Gabriel Gbadamosi
& Ato Quayson

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TWO AFRICAN JOURNEYS

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Gabriel Gbadamosi is a poet and playwright who lives in South London, where he grew up, and travels widely. He is currently an associate of the African Studies Centre, Cambridge University, researching into performance arts in East and Southern Africa. His latest play, Hotel Orpheo, which explores the links between Angola and Portugal, has been produced recently by the Schaubuehne Theatre in Berlin; and a work on the Notting Hill Carnival won a British award for the best radio play of 1993. The author is grateful to the Harold Hyam Wingate Foundation for supporting some of the work on which the following essay is based.

Ato Quayson is completing a Ph.D for the Faculty of English, Cambridge University on oral traditions and their transformations in the works of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri. At the time of going to press, he is taking up a junior research fellowship at Wolfson College, Oxford to work on the links between drama, democracy and development in Africa with particular reference to South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt. He is also interested in the spread of amateur video films throughout West Africa and in how indigenous theatrical traditions are affected by the new visual technologies.

PREFACE

This pamphlet is rooted in the African experience of international migration since the second world war. Colonial regimes bequeathed to their successors a preoccupation with national and ethnic identity which has plagued postcolonial states in Africa. This in turn has undermined notions of African solidarity, indeed the question of what being "African" means, which seemed quite unproblematic while colonial rule was in place and even soon after independence.

The authors are both writers living in Britain who are concerned to situate themselves within the historical project of African struggles for political emancipation in the late twentieth century. Gabriel Gbadamosi is a playwright and poet of Nigerian and Irish descent, born and still living in South London; Ato Quayson is a Ghanaian literary critic writing about Africa from a base in Oxbridge. If Panafricanism was an ideology of West Indians and Americans seeking to heal the rupture with Africa brought about by slavery, these men locate their desire for African unity in the conditions of the postwar diaspora which has brought millions of Africans to settle in Europe and America, as well as elsewhere within Africa itself.

Ato Quayson's essay contemplates the unimaginable mess that is Nigeria today, a people denied democratic self-expression by a military class fed on oil and the covert support of the western powers. The dialectic of his argument passes from colonial to military oppression and thence to the possibility of regional association as a means of overcoming the contradictions of nationalism. Gabriel Gbadamosi likewise wants to escape from nationalist restriction and finds hope in the effects of the African presence in London, where

the diversity and innovation of Brixton market symbolises more open and inclusive forms of identity. Who knows, we might even be witnessing here the decolonisation of Britain, the release of a cosmopolitan society from its post-imperial depression.

Both authors make free use of the literary imagination to sketch their vision while anchoring their arguments in historical analysis. They draw attention to the importance of the African diaspora's creative writers as a source of social, intellectual and aesthetic renewal. In this they point to the possibility of reinventing anthropology as a project which engages with and learns from artists who have every reason to distance themselves from the twentieth century discipline.

For, quite apart from the over-rehearsed complicity of anthropologists with colonial empire, it is more salient to emphasise the profession's contemporary addiction to ethnic divisions as the basic model of human society, thereby reproducing in microcosm a vision of world order which is tied for ever to the nation-state. Each author, by grappling with the world as they experience it, exposes the limitations of such an outlook and of the outworn academic ethnography which sustains it.

The map of the world is being redrawn to accommodate the movement and horizons of people today. Africans, who have least at stake in the twentieth century order, are leading the way in this work of the creative imagination. It would be a pity if western anthropologists retreated into a world which exists only in their own fantasies.

Anna Grimshaw
&
Keith Hart

October 1994

UNTHINKABLE NIGERIANA

by
Ato Quayson

Unthinkable Nigeriana: crisis in the idea of the African nation-state

the gasping eagle, shorn of proud feathers
and sand-ridden, mumbles its own dirge
gazing at the iroko
it can no longer ascend. . .

"The Fate of Vultures"
Tanure Ojaide

These lines from Ojaide's award-winning poem help explain the motivation behind the first part of my title. They conjure up an image of the unthinkable, when the proud and high-flying eagle is constrained to sing its own dirge. Something even more unsettling is suggested in the image of the eagle looking longingly at the iroko tree it can no longer ascend: it is as if, in losing its feathers, it also takes on the consciousness of a squirrel. Surely, we would imagine that it is squirrels who should be concerned with ascending tall tress. The eagle's sights should be on the clouds and not even on the iroko tree at all. The first part of my title tells of my own intuitive grasp of the unthinkable that Ojaide's lines grasp in simple but eloquent form. It is a sense of the dissolution of all the conceptual underpinnings behind my sense of growing up as a West African with Nigeria as a constant source of stimulating contradictions against which I defined my conceptual horizons as a young student, and, lately, as a scholar. This piece attempts to come to terms not only with the uneasy sense that that conceptual horizon has somehow been superseded by other realities but also to examine what it means to be a member of a nation-state in Africa today.

My growing sense of what Nigeria signified in the West African sub-region can best be grasped in reminiscences. I remember, round about 1977, the night-long arguments in secondary school Form Two about which was the better of our two countries, Ghana or Nigeria. "Well, even if they are bigger than us," said one of the more voluble apostles for seeing Ghana's superior position, "we've been beating

them at football." And with that the "Nigerian apostles" were temporarily silenced, because it seemed quite obvious that we were the most formidable soccer team in Africa. The current state of affairs, in which Nigeria has played in the 1994 World Cup finals and Ghana has not, allows us to see in hindsight how futile such debates really were as a source for canvassing national supremacy.

In Form Five we were introduced to Chinua Achebe's **Things Fall Apart** and immediately all males in the class were re-christened with names from the novel. You were either an Okonkwo to signal your firmness and enviable disrespect for your seniors, or an Obierika, to signal your calmness in the face of problems, or you were a despicable Efulefu, condemned to stutter before the fairer sex. It was easy for us to perceive a community of values between our own worlds and those Achebe evoked in his novel and his work was responsible for inculcating in many of us a strong interest in African writers.

By Sixth Form, Nigeria was firmly implanted in our minds as the dominant economic power in the region. This was confirmed for us in a special way through the fantastic apocryphal tales we heard of the way Nigerians spent their money. One tale had it that universities in northern Nigeria had hot-chocolate taps installed in their dinning halls and that this after-meal beverage was absolutely free! And, to further imprint its significance on our minds, a tale was told of a hapless Ghanaian student who went to visit his friend in one of the Nigerian universities and was taken for a meal at the dinning hall. Having quickly disposed of his meal, this unsuspecting chap just walked briskly to one of the chocolate taps with the obvious intention of washing his cutlery set. He noticed, much to his amusement, a couple of students gesticulating frantically to him not to go towards that particular sink. He ignored them, went ahead, turned the tap, and, Lo and Behold! there flowed some of the richest of warm chocolate drink that could be imagined. Not to be easily bowled over by such unforeseen complications, he calmly used his oily spoon to take a few quick sips of the chocolate and promptly departed form the university campus. This might sound amusing in hindsight, but

for us at that time, it was a clear sign of Nigeria's advancement and wealth.

