CODESRIA

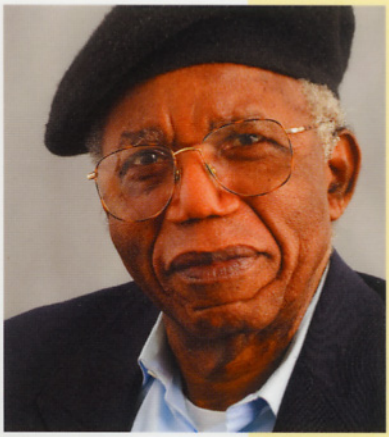
AFRICA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Björn Beckman & Gbemisola Adeoti

EDITORS

INTELLECTUALS AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Pretension and Resistance in African Politics



Africa in the New Millennium

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About the editors

Björn Beckman is a Research Professor in the Department of Political Science, Stockholm University. He has published extensively on African political economy and organized interests. His current work compares African trade unions and their interventions in policy and politics.

Gbemisola Adeoti is a Lecturer in the Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria. He studied for his PhD in English at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His areas of teaching and research include dramatic literature, poetic traditions, literary history and literary theory. He has contributed to scholarly journals both within and outside Nigeria. His collection of poems, *Naked Soles*, has just been published.

BJÖRN BECKMAN &
GBEMISOLA ADEOTI | editors

Intellectuals and African development

Pretension and resistance in African politics

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Predicament and response: an introduction

BJÖRN BECKMAN AND GBEMISOLA ADEOTI

What went wrong?

What went wrong? What is the way out? Progressives in Africa keep debating and agonizing over the failure of the forces on the ground to advance the material, social and political welfare of the continent, 'the African predicament'. This collection discusses in Part One the response of some of Africa's leading intellectuals-cum-writers: Soyinka, Ngugi, Achebe. They have made powerful statements of outrage and disgust at the betrayal of popular aspirations committed by Africa's political leaders. The writers have their own visions that point in dramatically different directions. Do they provide a way out? Can they be combined? The book looks also at a very different, more sordid type of aspiring 'intellectuals', the military men who have been in power for much of the post-independence period and who have grabbed for the pen in order to justify their own misrule. Part Two looks at the way in which other segments of African societies have responded. It is particularly concerned with students and young people, who are often considered the hope for the future. What answers do they provide? The collection contrasts the visions and admonitions of the 'intellectuals' with the multiple and often ambiguous responses of the youths and students. It is not necessarily encouraging. Some of the latter – 'the hopes of the nation' – have given up all hope for their countries and desperately want to get out, aspiring to reach the presumably 'greener pastures' of Europe and North America. But there are also those who valiantly confront a repressive, corrupt and backward state and struggle for national redemption. Of course, the radical intellectual critics demonstrate that the cards continue to be heavily stacked in favour of neo-colonial and imperialist forces and their local collaborators. But, as argued in this collection, there are also new, seemingly more benevolent forms of foreign interventions in support of 'civil society' and 'civic education' that similarly stifle the emergence of popular democratic alternatives.

This book is primarily concerned with the world-views and strategies of these various social agents, the writers and towering intellectual giants, the self-justifying soldiers, the students with their multiple strategies of resistance or escape, and the 'civic educators' who reinforce inequity and serve global strategies of control. It concludes, however, by looking at ourselves as academics and researchers concerned with interpreting all this. Who has the *locus standi*, and who, as a scholar, has the right to pronounce on Africa's development? How is our perspective affected by the way in which we are situated as 'insiders' and 'outsiders'? It is argued that 'location' matters, where you come from, how you are situated in relation to the issues at stake. Ultimately, however, whether as an academic or as an activist, what is decisive is how you choose to relate to the communities, the local forces on the ground, and their aspirations for a better life.

There is a glaring gap between the hopes and aspirations of the anti-colonial struggles and the realities of the post-colonial world with its authoritarian one-party or military rulers, ethno-nationalist crises, collapsed economies, political instability, unemployment and deepening mass poverty. Although the anti-colonial movement has turned its anger against neo-colonialism, in many cases, the new regimes have merely accentuated the repressive and anti-democratic character of colonial rule. Increasingly indebted and poor, African nations depend on loans from international finance institutions and aid from foreign donor agencies. Such loans carry conditions that make nonsense of Africa's presumed independence. An early generation of African intellectuals like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Cameron Dudou, Femi Osofisan and Claude Ake exposed an independence that had failed to liberate the people. To them, development after formal independence was colonialism clad in local apparel. They opposed neo-colonialism and national misrule and wanted to rebuild Africa in line with ideals that had inspired the anti-colonial struggle. Of course, 'intellectuals' would not all agree. While some were concerned with the problems of national development, others channelled their energies towards more sectarian or professedly 'non-political' ends. The messages of prominent writers discussed in the first part of this collection are all concerned with the fate of the nation. Their writings are infused with the ideas, traditions, hopes and aspirations of the communities from which they emerge and they seek to influence the course of action

taken by the people. There is an obvious connection between literature and politics in the pursuit of ethics, social order and national development. Indeed, literature is a site where the shining promises and deep disappointments of Africa's post-colonial history are confronted most graphically.

Intellectuals and soldiers

In *A Play of Giants* (discussed here by Olusegun Adekoya), Wole Soyinka furiously berates the extremities of 'personalized' rule as represented by megalomaniac leaders such as Idi Amin in Uganda, Emperor Bokassa in the Central African Republic, Macias Nguema in Equatorial Guinea and Mobutu in Zaire. Soyinka responds to the outrageous politics of these nation-wreckers with hilarious and bloody satire. He exposes their violent intolerance of opposition and their urge to perpetuate themselves in power. Their all-consuming obsession with suspected threats to their own persons poses an acute threat to 'national development' and society as a whole. In Soyinka's world, the 'giants' – a caricature of known African despots – are committed to bizarre political posturing and rely on power acquired and sustained solely through violent coercion. It allows them to stay in power in spite of the disasters they inflict on the progress and stability of their nations. Their disastrous misrule is facilitated by the support they draw from gullible or opportunistic 'intellectuals' from within and from outside who provide the phoney philosophical rationale for their excesses. In the Cold War era, such intellectuals courted allies for authoritarian regimes from both sides of the warring blocs. Adekoya points to the inevitability of chaos when the democratic aspirations of the people are brutalized.

As discussed in M. S. C. Okolo's essay, other celebrated African writers like Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are equally dismayed by gross misrule and failed nationhood. More overtly didactic than Soyinka, however, they blend a stark critique of African society, rooted in historically conscious literary creations, with a vision of viable alternative routes to national emancipation. While Achebe believes in 'reform' as a means of transforming the continent, Ngugi is disposed towards revolutionary action. Okolo offers a philosophical analysis of these juxtaposed political discourses, adding her own reflections and preferences. Philosophy, she argues, like literature, is a tool of social

inquiry aimed at enhancing man's consciousness of being and universe. Both disciplines engage in speculations as well as critical evaluations of existing social conditions, sometimes offering suggestions towards the reordering of society. In discussing Achebe's and Ngugi's contributions, Okolo argues the case for a 'third path' to development outside the reform and revolution that are envisaged in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*. Such an alternative way to social transformation, she argues, is to be constructed from where such models intersect.

It is widely agreed that the soldiers, just like the politicians whom they often violently displaced, offered no respite from the ills plaguing the continent, despite their efforts to inscribe themselves in people's consciousness as risking their own comfort to 'save the nation'. While the evidence of their actual performance has served to demystify the uniformed men in power, many have engaged in conscious efforts to perpetuate the myth through a form of narratives which Gbemisola Adeoti in his contribution, 'Narrating the Green Gods', calls 'an exercise in self-rewriting'. This refers to the genre of life narrative – autobiography, biography and memoirs – which in Nigeria has become increasingly popular among the military men who have held political office. The trend is for soldiers to write or get someone to document their life history, career development and adventures in power. Such works are usually launched with pomp and pageantry, often consuming state money that rightfully should be used in the service of the people. In this fashion, there is pretence towards intellectualism, as they seek to 'reinvent' themselves in the image of statesmen like Azikiwe, Awolowo and Balewa who had earlier used the genre of life narrative. The narratives tend to reinforce the identity of the soldiers as reluctant 'saviours' prodded by the crises of governance. The evidence from elsewhere has amply demonstrated that they have been more skilled in lining their own pockets than in attending to the well-being of the people.

The soldiers' narratives provide a site that brings crucial knowledge about post-colonial politics and insights into the complexity of power, its mode of acquisition and its (ab)uses. In our efforts to understand the travails of democracy after prolonged military rule, the study of the (auto) biographies of the army officers helps us to grasp the extent to which society has been militarized. Our engagement with the texts, Adeoti warns, needs to be guided by close attention not only to the

substance of the narration, but also to their apparent gaps, omissions and silences, more so as there is abundant evidence available from other sources.

Students, youths and citizens

The often acknowledged poverty of leadership and vision of the older generation of African politicians has reinforced a similarly oft-repeated platitude that the future belongs to the youth. Raising his arms in despair at his fiftieth birthday celebrations in 1984, Wole Soyinka lamented a 'wasted generation' when speaking of the miserable post-independence elites, in fact his own contemporaries. What lies beyond such sweeping denunciation? What becomes of Africa's tomorrow? Who are the agents of transformation? Will today's errors be allowed to stifle the prospects of recovery? Is it possible to construct a genuine future from the frail foundations of the present? What role will youths play? These are critical questions that continue to preoccupy Africa's scholars and intellectuals. They also provide the impetus for the essays in the second part of the book that focus on students and youths, their role in historical struggles for social development, good governance, knowledge and people's empowerment.

Not much encouragement for a national revival seems to be offered by Jude Fokwang's study of the expectations and strategies of young people, 'Ambiguous transitions: mediating citizenship among youth in Cameroon', that commences the second part of the book. He paints a dismal picture of political and economic decay, 'a package of recycled monolithic misrule'. The responses of the young people he has interviewed, mostly university and high school students, are at the most ambiguous in their modes of 'navigating' the troubled terrain. On the one hand, he finds those who seek to insinuate themselves into the political and bureaucratic lifelines of the regime, including the loyalist thugs who are more than ready to beat up those who do not fall into line. On the other hand, there are those who stay out of ruling party politics but seek to mobilize other networks and lines of patronage, often looking to bribe themselves into the heart of the system, the prestigious schools, the well-connected arenas and institutions that allow them to pursue their expectations of personal advancement – although with mixed success. But there is also the growing stratum of students and young people who have decided that they have no future

in the Cameroon and are voting with their feet. They look for escape routes to Europe and North America, exploring all possible avenues, including the lotteries organized by the US authorities for 'DVs', the much sought-after 'Diversity Visas'.

Fokwang's students with their partly cunning, partly desperate 'navigating' in search of a good life contrast sharply with the progressive, politically committed student leaders who fought military dictatorship and structural adjustment as discussed in Björn Beckman's chapter, 'Student radicalism and the national project'. Based on a workshop with past leaders of NANS, the National Association of Nigerian Students, mostly from the 1980s and early 1990s, it tells a rather different story, although the continuous decay of the Nigerian university system, state repression and internal divisions may have produced a student population not very different from that interviewed by Fokwang. NANS has been factionalized and the centre can no longer hold. Students, however, remain the most organized segment of the youth population in most nations. In the Nigerian case, they have been a thorn in the flesh of colonial, neo-colonial and autocratic regimes, although greatly weakened by the upsurge of ethno-religious politics, state repression, cultism and the global ideological shift away from leftist politics. Moreover, the learning situation has been undermined by the decline in students' material welfare and the withdrawal of state funding. However, Nigerian students have demonstrated a continued commitment to the national project, despite their restricted social base. Beckman points to the underlying contradictions that generate renewed attempts to assert both student and national interests that go beyond the pervasive opportunism, despair and commitment to exit options documented by Fokwang.

Harri Englund's contribution, 'Transnational governance and the pacification of youth: civic education and disempowerment in Malawi', is less explicit in its commitment to an alternative agenda. However, its penetrating critique of the ideology and practice of an EU-funded major 'civic education' programme (NICE) in Malawi is clearly informed by a radical democratic commitment and an understanding that things could be otherwise. It is not only in Nigeria that prolonged authoritarianism has severely disempowered the people. In Malawi, under the presidency of Kamuzu Banda, such disempowerment was central to the policies of the state. Ironically, the departure of Banda from power

has not reversed the patriarchal structure, despite the strident rhetoric to the contrary, and Malawian society continues to be permeated by inequality and authoritarianism. NGOs that pretend to be geared towards widening the democratic space wittingly or unwittingly promote the opposite. 'Civic education' that should empower the 'grassroots' reinforces inequality and non-democratic structures. This is the core of Englund's submission.

His focus is on NICE, a major foreign intervention in Malawi politics, with an all-national coverage and some 10,000 volunteers, the 'para-civic educators' (PCEs). Englund shows that the project helps to pacify and de-politicize its cadres and that it provides a means to control popular challenges to the state and the global order. It serves to foster elitist (undemocratic) values, idioms and attitudes that effectively insulate the local cadres from the communities where they operate. Rather than being a counter-force in society, youths are manipulated by their elders. In the case of NICE, there is a strong transnational element to this manipulation that contributes to undemocratic governance. Englund makes several points that are relevant to this volume as a whole, not the least in criticizing an excessive preoccupation with the 'failure of the elites' in the discourse on the African condition. Although presumably committed to 'democracy' and 'civil society', such critics often reproduce the same elitist, non-democratic orientation at that level. Although in no way exculpating the 'national elites', the argument suggests that a broader cross-section of agents and agencies are implicated in 'hijacking democracy and human rights', including powerful foreign ones.

Scholars and people

In exposing the repressive, inegalitarian and undemocratic role of civic education, Englund's point of departure is the perspective of the local communities that are supposed to be its beneficiary. This comes close to Nana Akua Anyidoho's position when she argues in the concluding essay of this volume that what really matters when judging the relevance of a particular piece of research is how it relates to the local communities, as audiences, beneficiaries and agenda setters. The norm that she seeks to apply to her own work contrasts with a dominant preoccupation among African scholars with how one should position oneself in relation to Western academic spaces, that is, the pervasive

controversy over 'outsider' versus 'insider knowledge'. It is prompted by the glaring and debilitating Western domination of intellectual production about Africa. In her contribution, 'Identity and knowledge production in the fourth generation', the controversy is addressed with great care and sophistication. The 'fourth generation' in this context refers to the current generation of African scholars, emerging from the universities in Africa and elsewhere and reflecting on their concern with what contribution they can make not just to 'knowledge' but to the development of the continent and its peoples. The foreign domination of scholarship has preoccupied previous generations of scholars and continues to be intensely debated.

Although reaffirming the importance of nationality, geography, race, gender, etc. in influencing positions, Anyidoho argues that it is less a question of *where* you stand than of what you stand *for.* She discusses the type of knowledge that is being produced, by whom and for whom. Much research is produced by non-African scholars, many with only marginal exposure to African geo-cultural space, and the disjunctions between identity, location and knowledge have important implications for the ways in which the problems of Africa are understood and analysed, including the development of theory and methodology. There is certainly a strong case for more 'authentic' knowledge production about Africa. While recognizing the necessity of African scholars investigating Africa (i.e. 'insider scholarship'), Anyidoho simultaneously emphasizes the multiplicity of identities and the complex ways in which the relevance of scholarship is affected by questions of power and privilege. The problem of 'insiders' versus 'outsiders' has, therefore, in her view, to be situated in relation to these multiple constructions of identity where the ultimate measure of relevance is how you choose to relate to the affected community itself.

The book opens by focusing on powerful statements by leading African intellectuals on what went wrong. It ends by addressing the choices that we, as students of 'the African condition', have to make in order to ensure that our studies are relevant for the peoples of Africa and their search for a way out of the predicament.

ONE | Intellectuals, writers and soldiers

1 | Psychopaths in power: the collapse of the African dream in *A Play of Giants*

OLUSEGUN ADEKOYA

A critical investigation of Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* (1984), this chapter discusses what the playwright himself calls the 'Aminian theme', that is, African leaders' obsession with power, a seductive drive that breeds moral corruption, dictatorship, delusions, economic distortions and ruination, megalomania, perversion and desecration of all that is good in African traditions. The problem leads to the evaporation of all dreams of greatness, nationalism, liberation from colonial thraldom, disease, ignorance and poverty, and of pan-Africanism nursed in the heady days of independence celebrations. The four despots caricatured in the play are Field-Marshal Kamini (late Idi Amin, deposed President of Uganda), Emperor Kasco (Jean-Bedel Bokassa, former Emperor of the Central African Republic), Benefacio Gunema (late President Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea) and General Barra Tuboum (late President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo).

Although in real life the four giants have been removed from office and divested of power, either forcibly and ignominiously by rebels or naturally by the inexorable force of senescence and death, the ravages of their misrule and profligacy are still felt by the beleaguered peoples of their respective countries. The economies remain in the doldrums and ethnic conflicts generated by suspicion of political marginalization and military coups continue to cause confusion and social upheaval and destabilize the polity. Thus, *A Play of Giants* is still of immediate sociopolitical relevance to African peoples. Besides, some of the countries are still struggling to throw off the yoke of military dictatorship and establish democratic rule, while others already on the road of democracy are yet to assimilate its principles and live the culture.

In discussing the topic, this chapter examines such elements of drama as setting, plot, action, character and language, which are used by the playwright to elicit the sordid dimensions of despotism

in the African political landscape. Dramaturgic devices employed by the author to signify the horrors of despotism are highlighted and discussed.

The 'giants' are in New York to attend the General Assembly of the United Nations. In response to the request of the organization's Secretary-General for a representative work of art from each member nation, say, a miniaturized bust of the president, they sit for a life-size group sculpture, at Kamini's suggestion, in what appears to be a vivid demonstration of the old African spirit of communalism but which, as events later show, is its outright bastardization. In reality, the suggestion stems from Kamini's megalomania. While seated, they engage in grim banter on the nature and dynamics of power, its privileges and trappings, and its specific manifestations in the countries over which they rule with a rod of iron.

A Play of Giants is set in the Bugaran Embassy in New York City. Its balcony adorned with framed portraits, its gold-gilt railings and the heavy throne-like chairs on which the giants sit for the sculptor reek of grandeur, opulence and power, and simultaneously reveal Kamini's megalomania. A prodigal president, Kamini has wasted the material resources of his country on frivolities and inanities and crashed the economy, which explains why he has brought with him the Chairman of the Bugaran Central Bank, to negotiate a World Bank loan of two hundred million dollars. Like the giants, the embassy looks full and gorgeous from the outside but is hollow and rotten within. For instance, the telex has been cut off because the embassy lacks funds to settle its bills. The playwright uses irony to punch holes in the grandiose edifice, which is emblematic of the giants' self-aggrandizement. Kamini appropriates and disposes of Bugara as if it is his private property. He tells Professor Batey, one of his African American admirers: 'This embassy is your own home. You must use it as if it is your own home. Madame Ambassador, I hope you are taking good notice. I want Professor Batey to have everything he wants anytime day and night' (p. 42). Thus, the setting reveals African leaders' profligacy and mismanagement of resources, which ensures the continued economic retardation of the continent.

The opening scene portrays the giants as ceremonial fops and stupid megalomaniacs whose lust for power is repulsive. The characters are

placed on three levels of power: the reigning giants occupy the highest level; Gudrum, the Scandinavian journalist, is located on the middle level; while Sculptor, who has been hired from Madame Tussaud's in London, operates at the lowest level. A perfect representation of three-tiered capitalist society, the gradation approximates the amount of freedom and political power enjoyed and exercised respectively by the characters in the play. Inverted, the order depicts their different degrees of intellectual perspicacity and moral probity. Sculptor in this respect is the most perceptive and sensitive of the lot, while the ruling giants, the wreckers of the work of the earth's toilers, are the most depraved. A representative of the perpetually wavering middle class, Gudrum veers between sheer ignorance of Africa and dubious knowledge oriented towards promotion of self. She, too, like the giants, cuts an obscene and repulsive figure. Soyinka's sympathies no doubt lie with the workers, represented by Sculptor, whose labour in fact builds the world. Kamini's huge military dress uniform is covered with medals. In contrast, Kasco is dwarfish but is equally adorned with showy medals and, to boot, he wears a cloak of imperial purple, though his size somewhat deflates his ballooned ego and status. Gunema is in tails of immaculate cut. His decorations consist of a red sash and blue rosette and a couple of medals. Their heavy throne-like chairs are awe-inducing and show them to be monomaniacs who ape God.

There is good use of colour symbolism in the tableau. Yellow (the gold-gilt balcony railing) symbolizes opulence, purple (Kasco's cloak) royalty, red (Gunema's sash) danger and mysticism, and blue (Gunema's rosette) nobility. The life-size group sculpture is a graphic and symbolic representation of the play and Sculptor's comment that the piece properly belongs in 'the Chamber of Horrors' (p. 28) sums up Soyinka's criticism. The play is a vision of horror and madness and, thus, has as its precursors *Kongi's Harvest* and *Madmen and Specialists*. The African dictators portrayed in the three plays are terrors who create horrors in their respective countries and contribute immensely to the invention of the image of black Africa as an underdeveloped land of modern-day cannibals and savages. An iconoclast, Soyinka exposes the despots' delusion of grandeur and represents their displays of power as obscene and vulgar.

Field-Marshal Kamini, the character around whom the dramatic action revolves, is represented as a despotic madman. In the Intro-

duction to the play, Soyinka calls Idi Amin, the former Ugandan president, a 'certified psychopath'. His first statement and first gesture in the play – 'Only one thing to do to subversive – Khrr! (*A meaningful gesture across his throat*)' – are incontrovertible proof that he is a murderer. In the Introduction to *The Burden of Memory: The Muse of Forgiveness*, Soyinka (1999: 11) calls Amin 'our greatest butcher of his time' and 'a practising cannibal'. Kamini's bloodthirstiness has driven critics of his demonic style of administration into exile and the family of any known runaway subversive is wiped out. Sometimes, his guards take bribes and allow families of runaways to flee. His lust for women is as enormous as his passion for political power. He agrees with Gunema that 'a leader should have many wives' on whom to practise his sexual power and demonstrate his virility (p. 4). In some primitive cultures, a king who has lost his sexual potency is put to death (Frazer 1987: 265ff).

An insensitive ignoramus, Kamini cares not whether the World Bank mortgages Bugara body and soul. All the attempts made by the Chairman of the Bugaran Central Bank to make him understand why the conditions set by the lending institution are unacceptable and why any currency needs backing fail. Told by President Kamini to get back to Bugara and start printing more bank notes after his failure to obtain the loan, the Chairman remarks that Bugaran currency has so depreciated in value that 'it is not worth its size in toilet paper' (p. 7). Incensed by the harmless statement, Kamini calls the Chairman a traitor and orders that his head be permanently put in a toilet and flushed over with water every time the cistern is full. Although he does not actually eat the tyrant's shit, the Chairman is made to smell it and his pleas for understanding fall on deaf ears. Kamini does not know anything about economic and financial management and will not allow anybody to educate him on the matter or on any other, for example, on waxworks.

