadorial engagement. Two other writers with long past associations with Nigeria were unable to attend: Ezekiel Mphahlele and O. R. Dathorne. The field belonged to the critics.

Christopher Heywood (Sheffield), former Professor of English at Ife University, and the spiritus rector of the conference, analysed the technique of South Africa's most prolific novelist. ('The Cool Eye of Peter Abrahams'). However, apart from Ngugi's and Rubadiri's East African contributions and Edward Blishen's intensely personal appraisal ('African Writing in English - a New World Literature'), which soared from coast to coast, critical attention was mostly focussed on West Africa. Gerald Moore (Sussex) came to grips with Christopher Okigbo's hermetic poetry, bringing it in line "with the esoteric nature of initiatory practice". Professor Eldred Jones (Fourah Bay) pointed out the double edge of Wole Soyinka's ideas of progress and civilisation. Soyinka, he stressed, does not roundly condemn progress but satirises those who only cherish its empty trappings, or are given to slavish imitation, like Lakunle in 'The Lion and the Jewel':

"I kissed you as all educated men -
And Christians - kiss their wives.
It is the way of civilised romance".

In society's spiritual morass the artist alone is in "an essential state of grace"; he has to be ready to sacrifice himself to shock the inert mass into a new awareness. Such artist-martyrs are Eman in 'The Strong Breed' and Sekoni in 'The Interpreters'.

Professor Lalage Bown (University of Zambia) called for more historical perspective in assessing literary development. English literature, she declared, does not debar a Samuel Pepys, a Lord Macaulay, a Lord Chesterfield from its premises; why should African literature shut out an Ignatius Sancho, a John Christopher Taylor - Bishop Crowther's companion on the Niger - or a historian like Carl Christian Reindorf? She traced the development of a distinct African prose style from the 18th century beginnings to the great parliamentary speakers of the post-independence era.

Problems of cultural interpenetration were in no wise neglected. Mrs. Brenda Packman (University of Ife) drove home some of the difficulties inherent in the translation of African literature from French to English, and Dr. Abiola Irele, comfortably astride the two languages and cultures, tried to break down barriers to communication erected by the colonial past. At the same time he postulated the unity of modernism and tradition and called for a radical decolonisation of African literary criticism.

Even when dealing with literary topics many of the speakers veered back to the pivotal question of language; significantly, Tutuola's novels were a recurrent theme. Professor John Povey (Los Angeles) emphasized the rapid process of divorce from British tradition that had taken place in West African writing in both language and subject matter. This process was similarly described by Edward Blishen as a growing away from the shadow of an old established literature.

It was hardly a conference aglow with the excitement of new discovery. It is true, John Povey introduced some young writers with a radically different perspective like Kbella Sonne Dipoko and Ayi Armah, but this was almost in the way of a parting gesture. Discussions tended to crystallise around the new classics. Determinedly moving away from impressionism, literary criticism in Africa is now well on the road toward academic consolidation.

NOTES ON AFRICAN CULTURE AND LIBERATION

DENNIS BRUTUS
AT THE PANAFRICAN FESTIVAL OF AFRICAN
CULTURE,
ALGIERS

At this great cultural gathering - the first of its nature in the history of Africa - there will be many contributions of profound significance, offered by some of the most distinguished thinkers on the cultural problems of Africa. To these contributions I am content to offer merely a few marginal footnotes on aspects of Culture in Africa which I believe it is necessary to take into account in any comprehensive discussion. I must add that it is my belief that there are many distinguished intellectuals in Africa whose views need to be added to those submitted to the Symposium, if we are to have the fullest and richest understanding of the tasks which await us.

I speak deliberately of "tasks which await us" for I believe that it is no cliché to say that Africa is in the process of rediscovering and redefining herself and her culture, and that the greatest part of this task lies before us, and stretches in an immense vista into the future.

It is as a contribution to the preparation for these tasks of the future that I offer these footnotes.

It is, I believe, essential for us that we should, in preparing for our journey, strip ourselves of all unnecessary lumber - particularly of such procedures and attitudes as we have taken over from, or have had foisted upon us by the colonial powers throughout Africa. It should not be necessary for us to create such stiff and complex procedures that it is difficult

for the artist to speak to the people for whom his work is done; nor should he find, interposed between himself and his audience, a hierarchy of bureaucrats or functionaries, through whom his message and his experiences must falter; above all, we must not be guilty of the restraints and silences which have been imposed on us by our oppressors - let Africa be distinguished by the freedom it gives for the artist to reach his full creativity, whether as poet, as dramatist or as editor - in a freedom truthfully and honestly defined which is not debased by sensationalism or commercial exploitation.

Not less important is the need for freedom from alien cultures or, more precisely, the imposition of their standards of value. The ideal for an African is not to be a black Frenchman, or a black Englishman, nor anything else but to be, at the greatest height of his powers, an African. Those who teach otherwise, whether they are foreigners or Africans, if they accept these alien standards, are not the friends of Africa or of Africans.