Not that we needed such stories to confirm what was everywhere evident. By the early eighties, every family on the street on which I lived could boast of at least one family member in Nigeria. My own uncle, who was a teacher, went to Nigeria with the promise of returning in no more than a year. It took a whole three years before we received a message to say he was alive and doing well. Even when millions of Ghanaians were forcibly deported from Nigeria in 1983, the impression was that it was some curious poetic justice revisiting us for our own expulsion of Nigerians in the late sixties.

With all these notions in mind, I undertook my first visit to Nigeria on a research trip in June 1993 with the sense of going on a pilgrimage. The experience of Nigeria turned out to be utterly disconcerting, however. It was like crossing from the real world straight into the hallucinatory realm of Tutuola's or Ben Okri's writings. The only difference between their writings and the strangeness that the real Nigeria presented was that in this case there was nothing esoteric about the Nigerian people as such. They were exceedingly hospitable. The sense of strangeness was lodged within the processes of unfolding events in themselves. And the strangeness was marked for me in a special way by two incidents that occurred during my stay.

One involved a visit to the University of Ibadan's central library. Searching for a copy of Aristotle's Poetics took me to an unfrequented part of the library. A sense of desolation was made manifest in the mustiness and dust that hung in the air. The book I required was not readily available and I had to prowl extensively in the section. Taking out a volume for the last time before I gave up the quest, I inadvertently pulled out a second one which hurtled to the floor. The fallen book disintegrated into so many pieces amidst a cloud of dust. I picked up the pieces gingerly while questions burned into my consciousness: What was this volume doing during the years of

Nigeria's oil boom? What was the relationship between this dusty volume and the crisis affecting the country at the present time?

The second incident was of a more public nature and involved my observation of the effect of Babangida's speech in which he announced the annulment of the June 12 election results. I watched the broadcast along with students of the University of Ibadan in one of the halls of residence. There was absolute quiet punctuated periodically by shouts of derision when the then president made some particularly inane remarks. By the end of his broadcast, however, a decidedly different mood pervaded the room. The audience gave a massive groan as if giving up the spirit, and all of a sudden, people's legs could no longer carry them. Several people sat on the floor and, as if in a daze, put their heads in their hands. There was a distant and glassy look in people's eyes, and the shock of the announcement was almost palpable. It was as if the death of something intangible had been announced which was dear to all people in the room. And in that brief and horrifying silence before the numerous bellows of bewilderment and anguish issued forth, more questions converged in my mind: Why did the government allow such focalization of the people's aspirations by making them go through the processes of democracy only to have them suddenly reversed in such a shocking manner? How did what I had observed relate to me as an African grown on the unquestioned assumption that it was possible to take courage from the inimitable resilience of this now battered people? What images were these? What tragedy scented the air? What apocalypse of despair?

With the foregoing conceptions and questions as a backdrop, I would like to put my musings into a more rigorous intellectual context by tackling the issue of the crisis in the idea of the nation-state in Africa, an issue which my visit to Nigeria has forced me to conceive of with greater urgency. I shall focus particularly on the internal political dynamics of Nigeria and Ghana, leaving aside their mode of integration into the global political economy and the imbalances that derive therefrom. Hopefully, this exercise might prove useful in

understanding the reasons for the widespread failure in the viability of the nation-state in places like Somalia, Sudan, Mozambique, Angola, Liberia, Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi in terms of the problems involved in forging nation-states in Africa.[1] By focusing on Ghana as well as Nigeria, I also hope to show that even when there seems to be a semblance of viability, as is the case in Ghana, the status of the nation-state remains a fluid one and is liable to dramatic shifts in emphasis.

I would like to present my ideas in the form of a number of propositions in a personal exploration of what seem to be the causes of the crisis in the notion of the African nation-state.

1—The first proposition is that the transition of African countries from colonial entity to nation-state status was carried through without resolving certain contradictions that derived from the rationale and practices of colonial political administration.

The British policy of Indirect Rule is well known to students of colonial policy. Basically, it involved governing the colonies and protectorates through the established traditional chieftaincy mechanisms. The system was particularly associated with Lord Lugard and Northern Nigeria where he encountered a highly developed hierarchized regime of emirs buttressed by sophisticated systems of taxation. However, the conceptual pre-conditions underpinning the policy of colonial administration generated serious contradictions which neither the British colonial administration nor the early cultural nationalists were willing or able to address.

The policy of Indirect Rule was based on a belief in an evolutionist model of human development. According to Henrika Kuklick, the critical feature of this scheme was that 'each individual and every society invariably repeated a single, linear developmental sequence'.[2] More important for our analysis here was the belief that in any given society and at whatever level of evolution, the elite were the most

advanced with the lower orders being closer to primitive nature.[3] By dealing with the chiefs, the colonial administration sought to deal with the cream of these native societies and also to assist in the acceleration of evolutionary trends. Furthermore, the chiefs were being trained in leadership practices to prepare them for taking on the mantle of leadership in the vaguely defined future. Unfortunately, these conceptual underpinnings also had the effect of treating the tribal entities as essentially homogeneous and stable.[4] In a sense the evolutionist model involved evolution outside the contradictory flux of history. Not only were the ethnic groupings perceived as essentially homogenous entities, their contradictory relationships with other ethnic groupings were completely ignored. There was an implicit process of the conceptual erasure of the reality of inter-ethnic strife. In the case of the processes of state formation of Yorubaland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the numerous conflicts that pertained both between Yoruba groupings themselves and between Yorubaland and their northern Muslim neighbours over trade routes and land claims were never addressed.[5] The only way in which the colonial administration engaged with these issues was by the use of military intervention in the various tribal wars, as was the case with the intervention that led ultimately to the establishment of British jurisdiction on Yorubaland in the 1890s. This attitude was symptomatic of the colonial administration's attitudes to potential areas of ethnic conflict and it paved the way for their disengagement from Nigeria without establishing viable mechanisms by which conflicting ethnic interests in the artificially bounded national entity could be mediated.[6]

In any case, despite the pride of place given to the institution of chieftaincy within colonial administrative policy, an important limitation to the development of traditional modes of authority was the fact that chieftaincy was perceived not as a model by which the totality of the problem of colonial governance could be mapped, but rather as an "instrument" of administrative policy. Michel Foucault's analysis of the changing European conceptions of state governance from the sixteenth century offers a useful context within which to

examine the problem of the status of chieftaincy as an instrument of sovereignty. In a series of lectures under the general rubric of 'Governmentality,' Foucault explores how the issues of governance have been defined through the family as a model of politico-economic articulation and later through the population as a base from which the parameters of citizenship are defined. He writes:

> In other words, prior to the emergence of population, it was impossible to conceive the art of government except on the model of the family, in terms of economy conceived as the management of a family; from the moment when, on the contrary, population appears absolutely irreducible to the family, the latter becomes of secondary importance compared to population, and as an element internal to population: no longer, that is to say, a model, but a segment. Nevertheless, it remains a privileged segment, because whenever information is required concerning the population (sexual behaviour, demography, consumption, etc.) it has to be obtained through the family. But the family becomes an instrument for the government of the population and not the chimerical model of good government .[7]