In the same vein, he cannot suffer Gunema's attempt either to intellectualize the idea of power or draw an analogy between voodoo and sexual power. As far as the savage ruler is concerned, to reason is to cause confusion and so he bans thought altogether. He is portrayed as a crude and devilish buffoon and sadist who derives a great deal of pleasure from inflicting pain on people who show the least sign of possessing a modicum of intellectual power, for their knowledge easily exposes his own stupidity. He thinks like a cretin or lunatic.

Knowledge is welcome only if it is pressed into the service of inflating and massaging his ego, as Gudrum does shamelessly in the profusely illustrated book *The Black Giant at Play* and Professor Batey in *The Black Giant at Work*. In other words, he sees eye to eye with only fawners, praise-singers and sycophants who feed him with lies and laud him as an astute and heroic revolutionary and as a great and superb administrator. A liar himself, he claims that he is a descendant of Chaka the Zulu and brags that, like the Zulu emperor, he killed his first lion at the age of seven.

Sculptor's attempt to educate him on the several stages in the production of a waxwork is mistaken for an insult, and for making the highly illuminating Chamber of Horrors remark, he is beaten black and blue by the Task Force Specials on Kamini's orders and his body wrapped in bandages from head to toe. Lack of knowledge lies at the root of Africa's underdevelopment. Kamini's stubborn refusal to learn worsens the matter. It is no wonder, then, that members of his delegation run away for dear life, an act considered as treason by the tyrant. Their desertion robs him of his *sang-froid* and makes posing for Sculptor no longer possible. Consequently, he suspends work on the sculpture, giving as his reason the need to allow the sitters and Sculptor to eat.

Ambassador's report on the delegates' disappearance, however, brings Kamini to the sudden realization of his human limitation. He confesses: 'There is so much corruption. One man cannot supervise everything' (p. 26). Soyinka's subtle innuendo is that Kamini rules over a corrupt state and sets the pattern followed by his security personnel. Corruption has laid most African nations prostrate and bled them dry. Gunema claims that with the aid of voodoo it is possible for one man to police everywhere at all times, which implies that voodoo is superior to the physical or military power on which Kamini counts.

Kamini, like most African heads of state on whom the giants are patterned, loves grandiloquent titles. From the playwright's perspective, honorific titles that are neither earned nor merited are vacuous and render their bearers easy targets of satire. Kamini's expectation that Sculptor stand up as a mark of respect for him every time he enters the room is absurd and tantamount to an outright bastardization of the African tradition of giving respect to elders. A sybarite, he clings tenaciously to power even after the coup against him has been reported. He threatens that if the coup is not reversed by the world powers,

nobody will leave the embassy alive. The preponderance of military coups in Africa is traceable to the life of comfort and ease guaranteed by political office. It is not patriotic zeal to serve or to correct mistakes of civilian government but the lust for the perquisites of office and privileges that makes the armed forces desire political power. As disclosed by Gunema, 'after a while, we cease to govern, to lead' (p. 2). In effect, he is saying that they cling to power for its own sake, for its allure. Kasco corroborates his view when he states: 'If you think first of responsibility and governing, you give up search for power' (p. 2). The failure of political leadership continues to be worrisome. Dealing with the problem is made difficult by the fact that bad governments present a false image of themselves to the outside world. For example, Kamini portrays himself to the Secretary-General of the United Nations as an altruistic and kind leader who takes good care of Sculptor when he falls from a ladder while spying – a patent lie.

As the drama draws to a close, Kamini's actions and outbursts become increasingly hyperbolic, incredible and lunatic and the mask of an affable and large-hearted leader drops. Conceited and deluded, he plans to attack South Africa and whines that the superpowers deny him the atomic bomb with which to defeat apartheid. He lives in a world of illusion till the very end. Two illusions suffice: he mistakes Bugaran protesters for his supporters, and he dreams of taking over the United States. As if to make good his threat, he launches an attack on the United Nations building in an attempt to raze it. He gives Batey, who is pleading that he should not blow up the Bugaran Embassy in which his brother giants, the Secretary-General of the UN, two Russian delegates and two American delegates are being held hostage, 'a backhanded swipe that knocks him flat on his back' (p. 68), a dastardly act that finally convinces the African American that Kamini is indeed a madman. Thus, *A Play of Giants* exposes the precariousness of a world with stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction. All that is required to trigger a nuclear conflagration and destroy the world is a preposterous attack by a leader who has gone crazy. It is a serious warning about the urgent need to protect the world against the use of the nuclear arsenals by psychopaths, and there is no better way to do this than to destroy the weapons.

A contestant for the crown of tyranny, Benefacio Gunema is only one degree below Kamini in megalomania. His thinness is a symbolic ex-

pression of the smallness of the country over which he exercises power. He portrays himself as a good and healthy lover, but the playwright represents him as a pervert. A specialist on the various manifestations of power, he identifies terrorists as people who seek not government but vengeance and enjoy secret power. The four giants, in his opinion, have put politics behind them, being 'gifted naturally with leadership' and existing, as they do, 'in a rare space which is – power' (p. 2). Thus, absolute, untrammelled power transcends petty bickering and the schematic intrigues of the politicians and puts its possessor in a special realm that equals or surpasses God's heavenly abode in grandeur. Whereas Jehovah occasionally leaves his throne, comes down to earth and condescends to reason with people, the giants never converse with people or depart from the ambience of grandeur and power. Rather, they banish thought and proscribe debate, two human activities which often breed dissension and the party spirit and corrode power. For power to remain pure, all subjects under its wielder must be robbed of their individual will and reduced to obsequious toadies and unthinking zombies that can be freely manipulated, as puppets are.

Gunema throws light on the character of voodoo power, his unrivalled speciality: 'Voodoo power is tranquil, *extendido*, like you making love to woman you really love or possess. You dominate her but still you make the love prolong, not to body alone but to her soul' (p. 4). Since it affects both the physical and the spiritual, voodoo can be rated the most dreadful and most effective form of power. It has no spatial and temporal limits and can be deployed against even the dead. General Franco, the late Spanish dictator, in Gunema's view, exemplifies military power, while Papa Doc Duvalier, the late dictator of Haiti, typifies a dispenser of voodoo power. Gunema thinks that Franco, who kept Spain peaceful for forty years, would be a better Secretary-General of the UN than the incumbent. His confession that Papa Doc Duvalier is more knowledgeable than he (Gunema) is in the practice of voodoo at least shows that he is less boastful than Kamini, who claims that Papa Doc cannot bewitch him, a spurious claim that is best interpreted as braggadocio.

A man with an intellectual bent and therefore a threat to Kamini the dunce, Gunema remarks that 'Alexander was an African' and that the name is 'African to the core' (p. 18). His voodoo power notwithstanding, Gunema envies the three other giants because of their accession to

power through military coups, which he describes as 'straightforward' and 'mechanical'. 'Power', he confesses, 'is something I must experience another way ... I inhabit, I think, the nebulous geography of power. That is why, always, I am searching to taste it. You understand, really taste it on my tongue. To seize it *a la boca*, roll and roll it in the mouth and let if [it] trickle inwards, like an infusion. Once, only once, I think I succeed' (p. 21). It was the occasion on which he made love to the wife of a man whom he suspected of plotting against him and who had already been condemned to death by a tribunal. Power, for him, should not be an abstraction. Rather, it should be visceral, savoured with relish, thoroughly digested and excreted with gusto. His conception of power reeks of cannibalism and makes clearer the relationship between power and cannibalism enunciated by Tuboum. Whatever their individual idiosyncrasies in the conceptualization of power, the indisputable fact is that the giants prey on black Africa and leave it terribly diminished. Gunema suggests that the best way to rid the envious of the quest for power is to turn such people into zombies. 'I am not sentimental,' he boasts (p. 3). As proof, he does his own executions either with the gun or by hanging the condemned, and he enjoys watching the zombies under his control torture lesser zombies.

Though puny in physical stature, Emperor Kasco is majestic and unique in his understanding of the phenomenon of power. His megalomania equals and probably surpasses Kamini's. 'Power', he tells his comrades, 'comes only with the death of politics. That is why I choose to become emperor. I place myself beyond politics ... Now I inhabit only the pure realm of power. I fear, *mes amis*, all three of you have chosen to remain in the territory of politics' (p. 21). Afraid that the weak minds in his empire might imitate the Bugaran coup plotters, he decides to 'safeguard the bullets' and is desperate to send home a telex message to that effect (p. 53). The emperor is unaware that he is already a hostage in the Bugaran Embassy, a victim of Kamini's mad pursuit of power.

General Barra Tuboum arrives late at the United Nations because he has been busy suppressing a revolt in his home country. He has not only quashed the rebellion but has also killed all the ringleaders except three, who are brought to be exhibited at the UN as specimens before he serves them up at a cocktail party for members in celebration of his victory. His leopards (security guards) kill and eat people who try to pry into their mysteries, for 'it is the only way to ensure

the re-absorption of that power of yourself which has been sucked away by profaning eyes' (p. 19). His costumes – a striped animal-skin 'Mao' outfit with matching fez-style hat, an ebony walking stick and an ivory-handed side-arm in a holster which is also made of zebra skin – portray him as a promoter of the indigenous culture of his people in a revolting and exhibitionistic manner. In recognition of the primacy of the autochthonous, the culture buff has changed his name from Alexander, which is foreign, to Barra Tuboum, which is indigenous. The rub is that the new name, Barra Boum Boum Tuboum Gbazo Tse Tse Khoro diDzo – quite a mouthful – signifies his murderous tendencies and passion for grandiloquent titles and self-aggrandizement. He is as deleterious as tsetse flies to the health of society. Moreover, his heavily onomatopoeic name echoes the guns of his 'striped' leopards that sound 'Boom, Boom Tuboum. Boom, Boom Tuboum' (p. 20) as they mow down the rebels and some of their hostages (the mine workers of Shabira, their families, priests, nuns, children, foreigners and citizens alike). The name is symbolic of horror and terror. An extremist in whatever he does, he has changed even the names on his father's headstones, an irrational and unnecessary action. The worst is that he has plans to get his people to change every name in their cemeteries, another extreme idea that truly portrays him as a dictator.

Rather than recoiling from the ludicrous idea of changing names of the dead, a risible idea thematized by Jose Saramago (1999: 234) in the novel *All the Names* ('the dead are all equal'), the other giants applaud it and embrace their crazy brother. Only Gunema, the tyrant with an intellectual bent, has a bone to pick with Tuboum over the name issue. Hear him: 'I still wish you do not change name. After this [the ruthless crushing of the rebellion], everybody will call you Alexander the Great. Who will remember name of Barra Tuboum?' (p. 19). Completely assimilated into the culture of the conquerors, Gunema's imagination is imprisoned in colonial history.

Hunger for fame is one of the forces that drive the giants to extremism. Owing to lack of a sense of proportion, everything they do is grotesque. Nothing in their life is kept at a balanced and moderate level. However, their over-exaggerated gestures, exceedingly ludicrous manners and grotesquery are rich, unfailing sources of laughter in the play. To their admirers, their antics and devilish thoughts are demonstrations of their physical prowess, mental alertness and sagacity. It is

clear that without the fawners and lickspittles, it would be difficult for the dictators to stay long in power.

Soyinka is critical of the role played by the Mayor of Hyacombe and Professor Batey who represent the black caucuses in the United States in the play. The two characters are taken in by Kamini's droll antics, symbolic gestures and manic tantrums directed at the plague of white racism and Western capitalist imperialism. The black caucuses are deceived by President Idi Amin's posturing as a black activist and see him as a misunderstood heroic black revolutionary who is out to talk back, like Malcolm X, and take vengeance on Europe and America for the transatlantic slave trade, the colonial conquest and neo-colonialism. Hence, they laud his oppressive regime and give it their unalloyed support. Their emotional attachment to Africa as the source of their cultural and racial identity prevents an objective assessment of the land and its people. It makes it difficult for them to see the blights of pre-colonial Africa and the atrocities being perpetrated by its present crop of demented rulers. African Americans and the black diaspora as a whole find any negative comment about Africans and African cultures totally unacceptable. Their uncritical attitude does not help Africans to identify, expose and expel the demons that destroy their land. Even if the demons are exposed, as Soyinka does in *A Play of Giants*, their African American flatterers defend them and their sullied image is burnished and refurbished. As demonstrated in the play, the black caucuses mean well but have a wrong and deodorized image of Africa.

Given the giants' proclivities, it would be wrong to accuse the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Paris Club of being solely responsible for Africa's current economic misfortunes. Bad governance has weakened the demand on Europe and America for reparations and restitution for the enslavement and colonization. Concerning African-on-African violence, Soyinka makes the following important observation:

> The crimes that the African continent commits against her kind are of a dimension and, unfortunately, of a nature that appears to constantly provoke memories of the historic wrongs inflicted on that continent by others. There are moments when it almost appears as if there is a diabolical continuity (and inevitability?) to it all – that the conduct of

> latter-day (internal) slave runners is merely the stubborn precipitate of a yet unexpiated past. The ancient slave stockades do not seem ever to have vanished; they appear more to have expanded, occupying indiscriminate spaces that often appear contingent with national boundaries. (Soyinka 1999: 19–20)

Perhaps Kamini fails to pay back previous loans and the interest on them because he considers them as part of the reparation due to Africa. Well, the World Bank is justified if it refuses to give him further credit. As a Yoruba proverb puts it: *'Eni to ya egbefa ti ko san, o begi dina egbaa'* (Babalakin 2002: 35). A person who has defaulted on a [loan of] 1,200 cowries, thus disqualifies himself for 2,000 cowries credit. Had African Americans been fully integrated into the American society after the abolition of slavery, Soyinka argues, 'the calls for reparations from the African continent would have failed to resonate in America' (p. 37). By extension or implication, the Mayor of Hyacombe and Professor Batey would have not been on the side of Kamini. Rather, they would have played a different kind of economic politics and demanded that financial reparations be made not to the descendants of Africans who sold their kin into slavery but to the descendants of slaves.

As far as the playwright is concerned, Batey is only being obdurate, especially after learning of the disappearance of his friend Dr Kiwawa who represents Byron Kadadwa, a Ugandan playwright to whom *A Play of Giants* is dedicated. Kamini fibs that all his fleeing advisers and secretaries do so because they have embezzled money. Instead of being sceptical and suspicious, Batey swallows the lie. He has visited Bugara and did not see any of the atrocities Kamini was committing. The ones reported in the Western media are condemned as imperialist propaganda. He is one of the scholars who perceive contemporary life in Africa purely as the tragic consequence of the exploitative nature of colonial and neo-colonial economy and who blame Western capitalists and imperialists for the disorder in the land. There is truth in what they are saying, that transnational conglomerates continue to milk African economies and thus deepen neo-colonial misery, but they ought not to be silent about the damage being done by Africans to their own societies.

Apparently, Batey has not heeded Soyinka's warning in the poem *Ogun Abibiman* (1976: 14–15) that the black diaspora, particularly

African Americans, should beware of embracing President Idi Amin who, in his opinion, is a viper claiming to be Shaka's descendant who yet stings Shaka's progeny. In the poem, Shaka expresses his anger at Idi Amin's atrocities and issues a strong warning to the blacks who see the recidivist as a revolutionary:

> Quicker too my rouse of rage by feet
> Rotted in lakes of blood from my descendant kin
> Yet claimants to the sandals I have worn.
> Distance breeds ignorance, your companion host
> From far-flung lands of Abibiman may seek
> A leader in the heart of amaZulu and embrace
> A viper. Bid them beware. The viper knows
> No kin. The bond of blood to him is – letting
> Bid all beware the scorpion in the thatch –
> His cunning lacks all shame.
> Make note of the dealer in death
> A stink of the hyena, gorged in carrion.
> Ravenous of fame – he dreams his image Shaka.

If Shaka occasionally slipped and wasted lives, it was also true that he built a big empire, invented military weapons, devised novel war strategies, and fought to liberate his people. On the contrary, Idi Amin destroyed his country without creating. 'He mushes earth/In mock-heroes, laying waste to ant-hills' (Soyinka 1976: 15). Of his droll antics, the greatest achievement that won him African Americans' adulation – forcing white men to carry him in a hammock the way African porters used to bear and transport white colonialists – made him appear to be a clown and a jester, because it had no economic and technological backing. It could be likened to a beggar pretending to be a billionaire. Amin is a 'bloated leech' burrowing deep in Shaka's 'majestic mane' and fawners who rationalize his murderous deeds tell 'idiot tales', for Shaka's world is not rebuilt from 'limbs of his defenceless sons' (p. 16). Soyinka is contemptuous of the monster's cheer-leaders.

Batey exposes the treachery of the two Russian delegates. Speaking in Russian, First Russian daubs Kamini a 'buffoon' and an 'overgrown child' (Soyinka 1984: 45) and asks his colleague to give him the Babushka doll to play with and tear to pieces to his heart's content in place of the limbs of Bugaran workers and peasants. Second Russian's

translations are full of lies. To Batey, the Russian's sarcastic remarks issue from white racism and amount to Western imperialist propaganda against Africa. Recognizing the political and military implications of Kamini detaining the two Russian delegates against their will, he pleads with his friend to let them go. He interprets the coup in Bugara as a betrayal of Kamini who, in his view, is cast in the mould of such black heroes as Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney and Martin Luther King who laboured much and made sacrifices to liberate their people from white oppression. All he requires to rid himself of such a grand illusion and others of its ilk is a simple dose of the Kaminian treatment.

The Mayor of Hyacombe is spared the treatment. He, like Batey, is in raptures when he beholds Kamini in person and pays homage to the African legend and his fellow giants: 'All leaders who have given us our pride of race. You who have uplifted us from the degradation of centuries of conquest, slavery and dehumanization' (p. 22). However, the Mayor has an embarrassing problem on his hands. Whereas the plan is to honour Kamini by presenting him with the key to the city of Hyacombe, there are present on this august occasion three other black African 'heroes' who are equally worthy of the honour and the award. To solve the problem, the award ceremony is postponed to give the presenters time to get more keys. That the key symbolizes the freedom of the city is one of the shocking ironies in the play.

Gudrum represents the Western press and the foreign propagandists who traverse the corridors of power in African countries and play a despicable role in the creation and retention of dictators, solely for selfish reasons. A seductress, she adores Kamini and sees him as a sex object that can be used to satisfy her lust for the African phallus, which in her warped imagination is the longest and the strongest. A pathetic victim of the myth of black hyper-sexuality, she is fixated on Kamini's giant physique and celebrated sexual prowess. She informs on Sculptor, probably in order to curry Kamini's favour and gain his confidence. Her repulsive physiognomy is Soyinka's underhand strategy of exploding the myth that white represents purity and perfect beauty. There is a touch of racism in her disgust for Bugaran runaways in her country. Her positive press reports on Kamini's rule constitute additional obstacles to the liberation struggle of the Bugaran rebels. She perceives Kamini as a reincarnation of one of the great African heroes

and nation-builders such as Chaka the Zulu, Sundiata and Mansa Musa. It is doubtful if she is sincere in what she says and writes about Kamini. One suspects that this paradoxical character is a secret agent. Ironically, Kamini takes her as a true friend because she tells him what he wants to hear. In contrast, he treats Sculptor, whose comments are limpid and unvarnished, as a spy.

A Play of Giants echoes other Soyinka dramas. The merciless beating of Sculptor by the task force specials recalls in detail the inhuman treatment meted out to Segun Sowemimo by mobile policemen on the orders of a former military governor of the old Western Region of Nigeria, because of the governor's wife's complaint that Sowemimo and other journalists had insulted her when covering a social party for state television. Sowemimo's ankle is smashed and, after a helpless round of hospitals in Nigeria, he is flown to Britain for treatment. The leg is infected with gangrene and amputated on three different occasions. His lungs become impaired and, finally, the man died, as the title of Soyinka's (1975) prison notes has it. Perhaps Soyinka had Sowemimo in mind when he wrote the following words spoken by Kamini: 'We take good care of you after your accident. But if you continue to tamper with dressing, what happen? The wounds become infected. Perhaps your leg get gangrene and then the doctor must do amputation. Perhaps even your head get infection and gangrene and then the doctor must do amputation' (p. 40). What provokes the speech is Sculptor's desperate attempt to tear off the bandages that have made him a mute, so that he can speak and tell the Secretary-General of the United Nations the truth. The rub is the last sentence of the speech: 'Even Egyptian mummy get more sense' (ibid.). Kamini's guards have more or less reduced Sculptor to a live Egyptian mummy by swathing his body in bandages and completely silencing him. Parodying Dr Bero, one of the progenitors of the despotic giants, Aafaa says in *Madmen and Specialists* (Soyinka 1974b: 228): 'Before we operate we cut the vocal cords.' To operate without hindrance, a nascent dictatorial regime silences the press, social critics and all forms of opposition.

Batey is a development of the character of Adenebi who romanticizes pre-colonial Africa in *A Dance of the Forests*, a play written by Wole Soyinka to commemorate Nigeria's independence. It is not accidental that both of them are councillors and express their sensitivity in a rather cloying manner. Batey tells the four giants: 'When we tell them back

in Hyacombe, no not just Hyacombe, when the entire nation gets to know this, that we were able at one and the same time to shake hands with ... I mean, to stand within the same four walls in the presence of ... please, forgive me, I am a very emotional person ... (*He turns away, whipping out his handkerchief*)' (p. 23). The statement recalls that of Adenebi: 'I have a weak heart. Too much emotion upsets me. This is the era of greatness' (Soyinka 1973: 11). Unfortunately, Nigeria's attainment of political independence did not usher in an era of greatness. Neither did the four giants bring greatness to Africa. On the contrary, they brought untold disasters and obloquy. The councillors' opinion on the greatness of the two occasions is not only exaggerated but specious.

Soyinka exposes the mechanisms exploited by despots to entrench themselves in power and indicts both the capitalist West and the socialist East for propping up unpopular regimes in Africa in order to prosecute their own selfish politico-economic agenda. Superpowers stir up conflicts on the African continent and sell arms to warring parties, thereby profiting from the nations' miseries and woes. 'All the big powers', in Tuboum's view, 'make trouble' (p. 43). They perceive and use African leaders as mere pawns on the race-riddled chessboard of the world economy and world politics and so play a significant and diabolical role in deepening the crises of Africa's economic dependence and political instability.

The play exposes the duplicity and brutal, amoral conception of international relations by the superpowers. As deployed by the two Russian delegates and the two American delegates, the language of diplomacy is replete with deceit and tergiversation. Although the two ideological blocs are opposed and practise a virulent form of Cold War politics, they find a common interest in ridiculing Kamini, who has just been forced out of power, and making him the butt of their oblique satire and caustic racial jokes. Yet, both ideological blocs have alternately given him their support and closed their eyes to his maladministration and the oppression of his people. The playwright reveals the duplicity of socialist Russia that knows Kamini to be a butcher and yet supports his regime and blocks any motion brought against his government at the United Nations.