This is true in a much more serious way in the area of politics and economics - areas which we know as Africans, cannot be artificially segregated in his society. The involvement of non-African countries in African economic and political life, in some areas, continues at an ever-increasing rate. This involvement is frequently to the detriment of Africa, and especially in the area of current greatest involvement; Southern Africa. British and American investment in the racist oppression of Apartheid shows no sign of decrease; the reverse is true. And the economic and military strength of Apartheid grows to monstrously dangerous proportions which threaten the freedom of all of Africa. To ignore this threat, or to discount it, would be to do a grave harm to Africa and to the cause of African liberation.

If Britain and the United States are the leading partners of Racialism in Africa, propping it up and strengthening it in South Africa and Rhodesia, and, through NATO arming the Portuguese oppressors in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissao - if these are the leaders, they are not left far behind by France, West Germany and Japan. By their support for and involvement in Apartheid, these countries are acting against Africa. France, for instance, may claim to be the friend of some States in Africa, but as long as she sells Mirage and Mystere jets and Alouette helicopters to South Africa, and helps her to set up a system of ground-to-air missiles, who can say that she is the friend of Africa? And who can say that Africa should remain silent when France is arming the enemy of Africa and the African people?

These are not matters of art. Some would even say these are not matters of culture. But we have come to the Festival of Panafrikan Culture understanding that there is a clear role for culture in the liberation struggle and that there can be no true culture where there is no freedom.

It is for this reason that I must reiterate - and I come from the area of conflict in Southern Africa and have been a political prisoner of both the oppressive regimes of Portugal in Mozambique and of South Africa, and have known the denial of all freedoms - that the freedom of Africa is imperilled by the growth

of the monster of Apartheid oppression, bloated and swollen by support from outside Africa to which I have already referred. The threat to Africa which is developing in Southern Africa can only be neglected at our peril. It needs the grave and urgent attention of us all.

The first is that the gap between the affluent world, which derived so much of its affluence from others, and the "developing world" grows rapidly greater. Those who have, will have more. Those who have little will have less. This is a matter of declared and defined policy, evidenced in such studies as the recent one by Duncan of Rio-Tinto in which the "Third World was discounted" and certain areas selected "for the greater future concentration of efforts and resources." The great expenditure on the exploration of the moon must also be seen in this context. While we salute, as a triumph of Man's intellect and of the human spirit, this great achievement, we must also be conscious of this turning towards mechanical and material concern as a turning-away from the urgent and immediate human problems which are crying out for solution. What might not the money spent on the moon probe (24,000m dollars or £10,000m) have done to relieve the agony of Black Americans? What might it not have done in social engineering to alleviate the agony and racialism which disfigure the United States: They can boast about their achievements on the moon; they cannot boast about what they are doing in their own country. Nor about what they are doing in Africa.

The second consideration of global significance is the increasing emergence of racialism in areas of the white world. The United States situation is sadly familiar to all of us; that of Britain, with characteristic humbug, is still in large measure concealed or disguised. But these symptoms in Britain and the United States are only part of an unfolding pattern, of which other parts can be seen in areas as distant as Australia and New Zealand. There is developing a most terrifying alignment of racial loyalties.

There is evidence of an unthinking and automatic lining-up of people - sometimes even those who believe themselves to be "liberals" - on the side of their "kith and kin". A division of the world on the line of colour. It is this blind loyalty to race and colour - this coalescence of the centuries of racial oppression by different white nations in different parts of the world - into a single global line-up on the basis of pigmentation - which some of us see, with great dread, looming in the future.

It is here that Africa, particularly in this Cultural Festival, has a special role to play, a special gift to give to the world. It is for us to assert the singleness of the human race, and the primacy of human values. We are on the side of humanity. It is this assertion, this declaration, that we must send ringing round the world - to save not only Africa, but all the peoples of the world, and to ward off this catastrophic conflict which some, in their blindness, their folly and their avariciousness, would thrust upon the world. I trust that of the many and important assertions that the Festival - and all of African Culture - will give to the world, this declaration will be paramount: Africa declares itself for the full freedom of Man and the Family of Man.



Even at the heavy cost of discontinuity, Afro-American writings have developed serious abbreviations. Black writers in America and Africa are approaching the point where their emotional sensibilities and their physical involvement is being transmitted with tremendous clarity and acuteness. Recently, those observers of literature on the Afro-American circuit would have noted that the flow of literary material has taken an appreciable shift towards verse. Afro-American writers and musicians have realised that they are living in a state of crisis, and because a crisis is in most cases short, therefore they cannot afford to expend their energies in verbal excess. The position now of the Afro-American writer is that of a man smashing a stone tower to obtain a clear insight of the construction. By doing this, the writers are not just co-operating with catastrophe. This revolutionary state has compelled the writer to search extensively for the most laconic way of stating his case. The writers today in Africa and America are propelled by a desire for condensed expression, the writer's screening time is limited, therefore his task should be levelled towards clarity of thought in short forms: call them poetical tone, movement and shape.

Surely it would be easy to dismiss my arguments about the emergence of verse as a useful instrument in preserving the nature of the grave crisis in the "third world". There are those who would scorn and dismiss all this as a passing vogue and contend that prose is the answer to the cause. The black writer in Africa and America, and this also applies to writers