Transposing these remarks to the context of colonial policy, it is possible to argue that the institution of chieftaincy played the same role in the policy as the model of the family played in early European political theory. It is easy to see the usefulness of such a conceptualization of chieftaincy for the colonial administration. The relationship between chiefs and their subjects was conceived of as essentially organic and benign and the chiefs were useful sources of information about their people's culture. Furthermore, once a chief had been convinced about the efficacy of introducing a policy, it was assumed that it could be passed on to the "tribal" family. The flaw in the whole conception can be discerned in the fact that such a conceptualization constrained the colonial administration to

homogenize a highly heterogeneous and contentious socio-political reality. It was never a straightforward matter deciding who qualified to be called a chief. According to Crowder and Ikime, this problem was particularly acute in Western Nigeria where there was a great array of people qualifying for the title of "chief."[8] In instances such as in Iboland, where the acephalous system prevented the easy identification of single powerful leaders, colonial policy was to impose warrant chiefs in order to erect the requisite parameters for governance. The issue of the "instrumentalization" of the institution of chieftaincy seems to be particularly important, not only because it justified tampering with certain chieftaincy structures in order to make of them more useful instruments of policy, but also because in a way it helped defer the problem of considering the conceptual contradictions involved in the role of Indirect Rule as a training of traditional authorities for governance. Even though chiefs were allowed into the legislative councils from the 1920s, it is clear that at no time did the question of how these traditional constituencies were going to be related to a national sovereignty ever arise for debate.

The policy of indirect rule also had ramifications for the ways in which political power was negotiated in the colonies. It enforced a "patrimonial system"[9] of administration in which the power relations within the system were vertical ties of domination and dependence, with subordinate clients jostling for the favour of their patrons and with the colonial administration at the apex of this hierarchy.[10] Several decades on, and this patrimonial system of negotiating power and authority still seems to dominate African politics. In 1976, the drafters of Nigeria's republican constitution saw politics in the country as turning on gaining the 'opportunity to acquire wealth and prestige, to be able to distribute benefits in the form of jobs, contracts, scholarships, and gifts of money and so on to one's relatives and political allies.'[11] This was something they abhorred, but which seems to have been an intractable problem for the drafters. Of course, it would be simplistic to argue that the massive nepotism that has marked the distribution of resources in the independent states of Africa derive solely from the patrimonial implications of Indirect Rule, but

it is difficult to dismiss the feeling that it certainly naturalised a particular practice of negotiating authority.[12]

The policy of Indirect Rule also effectively frustrated the perception of the true relevance of radical changes in the social structure of colonial possessions. Increasing numbers of educated Africans soon emerged to challenge the central position given to the chiefs, and the conflict that persisted between the chiefs and the emerging class of educated elites gradually led to a complete loss of power for chiefs.[13] In Ghana, by 1951, when the process towards decolonization had gathered momentum, the new constitutional arrangements completely excluded chiefs from having any special representation in the House of Assembly. This was a major set-back for chieftaincy as a political institution and it goes to show how the institution was perceived by the rising political forces. This cleavage between the chiefs and the rising class of educated elite was one whose consequence the British administration was late in recognizing because of the conceptual underpinnings of colonial policy. They attempted to engage with the rising political forces at the same time as they tried to shore up the position of the chiefs. In fact, as Robert Pearce points out in an article on decolonization in Africa, Colonial Office policy towards decolonization was riddled with ambiguities and marked by great confusion.[14]

In spite of all these conceptual contradictions, however, it seems to me that the true consequence of the Indirect Rule system can only be fully gauged with reference to the lateness with which the mass of the people emerged as a major factor in the dynamics of political authority. It is easy to observe that the colonial administration were forced to change their minds only when the mass of the people began rendering the colonies ungovernable. This is not to say that the people as a constituency were completely non-existent till the later stages of decolonization. Their presence was felt in the various riots that took place in Egbaland in Nigeria in 1918, the Asante rebellion of 1900, and in the Hut Tax riots in Sierra Leone in 1889. The significant thing in all these cases, however, is that though the colonial

administration had to respond to the demands of these events, all negotiations were with the chiefs or the educated elites, both groups of which did not truly represent popular aspirations as such. This is evident from the electoral demands that both groups made in the early 1920s. The educated elite, as represented in the National Congress of British West Africa, was a group of upwardly mobile professional men. At their inaugural meeting in 1920 they pressed for adult suffrage based on property ownership, something which would clearly exclude many people from voting. The chiefs, on the other hand, as represented in groups like the Aborigines Rights Protection Society of the Gold Coast, insisted that their organization should be taken as an electoral college to return members into the Legislative Councils. Since the A.R.P.S. was dominated by chiefs and their sympathisers, it is easy to see whose interests they were ultimately defending.

The position of the generality of the populace altered dramatically after World War II. A massive rural-urban drift during the war years transferred large masses of the colonized populations to the urban fringes, so that by the end of the war there were significant groupings of dissatisfied people who could identify commonly shared perspectives. The return of disgruntled soldiers after the war also added a new dimension in that the war had radically demystified the white man. These and other factors led to significant changes in the constitution of power bases; and it was those like Nkrumah and Azikiwe who were wise enough to perceive the significance of this mass factor who managed to achieve unshakeable leadership positions in the process towards decolonization. The "emergence" of the people at this time introduced new issues into the problem of governance which were not fully grasped by either the British administration or the nationalists. It introduced the issue of how the exercise of political authority was to be related to popular aspirations. This question had never arisen with any measure of urgency for the colonial administration because, for them, the chiefs were representatives of any such aspirations. But the urgency with which the masses now clamoured for the satisfaction of their basic needs and their

consciousness of the means by which they could articulate dissent meant that even after Independence the problem of how to satisfy their needs would determine the viability of the newly-emergent nation-states. I am largely in agreement with Basil Davidson in his assessment of the rise of the masses as contributing a social urgency to the anti-colonial struggles. I would however take issue with him for his assertion that 'as a mobilising and emotively compelling slogan, nationalism had small meaning in the Africa of the 1950s.'[15]

It was rather the case that there was no essential dichotomy between the two and that they were inextricably linked in the minds of the generality of the population at the time of Independence. At independence the fusion of social aspirations with what we might term the "nationalist-symbolic" was total and perhaps nowhere better articulated than in the famous words of Kwame Nkrumah: 'Seek ye first the political Kingdom and all other things shall be added unto it.' And the reason why there was no dichotomy between the two was that, by that time, it was generally acknowledged that the only viable way of articulating viability in the global political-economy was through the paradigm of the nation. It was only during the time of post-Independence disillusionment that a split emerged between the state as a symbolic nexus of cross-cultural identity and the state as a distributor of economic resources. It is arguable that by the late seventies the second function of the state was pre-dominant and its failure to satisfy social and economic aspirations gradually led to a loss of faith in the idea of a nation-state, with dire consequences. Furthermore, after Independence a gap emerged between the aspirations of the ordinary masses and those of the kleptocracies which had largely hijacked the independent governments. As governments grew in ineptitude and corruption, the state became increasingly seen as an alien entity 'suspended, as it were, in mid-air above society'.[16] We can even argue that, at its inception, the African nation-state represented a narrative to which all the people subscribed. It was like a single river carrying everybody's aspirations in the same direction. A few years on, however, and the narrative becomes discordant, hijacked by corrupt rulers and diverted to strange ends.[17]

2—The second proposition is that the problems involved in the integration of the nation-state in Africa are inextricably linked with the problem of the growth of the military as a class.