Although Soyinka has sympathies for socialism, he does not subscribe to slogan-mongering by socialist ideologues. In the play, he censures both ideological blocs for their opportunism. As disclosed

by Second Russian, the British had created Kamini and the Americans had backed him up. Then they quarrelled and the Russians moved in to fill the vacuum (p. 55). Kamini confesses that the British and the Americans helped him to make his coup and alleges that they have a hand in the coup that topples his government. US Delegate's prophecy that a military coup would soon take place in the USSR has come to pass. Although the military putsch was a failure, it was proof that the USSR, unlike the USA, was not a 'strong powerful democratic country' (p. 60). Democratic or dictatorial, both countries are snobbish and contemptuous of weak nations. Kamini criticizes them: 'When you call conference and everybody is making talk at conference tables, you are undermining talk and giving weapon to all sides. When you are making disarmament talk, you are making more and more atom bomb' (p. 62). The Cold War notwithstanding, the USA and the USSR conspired against Third World countries whenever it was in their joint interest so to do. According to Kamini: 'You agree everything between the two of you. You don't care about anybody else' (p. 64). He later avers that 'there is no coup in the world which is not backed by super-power' (p. 66). Both blocs did not want black people to succeed and become a superpower and hence they denied them access to the atomic bomb (p. 68).

As represented in the play, power is monolithic and brooks no opposition. Nevertheless, it takes diverse forms, among which are economic power, language or rhetorical power, military power, political power, secret power (enjoyed by terrorists), sexual power, supernatural power (voodoo or witchcraft, as exemplified in the play), and technological power. Every giant typifies one or two forms and covets the others. Consequently, there is a hidden struggle for power among them and also among their countries. The four giants perpetuate prejudices assimilated in the colonial period. Kamini appears to be the winner. But his pyrrhic victory is only another tantalizing illusion. Correctly read, his attack on the world powers is tantamount to a manifestation of a full-blown psychopathology, which must be dealt with intelligently and with extreme caution. It is a last-minute desperate demonstration of what Kamini meant when he declared earlier in the play that 'Power is indivisible' (p. 4). There are other characteristics of power highlighted in the drama. It is sensuous (one can smell and taste it), mysterious (ineffable, especially voodoo), dangerous, elusive and transient.

Superpowers use their technological expertise to gain further economic advantage, to pauperize and tyrannize the countries of the world that are already impoverished.

Awful and terrifying, the cataclysmic ending of the play can be interpreted as an apocalyptic vision, specifically as the playwright's prophetic reading of human history as inexorably bound for nuclear destruction, all because of the mad struggle for power and the sick desire to have control over other people's lives, the resources of the world and its markets. One expects that in the era of globalization the struggle for power will be keener, more ruthless and more sophisticated.

The current increasing wave of hostility towards Uncle Sam and of terrorist attacks on American targets by jihadists can be interpreted as a desperate attempt to challenge the pride bred by the economic, political and technological power possessed by the USA. The religious overtones notwithstanding, the attacks exemplify the perennial struggle for power. Given the horror unleashed by terrorists in recent times, environmentalists and socialists would call for a just distribution of the wealth of the world in order to extirpate the spectre of envy, hatred, jealousy and wrath and make the world a happy and safe place for all. On the contrary, capitalists and liberal humanists would argue that human beings are naturally depraved, that no amount of social engineering can put an end to free competition that causes strife, and that the strong will for ever enjoy more privileges than the weak. The psychological explanation provided by the playwright for the emergence of monsters and power-perverts in the world, discounting his disavowal 'I do not know how monsters come to be' (p. v), tends to locate the problem in human nature. There may be no scientific solution to these opposing claims. However, the instructional and heuristic function of art is as relevant as the politico-economic restructuring of society and religious sermons in combating and controlling the evil.

Judging by the ending of the play, Soyinka proffers the solution of creativity. While the possessed maniac Kamini and his human engines of wrath and aggression, the ferocious task force specials, behave as true philistines and destroy culture that is the fruit of long years of toil, Sculptor, according to the stage direction, 'works on in slow motion' (p. 69). The open-ended closure of the drama signifies that art, like living, is an unending practice. Creativity is the last defence and hope

of humanity and, if it ceases, humanity is bound to perish. Therefore, producers must never give up the work of creating culture. 'Indeed, according to rabbinical exegesis (Bereshit Rabba 9: 4), the world did not spring from God's hand all at once. Twenty-six attempts preceded the present Genesis, and all were doomed to failure ... "If only this one holds" ... exclaims God as He creates the world ... our history bears the imprint of total insecurity' (Neher 1976: 155–6).

The economic and human costs of power sadism are colossal. Among its evil effects are cynicism, dehumanization of both the practitioners and their victims, fear in both parties, and death on a massive scale. Soyinka wrote in the introduction to the play:

> In human terms, what happened in Uganda was this: that nation lost its cream of professionals, its productive elite ... But Uganda also lost tens of thousands of faceless, anonymous producers, workers and peasants who were ghoulishly destroyed by this mindless terror [Idi Amin]; the attendant economic disaster is still with Uganda, compounding her political instability ... What is being claimed here, in effect, is that the longer a people are subjected to the brutality of power, the longer, in geometric proportion, is the process of recovery and re-humanization. (pp. vii–viii)

Other negative effects of a prolonged dictatorship are domestic and organized crimes, the institutionalization of corruption, the militarization of the civilian population, the vulgarization of traditional ethics, the erosion of communal and family values, spiritual atrophy, the despoliation of the natural environment, the collapse of industries, capital flight, a brain drain and other symptoms of social anomie. The overall effect is despair, disgust and stupor bred by shock; the appalling state in which most African countries currently find themselves.

Considering the incalculable damage done to Africa by European imperialists, slavers and colonialists and their collaborators and successors, advocates of an African renaissance still have a long time to wait for the mucky stables to be cleaned, to pave the way for black Africa to come into its own. As depicted in the play, the African tragedy continues unabated as the land remains unproductive and the suffering of its peoples is unrelieved.

Not even language escapes the taint of despotism in the drama. The tyrants' bad grammar in a way is a reflection of their misrule. Profusely

employed, animal images connote the ideas of human bestiality and predation. Through the use of satirical military metaphors and images of violence, the author vents his wrath on dictators who pervert language and use it treacherously to hoodwink the masses of people and cow them into total submission. Tuboum calls his hit squad 'leopards' (p. 19) because of their destructive power and incredible celerity, while Kamini pours invectives on his runaway Ambassador. She is a 'Cow!' and 'Female bastard!' (p. 51); the other fleeing officials are 'Sons of stinking imperialist rats' (ibid.); the coup plotters are carrion-eating 'vultures' (p. 59); and Sculptor is a 'brass-monkey' (p. 42). Kasco describes people who are envious of power-holders and quest for it as 'ants' and 'flies' that lay maggots and waste the red meat of power (p. 56). The giants do violence to language and the animal images portray them as inhuman, contemptible, corrupt and rotten creatures who live a dissolute life. Irony is used by Soyinka to characterize Kamini, a lunatic who calls the sane mad, a wicked soul who pretends to be a good Samaritan. In a sense, the play is aimed at unravelling the art of dissimulation, which is vividly illustrated in the translation session, and at fighting the tyrants' suppression of truth. For democracy to thrive, freedom of speech must be guaranteed.

A caustic satire on despotism and abuse of power and a lasting testament to the horror of the wound inflicted on Africa by foreign and local power psychopaths, *A Play of Giants* is a bold affirmation of freedom, and an expression of the unflagging commitment to beauty, criticism and truth. Its humour is murky and morbid; the giants' gestures are grand, grotesque and outlandish; their language is stilted and riddled with obscenities; their manner is ludicrous and stiff; and their mien is mean. Everything about them is unnatural. Through the use of burlesque and image-reversal, Soyinka downgrades and ridicules the temporal powers that have inflated themselves to monstrous proportions. The satire says simply that they, too, like ordinary simple folk, are blood and clay and therefore mortal! It suggests that the traditional world built by black Africans has crashed and the new one that is being constructed to replace it is not only strange and incomprehensible but has also lost its moorings right from the foundation level.

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2 | Re-establishing the basis of social order in Africa: a reflection on Achebe's reformist agenda and Ngugi's Marxist aesthetics

M. S. C. OKOLO

Ever since the colonial encounter with the West, the story of Africa has been one of a long chain of forced amalgamation, unmanageable ethnic clashes, zero-sum political competition, intense religious conflict, programmed economic retardation, cultural and identity crises, heightened suspicion and conflict, policed underdevelopment, underemployment and peripheral status in global affairs (Okolo 2003). The cumulative effect is the social crisis engulfing most African societies today. It is necessary to appreciate all the dimensions of this crisis through a reflective identification with the issues. A philosophical engagement with literature offers a path to achieving this. As theoretical disciplines concerned with raising social consciousness, philosophy and literature engage in speculations, offer critical evaluation of existing social condition, and provide indications of how to reorder society.

The contention here is that a philosophical reading of literature can be of immense value in promoting African self-understanding by providing an intellectual and analytical framework within which the African experience can be articulated, explained and reordered. It is for this reason that Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* are subjected to philosophical analysis and reflection in order to evaluate the ideas contained in them. The reformist agenda proposed by Achebe in *Anthills* and the Marxist aesthetics that captured Ngugi's attention in *Petals* shed light on the situation in Africa and the possibilities for change. Critical reflection, however, suggests that the choice between reform and revolution as means of social transformation does not really capture the complexity of the African social climate. There is, therefore, a need for a third path that seeks to reconcile the insights of the two positions and provides a new course of social reconstruction for Africa.

Ngugi's Marxist aesthetics in *Petals*: a revolt against peaceful transformation

To be sure, Marx had no spelt-out theory on literature. A sustained reflection, however, makes his position on the matter very clear. At the heart of Marxism is unwavering support for the primacy of matter over mind. It is the economic, as far as Marx is concerned, that governs, moderates and defines the basis of every relationship. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* Marx and Engels posit that man's consciousness changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life. In effect, and *ultimately*, the economic structure of society is the 'real foundation', the base which determines the form that all other activities – the superstructure: legal, political, moral, aesthetics, philosophy – in any given society will take.

In a class society, such as engendered by capitalism, a writer as a member of the society is bound to reflect its antagonistic class structure. The essence of literature is to show the economic arrangement in the society and the nature of the relationship it produces. It evaluates existing society on its own terms and depicts a fictional world that is a lifelike representation of the real world. The writer serves as a medium for raising the consciousness of her or his society concerning the mode of production that operates there, the nature of the relationship between the various classes, how to bring about a revolutionary end to the oppression and exploitation of one class by another, and the historical possibility of communism as the most desirable end product. Real transformation of the society can be realized only by redirecting surplus to its rightful owners – the producers; harmonizing knowledge with social ends; and dismantling and smashing all class structure.

Art inspired by Marxist aesthetics reflects on the class distinctions in society; shows the social and ideological struggles; portrays the possibility of men and women engaging in such struggles and the obstacles that they confront; and, even, guides people on how best to bring about a revolutionary end to an oppressive system and create a more humane society. 'From the stand point of the revolutionary,' says Omafume Onoge (1985: 44), 'the political criterion of excellent art is art which serves the struggle of the people against their oppression.' A writer's task is to reflect an understanding of the economic relations that *ultimately* determine the aesthetics.

This is what I understand to be a Marxist understanding of aesthetics. It seems that Ngugi agrees with this orientation. For Ngugi (1981: 96), literature is 'a reflection of the material reality under which we live'. The writer's core duty in Ngugi's view is to approach his task as a social act which entails directing his creative energy towards the production of pieces of art devoted to the fight for cultural freedom, exposing the imperialistic nature of the social order, the exploitative and distorted values integral to capitalist system, and the necessity for a violent struggle to end class exploitation. To achieve this task, a writer has to be sensitive to the class nature of the society and its impact on the imagination. Ngugi asserts that: 'There is no area of our lives including the very boundaries of our imagination which is not affected by the way that society is organized, by the whole operation and machinery of power: how and by whom that power has been achieved; which class controls and maintains it; and the ends to which the power is put' (p. 71).

Literature plays an important role in the structures of class power that shape our everyday lives (p. xii). Without doubt, a writer's works portray the various conflicts – cultural, economic, ideological, political – going on in the society. Every literature is a commitment to a particular political ideology and every writer is a writer in politics (p. xii). For literature to be beneficial to man it has to assume a revolutionary stance. Its interest must centre on a critical evaluation of the economic formation of modern African society. Ngugi's ideal is for a literature that is partisan, committed, assertive and confrontational. It must contribute to the efforts to bring about a change in human relations, especially in the asymmetrical relationship between the West and Africa and other less developed countries.

Essentially, the task of literature, at least for the African writer, is to serve as a means of liberation from European imperialistic domination and from a Euro-centric perspective of the world. It is only a revolution that can restore to Africa and its people the confidence necessary for the radical transformation of society. The African writer, then, must disregard 'abstract notions of justice and peace' and direct his full support to the 'actual struggle of the African peoples' and in his writing show 'the struggle of the African working class and its present class allies for the total liberation of their labour power' which alone provides the base for a socialist transformation of the society (p. 80). In Ngugi's

view, Marxist-oriented literature provides an aesthetics that is viable for the future and is the *only* literature worth the writer's attention.

Petals of Blood represents Ngugi's practical realization of this vision. According to him, *Petals* is about the peasants and workers who have built Kenya (and by extension Africa), and who, through their blood and sweat, have written a history of dignity and fearless resistance to foreign economic, political and cultural domination (Ngugi 1981: 98). Throughout the novel, Ngugi presents characters whose conduct is firmly rooted in concrete material history and changing social conditions; his mission is to portray the devastating and retrogressive effect of imperialist capitalism on African societies and why it can never develop Africa or Africans; and the necessity to bring about a change in material production and class relations on Marxist terms.

Petals is a fictional account of Marx's history of class struggles; how workers organize through unions; how society will be transformed through a *must-come* revolution; how capitalism will be disbanded and smashed along with all the exploitative mechanisms that it has used to dominate, oppress, marginalize and enslave the proletariat; and finally, and inevitably, how communism will triumph. Ilmorog, the setting of the novel and a typical representation of a post-colonial African society, was once a thriving society with a huge population of sturdy peasants before the advent of colonialism. With colonialism came a number of changes: the farmers were robbed by European farmers of the virgin soil that they needed for shifting cultivation; the youths were lured to work on European farms or in towns; taxes were introduced to compel the people to sell their labour in order to earn the required money which they could no longer raise through their own independent farming. African societies were regarded as underdeveloped and backward, and the only way they could become more developed was by copying the West.

Events revolving round Ilmorog also point to neo-colonialism as a decisive factor in the decline of African societies. With independence it was expected that African leaders would turn their attention towards finding what would be suitable for Africa and its peoples; that they would pursue a rigorous programme of development aimed at lifting Africa from the multiple harmful legacies of colonialism: economic disparity, social injustice, mental inferiority, dependency, and underdevelopment. Instead, post-independence leaders as represented by

Nderi, the MP for Ilmorog, continued with the exploitative attitude of the colonizers. He adopts their leadership code of 'greed and accumulation' (Ngugi 1977: 163).

Ensconced in the capital, Nderi completely forgets the place he is supposed to be representing. His whole attention is taken up with enriching himself and ingratiating himself with the West. He accepts offers of directorships in foreign-owned companies and diverts the money he has collected from his constituents for a water project into collateral for further loans that will enable him to buy shares in companies, invest in land, in housing and in small businesses. He also forms the 'Kiama-kamwene Cultural Organization' (KCO) with friends to force the poor to take an oath (tea drinking) that will protect the riches of the few. Of course, the tea drinking is not free. The loot collected from the 'Mass Tea Drinking' exercise goes to make the few rich people even richer. Nderi's share runs into millions. The KCO is also used to strengthen 'progressive cooperation' and active economic partnership with imperialism (p. 186). Nderi sees it as an avenue to create wealthy local economic giants as exist in the West. It is also employed as the 'most feared instrument of selective but coercive terror in the land' (ibid.). It is used to eliminate political opponents and suppress any resistance from peasants and workers. Rather than act as a forum for cultural harmony, the KCO is used to maintain the economic, social and political gap between the hyper-rich and the super-poor. Reflecting on this post-independence development, a character in *Petals* laments: 'This was the society they were building: this was the society they had been building since independence, a society in which a black few allied to other interests from Europe, would continue the colonial game of robbing others of their sweat, denying them the right to full flowers in air and sunlight' (p. 294). By the time the Ilmorogians are forced by severe drought to trek to Nairobi to make their plight known to Nderi, he has become one of the richest MPs in the land. He owns a huge farm in the Rift Valley, a number of plots and premises in Mombasa, Malindi and Watamu, shares in several tourist resorts along the coast, and other lucrative business interests and connections (p. 174). All this, while the community he represents can effectively be described as 'a deserted homestead, a forgotten village, an island of under-development which after being sucked thin and dry was itself left standing, static, a grotesque distorted image of what peasant life was and could be' (p. 184).

The people's trek to Nairobi, however, makes Nderi realize the need to 'develop' his constituency. Nderi, to be sure, brought *development* to Ilmorog. A trans-Africa road that links Ilmorog to many cities of the continent 'was built, not to give content and reality to the vision of a continent' (p. 252), but, rather, to pander to the recommendations of foreign experts. The exercise ends up exposing them to international capitalist robbery and exploitation. People's lands and businesses were taken over through the enactment of laws that they did not understand. The result of this 'scramble' is the 'partition' of Ilmorog where 'every prominent person in the country owns a bit of Ilmorog: from the big factory to the shanty dwellings' (p. 282). The people of Ilmorog, on the other hand, are left to sell their labour; to die, as in the case of Nyakinyua who is too old and powerless to work; turn to prostitution like Wanja; be pushed into the streets, 'almost a beggar', like Abdulla whose attempt to run a shop is dashed by the activities of multinational corporations. In the end, Ilmorog is transformed into a *modern* town, the most significant feature of which is the sharp divide between the class of producers and the class of exploiters. The 'Cape Town' is exclusively for the rich while 'New Jerusalem', a shanty town, is for the former Ilmorogians to compete with migrants and floating workers, the unemployed, the prostitutes and small traders.

As Ngugi (1993: 107) notes elsewhere, 'independence did not always result in the empowerment of the people' and 'economic power still lay in the hands of a tiny elite exercising it on behalf of the dominant interests of the West'.

How is it that the people who provided the land and the labour for the *development* and *modernization* of Ilmorog can barely sustain themselves? Is the Western ideology of development suited to the African condition? Really, what kind of ideology will ensure the kind of cultural freedom, political stability, economic independence and technological advancement that Africa needs to reposition itself as a viable continent able to feed its increasing population, provide jobs, security, social amenities to its citizens and protect its sovereignty? Reflections on these issues lead Karega, through whom the political ideology and artistic vision in *Petals* is enunciated, to the discovery that at the root of Africa's problems lies the imperialist capitalist economy that ropes people in to a new kind of slavery. The solution lies in the alliance of the workers and peasants to carry out a radical socialist transformation

of the society. As far as Karega is concerned, the key to creating a 'more humane world' in which people's inherited inventive genius in culture and science is put to the use of all lies with the poor, the dispossessed and working millions. It is up to the poor peasants to equip themselves with guns, swords and organization in order to change the conditions of their oppression and seize the wealth which rightly belongs to them (Ngugi 1977: 327). Truly, imperialism, capitalism and landlords have to be 'fought consciously, consistently and resolutely by all the working people' (p. 344). Certainly, 'tomorrow it would be the workers and the peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system of all its preying, bloodthirsty gods and gnomic angels' so as to bring 'to an end the reign of the few over the many' and 'only then, would the kingdom of man and woman really begin, they joying and loving in creative labour' (ibid.). There is a defined aesthetic of confrontation, resistance, commitment and ultimate liberation in *Petals*.

Karega believes that every disagreement, all the evils hindering African societies from achieving genuine political liberation are determined by the economic forces of production; that this is explainable in the context of the exploitation of labour by capital; that it will result in the emergence of class struggle in which the working class will inevitably overthrow their exploiters in a revolutionary combat and replace capitalism with communism. For Marx and Engels (1968: 51) man's consciousness changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence; and at a certain stage in their development 'the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production' and 'then occurs a period of social revolution'. 'With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense super structure is more or less rapidly transformed' (Marx 1956: 67–8).

What are the implications of Ngugi's revolutionary stance for Africa's political impasse? How likely is the worker-peasant revolt that he so strongly upholds? Although the workers of Ilmorog are exploited, the peasantry as a whole is marginalized and impoverished rather than transformed into a Marxian proletariat capable of taking control over the means of production. Moreover, the people are deeply divided and are unlikely to adopt the same stance on important issues, as implied in Karega's position. Class antagonism is not the only principle that orders human conduct. Even in *Petals* the dispossessed of Ilmorog find

it difficult to present a common front. Nyakinyua's attempt to organize the dispossessed into a protest to fight for their land ends in some of them deriding her. Those whose lands are not to be auctioned off refuse to get involved. This, perhaps, is an indication that the working people will be more prepared to work within capitalism through reformist methods, than to fight for its abolition. Labour unions are more interested in securing better working conditions than in advocating for a socialist revolution. Poor people often support and canvass for the rich, especially during elections. In fact, they may fight each other in order to protect their 'man'. Many seek for ways of accommodating to the harsh conditions rather than channelling their energies towards a revolution. Class politics in Africa cannot be reduced to a simple conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat (Thomson 2000: 91).

To be sure, with the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, Marxism faced a new challenge to demonstrate its continued relevance. Yet, it will be a mistake to write off Ngugi's revolutionary perspective as having nothing to offer. By turning the searchlight on capitalism, Ngugi directs our reflection to a number of important issues, including the fact that workers continue to be alienated from the product of their labour; that they are likely to be resentful and that this can lead to a violent revolt; the need for a correspondence between labour and its remuneration; the continued exploitation of the resources of Africa by the West and how this is responsible for Africa's dependency in world affairs; how Africa's entanglement with the West continues to undermine the capacity of its leaders to address the continent's predicament; the lack of credibility of prevailing development theories that assume that Africa must follow the Western capitalist path. Ngugi's revolutionary plea underscores the need for a re-evaluation of what development should mean, especially given the colonial heritage.

Besides, there is worldwide outcry against the current capitalist world order. Joan Baxter (2002: 32) reports from the first-ever Africa 'Social Forum', held in Bamako early in 2002 with participants from forty-five African countries. It was directed against the dominant industrialized countries and their financial institutions which dictate the policies that make African governments so unpopular with their people: privatization, structural adjustment, open markets and cutbacks in social services. The African activists also criticized the New Economic Partnership for African Development (Nepad) for not challenging 'the

supremacy of the North and the weakness of the South'; instead, 'Nepad meekly follows the received wisdom of the IMF and the World Bank, courting the private sector and embracing globalisation at whatever cost' (Simpson 2002: 39).

Ngugi's submission, no doubt, acts as a constant reminder that capitalism, so far, has been unable to address the inequality and exploitation that mark African societies, the problems of underdevelopment, dependency, neo-colonialism, debt crisis, economic backwardness, lack of basic infrastructure, mass poverty, famine, water shortages, damaged ecology, corruption, election rigging, intimidation, violence, wars, and ethnic and religious clashes. By exposing the African condition within its socio-economic context, Ngugi points to the need to question what is taken as development; he provides an insight on how we can recognize real change; what is to be regarded as real progress. Above all, Ngugi warns that the world is changeable – the oppressed class can through a revolution bring an end to its exploitation. *Petals* serves to raise political consciousness by questioning the sustainability of a capitalist system that leads to deepening inequality both within and between societies.

Achebe's reformist agenda in *Anthills*: a vote against revolt

Achebe's *Anthills* invites a counter-reflection to Ngugi's vision of a revolutionary restructuring of African societies. By exploring the political conditions in Africa as portrayed through events in 'Kangan', a fictional African state, Achebe provides reasons why a gradual, evolutionary reformation of the society is the best road forward. In this story, the Military has just assumed power after ousting a corrupt and incompetent civilian administration. It is expected that the Military will embark on a cleansing programme to restore social order. This is not what happens. Beyond the urge to take power, the young coup-makers have no programme of action, no defined ideology, and no modalities for effecting structural change. Instead, they recruit a young army commander, Sam, who has 'pretty few ideas about what to do' to become 'His Excellency the Head of State' (Achebe 1987: 12). 'Without any preparation for political leadership' (ibid.), His Excellency turns to his friends for advice. The result is an Executive Council composed of 'yes-men', recruited without reference to qualification; a government without a vision.

The outcome is predictable. By the end of the story, it is clear that nothing has really changed with the military takeover. The sad truth is that the conditions appear to have become worse. Anything, literally, can still go on in Kangan: the looting of the nation's treasury with impunity; the suppression of civil society; the clamp-down on the press; secret executions in the barracks and open murder on the road; the brutality of law enforcement officers; the shooting of demonstrating students and striking railway workers; the destruction and banning of independent unions and cooperatives; bribery on the highways; the burning down of entire departments for accounts and audit in order to prevent inquiry; massive fraud deliberately covered up by dishonest billing and accounting procedures; inexplicable traffic jams; the absence of a national ethos; subservience to foreign manipulation; worn-out, hand-me-down capitalism; social injustice and the elevation of the cult of mediocrity; unproductive cabinet meetings; the appointment of spineless and visionless men to high offices; inordinate ambition to hang on to power; and, of course, counter-coups.

Ikem, who embodies the message of Achebe's ideology, sees the social crises in Africa as a product of bad leadership. The prime failure of government, Ikem insists, is the inability of 'rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being' (p. 141). To overcome this failure, the country requires leaders who have the firmness of purpose, the competence and the foresight to embark on a well-articulated, gradual and consistent agenda of reform. For Ikem, reform offers 'the most promising route to success in the real world' (p. 99). It is counter to Ngugi's revolutionary position.

Reform has the capacity to accommodate contradictions and differences, a basic requirement in the search for creative solutions. Due to the colonial legacy, most African countries have a political culture that is characterized by sharp, often irreconcilable differences in ideological leaning, economic pursuit, language, moral doctrines, religious beliefs and ethnicity that make it difficult for people to engage in collective decision-making and freely endorse a common political regime. It is therefore necessary to shun orthodox ideologies that discourage contradictions as this is likely to promote the conflicts that already exist. A revolution to institute a proletarian government, in line with Ngugi's vision, is therefore unlikely to produce the kind of unity necessary

for achieving an enduring political transformation in such diverse societies. The assumption that a single group of people can be defined as the oppressed fails to capture the complex relations of domination generated by such diversity. Even among the oppressed the perception of oppression differs. The workers, peasants, the poor, the unemployed, students, the urban oppressed, the rural oppressed, all have their different understanding of oppression. Writing on Africa, Ben Turok (1987: 92) tells us that 'many writers hold that the peasantry cannot identify with urban workers because of blatant inequalities between them'. An oppressed person may, in fact, view another oppressed person as his oppressor. To assume that differences will be swept away in one big tide of resentment against a particular set of oppressors is therefore an illusion. The divide is often a factor in other considerations: place of residence, ideological affiliation, ethnicity, religion, language, and level of education. Due to deep religious conviction an oppressed person may perhaps not even recognize the oppression to which he or she is subjected.

Again, there is no guarantee that the rule of the oppressed will bring about a more equitable social order. Being an oppressed person is not enough to be imbued with a sense of justice and fair play. Achebe (1987: 99) argues that progress will be 'piece-meal, slow and undramatic'. The hasty and action-oriented character of revolutions cannot accommodate the conditions for a proper leadership to emerge: a detailed and well-specified plan of action; defined ideology or ideologies, modalities for effecting structural changes where necessary; open deliberations involving civil society; well-designed education for people to enable them to understand government policies and implement a new way of life; and criteria for choosing a leader. It is important, especially, in the face of drive towards modernization by African states, to see modernization as a lengthy process, which requires evolutionary rather than revolutionary change, so that lasting structures can be achieved.

Achebe's vote for reform is premised on all these shortcomings of revolution, although reform is not a valid excuse for political inactivity or apathy. Rather, it is a protection against 'false hopes and virulent epidemics of gullibility' (p. 100). What is needed is a new political creed – a 'new radicalism' that is 'clear-eyed' and introspective enough to recognize the problems so as 'to see beyond the present claptrap

that will heap all our problems on the doorstep of capitalism and imperialism' (p. 158). Achebe's 'New Radicalism' sets out to achieve some defined objectives. It rejects the view of the dependency school that sees Africa's problems as externally imposed – specifically, by an imperialist capitalist economy. *Anthills* questions the adequacy of this view, given the numerous factors created and perpetuated by Africans themselves, including uncommitted and self-interested leaders; civil servants, employees of public corporations and, even, students, who through their activities sabotage any attempt towards national development; and the down-trodden masses themselves who through their subservient and unreflective attitudes endorse the positions of unprogressive leaders. To achieve an enduring transformation requires a good foundation, which can only be erected by first settling internal issues. This will make the task of tackling external factors easier.

Besides, the overemphasis on dependency and its corresponding concern with distinctions between core and periphery, exploiters and exploited, obscure the need to examine other issues such as the economic resource base, the potential for development, the demographic composition, the socio-political structure, and other conditions that are specific to different African states and which therefore necessitate a focus on the variety of relevant choices that have to be made. What Africa requires is a *creative* ideology that continuously reassesses itself, encourages analytic innovation; not one that is *sufficient-unto-itself* and that forces ready-made answers to new issues.

At one point it was commonly understood that the armed forces were agents of modernization. This may have contributed to the favourable reception that military coups once enjoyed in much of Africa. This is no longer the case. Now the dominant view is an opposition to military intervention. *Anthills* depicts the Military as equally, if not more, entangled in the conflicts in the society and susceptible to the corrupting influence of politics and the intoxicating effect of power. Ikem was murdered for his critical opinions of the Military's excesses. The 'Presidential Retreat', built with 45 million naira by the civilian administration, was refurbished with 20 million naira by the military that ousted the civilian government from power. The refusal of the drought-stricken Abazonians to endorse His Excellency's bid to become Life President costs them their share of the national resources. Of course, Achebe's picture mirrors events in real life. In Nigeria the regimes of

Babangida and Abacha were characterized by unbridled violence, the looting of the economy, and the entrenchment of draconian policies. Throughout their regimes there were arrests, open and secret trials and executions in and outside Aso Rock, the presidential palace in Abuja. The murder of Dele Giwa, the editor of *Newswatch* magazine, during the Babangida regime is reminiscent of Ikem's murder in *Anthills*. Abacha's attempt to transform himself into a Life President before his death in 1998 recalls Sam's similar attempt in *Anthills*.

Achebe's book is a warning against absolutism and fanaticism. It is a campaign for responsible government that is attentive to the needs of the people and guided by limited and accountable power. *Anthills*' insistence on the validity of the general political experience of the people is an antidote against concentrating power in few hands. Where the electorates are aware of their role, they will be able to checkmate those in government. Moreover, a good spread of political experience is unavoidable in the effort to create a common oneness among different ethnicities, as is typical of African countries. Also, the intolerant social climate of most African states makes Achebe's 'new radicalism' with its reconciliatory temper a defensible ideal and a timely one. There is a commitment to protect individual freedom, the safety of society, and to show a modern African government as one that will guarantee social and economic justice. The single-minded character of a revolutionary ideology is bound to stifle individual creativity. The general well-being of the society depends, to a great extent, on the freedom accorded the individual to explore his talents. At the same time, this pursuit must be guided by respect for the general welfare of the society. Such a political climate will make it easier for leaders to structure the society along the lines of social and economic justice. Ikem insists that 'the real solution lies in a world in which charity will have become unnecessary' (Achebe 1987: 155).

Achebe is concerned with the calibre of people who get into positions of power and the need to reorder the social culture through a reorientation of attitudes. Social justice can be achieved only if the leaders possess both the will and the ability to fulfil the demands of their office. Besides, society reflects the kind of leadership in place. Where the leaders are unable to set good examples it will be impossible for national development to take place. In short, the problem hindering the development of African societies, according to Achebe,

is poor leadership. Once this factor is righted, African societies will *stand firmly* on their feet and *think properly* with their brain.

However, to tie the fate of Africa to its leaders has some disturbing side-effects. Becoming a leader and possessing the sense or capacity for social justice are two distinct issues. The implication is that the society goes up or down depending on the kind of leader it has. Should this be so? Important social tasks should stand above the dictates of an individual or a select few trying to force their values on the society. To ensure a standard social code for the society, there is need for institutions capable of moderating the conduct of both leaders and citizens. Ikem points out that 'the real solution lies in a world in which charity will have become unnecessary'. Such civilized social order demands far-reaching reform, such as better distribution of wealth to enhance the welfare of the masses as opposed to the competition and disregard for citizens' welfare that characterize a capitalist economy. This problem clearly transcends leadership issues and touches the system of government in place; the kind of interaction that exists between state and society, including the way it has been shaped by historical inheritance – colonialism.

Achebe's concern with leaders is restricted to the elite class. His account of the happenings in the fictional state of Kangan is seen predominantly from the viewpoint of the elites: Chris, the Commissioner for Information; Ikem, the editor of the *National Gazette*; and Beatrice, Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. At the end of the book, after Ikem's and Chris's demise, coup and counter-coup, civil unrest, and the near collapse of society, it is Beatrice who becomes 'a captain whose leadership was sharpened more and more by sensitivity to the peculiar needs of her company' (p. 229). This elite-centred perspective reflects the concerns of a minority. Without paying attention to the way in which the masses articulate the situation, it is doubtful if even a good leader will be able to formulate and implement equitable policies that will ensure the well-being of the people. Besides, the singular attention on the elite discourages the political participation of other classes which is, in fact, a basic consideration in achieving genuine liberation in a democratic setting.

Yet, these criticisms should not obscure Achebe's cardinal points. These are: to draw attention to the indispensability of experts while recognizing the need for political equality; to explain the vital role of

good leadership in bringing about an ordered society and maintaining the political structure in place; and to show that a violent revolution is neither necessary nor desirable in order to achieve this end. Achebe seeks to identify the key elements that will ensure that citizens' interests and the safety of society will be protected whatever system of government is in place. *Anthills* seeks to persuade the reader that it is good leadership, not the type of political system in itself, that is responsible for instituting and maintaining viable social order. It prompts the reader to reflect on the whole question of social change and the need to reject the ideology of revolution and its elevation to national policy in the face of the inherent violent character of modern African states. The solution to the spate of coups and counter-coups, political murders, corruption and social indiscipline that characterize contemporary African societies is not a function of the system of government but of the quality of leadership.

Beyond revolution and reform: a 'third path'?

What ideology will best ensure the social transformation of African societies, effective political rule, economic survival, a redress of social inequities, ethnic differences and religious conflicts? What ideology will best promote trust and restore confidence to the cynical, traumatized and troubled societies of Africa? Is it Ngugi's Marxist vision that calls for anti-imperialist consciousness and aims towards structural transformation by empowering the people to dethrone the rulers through a violent revolution and establish a classless, humane, socialist society? Or is it Achebe's reformist, elite-centred agenda that rejects the revolutionary path and advocates an internal evaluation of our social culture, favouring a 'new radicalism' that welcomes different ideas and aims at piecemeal, consistent, gradual transformation of society?

This concluding section will briefly indicate the argument for a 'third path'. Attention has been drawn above to the inadequacies of both sets of ideologies, the utopianism of one and the elitism of the other. There is no point in looking for an ideology that fits the continent as a whole. It would obscure the important differences between the countries. What is needed are ideologies that are relevant in varying situations. What may be appropriate for one may be unworkable for another. Even in a single country there may be a need for different ideologies to reflect differences in ethnic, religious or regional orientation.

In recognizing the inadequacies of Achebe's and Ngugi's positions it should be possible, however, to make a case for a *third path* that will reconcile and transcend their divergent views in seeking to chart the course of social reconstruction. The basic challenge is how to reorder society in such a way that people can freely realize their potential and perform their duties and obligations. To achieve this, it is important to examine the processes, the institutions and agencies that make up our political life.

The issue of process has to do with how to entrench democracy. The essence of democracy is to create a free and equitable society where all members are considered as politically equal. To achieve this, Ngugi's submission that there is a need to revolutionize the state structures inherited from colonialism is vital; as is Achebe's caution that societal transformation is a gradual, time-consuming process that requires tolerance, consistency and patience. There are, also, other important factors: the need to bring about accommodation among social divisions based on ethnicity, class, religion, gender, age, education and other such considerations. 'Harmony' is too utopian to provide an alternative to Ngugi's class struggle. There is a need to bring the alienated members of society into the national fold; a programme of (re)orientation and (re)enlightenment to help the people understand the social forces affecting their lives; a defined social policy to improve people's well-being, to guarantee them the right to freedom, health, education, employment, power, relief from poverty; and a realistic timetable that will meet the needs of the peculiar African state. Entrenching democracy is vital but it will not automatically ensure the good life for all. There is no system of government under which some people may not feel unhappy, dissatisfied, treated unjustly and, even, completely alienated. The greatest benefit of democracy is that it offers a wider opportunity for addressing and resolving such grievances. Democratic institutions have to ensure that the different organs of government protect the interests of the people. Without yielding to Ngugi's vision of a centralized economy under popular control, it is important to set institutional rules that will make it possible for people who toil to produce the wealth to be adequately remunerated. This can be achieved through reasonable wages, institutionalized accountability, reinvesting the surplus in welfare services – free education, medical care, good and affordable transport – as well as in the supply of cheap staple

food, houses for the homeless, and the creation of jobs. This should not, however, prevent private choices. The aim should be to design policies that will accommodate private choices and public interest, and, at the same time, minimize political crises and ensure steady economic growth.

It is vital to ensure that those who rule are accountable to the people. Both Achebe's insistence on leaders who can act as role models and Ngugi's belief in people's revolutionary action in checking an exploitative government are important. Equally vital is an organized citizenry that is aware of its rights and is willing and able to claim them, that respects community interests, and, when necessary, is ready to confront the government. Also important is a free press that is willing and capable of exposing official misdeeds and suggesting the right course of action for both leaders and civil society; an independent judiciary that has the power to protect citizens from unjust treatment, especially from those in power, and that is capable of subjecting public officers to the law.

In its search for appropriate ideologies, Africa must look for choices that are balanced enough to remain viable in the face of unanticipated circumstances. It should look for good leaders who can effect social transformation but also for a citizenry that is fully alerted to the issues at stake, understands the political currents and conditions unique to the particular context, and is willing and able to translate this knowledge into practical benefits for the good of the society.

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3 | Narrating the green gods: the (auto) biographies of Nigerian military rulers

GBEMISOLA ADEOTI

In the tyrant's praise
Let cannons of fake biographies be burnt
(Remi Raji, *Webs of Remembrance*, 2001)

Background

Since the inauguration of military rule through the first coup of Saturday, 15 January 1966, there has been no aspect of Nigerian life that has not experienced, whether positively or negatively, the reformative ardour of successive military regimes. As a result of the long span of military rule and the domination of political power by soldiers while military governance lasted, soldiers have had an immense impact on politics, education, sports, internal and international relations, economy, law, penology, resource allocation and so on. This observation has been made in diverse studies. For instance, Sanda et al., in *The Impact of Military Rule on Nigeria's Administration* (1987), examine the influences of the military on various aspects of public administration in post-independence Nigeria (1966–79 and 1984–87). The contributors in Ninalowo's *The Quest for Democratization: Military Governance and Trade Unionism* (1996), through a multi-disciplinary approach, engage the interconnections between trade unionism and military rule on the one hand and the dangers posed by military dictatorship to the development of an enduring democratic culture on the other. Soyinka's *Open Sore of a Continent* (1996) re-narrates Nigeria's socio-political crisis exacerbated by the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election and the ascendancy of tyranny under General Sani Abacha.

The realm of fiction also bears the imprints of decades of military rule. A military coup provides the *deus ex machina* that resolves the political débâcle in Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), although later, in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988) – as discussed elsewhere in this volume – he reviews the messianic conception of soldiers, especially

in their intervention in civil administration. Soldiers and the military institution provide the butt of Soyinka's ridicule in plays such as *Kongi's Harvest* (1967), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *Jero's Metamorphosis: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope* (1988), *Madmen and Specialists* (1988) and *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1995). Festus Iyayi in *Heroes* (1986) celebrates the ordinary people and the underprivileged soldiers on the Nigerian and Biafran sides as the true 'heroes' of the civil war. Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), Odia Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied* (1989) and Frank Uche Mowah's *Eating by the Flesh* (1995) are also a part of Nigerian literature that engages with soldiers as subjects.

The impact becomes more evident, however, when one considers the public policies and actions of military regimes that influenced literary productions as well as the contributions of Nigerian soldiers as writers and subjects of writing. One literary genre that has received a good deal of exploration by military officers in this regard is that of life narrative, referred to in this chapter as (auto) biography.[1] Considering themselves to be statesmen and intellectuals of some sort, soldiers who hold political or top army posts use the genre as a discursive space to articulate, *inter alia*, their stewardship. The works are political writings yet they claim some literary merit, however slender. They often celebrate rising from a humble background to a high pedestal of power and influence. Though lawyers, politicians, artists, bureaucrats and other professionals have explored the genre of (auto) biography in contemporary Nigeria, this chapter primarily focuses on the narratives of military officers who have contributed to the recent expansion of the canon.

Self-(re)-writing and the public sphere

The genre of life narrative has an enduring history and it occupies a significant space in modern Nigerian literature. As Geesey rightly remarks: 'Even to the casual observer looking at the development of contemporary African writing, autobiography would certainly seem to stand out as a major component in the vast array of cultural productions from that continent' (Geesey 1997: 1). Among different cultures in pre-colonial traditional societies, it is channelled through oral poetic modes such as epic, ballad, saga, legend, myth and song. Judging from its oral antecedents, one can assert that (auto) biography has a long tradition of existence in Nigerian literary culture. Indeed, praise chants

or heroic poetry generally bear fragments of self-representation. Even though they adopt literary devices such as exaggeration and symbolism in the representations so as to make them fictive, references to actual people and places establish their (auto) biographical motive. For example, among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, poetic chants like *rara* (ballad), *Iwi Egungun* (poetic chants associated with the ancestral cult) and *Ijala* (hunters' chants) feature the life struggles of distinguished personalities as well as their contributions to the shaping of their societies' destiny. The long narratives of Hausa men called *Labaru* contain historical and autobiographical stories of the narrator. These are handed down from one generation to the next in spite of the oral mode of transmission. According to Skinner (1980), they are rendered in a manner that lays claim to truth.

With the advent of missionary education in the nineteenth century and the concomitant focus on the written word, another mode of articulating personal narratives of a distinguished existence developed. Some of the earliest attempts at prose narratives in Nigerian literary history were actually in the form of autobiography. One of them is the autobiography of the slave boy Gustavus Vasa, otherwise known as Olaudah Equiano. *Equiano's Travels*, published in 1787, captures an important period in history of human (un)civilization, that is, the slave trade era. It narrates the genealogy, the growth, capture, transportation, service and freedom of Equiano as a slave from Africa. It is against the same backdrop of documenting an important life for the sake of posterity that one can speak of the works of Nigerian nationalists and statesmen like Awolowo's *Awo* (1960) and *My Early Life* (1968), Nnamdi Azikiwe's *My Odyssey: An Autobiography* (1994), John Paden's *Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto: Values and Leadership in Nigeria* (1986), Trevor Clark's *A Right Honourable Gentleman: The Life and Times of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa* (1990), Tai Solarin's *To Mother with Love: An Experiment in Autobiography* (1987) and Wole Soyinka's trilogy of *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (1981), *Isara: A Voyage Around Essay* (1988) and *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (1994).

Nadel identifies two primary objectives of biography. While it narrates the subject's life, it also 'corrects, restates or re-interprets false and distorted accounts' of the subject (1984: 176). (Auto) biography is a vital source of knowledge of a people's history, culture and public sphere, though it is primarily concerned with the narration of a

life or what Starobinski describes as 'self-interpretation' (1971: 286). According to the transparency theory of the genre, (auto) biography strives after a truthful recollection or transmission of life events. Miller examines this theory and submits that it is basically a 'transparent recounting or reproduction of actual life events' (1997: 5). Apart from re-presenting the essence and presence of its subject,[2] it also rewards the reader with a vista of interaction between this subject and the society. Consequently, with the benefits of (auto) biography, a people can avoid the pitfalls of the past, and chart a new historical course away from the errors of the present. That is why Albert Luthuli's *Let My People Go* (1962), Donald Woods's *Biko* (1978) and Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* (1995), for instance, stand to enrich the investigation of the mechanisms of discrimination, social injustice and racial prejudice directed at the black man in apartheid South Africa. Azikiwe articulates the social utility of life story narrative:

> Man comes into the world, and while he lives he embarks upon a series of activities; absorbing experience which enables him to formulate a philosophy of life, and to chart his courses of action; but then he dies. Nevertheless, his biography remains as a guide to those living who may need guidance, either as a warning on the vanity of human wishes, or as an encouragement, or both. (Azikiwe 1994: xi–xii)

Theoretically, the genre promises a truthful representation in a way that fictional literature does not. It must be granted, however, that the realization of this goal is hindered by three factors. First, the (auto) biographer, like the fiction writer, has to select his materials from a vast array of events. The practice of selectivity inherently problematizes accuracy or truthful representation. Second, psychologically, the self invariably pursues that which is pleasurable and always seeks to avert what is unpleasant. It follows that the narrator of the self may be tempted to leave out that which is unpleasant or unwholesome to the self in the course of selection. Third, the fallibility of human memory in terms of accurate recollection of people, events and situations, is also a factor that undermines transparency and accuracy.