In Africa, it seems futile to speak of classes because of the fluidity between the various social groupings. Much of the group that would normally be viewed as the middle class is composed of traders and people in the distribution sector of the economy. And because of the very real vagaries of African economies, it is easy for so-called businessmen to move very rapidly from riches to rags. More significantly, this grouping does not seem to possess a coherent world-view as a group, because of the varying relationships it establishes with a largely traditional and peasant background. It is important to note that even wealthy Africans pride themselves on springing from humble parentage.

The matter seems to be quite different when we consider the military. This is the only grouping in the African political system that possesses a coherent world-view and is able to articulate aspirations as a group. Furthermore, and rather unfortunately, they are the only grouping that has the means of seizing political power for the sake of controlling economic resources in furtherance of the aspirations of their grouping. Of course, the reasons for the emergence of the military in the African political arena are myriad and complex. Sometimes they come to redress political imbalances. Sometimes they are literally invited in. At other times they come to correct perceived ethnic imbalances in the sharing of power. They always claim to represent the silent majority. But, in my view, no matter for what reason they come it does not take long for them to articulate the interests of their grouping and to establish networks for the perpetuation of the military in power.

The fact that they are a class is evident from their attitudes to other perceivable political groupings such as intellectuals and businessmen. One reason Ibrahim Babangida gave for annulling the recent Nigerian elections was that M. K. O. Abiola, widely believed to have won the elections, was not acceptable to the military and that there was the

real danger that the democratic experiment would be aborted before long if they so wished. What was generally believed is that Babangida did not wish to relinquish power to the civilians at all. It was in his interest and in the interest of the military to generate as much confusion as possible, so that they would have an excuse to stay in power. In Ghana, though the intentions of the military were very well disguised by the use of a populist rhetoric, their group interests were still very much in evidence. The regime was quick to establish Civil Defence Organisations modelled on the military. There were also suggestions put across for compulsory military training for sixth-formers on national service, and the word "cadre" was the general designation for members of these organisations. In the judicial sphere, Public Tribunals were set up to speed up judicial processes. What is clear to me in all these cases was that there was an urge to clone civil society in the image of the military at the same time as the means of force was reserved in the hands of soldiers. Significantly, the process we have noted as operating in Ghana is a reflection of the general urge of the military to civilianize military power by changing the structure of political relationships in the society.

In a discussion of 'military constitutionalism,' Eboe Hutchful extends the Weberian notion of charisma to argue that the political implications of coups can be discussed in terms of 'charismatic moments.' Two elements define this concept: first is the 'delegitimisation and loosening of pre-existing structures and relations of power and authority,' and second is 'the opportunity to more or less extensively re-organise these relations.'[18] In this sense, Babangida's about-face when he finally had to relinquish power was symptomatic of the fear that the democratic arrangements had not really succeeded in altering the patterns of relationships in the society, and, more importantly, that they would completely dispossess the military of effective political power. Unlike for Rawlings, civilianization of military power failed for him because he could not open himself up fully to the implications of the processes he had initiated. The dilemma for African soldiers in government has always been how to generate impartial rules of political procedure in which 'the subjective interests

and preferences of the military are nevertheless embedded.'[19] Babangida's regime seems to have been carried forward so far by the momentum of the democratic process that the only way to express the military's interests was to abort the process altogether.

Following Donald Rothchild, we can describe military governments as generating "hegemonic exchange arrangements" defined in terms of 'bureaucratically administered patterns of governance that allow for a limited amount of political exchange relations to take place between the state and societal élites.'[20] Rothchild discusses the notion in relation to the quasi-democratic cultures established in some African states such as Cote d' Ivoire and Kenya, but it is possible to argue that states under military governance display the phenomenon to an acute degree. The political forces under military regimes are forced to relate to the government in perpetually unequal power relations because of the lack of democratic avenues by means of which to express dissent and to effect a change of government. Because of these hegemonic exchange arrangements, the norms of democratic reciprocity which should mark the interaction of various interest groups in the nation-state are never allowed to flourish. Instead, there is a recourse to violent political activism and a fall-back on primordial patterns of ethnic alliances. This process gradually leads to a strengthening of the hand of the military in power who find excuse to remain seated in order to maintain national security.

Thus, a cycle of repression inaugurated by coups is naturalized as the best means of keeping the nation-state together. This serves to frustrate the development of viable democratic alliances and rather strengthens the army in relation to all other groupings in the body-politic. This is not to absolve inept and corrupt civilian regimes from blame, but the fact is that so long as the means of force remains a political factor, there can be no growth in the capabilities of ordinary people to claim a place in political processes.

3—My third proposition is that the suasive capacities of the African nation-state have not been properly directed towards forging the symbolic integration of the various ethnic interests inherent within. It has either been unduly focused on projecting the authority of the state in the form of its personnel and symbols of authority or on the projection of partisan political symbols.

But what can be meant by the "suasive capacities" of the nation-state? Apart from the mass media, we should also add the power of the collective capacities of the apparatus of the nation-state to generate a sense of centralism or integration expressed at various levels of the nation's discourse of selfhood, whether it be in relation to its constituent parts or to other states. In other words, the suasive capacities of the state embrace all the discursive strategies by which the nation-state projects a sense of wholeness both to itself and to the rest of the world. To explore what is meant by the "suasive capacities" of the nation-state in the context of our discussions, it is useful to digress a little and look at **Kongi's Harvest**, a play by Wole Soyinka written early in his career, which seems to bear on the issues at this point. **Kongi's Harvest** is a satirical play about a tyrant who detains the traditional authorities and tries to impose his own system of government with the assistance of a self-created bureaucratic apparatus. To advance his ends, he needs to get the detained Oba to capitulate publicly by handing him a fresh yam during the official New Yam Festival. The play opens with the Oba and his retinue singing a mock anthem. Some of the words give a clear indication of a sense of frustration under totalitarian authority:

> Ism to ism for ism is ism
> Of isms and isms on absolute-ism
> ....
> They say, oh how
> They say it all on silent skulls
> But who cares? Who but a lunatic
> Will bandy words with boxes
> With government rediffusion sets

> Which talk and talk and never
> Take a lone word in reply.[21]

The Oba and his retinue are rudely interrupted by the prison superintendent who comes to reprimand the Oba for desecrating the national anthem. Things get even worse for the Oba when this imperious state official notices that he has pulled down the national flag to cover his shanks. On being asked why he has decided to so desecrate the national flag, the Oba retorts that he should not have been deprived of his 'national trousers.' Later on, there is an interesting contest in which the Oba tries to prostrate to the superintendent but is vigorously prevented by the utterly discomfited prison official. It is clear to him that the Oba is intent on imposing an irrevocable curse on him by this act of prostration, something which, in spite of the insulation that his official position gives him, he is desperate to avoid.