The problems indicated above make it more imperative for scholars to devote critical attention to ex-soldiers' life narratives not only in the study of contemporary Nigerian writing, but also in efforts to apprehend the dialogic interaction of literature and the public sphere.

Military officers' narratives

The second coming of military rule in 1984 produced another set of military officers, who would later find life narrative an appropriate medium for celebrating their intervention in politics. These 'green gods'[3] have since then been exploring the genre either as writers or as subjects. The genre actually received a boost in the 1980s and 1990s during the regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha and Abdul-Salaam Abubakar, when it became modish for soldiers who held military posts or public offices to have their (auto) biography produced and launched with fanfare at elaborate ceremonies.[4] However, the seed of this development had been sown earlier with the publication of Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Command* (1980), a narration of the author's involvement in the Nigerian civil war, and *Nzeogwu* (1987), a biographical portrait of Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu who led the 1966 coup but died during the civil war while fighting on the side of Biafra.[5] In spite of the controversies generated by these books, they pointed to a direction that would later attract many fellow professionals, in or out of uniform. Many Nigerian officers have wanted to share with the reading public their experiences of the first military coup of 1966, the civil war and post-civil war military governance. These events are obviously major challenges in the intriguing history of the Nigerian Army. The urge to be part of a reconstruction of national history from the perspective of the military ruling class shared by Obasanjo stimulated subsequent (auto) biographies of military personnel.

A critical reading of these works allows us to identify three major categories. Some of them are autobiographies written by officers themselves usually after leaving the force. Post-service years afford a break from the regimented existence of the barracks and the crowded schedule of public office. There is ample time for 'looking back' with varying temperaments. Examples include David Ejoor's *Reminiscences* (1989), Olu Bajowa's *Spring of a Life: An Autobiography* (1992), Samuel Ogbemudia's *Years of Challenge* (1991), David Jemibewon's *A Combatant in Government* (1990), Abdul-Karim Adisa's *Loyal Command: An Autobiography of Major-General Abdul-Karim Alabi Adisa* (1999), and James Oluleye's *Architecturing a Destiny: An Autobiography* (2000).

In a second category are 'authorized' biographies written by others. These include Isawa Elaigwu's *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier-Statesman* (1986), Lindsay Barret's *Danjuma: The Making of a General* (1979),

Funmi Omosefunmi and Foluso Akinlonu's *30 Days in Power, 4 Years in Command: The Story of Vice-Admiral Akin Aduwo* (1997), Onukaba Adinoyi-Ojo's *Olusegun Obasanjo in the Eyes of Time: A Biography of the African Statesman* (1999) and Oluranti Afowowe's *Onward Soldier Marches On: A Biography of Major-General Robert Adeyinka Adebayo* (1998).

Some texts, and they belong to the third category, instal themselves in the spaces between (auto) biography and political discourse. They feature analyses of historical and political events as well as military governance along with materials drawn from the private lives of the authors or the central personalities of the narratives. Here, one can cite Chidi Amuta's *The Prince of the Niger: The Babangida Years* (1992), Uche Ezechukwu's *Abacha: The Myth, the Man* (1997) and Chris Alli's *The Federal Republic of Nigerian Army: The Siege of a Nation* (2001).

Curiously, there seems not to be much difference between the military officers' biographies and the autobiographies, especially in the mode of production and method of realization. One finds hazy or missing the objective distance that ought to exist between the biographer and the subject. The biographer who is well supported by the subject or his close associates essentially narrates the life from the viewpoint of the subject, defending his opinions and sometimes sharing his prejudices, biases and sentiments as, for instance, Omosefunmi and Akinlonu demonstrate. Thus, the biography becomes only slightly different from the autobiography.

What accounts for the increasing fascination of military officers for the genre? What are the factors that motivated them to explore life narratives? Arguably, some of the texts are goaded by the quest for acclaim and 'immortality' which successful writing confers on its producer. However, some are stimulated by mercantilist calculations, considering the financial success that the subculture of patronage and distribution through public launching often attracts. Apart from this, military officers in Nigeria, whether by design or accident of circumstance, often leave the force when they could still put in more active years in public service. The manner of exit ranges from outright dismissal to voluntary or compelled retirement. Those who consider themselves too 'young' to fade away from the public sphere look forward to another opportunity in the future to serve through a career in politics. (Auto) biography is therefore sometimes used as a prefatory step into this new arena. It

offers a ready means of painting a good record of performance while the commission lasted in order to secure a positive public evaluation for the subject and place him in good stead for political competition in a democratic dispensation.

The pre-eminence of the military in Nigeria's post-independence governance, and the success-after-misery stories of many officers who held public office during the period, are generally self-recommending subjects for (auto) biography. This is more so in a country where, in the words of Omosefunmi and Akinlonu, 'leaders tended to play god' (1997: 63). By virtue of their wealth, these officers could afford to bear the cost of production of their life narrative through the increasingly popular tradition of self-publishing in contemporary Nigeria. As an alternative, they or their friends/admirers can finance the production of biographical works. For instance, as the author acknowledges, a 'friend' of Babangida – Chief M. K. O. Abiola – financially supported the publication of Amuta's *The Prince of the Niger: The Babangida Years* (1992).

In a way, the boost in the production of life narratives by soldiers is a product of the economic expansion of the oil boom era of the 1970s. It also owes a measure of debt to the austerity and liberalization associated with the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced by the Babangida administration in 1986. The expansion in commerce in the 1970s had an impact on the book industry. Several indigenous publishing outfits developed alongside the dominant names of Oxford University Press, Macmillan, Heinemann and Longman. The new ones had to compete for survival with the international publishers who also struggled to remain in business in the face of economic recession in the 1980s and 1990s. With acute poverty and low literacy rate as a result of economic hardship, the publishing and patronage of fiction suffered a setback. One way of meeting the challenges of the market was to make publishing facilities available to those who could afford them. This class of people included wealthy military officers who would not mind investing in the venture of putting a perceived unpleasant record 'permanently straight' through (auto)biographical publications.

There is no doubt that successive military regimes in Nigeria accentuated political exclusion and economic hardship. Their arbitrary actions and policies, wanton abuse of human rights, inability to stem

corruption, among other failings, are strong indices of the performance of military rulers. As Fawole has aptly observed, the Nigerian military from its colonial inception has remained an instrument of coercion in the hands of a state that is essentially 'a predatory mechanism for plunder'. He submits that 'in the course of performing their duties of pacification on behalf of the rulers of the state, Nigerian soldiers are generally contemptuous of people's rights and freedoms, and consequently have elevated sheer lawlessness and banditry to a norm' (Fawole 2001: 61). Thus, conscious of the unfavourable representation of their actions in other published accounts and the negative responses that their public policies while in government might have generated, the military rulers find an appropriate medium in (auto) biography to counter this 'negativity'. In the words of David Ejoor in *Reminiscences*: 'This volume affords me the opportunity of stating *my own side of the story of events* during a crucial era of our nation's history' (Ejoor 1989: vii).

Consequently, from the perspective of the officers, the genre provides an opportunity to remedy the untoward perception/evaluation of the quality of leadership offered by soldiers during the era of military rule. To this end, there is an ostensible pursuit of collective redemption through individual testament of propriety. It is not surprising, therefore, that the image of 'failed administrators' with which the officers are associated by many analysts and critics are quite tempered in the (auto) biographical works, even when there is an admission of collective guilt. In *Loyal Command*, Adisa, a former governor of Oyo State and Minister of Works and Housing, dismisses his association in public perception with meanness, severity and sternness. Chapter 10 of the book, titled 'Not a Bull-dozer', reinforces the author's preoccupation with self or identity reconstruction. In his words:

> I am a favourite subject of cartoonists desirous of making a caricature of public officials. I have been portrayed ensconced behind the driving wheel of a bull-dozer exuberantly ready to charge at structures … Indeed the cartoons will provide a minefield [sic] of information in a study of what I am supposed to be but which thankfully I am not. (Adisa 1999: 69)

Some officers who took exception to the way they were represented in Obasanjo's *My Command*, and who disagreed with his interpretation

of historical events, also adopted the genre for rebuttal. Some perceived gaps in the stories of the civil war in the life narratives of other writers that they felt obliged to fill. Naturally, this became a pattern: one (auto) biography begets another, aiming at correcting perceived misrepresentations. Justifying the publication of *Reminiscences*, Ejoor declares: 'Telling my own story gives me a chance to answer some of those who, in an endeavour to exaggerate their own contribution to the nation's survival in those difficult years of 1966–1975, have sought not only to play down my own role, but to malign and deliberately misrepresent me' (Ejoor 1989: vii–viii). He explains the difficult circumstances in which he found himself as the Governor of Mid-western State when Biafran soldiers invaded. He was forced to flee the State House and find his way to Lagos through a bush path on a bicycle. Though the event painted him as a cowardly and disloyal officer who collaborated with Biafran soldiers against the federal government, he emphatically submits that he was 'really no more than a victim of circumstances' (p. 126). He writes a rejoinder to Obasanjo who derides him on account of this event as 'a helpless spectator' and a 'bicycle-riding fugitive' in *My Command* (1980: 37). According to Ejoor, 'circumstances may have catapulted Obasanjo to being Head of State … some of us who will no doubt die unsung did far more to "keep Nigeria one" in those critical months of 1966 and 1967 than Obasanjo was in a position to know, given his rank at that time' (1989: 127). In another respect, the author dismisses as 'a gross misconstruction and ignorance' Isawa Elaigwu's conclusion in *Gowon* that Ejoor had a 'lax attitude' as the Chief of Army Staff towards the issue of reorganization of the post-civil war Nigerian Army (1986: 130). In *Years of Challenge*, Samuel Ogbemudia (1991) responds to Ejoor's insinuation of collaboration between Ogbemudia and the Biafran soldiers in the invasion of Midwest. Both writers were military governors of the old Mid-western State from where they hail.

The biographers of Akin Aduwo in *30 Days in Power, 4 Years in Command* (Omosefunmi and Akinlonu 1997) also deplore the portrait of of their subject in Obasanjo's *My Command.* They highlight the undercurrents that informed his unfavourable disposition towards Aduwo while both were in office as Chief of Army Staff and Military Governor of Western State respectively. Obasanjo in his book claims that Aduwo was relieved of his appointment as the governor in order

to rescue him from the problem of the West 'which had overwhelmed him'. In defence of Aduwo, Omosefunmi and Akinlonu reveal the political intrigues that saw their subject out of power in a month. They ascribe the development to Obasanjo's intolerance, 'pre-meditated double standard, undisguised prejudice and hostile attitude' towards Aduwo, rather than the latter's incompetence.

One tendency that is noticeable from the foregoing is that one account emerges as a counter-discourse to or as a renegotiation of another. In this sense, one can speak of the genre as a dialogic space through which military rulers trade facts and interpretations of national history.

As for the subject matter, the works commonly present the central figure in association with people and places, showing the influence of the family and the environment on the formation of his personality. They provide information about genealogy, early childhood, educational profile, entry into the military and attainment of high professional status, which the works are essentially out to applaud. Besides, they articulate the views of the central personality on historical events, his 'philosophy of life' and experience in public office. The perceived largeness of the subject sometimes informs the attempt to dig into family origins, which in the manner of rendering is almost synonymous with his place of birth and/or ethnic affiliation. For example, Oluleye (2000) prefaces his narration in the first chapter (titled 'Birth in a Natural Fortress') of *Architecturing a Destiny* with an account of his roots in Efon Alaaye, a town in the present Ekiti State. Similarly, Olu Bajowa, the Acting Administrator of the South Eastern State and one-time Director General of the Ministry of Defence under the regime of General Babangida, documents his birth and upbringing as a Prince of Ikale in Ondo State. *Spring of a Life: An Autobiography* is his first in a proposed trilogy of life narrative (Bajowa 1992). The 151-page book also narrates his education and experience of life in Lagos as well as his enlistment and successful career in the Nigerian Army, from which he retired with the rank of major-general in 1980.

Another common focus of the soldiers' narratives is the subjects' struggles with the forces of fate and the harsh realities of life. These struggles are attended by varying degrees of failure and triumph. But one picture that is common to these accounts is that of a man who, as Ken Saro-Wiwa puts it, 'literally lifted himself by his boot straps'

(1989: 251). The subject usually rises from a modest background and attains remarkable success through 'hard work' and 'divine intervention' as expressed in the turn of destiny. Here, the reader encounters a seemingly Olympian figure who enjoys a pleasant reversal of the Aristotelian 'reversal of fortune'. Unlike the hero in classical Greek tragedy, the subject rises from rags to riches, from an inconsequential beginning to a lofty croft of power with attendant influence and wealth. Aduwo, for instance, is presented as a 'gallant Naval Officer, elevated from the drudgery of life as an inconsequential part of the rural humanity of Ode-Aye' (Saro-Wiwa 1989: 20) to become the Chief of Naval Staff. Similarly, Ejoor describes himself as the son of a poor Urhobo farmer/trader who could not pay his school fees as a child. His mother, a trader, financed the education of David the boy and that of his sisters. He had to supplement his mother's effort with proceeds from handicrafts. He was appointed Military Governor of Midwestern State and Chief of Staff, Nigerian Army, before his retirement.

The genre provides a platform for exposition and evaluation from within, of the military in national politics. As such, the reader comes to a clearer awareness of factors that ensure the domination of politics by military culture (even up to the present) as well as the ethos around which success and failure in the military profession are structured and facilitated. One of these is ethno-geographical affiliation.[6]

In view of the interested motive of the genre and the involvement of the subject in the process of production, objectivity is inherently problematic. The task of telling the truth 'as it is' becomes arduous. One finds traits of adulation, hero-worshipping and self-deification. In *Prince of the Niger*, a 354-page exposition on Babangida, his regime and legacy, Amuta (1992) sets out to distance his work from those of 'court biographers, sycophants and fifth columnists'. But his success in this regard is quite doubtful if one considers the following assertion among others in the book: 'The acts of good that were performed under his administration [Babangida's] to the greater number of Nigerians completely overwhelm the isolated instances when evil may have been enacted by the state' (Amuta 1992: 40). What Amuta produces is an apologia for a leader who was already having it rough in power. With the economic hardship that attended the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) as well as with the intrigues, uncertainties, corruption and equivocation that characterized Babangida's

programme for 'Transition to Civil Rule', Amuta's claim is suspect and many analysts would be wary of endorsing it.[7]

The point can be corroborated by another illustration. The military (auto) biographies usually present stories of material success attained through hard work. Even when evidence from the public sphere points to mismanagement or nepotism by the individual while holding public office, there is usually a dignified silence on such unpleasant details. Acts of arbitrariness and violation of human rights among other excesses are conveniently omitted or appropriately tempered in the narratives. For instance, Adisa in *Loyal Command* defends the policy of demolishing 'illegal structures' under flyovers and within 30 metres of federal highways in Lagos while he was the Minister of Works and Housing. However, the autobiography refrains from explaining that in carrying out the demolition, men of the Special Task Force under the Soldier-Minister's command destroyed structures that were not under any bridge, including structures that were clearly beyond a range of 100 metres, using bulldozers from the Ministry of Works.[8]

In another instance, since his demise on 8 June 1998, there have been substantiated allegations of gross abuse of office and corrupt enrichment against General Sani Abacha during his tenure as head of state between 1993 and 1998.[9] Ihonvbere (2001: 18) underscores these allegations when he describes Abacha as belonging to the class of 'bloodthirsty despots and world renowned looters of their respective national treasuries'.[10] Nevertheless, the portrait of Abacha painted by Adisa (1999: 102) in *Loyal Command* is strikingly more redeeming:

> Abacha remains, in my modest estimation, the quintessence of fair-mindedness and firmness; a true but an underestimated soldier not given to lies. No pretence. He taught and I imbibed that *it is soldierly to tell and stand by the truth, to put all cards on the table as a matter of honour and never to bend the rules for vested interests.* (emphasis added)

It can be argued that the assumption of office by Abacha as an unelected head of state on 17 November 1993, the acts of repression experienced under his regime and the failed transition programme that he super-intended all point to 'bending the rules for vested interests'.

Readers in search of truth and objectivity have to look beyond soldiers' self-writing. Critics should not just engage the text, but also the world outside which the text seeks 'transparently' to recount. They have

to look for information from other sources such as books on politics and history, newspapers and magazines, popular songs, cartoons, films, fiction, drama and theatre. One reading should be mediated by the experience of other text(s). The submissions in each of the texts need to be weighed against similar texts in the genre as well as other means of life documentation.

Conclusion

At the moment, the list of (auto) biographical discourses of military men who have participated in governance since the first coup of 1966 is growing. Many have been written and many more are likely to be produced in order to meet what the officers and their mouthpieces perceive as 'gaps' in Nigeria's extant narratives. Such self-representations will be helpful if one is to probe the contours of state collapse and authoritarianism among other indices of the military years in governance. As such, they deserve more than passing attention or premature dismissal by scholars. This chapter has observed that these life-narratives, being an essential part of national historiography, need to be understood as a medium for renegotiating Nigerian history and politics. They provide insights into the complexity of power relations in Nigerian society and the way they involve the military profession. The information provided by this genre may contribute to an informed evaluation by critics. They allow the critics to confront the personalities who have shaped and distorted the nation's history. The texts are, of course, replete with gaps, absences, silences and omissions. As Belsey (1980: 136) has rightly noted, 'the task of criticism, then, is to establish the unspoken in the text, to decentre it in order to produce a real knowledge of history'. Since the genre manifests inter-textuality and counter-narration through which truth is configured and reconfigured, a text can supply the missing strand in another narrative. A text should, therefore, not be treated in hermetic isolation or as a complete whole. Rather, it should be considered along with other texts with which it shares a generic boundary and with which it is in a dialogic relationship. Writers and critics whose allegiance is to the public and posterity should carefully examine this class of (auto) biography. They should not only study it, but also contribute by adding their own understanding and interpretations. Their contributions will go a long way in ensuring a proper representation of an era that has been hitherto portrayed with

a bewildering admixture of facts and fabrication. There is a need to be aware not only of the 'identity productions' of the 'green gods' but also of their substantive role in Nigeria's post-independence political history, which they have dominated.

Notes

1 '(Auto) biography' in this chapter refers to both biography and autobiography.

2 'Subject' refers to the central personality in the life narrative.

3 'Green gods' is metaphorically used in this chapter to refer to Nigerian army officers. The designation is derived from a pun on the colour of the Army uniform, which is green. However, 'green' also connotes inexperience. This implies that soldiers are greenhorns in the sphere of politics and governance, hence their inability properly to nurture democratic development after about three decades in power. Meanwhile, their domination of power space, their *deus-ex-machina*-like manner of intervention in political crises, their imperious disposition and their association with a certain measure of omnipotence by citizens when they take over power mark them out as 'gods'. While in power, some of these officers too carried on as if they were omniscient and omnipresent. They gave the impression that they had solutions to all the socio-political problems facing the nation, hence their intervention in every aspect of the polity. 'Green gods', therefore, captures the paradox or ambivalence of military governance. Niyi Osundare has earlier employed this metaphor in *Waiting Laughters* (1990: 49).

4 Such ceremonies were usually attended by 'eminent' personalities from different segments of the polity, from corporate organizations to private enterprises, government departments and parastatals. The invited guests would be expected to purchase copies at prices well above the bookshelf prices, or simply make financial donations with a view to offsetting the production cost and leaving behind some margin of profit.

5 Obasanjo thereafter published another autobiographical piece titled *Not My Will* (1990). This work also generated a great deal of controversy. For instance, it provoked an instant response from Ebenezer Babatope in *Not His Will* (1991). Here, Babatope, a politician, tries to defend Chief Obafemi Awolowo against perceived denigration by Obasanjo.

6 Though the works, admittedly, often paint records of remarkable achievements, there exists some soul-searching, lamentation and a nostalgic yearning for the restoration of professionalism and integrity obviously compromised in the course of the politicization of the military. For instance, Adisa in *Loyal Command* writes:

> However, I think it will be dishonest to say that military involvement in government has done the nation any good. Undoubtedly, professionalism has been affected. In the name of security, a lot of wrong appointments have been made: there is no regard for seniority, no regard for experience, no regard for competence. Rather, it is politics, intrigues, god-fatherism.

> Trust has been eroded and very little premium is placed on loyalty. It has been difficult even to organize exercise of training: there is always the suspicion that you might be planning a coup ... [sic]. (Adisa 1999: 97)

7 Compare this view with an assessment of Babangida's regime in Ihonvbere's essay 'A Radical View of Nigeria's Political Development' (Ihonvbere 1996: 108–34).

8 See S. Fulani, 'By Force', *News Magazine*, 10 June 1996, pp. 18–19; J. Oyewole, 'The Coming of Adisa's Bulldozers', *P.M. News*, 4 June 1996, pp. 2–3; C. Iwuoha, 'Aksion on the Bridge', *This Day*, 26 May 1996, p. 11.

9. Abacha was alleged to have looted 9 billion dollars with the aid of foreign banks and multinational companies. See *The Anchor*, 22 August 2001.

10 Other despots mentioned in this category include Idi Amin of Uganda, Jean Bedel Bokassa of Central African Empire and Marcias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea. They are portrayed in a play by Soyinka as discussed in Adekoya's chapter in this book.

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TWO | Students, youths and people

4 | Ambiguous transitions: mediating citizenship among youth in Cameroon

JUDE FOKWANG

More often than not, ethnographies of Africa have treated 'youth' as a supporting category rather than a subject of exclusive inquiry (cf. Furlong 2000; Durham 2000). The academic marginalization of youth has prompted Caputo (1995) to describe youth as anthropology's *silent others*. That is, 'silenced' by academia but not necessarily by the social contexts and structures they find themselves in (cf. Mbembe 1985). Thus, the notion of youth as the *silent others* pertains to the claim that comparatively less scholarship was devoted to this social category until the late twentieth century. Today, however, there is a vibrant trend which allows for substantial debate and intellectual exchange on the general subject of youth. Anthropologically speaking, one could suggest that scholarship in this domain has come of age (Diouf 2003).

In Cameroon, most of the research on youth has focused on the predicament of youth in the context of prolonged economic crisis and the country's flawed democratic transition (Fokwang 1999; Onana 2000; Nna 2001; Jua 2003; Konings 2002, 2003; Nyamnjoh and Page 2002). Researchers have also investigated patterns of political socialization and the ways in which youths appropriate symbols of state power, particularly in their art and dance (Argenti 1998). Another interesting domain of research that has emerged in the past two years is the involvement of youth in fraudulent schemes known in Cameroon as *feymania* (Malaquais 2001). This refers to the art of trickery or the use of crafty underhand ingenuity to deceive or cheat. *Feymania* has gained tremendous notoriety in Cameroon since 1990 and, today, it constitutes a fully-fledged profession for a good number of young adults – a profession that ties in neatly with Cameroon's growing reputation as a corrupt state.

Some of the studies have shown, in varying degrees, the coping strategies of youth and the role of new youth movements in negotiating transition to adulthood for its members. Scholars have investigated

President Biya's Youth (Presby) (see Jua 2003) and Konings (2003) has recently investigated the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), a youth movement advocating armed struggle as a means of achieving independence for the two Anglophone provinces from Francophone-dominated Cameroon. However, none of these studies has dealt explicitly with youth experiences and discourses of citizenship. While some of the studies have argued that youths have responded to Cameroon's economic and political crises in differential patterns (for example, see Jua 2003), none of them has accounted for the different biographic trajectories undertaken by young people in the context of Cameroon's political and social (dis)order. My study seeks to fill this gap and to explore further the relationship between youth transition and citizenship as localized experiences within the current global era.

This chapter addresses the subject of youth transition and its relationship to the struggles for citizenship in contemporary Cameroon. It is premised on the assumption that the end of youth transition is not simply adulthood but, precisely, full social and political citizenship, and that for many young people today this end is elusive. It is against this background that young people have begun to redefine their identities and aspirations, thus transgressing local understandings of citizenship. John Urry (1999) has argued that the struggles for citizenship around the world constitute one of the most powerful organizing processes of the late twentieth century. This is because citizenship, at least in its broadest sense, defines those who are and who are not members of a given society (Barbalet 1988). This implies that citizenship deals with identity as much as with boundaries. Increasingly, this definition has been contested, particularly in the era of globalization, characterized by high degrees of flows and closures (cf. Meyer and Geschiere 1999). For instance, there is current talk of 'global citizenship' (Urry 1999) and it is doubtful to what extent this is relevant to Cameroonian experiences, particularly in a context where national citizenship is bereft of any substance for the bulk of young people, including adults. Citizenship has two broad classifications, namely, political and social citizenship. The former is defined by an individual's capacity to participate in certain political institutions and processes, especially in the election of government (local or national) and in the welfare and taxation systems. The latter is rooted in the assumption that an individual has the right to the prevailing living standard in society, especially education,

health, housing and social welfare (Jones and Wallace 1992: 21). This chapter will draw heavily on the concept of social citizenship which underpins the critical relationship between individuals/groups and the post-colonial state.

Be that as it may, citizenship 'has become a matter for concern and inquiry as increasing numbers of young people experience blocked opportunities, reduced access to the necessary resources, and social exclusion in their endeavour to negotiate the complex pathways to full participation in adult society' (Williamson 1997: 209). It is against this background that there is consensus among researchers on youth, that although citizenship rights are gradually acquired during youth, access to these rights, including the right to full participation in society, is still determined by social structures of inequality such as class, gender, race, disability and so on (Jones and Wallace 1992: 18). This contention is revealing, not only of the experiences of youths in developed countries, but also of those in developing countries, particularly in Africa. Thus, it is important to investigate and account for the ways in which youths attempt to negotiate scarce resources and opportunities in the context of these difficulties. However, my chapter will focus specifically on the ways youths represent and justify various forms of negotiations or 'struggles' in their transition to adulthood. Hence, the specific question to be addressed is: what are young people's understanding and experiences of citizenship in Cameroon and how do these shape the choices they make in their transition to adulthood?

Ethnographic context

It should be borne in mind that my research deals with a specific category of young people in Cameroon, mainly students and young graduates in urban centres; thus, my findings do not necessarily reflect the reality of the broader youth population in the country. This chapter draws on my ethnographic research conducted in two cities in Cameroon between December 2001 and March 2002. Data were collected by means of case studies (tape-recorded interviews), some limited participant observation and a survey in the cities of Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, and Buea, the capital of the South West Province. These two cities were chosen because of the accessibility and diversity of students in state universities and other professional schools. These were also popular destinations for many young people

from other provinces of the country who came in search of jobs, travel opportunities and to write competitive exams for recruitment into the public service or government-run professional schools. Thus, the cities offered an exciting variety in terms of the variables that were relevant to my study, such as gender, ethnicity, level of education, linguistic orientation (Anglophone, Francophone) and regional origins.

I conducted a total of twenty intensive interviews with willing participants and also administered questionnaires to individuals who were members of specific youth groups that I identified as vital to the scope of my study. Fifty questionnaires were distributed in Yaoundé and fifty in Buea. The sampling method was not random but purposive because this was based on individual membership to identified groups. My emphasis was on the diversity of respondents, especially in terms of group membership and gender. I should also point out that most of the informants were high school and university students, including a selection of unemployed youths as well as young people employed in the public and private sectors. Given the nature of the study, I do not claim any degree of representativeness, although I have a strong conviction that many Cameroonian youths would identify with the different individuals or groups that make up my sampling population.

Although the issue of citizenship was researched as part of a broader study on youth activism in Cameroon, I think it is important to highlight some of the key variables I was interested in. I wanted to identify and understand the kinds of social networks that young people created and their purposes, their economic activities, sources of support, particularly financial and material, their degree of dependency, independence or interdependence on kin-based groups, ethnic, social and religious associations. I also thought it was important to determine the degree of youths' involvement in decision-making processes, particularly those that concerned them (such as in policy-making), their voting history (that is, if they had voted in any government-organized election), and their perception of their rights and duties as young citizens in Cameroon. Last but not least, I also asked informants to indicate how they would define their identities (such as Anglophone, Francophone, Northwesterner, Bamileke etc.). My case studies drew from individuals' repertoire of 'struggles' in negotiating their transition to adulthood and, consequently, as citizens. For instance, I asked informants to describe their ambitions, the opportunities they had

encountered, created or failed to maximize, the challenges they faced, and the ways they had or intended to tackle these problems. These data were collected and analysed by means of discourse analysis and classification. This resulted in the construction of three loosely defined categories, each identified by the parallel experiences or aspirations of its members. But before I delve into this, I will provide a brief insight into the economic, social and political situation in Cameroon. This is intended to provide a contextual background against which most of the discussions will be articulated later in the chapter.

Youth and the Cameroon state

At the end of the 1980s, Cameroon witnessed a reversal of its economic prosperity that had depended heavily on oil revenue (Jua 1993). The decline of the economy strengthened resort to kinship and ethno-regional or clan politics as elites fought over an ever-diminishing pool of state resources. Corruption also worsened as bureaucratic elites and politicians from President Biya's ethnic group publicly contended that it was their turn to monopolize the 'dining table' to the exclusion of other ethnic groups. With declining conditions of material subsistence, the legitimacy of the authoritarian state was greatly eroded and a growing sense of dissent began to dominate the public imagination. Collective anger also increased and members of civil society began to call for the liberalization of political space. By the early 1990s, students at Cameroon's only university (University of Yaoundé) joined in this process and organized several strikes to call for liberal reforms. Although these calls met with resistance from the Biya regime, John Fru Ndi went ahead and launched his party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), on 26 May 1990 in Bamenda. This event provided leeway for greater political dissent, compelling the government to liberalize political competition and the press in December 1990 (see Mbaku 2002; Takougang 2003). Political liberalization thus created space for the articulation of perceived or actual injustices by groups and communities who had found authoritarian rule unsafe to express their indignation against the Biya regime. Political reforms were soon followed by civil disobedience organized by a host of opposition parties, civic organizations and student movements in the form of 'Ghost Towns' or what were commonly referred to as *villes mortes*. President Paul Biya reluctantly consented to the pressures and opted to host the Tripartite Conference,

a defective mimicry of the Sovereign National Conference held in most Francophone countries. Though the talks yielded few dividends, they paved the way for legislative and presidential elections in March and October 1992 respectively.

Youths played a conspicuous role in the fight for democracy in Cameroon. During the launching of the SDF party in Bamenda, six youths were shot to death by soldiers sent to suppress the activities of the newly launched party. Between 1990 and 1991, students of the University of Yaoundé were organized into two ferociously opposed camps: the Parlement and Auto-defense.[1] The former incorporated students who advocated political liberalization; the latter, in the main, were students, notably of Beti origin, claiming to support the president, Paul Biya (a member of their ethnic group) and to resist popular attempts to undermine the Biya regime. It is alleged that brutal confrontations between the Parlement and Auto-defense led to the 'disappearance' of Parlement members. Dozens of these members were rumoured to have been murdered by government-hired thugs, including the military, and their corpses to have been buried in mass graves near the River Sanaga. A commission was set up to investigate the allegations but the chair of the commission, Professor Augustine Kontchou (then the Minister of Information and a government spokesperson) concluded that no Parlement member had died. This earned him the cynical name Zero-mort.

Unfortunately, the enthusiasm and momentum for change evidenced by the reintroduction of political parties was short-lived. The excitement petered out 'shortly after the presidential elections of October 1992, when the public was made to understand that democracy is not necessarily having as president the person the majority wants' (Nyamnjoh 1999: 114).[2] The situation has remained more or less the same even after subsequent local, parliamentary and presidential elections in 1996 and 1997 respectively. In fact, some commentators have described Cameroon's current status as located between 'survival' and 'reversal to authoritarianism' (Bratton and van de Valle 1997: 235). This seems to be the case when considered in the light of recent developments in the country, particularly the June 2002 local council and parliamentary elections in which the ruling CPDM won over 80 per cent of the seats in parliament following pre-election manipulation and sophisticated rigging mechanisms (see Nyamnjoh 2002; Takougang

2003; also see Cardinal Christian Tumi's *Open Letter to the Minister of Communication* in which he warns that the Cameroon government might provoke civil war due to its legendary 'partiality' and reluctance to embrace full democracy).[3]

Granting the above qualification, Cameroon's democracy could be described as pseudo, a package of recycled monolithic misrule, or rather a sort of 'T-shirt slogan' democracy whereby the power elite set the agenda for the masses, 'use them to serve their ends and at the end of the day, abandon them to the misery and ignorance to which they are accustomed' (Nyamnjoh 1999: 115). Thus, liberalization in Cameroon has not led to the consolidation of democracy. Takougang also maintains that Cameroon's path to democracy has been tortuous, not only because of the regime's capacity to manipulate and control the rate at which democratic reforms are introduced, but also because members of the opposition have been preoccupied more with the politics of the belly than pursuing a political agenda that will benefit the interests of the masses (see Takougang 2003: 427). However, this is not to insinuate that Cameroon is incapable of sustaining a liberal and democratic society given the extensive grassroots organizations struggling for democracy.

Despite this note of optimism, the current socio-economic situation does not offer much hope for many young people. The unemployment rate is estimated at 30 per cent, and 48 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.[4] And with the current structures of corruption and mismanagement, there is little hope that much will change in the near future. Youths are hardest hit by this predicament, precisely because it implies that their transition to adulthood will not only be indefinitely 'extended' but they might claim their citizenship rights only by proxy (see Jones and Wallace 1992). It cannot be overemphasized that youths differ in their perception of the problems at stake and tend to act based on these perspectives, which ostensibly change with time. Thus, I will begin by showing the different ways in which youths have responded to the 'crisis' and then attempt to account for the 'differential responses'. I will conclude by arguing that popular understandings of citizenship have undergone a redefinition among youths in Cameroon and that this should be taken into account in any discussion about citizenship in Africa.

I will describe the categories of persons or groups that I studied and

provide an account of the meanings they gave to their experiences as young people in contemporary Cameroon. For purposes of analysis, my ethnography is divided into three broad categories. These classes are neither frozen in time nor space. I contend that individuals exercised high degrees of resourcefulness and mobility from one 'strategy' to the other, although their 'actions' could not be isolated from the specific social contexts in which they found themselves. I should also suggest that my use of distinct categories does not exclude the possibility of individuals straddling two or more categories as dictated by the specific contexts. What I endeavour to get across is that each category consists of individuals or groups who shared similar experiences and views on the issues under study.

In broad perspective, they are as follows: (i) individuals or members of groups who aspired to or saw themselves as an elite-in-waiting, that is, as protégés of the ruling regime. These individuals described their transition to adulthood as an easy process, facilitated further by virtue of their strategic connection to state institutions and high officials; (ii) individuals or members of groups who were scrupulous in their attempt to draw a line between themselves and the state but would make use of any possibilities (either from the state or elsewhere) to negotiate their transition into adulthood and for recognition as citizens; (iii) individuals whose struggles for transition into adulthood were framed within secessionist discourses or the yearning to seek alternative citizenship such as migrating to so-called 'greener pastures'.

Elites-in-waiting or merchants of illusion?

One of the most conspicuous groups I identified was President Biya's Youths or Presby as it is popularly known. As implied by its name, it purports to support the president of Cameroon, Mr Paul Biya, who has ruled the country since 1982. Presby was not the only group that claimed to support the president, but it was by far the most prominent in the country. Indeed, there were countless groups spread across the country, each trying to outperform the other in its tribute and support for the president in particular, and men or women in powerful government positions in general. These groups were creative in their conception and use of fashionable and elegant names with the intention of attracting not only membership but also patrons, especially those in government positions. Some of the groups included Youths for the Support

of those in Power (YOSUPO) and another with the fascinating name of Movement for Youths of the Presidential Majority (MYPM). Apparently, President Biya's wife had also become the target of several youth organizations, the most popular of them known as Jeunesses Actives pour Chantal Biya (JACHABI).[5] These movements proliferated by the day and it was not possible for me to establish their exact number, members and objectives. But I had the feeling that there was something deeply sinister about the emergence of countless youth organizations, particularly during the previous five years. Some of these new groups were created by former Presby members disappointed with the leadership of Presby. An attempt by some youths to create a counter-organization with the objective of supporting prominent opposition leaders was discouraged. Nevertheless, many of the youth organizations were modelled on the objectives of Presby. Their strategic mission was to harness a group of disaffected and marginalized youths for tributary purposes. This kind of mobilization is characteristic of patrimonial states where patron–client networks are deeply entrenched, thus constituting the mainstream order of everyday politics. Their practices range from what Mbembe (1992) has termed 'illicit cohabitation' to collaboration and in some cases outright rebellion against the system. O'Brien (1996) observes that groups of this nature tend to harbour predators as well as heroes and victims. And it seems to me that Presby represents an archetype of such groups, and therefore needs critical examination.

Presby emerged from a defunct group known as Auto-defense,[6] created in the early 1990s by a former rector of the University of Yaoundé, Professor Jean Messi. Messi's Auto-defense was an ethnic militia, created to protect Beti interests on campus and to counter the activities of pro-democracy student movements such as the Parlement.[7] Its membership was composed of students, thugs and paramilitary persons who tracked down, intimidated and brutalized pro-democracy activists. By the mid-1990s, when tensions over political liberalization had dwindled, and Auto-defense had become less popular or useful, its members transformed it from an ethnic militia to an open movement with the intention of attracting more membership and attention from the Biya government. Its transformation was slow and it took several years before it became popular as a youth movement with national pretensions. Its objective was no longer to counter the struggle for democracy among youth, but to promote the political ideals of Biya as

outlined in his book, *Communal Liberalism* (1985). Membership was also opened to all interested persons; some members were over forty years but aligned themselves with the category of youth. Today, Presby is the foremost mass youth organization and claims to represent the interests of all young Cameroonian citizens.

According to statistics that could not be verified, its national membership (as of 2001) was 120,000 including 7,900 office-holders.[8] During my research in 2002, I established that the group had not yet held any elections to legitimize its national leadership. It is in this light that its president, Philomen Ntyam Ntyam, is accused of being a self-imposed leader, although little can be done about it. Thanks to his leadership of Presby, he was appointed by President Paul Biya as a member of the Central Committee of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). Apparently this status seems to have granted him some kind of 'official' immunity, as is the case with most members of the Central Committee of the CPDM. That is to say, they can avoid government inquiry into any allegations of undemocratic or corrupt activity. For instance, some members of Presby in Yaoundé alleged that Ntyam Ntyam had misused Presby funds in his frequent trips to Europe (Germany in particular) where he claimed to have established international branches of the association, but at the time of writing, no inquiry has been carried out and it is unlikely anything will be done in this regard.

Thus, by the end of the decade, Presby had successfully established itself as a national organization, with branches in almost all the provinces and divisions in the country. Although it claimed to be apolitical (that is to say, it did not profess allegiance to any political party), in reality the organization was affiliated to the ruling party. In the recent past, there have been serious disputes between leaders of Presby and the youth wing of the ruling party, the YCPDM, in Kumba, a city in the South West Province, and, according to newspaper reports, most government elites tended to favour Presby.[9] It is not certain if these disputes have been resolved, but this particular episode made it clear that Presby was not 'apolitical' as it claimed in its flyers. It still does not have a national constitution and, interestingly, there was no head office during the period of my research. Despite several attempts, I was unable to get hold of the national president at his home in Olezoa, Yaoundé. Members of the organization were expected, sooner or later, to pro-

cure CPDM membership cards and paraphernalia. The organization's general objective was to support Biya and lobby for government funds and positions for its members. Influential members of government were also reported to have recruited Presby officials to campaign for the CPDM and, in some cases, were entrusted with the inauspicious tasks of destabilizing the activities of opposition parties and brutalizing opponents of the government.[10] The organization also enjoyed extensive support and patronage from CPDM elites nation-wide. A member of the government elite in the South West Province, for example, was alleged to have bought about a thousand Presby membership cards for distribution among youths who had difficulties completing their registration formalities.

It was against this background that I gained a deeper understanding of the ideas and perspectives of Presby members regarding citizenship. In general, most of them suggested that they were already members (or aspirants, depending on their level of 'integration' in the association) of a privileged class of citizens. In popular terms, they saw themselves as the 'true' leaders of tomorrow, owing to their grooming through various networks of patronage. Some of them gave the impression that transition into adulthood for them was simply a smooth process. Most of those I interviewed asserted a narrative which emphasized the economic and social benefits they had gained from the state. Individuals who held such opinions were, in the main, students of the *Ecole National d'Administration et de Magistrature* (ENAM), one of the most prestigious schools in the country where civil administrators are trained. In general, students in state-run professional schools gave the impression that they would encounter no problem in getting employment in the civil service upon completion of their programmes.

Presby members suggested that they enjoyed certain rights and benefits from the state, and that they also observed their duties to the state and its institutions. With reference to the latter point, Presby members claimed that they were, in many respects, the 'best' citizens, owing to their passionate support for Biya who was the 'incarnation' of the state in Cameroon. In return, they expected jobs and other sinecures associated with the patrimonial state. Those who were new to the organization expressed profound enthusiasm and expected that, with time, they would gain access to jobs or entry into prestigious public schools.

I should emphasize the point that I am not interested in whether

individual members believed in the objectives or ideals of the association, but, rather, I conceive of their participation as performative acts. In this regard, quite a number of them expressed their association with Presby in instrumental terms, but were careful not to convey this view in public. Many were encouraged to join after having heard that it was easier to get a job in the civil service by doing so. Examples of such incentives are many but, in reality, elusive. During a trip to the Bui Division in the North West Province in September 2001, Penandjo Roger, national chargé de mission of Presby, was reported to have promised 'government favours' to youths of the division who joined the organization. He pointed to the recent appointments of two Bui elites – one as Minister of Transport and the other as Director of Security at the presidency in Yaoundé – as indicators of President Biya's favour to those who showed allegiance to him and the ruling party. During this trip, Penandjo also presented thirty scholarship application 'forms' (not awards) for study in Bangladesh to Presby members who had a minimum qualification of the Advanced Level Certificate. He then concluded his speech by asserting 'that it's only when you join Presby that you can have these opportunities'.[11] Another example was Biya's Youth Day speech of 10 February 2002 in which he suggested he had facilitated the 'full integration' of 1,700 previously part-time primary school teachers into the public service. He also hinted that more such initiatives would be negotiated in the future. In a country where the government is still the principal employer, one can understand the intense euphoria such statements tend to provoke among a largely unemployed youth population.

These 'performative utterances' created the illusion that all Presby members would benefit from the organization but the reality was that many members were disappointed with the unfulfilled promises of the organization and the Biya regime in general. While some members considered the idea of quitting, others resorted to crime as an exit option. Some members went as far as using the organization's name to extort money from elites and businessmen. The case of Charles Esseme was particularly infamous. Esseme was the Provincial Secretary of Presby for the South West Province and was reported to have extorted money from parastatals in the province such as the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), and the South West Development Authority (SOWEDA). He was also accused of having threatened some

state employees with punitive transfers in return for huge sums of money (cf. Jua 2003: 30–1). These kinds of practices might become widespread since competition for fewer and fewer resources is getting tighter by the day. The proliferation of groups such as Presby and individuals such as Esseme tend to reinforce the intricate networks that have contributed to the criminalization of the state in Africa (cf. Bayart et al. 1999) as well as the instrumentalization of disorder (Chabal and Daloz 1999).

Self-made citizens

The second category of persons I identified consisted of individuals who were not particularly interested in party politics. None of them was a member of Presby nor of any of the groups that advocated support for government elites or President Biya in particular. These individuals were, in the main, members of cultural groups and other associations that could be labelled 'self-help' associations. In most cases, these individuals did not see themselves as excluded from the benefits or privileges of citizenship. Many of them, indeed, claimed to have benefited from the state in various ways. According to one insightful informant, one did not necessarily need to be a member of the CPDM or its related organizations to enjoy the 'favours' of the state. One could be the nephew, niece, cousin, far kin or just a friend of an influential member of the ruling party, and use these networks to negotiate state favours. In fact, some government elites, it was alleged, measured the degree of their success or 'inner status' within the party and state bureaucracy by the number of kinspeople and friends they had helped as a result of their strategic location within the nexus of power. This claim ties in with the concept of 'ethnic barons' who tend to play the role of brokers between the central government and their ethnic groups or regions.

This second category includes two principal kinds of individuals. First, those who dismissed the relevance of direct relatedness to the ruling party and other dubious organizations as key routes through which they could benefit from state 'favours'. Second, those who made use of a combination of horizontal networks, including the state, to achieve their own private ends. Individuals in this category tended to define themselves as citizens in so far as they had the freedom and means to carry out any activities that enhanced their goals, particularly

that of becoming and being recognized as 'adults'. By this, they meant the need to find employment, marry, raise a family and become 'responsible' members of society. These constituted in the main what many informants referred to as the 'goals of life'. The goals of life included a vast, almost inexhaustible set of ideals towards which many individuals aspired, but as noted above, there were certain common principles. Perhaps I should note that most of my interviewees indicated that they had failed to attain their 'goals' such as negotiating entry into prestigious professional schools, or finding a job in the private sector. In the following paragraphs, I will examine the cases of two young informants who I think represent the variety of persons in this category.

Carlson Ayuk (pseudonym) was a young man of twenty-eight who lived in the overcrowded student neighbourhood of Bonamoussadi, Yaoundé. He was a graduate of the Ecole Normale Superieur (ENS) at Bambili (a professional school of the University of Yaoundé I, specialized in the training of secondary school teachers). He was also the oldest child in a family of seven and still depended on the meagre salary of his father, a head teacher in a remote border village of Takamanda in the South West Province. Two of his siblings were students at the universities of Buea and Dschang respectively and also depended on their father for their major needs. Their mother was a petty trader and also did a bit of gardening.