The point of all this for our discussion is that the Oba launches an attack on the state apparatus by the only means available to him and that is by attacking its symbols. In fact, the whole play has this theme as a sub-text and we are made to see how each political faction attempts to appropriate ritual symbols for prosecuting the political struggle and gaining dominance in the political arena. When we leave the pages of literature and come to reality, however, we notice that though the power of traditional ritual symbols is no less diminished for existing in the real world, their true value for national integration is largely taken for granted. National flags and anthems are taken as adequate symbol of national integration, but their adequacy is often controverted by the linkages established between cultural and political agendas at lower levels of the political hierarchy. It is interesting to note this linkage in the symbolic discourse of Nigerian political parties for instance. All the major political parties in Nigeria derived initially from ethnically-based unions. The Action Group of Western Nigeria, to take the most coherent example, was formed from the Egbe Omo Oduduwa union which had as its ethnic inspiration the fact that all Yorubas claimed descent from Oduduwa.

Among Yoruba cultural nationalists a central value had always been placed on 'olaju' or enlightenment. The iconography of the United Party of Nigeria (U.P.N.) which derived its antecedents from the earlier Action Group comprised a lighted torch with the motto "Light Over Nigeria". Interesting also was the fact that the most prestigious project of the Action Group in the 60s was the establishment of a western university at Ile Ife with a logo comprising an image of Olukon, to represent ancient Yoruba culture, an open book, to represent godliness and good learning, and a blaze of light, representing 'olaju' or enlightenment. As John Peel rightly suggests, these symbols encapsulate an ideology as well as a history.[22] At this level of politics, there was clearly the articulation of nationalism by means of local symbols.

One of the reasons these local symbols were not deployed by the state apparatus to redefine ethnic conceptual boundaries and project a nationalist paradigm was that the suasive capacities of the nation-state were focused on national symbols as vested in the expressions of state authority. There was a general fusion of state authority with its more visible functionaries and institutions. Thus Nkrumah focused on creating a huge personality cult and identified the state with this cult. But because the identification was articulated within the struggle for power in a party-political system, it was easy for this identification to provoke alienation in any group of people not sharing the same ideology or political affiliation. In Babangida's Nigeria, on the other hand, it is remarkable the extent to which the cityscape is named after the former president and his wife. There are numerous towns in which boulevards, streets, round-abouts and squares were named after the former president. This mode of "naming" suggests a postulation of the state as supremely represented in the personality of its leader. The obvious harm that is done when such a leader falls from power can best be imagined.

In an interesting article appropriately entitled "His Eternity, His Eccentricity, or His Exemplarity," A. H. M. Kirk-Greene shows that all these practices relate to a process of the legitimation of the African

leader's political status and that it is of a piece with the taking of titles and epithets for the projection of the leader as a sort of culture hero.[23] The point for us, however, is that the symbols of statehood are too closely tied to the vagaries of political interests so that the suasive capacities of the state fail to sustain a national symbolism that would be capable of drawing out the sentiments of patriotism and national feeling. In the case of ethnic symbols, they also remain unutilized in the national arena mainly because their symbolic value is given a touristic inflection. The various art works, carvings, items of clothing, festivals and other paraphernalia of ethnic ethos are turned towards defining the nation-state to the outside world instead of towards forging symbolic national integration. Whatever potential was inherent in the local ritual symbols seems to have been placed solely within the context of their touristic value by the state apparatus, while the symbols of state authority had pride of place in defining a national identity internally.

What is to be done?

After this confusing picture, what is to be done about the crisis in the idea of the nation-state in Africa? First of all, it is important that the unity of the nation-state no longer be taken for granted. It is crucial for debates about ethnicity and the usefulness of integration to be launched and pursued vigorously. As Adebayo Adedeji affirmed in his opening address to a conference of the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development in 1989, African governments need to actively engage with the issue of ethnicity. One of the recommendations of the conference echoed his affirmation, calling on African governments to devise 'ways and means of avoiding ethnic tensions and the marginalization of ethnic groups and of transforming ethnic loyalties and values form being perceived as a threat to national cohesion to being utilized as an engine of development and positive social change.'[24] Ethnic insularity needs to be gradually broken through greater transactional exchanges between the various cultural groupings. This would involve, among

other things, the projection of the touristic potential of cultural symbols and artefacts inwards instead of outwards.

Secondly, it would be useful to adopt a changed emphasis in the attitudes towards the democratic upsurge in Africa. There should be dual emphasis on the establishment of democratic institutions as well as on a greater concern with the processes by which consensus is arrived at. I do not mean here just the processes of political campaigning, which generally tend to rather alienate the people by identifying democracy too closely with articulateness and wealth. Rather, the ordinary people need to be involved in discussions of policies and issues at every level. The decision-making at these local levels should be seen as capable of significantly affecting the allocation of resources and rewards at the higher levels of policy-making. The atmosphere should be created for ordinary people to feel that they matter not as seasonal voters, but as members of a common socio-political entity.

The next suggestion seems to be the least practicable, though it seems to me the most desirable. It seems necessary that armies in African nation-states be reduced in size and their roles radically redefined in terms of regional rather than state policy. Ideally, each state in the various African sub-regions needs to cede control of their armies to a regional high command which will be responsible for all aspects of manpower, training and equipment. The allegiance of the armies should be to the regional authorities and not to the individual nation-state. This would conceivably have the effect of inculcating a higher degree of professionalism, ensuring a permanent force for peace-keeping interventions (the excellent example of Ecomog comes to mind), and also paving the way for resolution of conflict within the various nation-states through dialogue and discussion in stead of violence and bloodshed. Simultaneously, there should be an effort at compulsory military training for all youths for a year or two and this should be made a pre-requisite for joining public service. Hopefully, this will ensure that some of the rigorous training of the army is passed on to the civilian population and, additionally, that

when military participate in politics, they participate not by virtue of their control of the means of force but on equal terms with everyone else. Even more importantly, such an arrangement will ensure that possessing military knowledge becomes the possession of all members of the body-politic.[25]

Finally, and indeed most importantly, Africa needs massive economic reforms because the problems of the nation state are ultimately a function of economic failure more than anything else. With all these, hopefully, ordinary Africans will be able to step out from the vale of hallucinatory realm of alienation and disillusionment and to reclaim the unuttered hopes that the dawn of independence was supposed to bring.