Every year, the ENS, like all the other professional schools, organizes competitive public examinations, known in Cameroon as 'concours'. The objective is to recruit about eighty candidates into each academic department to be trained and deployed in the service of the government. In some of these professional schools, such as the ENS, private persons can be admitted but will not be employed by the state after completion of their studies. Every year, tens of thousands write these competitive exams with the primary objective of securing a position in the government's list of the 'chosen few'. Unfortunately, many candidates do not succeed, but some are given the opportunity to enrol as private candidates (as opposed to the government's candidates). Carlson was one of those who succeeded in enrolling as a private candidate in 1995. Like many others, he had nursed the ambition that, upon entry into ENS, he would write the 1996 session of the competitive exams in order to rise a step forward, that is, gain access into the government's list. But he wrote the exams and still failed. I should also

point out that the selection process is riddled with terrifying fraud. Membership of the CPDM or the Presby and similar organizations becomes extremely useful at this juncture. Those who do not have party cards (or visible connections) as evidence of their commitment to Biya's version of 'advanced' democracy have to look for alternative means to attain the same objective, such as bribing their way through. In most cases, people combine both methods in view of the fact that competition is remarkably stiff.

Carlson graduated in 1998 as a private candidate after having exhausted every possible means to negotiate his name on to the government's 'list'. He was deeply disappointed because he graduated as the best student in his class, although this did not count in the eyes of government authorities. He would have preferred to search for a job, but his father encouraged him to apply to the Higher National Teachers' Training School in Yaoundé. Carlson told me he would have succeeded if he had fulfilled the request of a key member of the selection committee who demanded $1,000 as bribe. He also claimed to have written a series of competitive exams but had not succeeded in any. When I interviewed Carlson, he had a part-time job as an English teacher for a couple of French-speaking pupils but this could only pay for his transportation around the city. He was deeply anxious about his future and his prospects of becoming an adult in the eyes of his parents and his extended family.

Julienne is the subject of my second case. She was twenty-three and a drop-out from the University of Yaoundé. She claimed that she had been sexually harassed by one of her professors and, after unsuccessful attempts to seek justice, had decided to leave the university. But all was not lost for her. She wrote the entrance examination into the Institut National de Jeunesse et de Sport (INJS) and with 'supplementary' help from her uncle, who was a prominent member of the CPDM in the South West Province, her place in the prestigious school was guaranteed. When she graduated, she was posted to teach physical education in one of the government secondary schools in Buea. Although Julienne was a beneficiary of 'state favour', she was, however, critical of the regime, partly because she had many friends who, she claimed, had better qualifications than she did, but were unemployed and very poor. She also claimed to know of many Presby members who had failed to get a job or to make it to government professional

schools. Some of them, she told me, had also failed in their business ventures because of high taxes.

Marginal citizens and the 'exit option'

The last category was made up of individuals who claimed that their rights as young citizens had not only been abused by the state, but completely eroded. Many youths insisted that they felt betrayed by the Biya government and there was no prospect of them ever becoming 'proper' citizens in Cameroon. This was particularly true of my informants in Buea who suggested that, as Anglophones, they would never be treated as equals with their Francophone counterparts in a Francophone-dominated country. Piet Konings (2003) has recorded similar feelings of disillusionment among members of the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) whose response to marginalization is armed struggle against the government of Cameroon and the establishment of a separate Anglophone polity. So, how is the current generation of African youths reacting to their growing marginalization (cf. Konings 2003: 1)? There is no single answer to a question of this nature, but it should be emphasized that youths' responses have been multiple and diverse. Responses range from various forms of resistance to diverse modes of seeking access to the state (conformity). However, I am interested particularly in the option of 'migration' which has become extremely popular although unattainable for the bulk of youth in West Africa.

Travelling abroad for many youths in West Africa has become associated with emancipation, if not a mode of self-affirmation (see Timera 2001). And although youths have different purposes and understanding of this activity, it has been subsumed under the concept of *falling bush*. Apparently, this pidgin phrase borrows from indigenous notions of tedious and dangerous expeditions into the black bush (cf. Argenti 1998). In popular parlance, the black bush refers to a 'forest' far away from human settlement. It is a jungle of abundance par excellence, attractive to the daring but inherently hazardous. It is also a no-man's territory, characterized by wild, unseen and mysterious entities. It is also a strategic setting for many heroic fables. In the coastal and grassfields areas of Cameroon, the black bush is the most suitable area to go in search of game, wild fruits, timber, medicines and so on. In ancient times the black bush was more or less the exclusive domain of herbalists

and traditional doctors but, today, women venture into these bushes and some even practise farming there. To fall bush is synonymous with the notion of going to the black bush, but it is suffused with a new meaning. In a way, one could claim that it is a modern version of the 'black bush' legacy, dominated instead by the young, not the holders of arcane knowledge, as it were. Precisely, Europe and North America have become the imagined new 'black bushes' where many youths would do anything possible to explore the mysteries of super-abundance, notwithstanding the risks involved.[12] In fact, risk-taking has become a marker of youth mingled with heroism (France 2000).

Those who succeed to migrate are known as 'bush fallers'. No interviews were carried out with 'bush fallers' owing to their non-availability. However, it would be interesting to conduct a study among these so-called bush fallers in order to explore their notions of success, self-actualization and citizenship. One of the dramatic cases I recorded during my research concerned a young man named Tom (pseudonym). He was thirty when he left for Switzerland in June 2000. Prior to his departure, he worked as a security guard at Patron's Hotel in Bamenda. Tom also a held a bachelor's degree in environmental science from the University of Buea. His story was recounted to me by his younger brother, a third-year student at the same university. In order to prepare for his journey, Tom received some money from their oldest sister who lived in Copenhagen. He immediately offered a bribe for the instant production of a passport in Douala. Suspecting that a formal application for a Swiss visa might not be fruitful, he instead bought his flight ticket and established some connections with two 'senior' customs officials. The idea was to go through the airport without being subjected to visa checks or any relevant bureaucratic procedures. He succeeded in bribing his way through with $500 and, thanks to his connection with some 'seniors', a customs official was assigned to accompany him right to the plane. Upon arrival in Switzerland, he destroyed his passport, or so it was claimed, and applied for refugee status.

Apparently, several Cameroonians are reported to have travelled to Europe through similar channels and 90 per cent of them seek refugee status in Europe. Little is known of the predicament of these youths after their arrival and no study has been conducted on this. In exceptional cases, there might be a newspaper or online article about the

atrocities committed by or against some of these youths. On Thursday, 25 September 2003, for example, a young man of twenty-seven of Cameroonian nationality, resident in Britain, threatened to burn himself alive following allegations that his application for refugee status in the UK had been rejected and that he was going to be deported. He was reported to have entered a Bradford courtroom holding a petrol container and a lighter. His clothes were also reported to be soaked with petrol. This incident attracted a huge crowd, including the local Bradford police together with firefighters. The stand-off lasted more than five hours until a local priest eventually convinced him to give up his threat of suicide.[13] It is not yet clear what the young man's motive was, but this incident revealed the desperate measures which some young people would take to avoid deportation to Cameroon, a sign of failure and forced return from the 'bush'. It is claimed that this incident has inspired new legislation in Britain which refuses entry to Cameroonian citizens on transit without UK visas. Previously, Cameroonians on transit through Britain did not require a transit visa but it seems the British government has taken pre-emptive measures against those who allegedly abuse their system.[14]

It is apparent that the realities of the global age have dawned on Cameroonians. The increase in communication and the unlimited opportunities promised and facilitated by new communication technologies have offered expectations of unimaginable proportions to many young Cameroonians. The introduction of the American visa lottery, popularly known as the DV, has also added renewed impetus to the fascination of 'falling bush'. Since 1994, the American government has promised to grant 50,000 Green Cards to citizens of countries with 'low rates of immigration to the US' on an annual basis. Although the competition does not discriminate on the basis of race or socio-economic status, it is apparent that most of its recent winners are young adults and African. Thus, the DV programme has offered many Cameroonian youths a chance to gamble with their citizenship. In 2002, 775 Cameroonians were granted the opportunity to migrate to the USA as permanent residents. This probably included people already living in the USA or elsewhere. The number fell to 675 in 2003 but reached an all-time high, as disclosed by the DV 2004 results, whereby 1,531 Cameroonians won. In the survey I conducted in Buea and Yaoundé, 75 per cent of the respondents aspired to leave Cameroon for Europe and the USA if granted

the opportunity. Thus, one can see the kinds of expectations generated among youth by programmes such as the Diversity Visas and the attractions of the West broadcast on satellite television and the internet.

TABLE 4.1 Number of 'diversity visas' granted to selected West African countries (2002–04).

Year	Cameroon	Nigeria	Ghana	Gabon	Chad	Senegal
2002	775	6,049	6,531	18	19	379
2003	675	5,989	6,333	20	45	199
2004	1,531	7,145	7,040	14	41	269

With the advent of the internet and cell phones, youths in the major cities of Cameroon have demonstrated a deep interest in and the capacity to make use of these technologies, as a mode of escaping the 'emptiness' of national citizenship. But for the bulk of Cameroonian youths, access to the internet is extremely limited and still expensive[15] (see for instance Facer and Furlong's 2001 article for similar experiences of British youths at the margins of the information revolution). Today, young people in Cameroon are known to have negotiated marriages over the internet and the numbers seem be on the increase (also see Jua 2003 on internet dating in Cameroon). During a brief visit in January 2002 to Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon, I visited an internet café where the managers, whom I had known for a couple of years, recounted to me their recent success in finding a Moroccan husband for a customer named Alima (pseudonym). Alima was reported to have travelled to Morocco a few days before my visit. Her perceived 'success' spurred more youths in Alima's neighbourhood to take a chance on the vast possibilities of 'arranged marriage' over the internet. And for this, the managers of the internet café were extremely happy because of the sudden boom in their business. One of the excited customers whom I interviewed (15 January 2002) expressed her opinion about this new venture as follows:

> We have no future in this country. Everything revolves around corruption and for those of us who have no godfathers, or godmothers, our hope lies beyond the borders of this country. Since graduation from Yaoundé, I've not been able to find a job or even get a husband. Young

> men in this country are not rich enough to think of marriage. Most of them are interested in cohabiting and deceiving young girls. I wouldn't fall for their tricks so I'm here to search for opportunities out there.

The quest for such 'opportunities out there' has also inspired the emergence of fraudulent networks which claim to facilitate the acquisition of visas and travel documents for a fee. Some of these networks operate as NGOs with dubious mission statements. There are countless stories circulating in Cameroon of NGOs that extort money from desperate youths in their attempt to procure travel documents. Most of these facilitators are adepts of *feymania* (see Malaquais 2001), and their practices are reminiscent of the 419 scams that Nigerians and, increasingly, Cameroonians are infamous for (also see Apter 1999 for more on Nigerian scams). Conmen have become the new icons of ostentatious consumption and seem to parallel the status of well-known Congolese members of la Société d'ambienceurs et des personnes elegantes-SAPE (see Gondola 1999). Conmen (also known as feymen) in Douala are particularly notorious in the spheres of passport production, the issuing of fake visas and the processing of bank statements. By engaging in such practices, the Comaroffs have argued, these youths have successfully established 'a counter-nation with its own illegal economies of ways and means, its own spaces of production and recreation, its own parodic patriotism' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 24).

It is apparent from the above narratives that some youths in Cameroon have created not only a counter-nation of criminality, but real and conceptual spaces within which they can act out their dreams and desire for full citizenship, denied them by the post-colonial pseudo-welfare state. So far, the most popular means are: gambling for the American Diversity Visa lottery and seeking refugee status in Europe. I suggest that these trends should be examined further to ascertain the ways in which new meanings of citizenship and fulfilment are reconstructed, especially among migrant African youths in the West. Next, I will attempt to account for the differences exhibited by youth in their quest for full citizenship and self-actualization.

Theorizing youth transition in Cameroon

Evans and Furlong contend that sociological theories on youth transition have changed with the social and economic conditions of

the era. Although their observations are based on studies of youth in Britain in particular, I maintain that these views have implications for a general understanding of theories of youth, particularly in Africa. They argue that, in the 1960s, the dominant metaphor for explaining youth transitions was that of filling society's niches (Evans and Furlong 1997: 17). This framework was couched within the functionalist and developmental perspectives of that era. By the 1980s, the dominant metaphor was that of trajectory, reflecting the structuralist influences of the period. The understanding behind life trajectory theory was that young people's transition was a function of social forces. In other words, it meant that 'transitions were largely outside the control of individual social actors' (p. 18). In the 1990s, navigation emerged as the dominant metaphor. Young actors were perceived metaphorically as 'navigating perilous waters' and 'negotiating their way' through a sea of 'manufactured uncertainty' (ibid.). Apparently, this has remained the dominant framework until today, albeit with minor modifications (see Boeck and Honwana 2000, on the cubic model). I will attempt an assessment of the relevance of the metaphor of navigation in the paragraphs below.

Granting the above qualification, the question at stake is: why do individuals choose one specific trajectory over another? First, it should be pointed out that social actors differ in their motives and ambitions and that these are, in turn, structured by other factors such as kinship, educational level or gender. Furthermore, I argue that young people's motives and capacities to 'navigate' are shaped but not necessarily determined by the differential endowment of social and material capital at their disposal. As observed in our cases above, there were individuals who enjoyed the patronage of the status quo, and while several Presby members were determined to see the continuity of this system, others, like Julienne, could not contain their disillusionment despite their apparent gain from it. In case two above, Julienne is the ideal example of those still filling society's 'niches' while others like Carlson navigate to no avail. Carlson did not have the financial strength to bribe his way into prestigious professional schools. His level of dependence on his parents was extreme to the extent that he had to compete for scarce resources with his siblings. His is a case where brilliance and effort are ditched in preference for mediocrity despite popular outcry. Someone might suggest that if he were a member of Presby or a related

organization, he would have navigated beyond his actual capacity. But then, how many Presby members made it? Moreover, there is an aspect of morality play. While some social actors owe their actions to their conscience and numerous forms of accountability, others have no space for such 'illusions' in their world of play. However, some scholars have argued that virtue and morality should be taken into account, if we are to gain a full view of the complexities of social action in everyday interaction (see Lambek 2002, 2002; Myhre 1998).

Despite the apparent disillusionment among many young people, it should be underscored that a significant number of those interviewed still aspired to work in the civil service and for different reasons. But it could be asked what these individuals stood to profit from service to the state. Reasons range from the quest to earn a simple source of livelihood to the search for power and its gratifications. In this connection, Nyamnjoh's observation on corruption in Cameroon is worthy of mention. He contends that 'to many people in or seeking high office, Cameroon is little more than a farm tended by God but harvested by man … Everyone is doing it at his own level, from top to bottom – the only difference being that those at the top have more to steal from' (Nyamnjoh 1999: 111–12). Hence, the continuous reference to state resources as the 'national cake' that has to be shared among different ethnic groups or regions. Youths who successfully bribed their way into the 'grandes ecoles' (government professional schools) were often heard expressing intentions of recovering their money a hundred-fold upon accession into the civil service – because, as it were, 'a goat eats where it is tethered'. Hence, despite the fact that 'corruption bolts every door … wherever you may need a legitimate service',[16] the practice seems to be growing in leaps and bounds with little prospect of abating.[17] Youth associations such as Presby thrive precisely on this kind of patrimonial system. According to Bourdieu, individuals of this orientation become 'instruments which contribute to the reproduction of the social world by producing immediate adherence to the world, seen as self-evident and undisputed, of which they are the product and of which they reproduce the structures in a transformed form' (Bourdieu 1977: 164).

The second reason that accounts for differential capacities for navigation is that, despite themselves, not all youths have access to the privileges of the patrimonial state even if they desire to. Many youths felt

excluded from the endowments of citizenship in Cameroon. This sense of exclusion was particularly strong among Anglophone youths who, in the words of Piet Konings, felt more 'marginalised than their Francophone counterparts because of the allegedly second-class citizenship of Anglophones in the post-colonial Francophone-dominated state' (Konings 2003: 2). This was confirmed by my survey in which 80 per cent of Anglophone youths aspired to a return to a federal system that had prevailed in Cameroon in the 1960s. Their provisional choices involved, among other things, the search for employment in the private sector, or migration to 'bush'. But, as already highlighted, the option of migrating to the West is limited to a privileged few and some do this at a profound cost. This corroborates the contention that 'modernity and globalisation are bazaars to which many are attracted, but few are rewarded or given clear-cut choices' (Nyamnjoh 2000: 11). This notwithstanding, continuous economic misery[18] has 'pushed many Cameroonians, the youth in particular, to actively seek association with whiteness as a way out of their individual and collective predicament' (Nyamnjoh and Page 2002: 632). Hence, programmes such as the American DV lottery will continue to inspire or dampen the aspirations of the most dispossessed and underprivileged.

Nevertheless, many will continue to aspire by invoking the emerging promises of the 'prosperity gospel' and Pentecostalism as exit options from their misery (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1999 for parallels in post-apartheid South Africa and Meyer 1999 for Pentecostalism in Ghana). Besides Pentecostalist expectations, some social actors have already established what Michael Walzer (1991) has termed 'associative democracy' arising from horizontal networking among members of civil society. In other regions of Cameroon such as in the grassfields, people have tended to balance their struggle for citizenship with their status as subjects under powerful traditional rulers. In my survey, for instance, 80 per cent of the respondents indicated that they were members of ethnic-oriented youth associations. They also underscored the point that membership to these organizations was very significant because it provided them with a sense of identity, of belonging and mutual support, particularly in times of crisis. This rationalization was prevalent among youths living away from their homes and parents.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that youth transition in Cameroon is structured, although not necessarily determined, by a plethora of factors. It is evident that young people in Cameroon have responded or 'navigated' differentially in the context of what Jua (2003) has termed, a 'crisis ridden economy'. Youth choices for transition have ranged from conformity with the system to overt forms of resistance such as the threat of armed struggle against the state by secessionist youths (see Konings 2003).

This notwithstanding, I also argued that young people's perception of citizenship and its craving for fulfilment have been influenced significantly by the introduction of new communication technologies and programmes such as the American 'Diversity Visas' lottery. By means of case studies, I have demonstrated the various trajectories embarked upon by youths from different socio-economic and political backgrounds. In one case, a youth is determined to gain employment in the civil service but his attempts are continuously frustrated by the corruption of government officials. Another youth chooses to travel to Europe under very dubious circumstances, ostensibly aided by unscrupulous government functionaries. There are also individuals who aspire to membership in Presby as their 'exit option'. The promises of Presby and its leading officials have increasingly been negated as success is reserved for an extremely small number of people. Thus, many youths still suffer social exclusion and exploitation and, in some contexts, are treated as a 'source of surplus value' (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 46) by other youth predators in collaboration with the state.

My chapter makes the case for the need to explore the contexts in which youths' aspirations for transition are structured by national conditions. It validates the argument that citizenship rights are only formal (Barbalet 1988: 2) and that, in most cases, citizenship rights are elusive. Furthermore, it examines the ways in which the status quo is reproduced through the recruitment of young clients into state-sponsored movements such as Presby.

This chapter also points to certain gaps in our knowledge about the ongoing redefinitions of citizenship in the global age. What does citizenship mean to migrant African youths in diasporic communities in Europe and North America? Similarly, what does citizenship mean to the bulk of young people in Cameroon whose transition into

adulthood is more or less permanently extended? Some scholars are already talking of 'global citizenship', and it is doubtful to what extent this is tenable for a majority of young people who feel marginalized and dispossessed. It appears to me that more research on youth and citizenship is needed to understand ongoing shifts in the meaning of citizenship. The concept of global citizenship seems to mask the vast inequalities that characterize the lives of many young people across the world. Perhaps, an alternative research agenda would be to investigate the ways in which young people subvert or undermine citizenship in preference for new forms of identities.

Notes

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1 Auto-defense, or Committee for Self-Defence, was an exclusively Beti militia charged with the task of safeguarding Beti interests at the University of Yaoundé in particular and in Yaoundé in general. I have opted to maintain the French name of Auto-defense instead of the translated equivalent. Parlement on the other hand, as implied by its name, consisted of students who demanded democratic reform. Membership of the organization was made up principally of students from the Bamileke ethnic group and the English-speaking provinces. They constituted what is popularly known in Cameroon as the Anglo-Bami alliance. Also see Konings (2003) for details.

2 In the presidential elections of 1992, the incumbent, Paul Biya, won 39.976 per cent of the votes while the opposition candidates put together scored a total of 60.024, 'showing that even according to official statistics, the majority of the electorate wanted a change of president' (Nyamnjoh 1999: 103).

3 See Online edition of *Le Messager*, 19 September 2003, <www.wagne.net/messager> accessed 24 September 2003. Cardinal Tumi, who is also the Archbishop of Douala, maintained that: '*Partout en Afrique, la cause de la guerre civile que personne ne souhaite de gaité de coeur, est toujours politique. La même cause produit chaque fois les mêmes effets. Une guerre civile est aussi possible au Cameroun parce que les injustices ont atteint le seuil de la tolérance.*'

4 The World Fact Book: <www.politinfo/infodesk/print/cm.html> accessed 27 September 2003.

5 JACHABI was launched at the Hilton Hotel in Yaoundé under the auspices of Mrs Chantal Biya, wife of Cameroon's president.

6 I have already highlighted the role of Auto-defense as a student militia which operated on the campus of the University of Yaoundé during the early 1990s.

7 The Parlement or Parliament of Students was a well-organized group of

students at the University of Yaoundé advocating democratic transformation in the country. According to Konings (2003), many Anglophone members of the defunct Parlement eventually came together and formed the Southern Cameroons' Youth League (SCYL) in May 1995.

8 *The Herald*, no. 1125, 24–25 October 2001, p. 4.

9 See, for instance Charles Taku's article: 'PRESBY and the Seeds of Genocide' in *The Post*, no. 0249, 23 February 2001, p. 8. In this article, Charles Taku expresses his fear for the growing popularity of Presby, as a instrument of political violence. He wonders aloud why the presidential couple sidelines the 'YCPDM in preference for this group [PRESBY] that legally does not belong to any of the political structures of the CPDM'.

10 This is reminiscent of the organization in the early 1990s when it operated as Auto-defense. Presby members were reported to have brutalized participants at an SDF rally that took place in Yaoundé, prior to the Franco-African Summit held in January 2001. See *The Post*, January 19 2001, p. 3 for details. This incident was noticed particularly because Presby's acts of impunity were carried out in the presence of government security forces who stood by and watched without intervening. It was also reported that the governor of the South West Province had instructed Presby members to combat (by any means possible) the activities of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), a political movement advocating the secession of the two English-speaking provinces from Cameroon.

11 See *The Herald*, no. 1103, September 2001, p. 3.

12 See for instance the recent news story on BBC News Online which reported the horrific death of seventy Africans (men, women and children) trying to enter Europe illegally from Libya. The migrants died of hunger and thirst and their boat broke down and drifted at sea for at least ten days before it was spotted by an Italian ship. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/3205974.stm> for details.