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25 – Clearly such a policy needs to be undertaken on a continental level, bringing to mind Kwame Nkrumah's calls for an African High Command in the early sixties. However, because of the rapidly changing face of global politics, it seems preferable to undertake the idea on different regional levels first before hoping for a continental military command with the blessing and support of the international community.

THE ROAD TO BRIXTON MARKET

by

Gabriel Gbadamosi

The Road to Brixton Market

The genre of post-colonial travelogue demands a new geography - new points of origin, trajectories of meaning, enigmas of arrival - and, in the meantime, hardly knows whether it's coming or going. Bombing round Nigeria by taxi, a commission in his pocket from a British publisher, Adewale Maja-Pearce (1987) explores the double irony of genre and identity:

> 'For many years after I left Nigeria I didn't admit to anyone that I couldn't speak my father's language. It was like a dark, shameful secret which cast doubt on my 'Africanness'. The matter was further complicated by the fact that I was, after all, half English... But in England I was taken to be a foreigner. I was continually being asked where I was from. I would invariably say Nigeria; but it would have been equally accurate, in some ways more so, if I had said England. That I didn't was telling. By rejecting my Englishness, I was colluding in a subtle form of racism.' (pp.14-15) [1]

Adewale is known to me as an editor for the Heinemann African Writers series, Africa correspondent for Index on Censorship and a fellow Nigerian-Englishman (though his english is scots and mine irish). A difference that fascinates: he was brought up in Lagos, I'm from London. So I pay special attention when, even ironically, he enters that dark territory of identity: Who are you? Where are you going? How, beyond racisms, across cultures, do you locate yourself? What, then, do you have to say?

Language, in Adewale's account, frames a gnawing anxiety about his 'Africanness'. This is an old bone - the dog's sincere, but the plastic's inauthentic - and I don't think Adewale means to accept an essentialist position on 'Africanness' any more than one on 'Englishness'. I, at least, don't think it's got much marrow, beyond giving it a few licks. Rather, I want to crack it by linking language to

another, closely related, facet of what boils down to cultural identity: food. Adewale himself gives a clue in recounting 'a popular refrain' chanted by children in Nigeria (in English) at him and his brothers:

> 'Oyinbo pepper,
> If you eat pepper
> You go yellow more more.' (p.15)

Oyinbo, he recalls, means white man. What's interesting here is the curious idea that eating certain foods not only changes your skin colour but actually makes you a 'white man', where food intersects with cultural identity. Who doesn't know that food is culture, up there with language?

The point is made, with a child's precision, in Jane Tapsubei Creider's autobiographical account of a Nandi childhood in Kenya, **Two Lives: My Spirit and I.**[2] In one chapter, "Life on a British Farm", she and her family find themselves running away from the British. It is the children (not the adults) who mix in with the other refugee peoples - Masai, Sebei, Teso and so on - escaping the British and arriving among the Luyia. The Mount Elgon Masai, she finds, 'spoke a language which was almost like Nandi, but with a very strong accent and with many different words' (p.42). She calls them 'half-and-half Nandi' and pities them because 'they can't talk like real people' (p.42). They are, nevertheless, a cultural and linguistic bridge between the Nandi and the surrounding Luyia, who, to her horror, eat fish: 'A fish is a small snake. They get it from the water alive, kill it, cook it and eat it with porridge' (p.41). She describes how one day she asks the Masai children a question: '"How do you eat? Do you have a problem eating because of your accent?" "No... we eat just fine" (p.42), (a Canadian transliteration, she says in the acknowledgements, of her Nandi syntax). She sets them a test of eating 'a sour, lemon-like fruit'. Her brother notices two things: earrings shaking in a little girl's ears from the sourness of the fruit and that 'they talked when they had food in their mouths (something we wouldn't do)' (p.42). The language of food is how these children tell people apart from themselves. What's

at stake is made very clear: 'In my mind, anyone who was not a Nandi was not a real human being. I would always feel pity for such people' (p.40). This is the language of 'ethnic cleansing' allied to the hygiene of Nandi dietary rules. This is the pity, palatable in a child, which now perplexes the world in the so-called 'ethnic clashes' in East and Central Africa, amounting to genocide in Rwanda.

* * *

I want, then, to take refuge in an alternative account of food, language and identity by looking at life in a British market over the last twenty-five years. Moving on from the aggressive, colonial expansionism of that farm, I want to claim this market, to which both my parents came as migrants on the eve of the post-colonial settlement in Africa, as the site of more fluid exchanges between cultures. Life in such a market is, for me, mediated by relations of affection (the earrings shaking in a little girl's ears; my parents finding each other). This openness to diversity is distinct from an official 'multiculturalism' which tolerates ethnic difference, safe in the knowledge of strict immigration controls. For me a street market's the place where you can go and forget your troubles on a Saturday afternoon in among the crowded colours of the food stalls. I love walking in a London street market because it's full of Londoners: Irish, West Indian, Indian, African and, among others, English, too. This is my post-colonial travelogue.

My first market was Lambeth Walk, made 'world famous' by the song-and-dance of the same name, 'Doing the Lambeth Walk, hey!', and a post-war 'mass observation' study of typical working-class British society. I remember walking along, a typical Celtic Yoruba, at four or five or six saying to my mum I didn't like cabbage, I didn't want cabbage, I wouldn't eat cabbage...

> 'Look out for the rats. They're healthy. Eat your cabbage.'
> 'I hate cabbage. I don't want... What rats?'

> 'The ones with the sleek, glossy black coats - from eating the cabbage stumps they throw in the gutter. It's healthy. Eat up your cabbage.'

Which is the story of how she never got me to eat cabbage (except disguised in an Irish stew) and despaired at the unending struggle to make her children's hair sleek, glossy and black. Black hair was beyond her. With six happy, healthy, cabbage-eating babies, she never knew how to take care of the tangled African mops that always ended up going to the (Maltese) barber.

Please imagine my relief when the seventies came in with the 'Afro' hairstyle (and my relief when it went out). The sixties were a time for me when street markets sold solid English cabbages, my hair and skin went unoiled and I hadn't yet read Simi Bedford's **Yoruba Girl Dancing** [3] in which she too describes having her hair cut, before leaving for boarding school in Britain, because they won't know how to oil it. Imagine the scene, now in Britain, trussed up in a winter hat and coat and taken off for a fitting for the new school uniform - the hat and coat have to come off:

> 'There was a slight gasp from the saleswoman and we all stared at my reflection in the looking-glass. I was a frog on stilts, pink medallions decorated my arms and legs where I had scratched the skin from my bites, and already in the crisp English air my skin had become dry and grey and flaky. My hair no longer resembled a snug fitting velvet cap; unoiled, it looked as if it had been hurriedly knitted onto my head with many dropped stitches where my scalp showed through.' (p.66)

When Lambeth Walk closed down, we moved (along with the Pie & Mash shop) to Brixton market with its gaudy-coloured covered arches arranged into 'Avenues' (1st, 2nd, 3rd...) and open-air food and second-hand clothes stalls. As an area, Brixton has seen waves of

immigrants coming through mainly from the West Indies and, more recently, Africa. In addition, it attracted the 'local colour' of a variety of sub-cultures: artists, students, the downwardly mobile, the very poor and the present British prime-minister as an upwardly mobile Conservative councillor. As a market, I've seen it change, over the last twenty-five years, from selling fruit & veg of the mainly cabbage kind to dealing in foods from Asia, Africa and the West Indies. When I remember Simi Bedford's frog on stilts, and me in the barber's mirror like a slump-town rat, I see in Brixton market a rich detritus: a narrative connecting cabbage stumps to oiled, glossy black hair and young south London traders' accents to the flirting patois of elderly West Indian ladies: a mixed diet for the cultures and identities it nourishes.

One Saturday afternoon I made a list of some of the foods to be found. Here it is:

> cassava, yam (many kinds), mango, ackee, sweet potato, sugar cane (six footers), choochoo (cristafine, from Costa Rica), water coconut, ewedu, egusi (melon seed), horse eye (a hard soup nut), goat's feet, pig's trotters (for Irish stew), tilapia (east African fish), salt-fish, palm-oil, kola nut (red & green, they get you high), plantain, ogerie tola (from Sierra Leone) and two teas:
>
> SOROSIE HERB
> Good for: Blood Pressure, Purifying blood, Nerve settling & restoring appetite
>
> MINT TEA
> Good for: Upset stomach, feel bad stomach, making tea

Perhaps the prize find was the plantain, imported from the West Indies, being sold under the Ghanaian name apim to anyone by east African Asians. I also found tins of corned beef - used for making moi moi with black-eyed beans (a Nigerian dish my mum used to make and I

used to love) - which set me wondering, whatever happened to corned beef? Something that went out with post-war austerity, I suppose. But, the point is, hasn't the British diet changed? Not to mention the kiwi-fruit and avocados I didn't think to list but don't remember being around in my salad days. If I celebrate Brixton market it's because this diversity nourishes me.

Since the seventies in Britain, I seem to have lived through a series of end-on-end economic recessions (having missed out on the yuppie-boom of the eighties). Sometimes, the only thing booming in Brixton seems to be the second-hand clothes market. If post-war reconstruction and optimism brought one wave of immigrants, world-wide recession seems to have brought another. Where I became used to hearing a lilted patois, I might now as easily hear Yoruba, Asante or the roundly indistinct 'r' of Sierra Leone. What's more, West Indian patois has now developed its own British variant, rough as 'raga' music. Where, before, I might have thought to travel to find my Yoruba or Irish cultural routes out of the south London poverty trap, I now find the world is here, and rich. Brixton, where I live, is a source for me in writing about my culture: African, British, Irish, Black. I can, and do, travel; but I can stay here and chart my knowledge of these streets.

Once, the term been-to was used in west Africa to describe and debunk the hauteur of people who had 'been to' Europe, for qualifications, commerce or pleasure. Now it might be more to the point to introduce the term been-back, as in, have you 'been back' to Africa? Presumably to refresh oneself at the springs of cultural authenticity. The point is, people are now here; working here, living here, being here. Many never go back. This is a major shift, part-demographic, part cultural. It is part of a still larger pattern of exchanges and transformations towards the end of this century affecting the language, identity and work of many 'African' writers. Language is no longer (if it ever was) a guarantee of paternity so much as a map of influences and - why not? - a choice of menus.

* * *

Diet and literacy, or food and books, are among the basic issues affecting our well-being and they figure largely in Biyi Bandele-Thomas' novel, **The Man Who Came In From the Back of Beyond**.[4] Biyi is a British-based Nigerian writer and the book is published in London. It is set in Nigeria, in Kafanchan, a railway junction town at the approximate geographical centre of the country. As a setting, Kafanchan might be read as being at the centre of a newly emerging Nigerian identity, having drawn to it peoples from all major ethnic groups at the height of its railway boom. Then again, it, along with its inhabitants, might simply be seen as slump-town marginalia to the rigidities of those ethnic groups, liminal to all of them. It was Biyi's home town and is home to the novel's main protagonist, David, alias Bozo. Conflicting cultures in diet and education emerge at an interesting moment in the book when Mrs Abednego, David's mother, a Catholic, buys a box at auction that turns out to contain books: 'nothing but books. Books and books and books and books. Oh, David, she had thought gleefully to herself, here's your food' (p.37).

The food hamper turns out to be a pandora's box of knowledges subversive of her own catholicism, all of which David reads. A sample of its contents includes: Sadducean theses against the authenticity of Christ's resurrection (imagine!); Greek atheists, Democritus and Leucippus; the Roman, Titus Lucretius Carus; and the works of Arius (Christ a similar, not one, substance with God). The result: David, alias Bozo, 'voluntarily ex-communicated himself' (p.37), a moment recalling James Joyce's Stephen Hero[5] in Stephen's struggle against the 'strong and intricate' tyranny of his Catholic-Jesuit education (p.134). The struggle here's with 'food': a change in diet, and something 'disagrees'.

It's a feature of post-colonial literatures, this 'mixed diet' of cultures and education, mostly clearly seen in symptomatic crisis of language-use and identity. Biyi's novel has more to say on the point of educational constipation in bouts with verbal diarrhoea. Mrs

Abednego is talking with Mr. Abednego about David, alias Bozo, alias, for his father, 'son-of-a-bitch':

> '"Little woman," he would bellow in the fake British accent which he always adopted when conversing with anybody he considered intellectually below him. "Little woman, you are mistaken, that son-of-a-bitch was born three months before independence. I should know better; I am his father."
> "Abed..." Mrs Abednego would begin.
> "Call me Abe," he would say.
> "But you are not Abraham," she would protest.
> "You are stark illiterate," he would tell her pompously. finished my standard four, so I should know better than a bush woman like you."
> "OK, Ape," she would say.' (p.27)

Just to unpack this a little: 'I should know better' often means in Nigerian english, 'I should know better, and do' - the opposite of what it usually means in this country and, therefore, a mistake in Mr. Abednego's 'fake British' english. The irony's on him; a case of the Emperor's twisted underclothes. To stay with this image of clothing - another basic requirement along with food and literacy - Mr. Abednego calls his wife 'stark illiterate'. Coupled with the further accusation against her of being a 'bush woman', it conjures an image of nakedness: to be uneducated is, in a sense, to be unclothed, uncivilised, in the bush, stark naked. In the novel Mr. Abednego is impotent - from the moment of seeing his wife naked and bleeding, at the birth of David. His impotence barely clothed by language, who is the 'bush' figure in the word rift of 'Abed' to 'Abe' to 'Ape'? Mr. Abednego's 'fake British' english constitutes a kind of bush tangling up the 'Ape-ing' of him by his wife. As such it sustains a recognisable trope of racism - the ape-bush figure - reduplicating itself through a standard four education.

Where does this leave David, alias Bozo, in his struggle with upbringing and education? Lost, preaching the subversive fare of

revolution: 'He stood, in a way, as a representative of the mood of his generation, an iconoclast, a sceptic by societal osmosis, a cynic by experience, bitter in practice' (p.60). But, finding his feet when thinking of writing song lyrics, a rather interesting realisation emerges of what kind of language to write in: 'In pidgin of course, our real lingua-franca, the language of the ghetto' (p.60). Pidgin -referred to in Nigeria as more or less 'spicy' depending on its ingredients and inventions - has become the 'stew', or scouse (perhaps, so far, a 'bitter' one) out of which a new consciousness is being formed not only for the likes of Bozo in his liminal position in Kafanchan, but potentially (excuse me as I leap out of the fiction) across west Africa, and beyond.

Pidgin is by no means the only pot out of which something is bubbling. Biyi, that other denizen of Kafanchan and London, has actually written a novel within a novel within a novel, using very disparate styles in an aggressive mastery, and deformation, of English idioms as well as pidgin. Full of syntactical fireworks, recherche vocabulary and fun, here's a shopping list on page four, taken from a lesson (in English) on what is a simile:

> '"No you twittering idiot, it's not an oxymoron," someone said.
> "Metonymy." "No Pauline, it's a paradox." "You mean parable." "Shut up you two, it's a synecdoche." "It's an antithesis!" "An antonomasia!" "An apostrophe." "A denouement." "Litotes." "It's an epithet." "An alliteration."
> "A euphemism." "Rhetorics." "An aphorism." "An apothegm." "Onomatopoeia." "A hyperbole." "An assonance."
> Someone even called it a ballad.'

Really it's a game with language everyone seems to be enjoying. Just to reinforce the point, Simi Bedford's **Yoruba Girl Dancing** opens with this observation: '"Africans can talk oh!" Aunt Rose often said. She was right, in our house we spoke four languages, and two of them were English...'

* * *

Whatever the position, it's clear that 'African' writers have a mixed diet of languages. In languages of, perhaps, 'the ghetto', it has been possible, in the post-colonial context, to arrive at internationalist, even anti-nationalist, perspectives. Adewale Maja-Pearce's anxiety, with which this discussion began, at not speaking his father's language, belongs to a period politics of fomenting cultural nationalisms in Africa and elsewhere, which often reproduced in themselves conditions that underwrote the colonial project: a sweeping simplification and division of identities. His anxiety shadows the failures of the post-independence political order in Africa. On the other hand, eschewing the 'ethnic' authenticities (and certainties) of that order, particularly as part of the large-scale migrations of Africans to a diaspora, has given creative writers a more fluid, more cosmopolitan set of identities both for Africa internally and for Africans in the world. Why, then, should any writer present credentials, even in one's father's language, of being authentically anything? And why, if an 'African' writer does not use impeccable english, is it not possible that he or she might not wish to represent impeccable Englishness?

Simi Bedford again makes the point. Her book is written in sharp, impeccable English. She describes the moment when, after six years of boarding school, her father pays a visit with his brother to see how an English education is going:

> 'I put out my hand and looking from one to the other said brightly in my best English, "How do you do, which one of you is my father?"...
> "The transformation has been too complete," said Uncle Yomi.
> "I think so," said my father...
> But they would never know what it had cost me.' (pp.130-1)

Yes, there has been a transformation - a major shift of peoples, along with language, culture and identity. Brixton market is my metaphor

for attempting to understand its complex web of exchanges: the points of origin and arrival, the strands of linguistic and cultural crossing. Each person must find their own position on entering such a market and is, to some extent, free to make choices concerning their own experience and identity. Many things can go wrong when that market contracts and goes into recession, foreclosing on the pleasures and freedoms of exchange. The present world recession is something we will all have to count the cost of. One part of that calculation has been described by Frantz Fanon in **Black Skin, White Masks** [6], first published in 1952 and ironically stating the cost of a colonialism founded on the mono-culture of sugar-slavery:

> 'The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter - that is, he will come closer to being a real human being - in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language." (p.18)

This fallacy cuts both ways, in respect of the African language as well as the European. It represents a return to the xenophobic monologue of assimilation, where diversity is replaced by savage monopolies on the languages available to 'real human beings'.

Now, as Africa disappears from world geo-political concerns, it's important to insist that Africa itself does not disappear. Africa is also here, in its diaspora, interacting with other presences in a context very different from the early modern slave societies of the Americas. My question is, what new forms, what metaphors, might emerge to take us forward into the next century, beyond the 'third world' and 'cold war' ghosts of my childhood? I have not stopped listening because I need to know: what kinds of conversations are happening at bus stops on the road to Brixton market?

* * *

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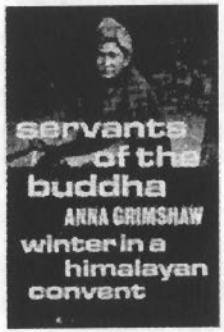

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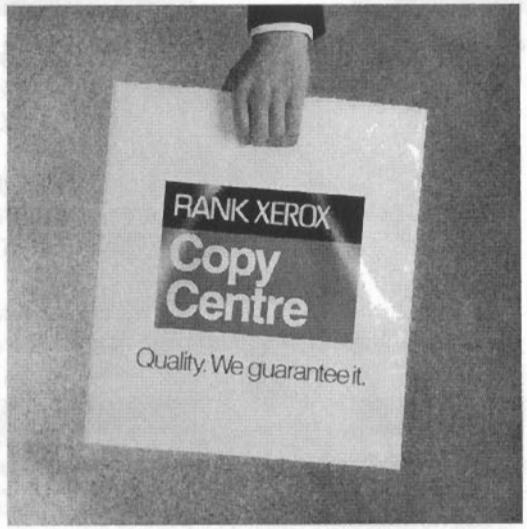

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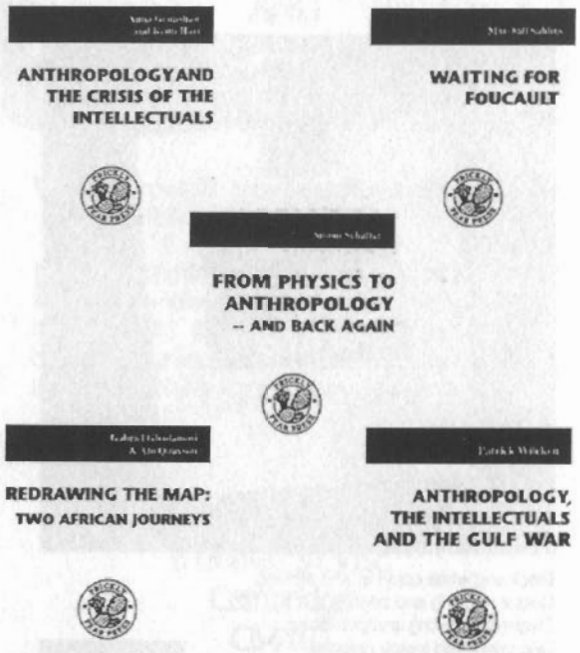

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