13 See <http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/camnetwork/message/55238> accessed 27 September 2003.

14 See <http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/camnetwork/message/55647> accessed 16 October 2003.

15 It should be pointed out that the American government has recently changed the format for submission of DV applications. At the moment, only electronic submissions are permitted, a move that would have serious repercussions on many youths in developing countries who do not have access to the internet.

16 Quoted from Cameroon Bishop's Conference on Justice and Peace held in Mbalmayo, January 1997.

17 It should also be pointed out that Transparency International ranked Cameroon twice in sequence as the most corrupt country in the world (1998 and 1999). In 2003, Cameroon was ranked 124 out of 133 countries, indicating that although some 'progress' has been made, corruption is still endemic in the country. See <http://www.transparency.org/pressreleases_archive/2003/2003.10.07.cpi.en.html>, accessed 19 October 2003.

18 Cardinal Tumi argues that, in Cameroon, people suffer from *misery* due to the greed of the elite few. He makes a strong distinction between poverty and misery, arguing that the latter is the product of human action. '*Au Cameroun, nous luttons, mais non pas contre la pauvreté, mais contre la misère*' (see *Open Letter to Minister of Communication*).

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5 | Student radicalism and the national project: the Nigerian student movement

BJÖRN BECKMAN

In much of Africa, as well as in other parts of the Third World, student movements have been prominent in giving voice to a radical nationalist agenda in sharp contrast to the narrow, self-seeking and sectionalist pursuits often seen as the hallmark of politicians and political parties. Such radicalism and commitment to a 'national project' have placed student movements in the forefront of reform, spearheading, for instance, 'democracy movements' or the demand for a 'national conference' at times when civilian and military politicians have been particularly inept in handling the nation's affairs. This has been the case despite the narrow social basis of the students in the institutions of higher learning – accessible only to a tiny minority of the population – and despite their privileged class aspirations and perhaps class origins as well. Moreover, the political class which they so vehemently attack for its failure to fulfil national aspirations is to a considerable extent made up of people with university training; some may even have had their first political exposure as radical activists in the student movement. This chapter summarizes the contributions to a workshop held in Kano in 2002 (see the note on page 121 and Beckman and Ya'u 2005) and reflects on the role of the Nigerian student movement in the struggle to reconstitute a national democratic project in the face of deepening economic crises and political decay. It argues that the patriotism demonstrated by NANS, the National Association of Nigerian Students that was at the focus of the workshop, was more than an ephemeral phenomenon that merely reflects the transitory and ambiguous nature of students as a class category. It is seen as structurally rooted in the national character of the institutions of higher learning (including the national class aspirations of university-trained professionals) and in the contradictory nature of power in such institutions (intellectual and bureaucratic). In a context marked by the immaturity, sectarianism, and fragmentation of the ruling class, these structural conditions allowed

for a political space that NANS was able to appropriate, forming alliances nationally and internationally, and turning itself into a vanguard of national democratic resistance to military dictatorship and national decline, not the least within the educational system. NANS served as one of several front organizations of a left-wing core, largely with a university base or background, with its own networks and organizations in pursuit of wider national political objectives. The decline of NANS is therefore closely linked to the decline of this wider radical movement but also to the intensified competition from the new agenda of religious and ethno-regional politics.

Is student radicalism and the commitment to a national project something of the past? Have student movements outlived their usefulness? To what extent were they a product of a distinct historical conjuncture that allowed for a temporary impact? Have the realities of post-colonial class societies, including students' own class ambiguities, caught up with them, draining the movements of their wider ideological possibilities? Are we even justified to speak of 'movements'? Does it not presuppose a level of coherence and commitment that can no longer be taken for granted?

In conclusion, it is argued that, despite the apparent decay and the failure to produce a credible progressive national leadership, students continue to have a special place in national democratic politics which is rooted both in the internal contradictions of the universities and their role as custodians of the nationalist project. Much can therefore be learnt from the achievements and limitations of NANS when exploring the preconditions for national democratic reconstruction.

NANS as a national democratic force

The achievement of the Nigerian student movement has been widely acclaimed (Shettima 1993 and 1997; Yusuf 1991). In particular, its performance during the 1980s and the early 1990s has been celebrated, even if there were heroic moments both before and after, such as the fight against the defence agreement with the British after independence, a formative event of the early anti-imperialist struggles (Babatope 1991). The 'Ali-Must-Go' campaign of 1978, protesting the raising of fees and the commercialization of education, was another high point, often referred to as a watershed in the radicalization of the movement (Yusuf 1991). The violence and brutality of the state is often recalled,

highlighting simultaneously the courage, discipline and commitment of the students. The ABU massacre of 1986, when the security forces invaded the campus of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, was another dramatic moment, precipitating a nation-wide students' uprising (ASUU-ABU 1986; Yusuf 1991). The glaring violations to which students were subjected by the state and the school authorities contributed to sharpening a revolutionary commitment. The constant confrontations with the police, secret agents and security forces obliged the student leaders to develop skills in protecting cadres, lines of communication, and alliances and networks in wider society (Komolafe 2005; Lukman 2005). However, neither the heroism of the students nor the viciousness of the state may on their own tell us much about the transformative potential of these struggles. In order to appreciate the contribution of the Nigerian student movement in this respect, we need to look at the substantive issues at stake in these confrontations and the ideological commitments by which they were informed.

Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and popular democracy

NANS addressed the problems of the university campuses in a context of the overall development of the nation (Black 2005; Iwere 2005). It was more than simply asserting that higher education is important, something claimed by academics and students everywhere, and may merely reflect the self-interest of those located in this sector. The NANS' position was most effectively formulated in the Students' Charter of Demands of 1982 (summarized in Yusuf 2005), which continues to be the most crucial document for the progressives in the student movement. It was argued that if higher education was to contribute to the progress of the nation it had to be both national and democratic; national in the sense of reflecting the aspirations of the nation as a whole, not just of its privileged elites; democratic in its ability to recruit and cater for the popular classes. Higher education should be a vehicle for the transformation of Nigeria's class society in an egalitarian and democratic direction. To achieve this it could not be addressed in isolation. It depended on the ability to overcome the backward and authoritarian values that informed the educational system as a whole. If not, students in the universities would merely reproduce the class values and the backward mentality on which they had been bred.

Most impressively, NANS succeeded in turning the high-sounding

phrases of academia, 'academic freedom' and 'university autonomy', into credible vehicles of the national democratic struggle (Yusuf 2005). The progress of the nation, NANS argued, depends on the growth of genuinely free learning, with an intellectual freedom to question and dispute, where nobody has the right to impose his or her version of the truth by virtue of a formal standing in the class-ridden hierarchies of society. The primary threat to academic freedom in this enlightened sense was seen as coming from the academics themselves and their tendency to reproduce authoritarian modes of learning and values. Of course, there were other, external threats to academic freedom, not the least from the state, and it was therefore a progressive imperative to protect the institutional autonomy of the universities and their component institutions. Such autonomy from external interference can be justified with reference to academic freedom alone, which is also done elsewhere. However, the claim by NANS to a national democratic position on this issue lies in its insistence that the question of institutional autonomy was inseparably linked to the democratization of the institutions of higher education. The democratic processes of the universities, from individual departments to the appointments of vice-chancellors, would ensure that the autonomy, the right of self-determination, was put to the service of values that the universities were expected to uphold, and a free democratic learning process in particular (ibid.).

Again, it was not a question of seeing institutional democracy as something uniquely reserved for the universities. On the contrary, if anything, NANS saw the struggle for democracy in the universities as a vanguard struggle for the democratic transformation of the institutions of society in general. It was not any type of democracy, even if the immediate problem was the deepening entrenchment of a manipulative and ruthless military dictatorship. NANS wanted a popular democracy, rooted in the active self-organization of popular groups in society, not just the democracy of self-seeking exploitative elites and money bags, not to speak of self-succeeding ex-military dictators. The historical claim of NANS as a force for national democratic transformation is, thus, first based on its ability to situate the problems of the universities, as confronted by students in their everyday life, in a wider, ideologically rooted understanding of what academic freedom, university autonomy and institutional democracy should mean, not just to themselves but to the progress of society as a whole.

An anti-imperialist world-view The NANS position was based on a systematic, ideologically rooted and theoretically articulated world-view where the welfare of the popular masses in the poor countries depended on their ability to transform state institutions into vehicles of national development (Black 2005). This had to be done in opposition to a world order dominated by imperialism, which basically meant that the rich and powerful countries were in a position to subordinate the development of the poor countries to serve their own interests. In the period when NANS waxed strong, this world-view was effectively developed theoretically by great Third World scholars like Samir Amin. It could also draw on Marxist-inspired theories about the unequal development of the world economy. However, the most powerful source of inspiration came from the anti-colonial movements themselves and their struggles for national liberation, where it was obvious that those with superior military and economic power held back the development of those they had subordinated. This anti-imperialist world-view was most directly manifested in solidarity with national liberation struggles in Africa and other parts of the post-colonial world, including the anti-apartheid struggle (ibid.). The scheming of imperialist governments and companies in their attempts to secure control over oil during the Nigerian civil war boosted an anti-imperialist awareness in the population at large and in the student population in particular. The support received by the Federal Military Government from the Soviet Union during the civil war also tended to reduce the strong anti-communist heritage left behind by British colonial education. The decision of the Murtala Mohammed's government openly to defy US diplomatic pressures on Angola and to nationalize British Petroleum over sanctions-busting in Rhodesia contributed to the anti-imperialist mood of the late 1970s.

For NANS, an anti-imperialist world-view meant more than a progressive foreign policy and international solidarity. Above all, it was a question of rejecting the liberal economic policies promoted by the leading capitalist countries and the international agencies which they controlled, the IMF and the World Bank. These policies were deliberately obstructing the independence of national development policies, the only way of breaking out of underdevelopment and imperialist subordination. Opposition to SAP, the Structural Adjustment Programmes, directly or indirectly pushed by the international finance

institutions (IFIs), therefore became a central feature of the national democratic platform of the Nigerian student movement. Already the fight against the commercialization of education in the 'Ali-Must-Go' campaign of 1978 had a strong anti-imperialist element of this type, a defence of the public sector against liberal economic policy. The struggles were stepped up throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, as Nigeria's economic crisis as well as its dependence on the IFIs deepened (Komolafe 2005).

The status of NANS as a leading popular democratic force drew largely on the militant leadership it was able to provide for the struggles against what were identified as the key elements of the SAP agenda, including the repeated increases in petrol prices (world market adjustment), especially at a time when the Nigeria Labour Congress had become ineffective in opposing government economic policies, first as a result of cooptation and later through state intervention to dissolve and reconstitute the leadership. Most of the anti-SAP campaigns of NANS had wide popular support, not the least when fighting higher petrol prices. Such increases had a direct impact on transportation costs in the whole economy, not the least on food prices. They also hit directly at those who depended on transport to get to work. NANS offered leadership not only to the students but to a wide range of popular forces opposed to SAP and military dictatorship. It sought alliances with other popular groups, including the trade unions, for mutual support and protection.

Building alliances: NANS as a front organization NANS had thus cut a powerful image for itself as a national democratic force, struggling for university reforms that were situated squarely in a framework of popular democracy and national unity, fighting repressive military dictatorship and reactionary university autocrats, and resisting the subordination of the national economy to the dictates of imperialism. Simultaneously, it was forging alliances with progressive forces in civil society and reaching out in international solidarity with freedom struggles in other parts of Africa and the world. The pattern of alliance politics pursued by NANS included university lecturers, trade unions, journalists, democratic lawyers, women's organizations, human rights groups and other groups that had important ideological commitments in common (Lukman 2005; Iwere 2005). In some cases alliances were formal and

officially acknowledged. The close alliance with ASUU (Academic Staff Union of the Universities) was particularly important, not the least in view of the potential conflict between the two parties. In some cases the alliances were informal and network-based, often drawing on individuals moving from one organization to another. Student activists, for instance, had been recruited into important positions in the secretariat of the NLC and the human rights groups relied heavily on the student movement when recruiting their staff.

Despite this element of informality, the alliances were rooted in the underlying cohesion of the political forces that gave direction to the various 'fronts' through which the radical left and its political organizations sought to assert their influence in Nigerian society. As pointed out by Jibrin Ibrahim (personal communication, December 2003), the radical politics of NANS should be seen as an outflow of such a wider progressive national democratic struggle. The alliances were not just a question of separate organizations seeking to enhance their impact and provide mutual protection through cooperation. They reflected a political unity that already existed at the level of the groups that sought to promote and maintain control over 'front organizations' (students, lecturers, women, workers, human rights and pro-democracy groups), while simultaneously encouraging them to cooperate in broader alliances. In NANS, those forces were represented by the Progressive Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN), with its member organizations on the campuses, e.g. the Movement for Progressive Nigeria (MPN) in the case of ABU. They took an active part in grooming and promoting their own candidates in student union elections and provided a 'shadow' structure of command, presumably hidden and shielded from state security and campus authorities. PYMN, in turn, was part of a wider national network where SCON, the Socialist Congress of Nigeria, sought to offer leadership and cohesion for the various 'fronts', while drawing on its own local member organizations, including, in the ABU case, the so-called Zaria Group. The local student leadership at ABU could thus be seen as politically accountable to the MPN, which linked it to the PYMN (and SCON) at the national level as well as to the Zaria Group, locally.

The collapse of NANS as a progressive force: what went wrong?

By the mid-1990s, the student movement had collapsed into competing factions (Gaskia 2005; Onoja 2005). What were the immediate and remote causes of this collapse? This section summarizes some of the causes that were identified in the contributions to the Kano workshop. I focus on those aspects that have a bearing on what happened to the national democratic orientation of the movement and its capacity to intervene in national politics.

Militarized repression and divide and rule It is reasonable to assume that NANS as a national democratic force was in fact unable to survive the onslaught of militarism. It operated in an increasingly hostile environment. It certainly advanced its own competence to organize, to hold meetings in ways which dodged the security agents, and to protect its cadres. Its ability to mobilize wider popular support for its campaigns was clearly a constraint on state repression. But the military rulers also advanced their own methods of subverting and controlling popular organizations. In a written comment on a draft of this text, Gbenga Komolafe, one of the participants in the Kano workshop, draws attention to what a top security hand, Major-General Chris Alli, had to say in his 'memoirs' about his master, General Babangida, who had identified the students as a 'major source of opposition and resistance to his sit-tight plan'. As the pressure from the students built up, he launched an all-out strategy to destroy the student movement; divisions were created within its ranks through 'all kinds of inducement and patronage', promoting a culture of violence that grew as 'a cankerworm' (Alli 2001: 93).

As the efforts to democratize the universities backfired, the autocratic powers of the university authorities were rather reinforced. As the number of universities multiplied, the criteria for appointing vice-chancellors became less concerned with academic merits and more with the political ability to exercise 'control' and ensure that the institutions remained loyal to the regime. University leaders were increasingly unconstrained in their strategies of suppressing challenges from the student unions, both to themselves and to their masters (Bello and Adinnu 2005). The authorities became more successful in penetrating, dividing and destroying student unions that were deemed

hostile (Adejumobi 2005; Ubani 2005). The militarization of political power was accompanied by a centralization of political control, with military officers placed in command of state governments, and with military surveillance of the university campuses. The power of both the Babangida and the Abacha regimes depended primarily on their control over vast state income from the petroleum industry, much of which they handled personally and without being accountable to anybody. Their ability to translate this into political control depended on the way such money could be put to effective use in undercutting enemies and by supporting the rivals of enemies. This happened also in the case of NANS, where a government-funded faction emerged. The same game was played by campus autocrats, using public money to intervene in student elections in order to obstruct radical candidates and support the cooperative ones.

The intensified militarism, repression, and divide and rule that affected NANS also affected its allies, including its scope for building and maintaining wider alliances in civil society. Of particular importance in this respect was the state's penetration of the Nigeria Labour Congress, the most significant organized force in society outside the state itself. The alliance that NANS had been able to build with the NLC was drastically weakened as the leadership of the Labour Congress was reconstituted in 1988 after having first been placed under a 'Sole Administrator'. Similar struggles for state control were experienced by other organizations, including the professional associations of lawyers and journalists, further undercutting the movements' sources of material and moral support.

The secret cults It has been demonstrated how state and university authorities made use of secret cult groups in their effort to destroy the progressive student movement. A number of union leaders were actually hacked to death and many more were manhandled and physically intimidated. It is difficult to imagine that such gruesome and much publicized events would not have had a dampening impact on students' willingness to confront the authorities. In the late 1990s, the genie of cultism that had been let out of the bottle had waxed into a monster that the authorities were unable to control. Cultism had replaced student unionism as the dominant feature of campus life, at least as reported in the media (Adejumobi 2005; Momoh 2005). However, the antagonism

between cults and progressive student unionism had other causes than outside instigation. Apart from the ideological incompatibilities, it also reflected a competition for allegiance in the student population. Secret cults were pulled into regular student politics and electoral competition, supporting one candidate over another, further obscuring transparency and inviting behind-the-scene manipulations.

Student politics was, of course, marked by competition and rivalry between different tendencies before the rise of secret cults (Iwere 2005). The remarkable dominance enjoyed by the Progressive Youth Movement of Nigeria, a progressive tendency within the politics of NANS, was repeatedly contested on individual campuses by various loose, often personality-centred electoral coalitions. On some of the northern campuses, the MSS, the Muslim Students Society, challenged the 'progressives', leading to violent confrontations as well as allegations of sponsorship by the state and university authorities (Abdu 2005; Onoja 2005). The way in which student politics were affected by religious allegiances may also have had a dampening effect on students' interest in campus politics, especially in universities where one faction could count on the sympathies of the surrounding community in case of conflict.

The resurgence of ethno-regional politics More powerful than religion as a cause of the disintegration of the progressive movement, however, was what Egwu (2005) speaks of as the resurgence of ethno-regional politics, which could contain elements of religion but was primarily territorial and ethnic. This was particularly conspicuous in the case of the University of Jos, Egwu's own base. But also it reflects a wider phenomenon whereby both staffing and admission policies became increasingly subordinated to political projects for changing the ethno-regional balance of a particular campus, often spearheaded by university politicians seeking to exploit a particular territorial or ethnic constituency in their struggles for office (Bagu 2005). The proliferation of new universities strengthened the claims that such institutions had special obligations to their 'catchment areas'. But it also affected the old federal universities where pre-existing communal balances were directly affected by the admission and recruitment policies of the new ones. While many students had long organized on ethno-regional lines, this had been more of a parallel mode which had not necessarily

prevented other organizing principles, including ideological ones, from prevailing at the level of student union politics.

The ethno-regional resurgence on the campuses was unavoidably entangled in the sharpening divisions at the level of national politics. Military dictatorship and the centralization of the petroleum economy had radically redefined the basis for Nigerian federalism, causing much ethno-regional resentment. In the early years of independence, the three dominant regions of the federation exercised a high degree of political autonomy, each being financed primarily from regionally distinct agricultural export economies. This pattern was shattered by the civil war and the rise of petroleum as the all-overshadowing source of income. The commitment to national development expounded by the military was largely welcomed by the progressive Nigerian student movement, although firmly opposed to military dictatorship. Patriotism was primarily linked to notions of national unity and national development. Progressive NANS had little sympathy for either the political rivalries of the dominant nationalities or the aspirations of the subordinated ones. With the crisis over 'June 12', however, a new scenario emerged, pulling NANS irresistibly down into the ethno-regional maelstrom that it so far had successfully resisted. June 12 of 1993 was the notorious culmination of a period of recklessly manipulative transition politics. It had little democratic content whatsoever and had consistently been exposed by NANS as sham and illegitimate. However, as the June 12 presidential elections were annulled by the military, depriving Mashood Abiola of his assumed victory, the tensions were exacerbated. In participating in this foul game, the voters had their own calculations and those who felt robbed of their entitlements were outraged. NANS felt obliged to support the demand that the election result should be upheld, despite the fraudulent transition politics that preceded it. The voters had made a choice which at least could be considered more democratic than a continuation of military dictatorship. To some, NANS failed to come out strongly enough in support for the June 12 election results. Others were dismayed for the opposite reason, feeling that NANS leaders, by their moderate support for June 12, played into the hands of an essentially south-western regional, chauvinist agenda. The divisions further undermined the unity which earlier had allowed the progressives to dominate NANS. The splits multiplied within allied organizations, not the least among the human rights groups. The

student movement became vulnerable to fresh attempts to divide and rule by state and school authorities.

The subsequent regime of Sani Abacha did little to assuage the ethno-regional acrimonies that were exacerbated by June 12. On the contrary, more nationalities were up in arms, protesting the corruption and decay of military dictatorship, joining in the demand for renegotiation of the 'contract' that was assumed to have underpinned the formation of Nigeria as a nation. NANS, which had played a leading role in the demand for a Sovereign National Conference as the basis for the democratization of Nigerian society, found itself sidelined as the meaning of such a conference became subordinated to an agenda for renegotiating the balance of power between Nigeria's aggrieved nationalities. Their commitment to national unity had been greatly impaired by the excessive centralization and selfish use of national resources by the military clique and its civilian collaborators. It looked as if Nigerian politics had moved on to a new stage where the scope for a progressive national democratic agenda had greatly diminished.

Internal divisions So much for the momentous changes at the level of Nigerian national politics and their interconnections with campus politics. But what about the internal dynamics of the student movement itself as well as its alliances in wider society? Do we need to blame outside forces for intervening and destroying the forces of national democracy? With the contending left factions that struggled for the control over NANS present at the Kano workshop, the discussion was conducted in an admirably constrained manner. Of course, the spokespersons of the former factions would not agree on how to apportion blame for what happened. However, the contributions highlighted what preceded the loss of control by the previously dominant left tendency and the passing of control to a new majority made up of a minority left faction in alliance with a larger, so-called non-political group (Gaskia 2005; Idika-Ogunye 2005; Abdu 2005). Would not such internal factional wrangling by itself explain the demise of NANS? But, more importantly, were not the 'progressive forces' themselves at this point radically weakened? Would it not have been too much to expect that the Nigerian student progressives would keep the banner flying at a point in time when the left projects globally confronted a deepening crisis? Could not this on its own be expected to have radically reduced

the space for a national democratic agenda? The disarray of the Soviet policy in Afghanistan, the decay of the Soviet economy, and the reform policies that preceded the collapse of the Soviet Union, and finally the collapse itself and subsequent capitalist triumphalism are all likely to have shaken the confidence of the progressives in their international alliances. Although South Africa was finally liberated, the progressive forces in other parts of Africa such as in Angola and Mozambique had suffered fatal setbacks. The Ethiopian revolution that was once hailed, not the least because of its commitment to agrarian reform and national unity, had degenerated into crude military dictatorship and an unwinnable war over Eritrea.

There was a global ideological shift away from the progressive traditions. Also, some basic theoretical assumptions on underdevelopment and national progress seemed to be challenged by the extraordinary capitalist achievements in East and Southeast Asia. The consolidation of the USA as the sole superpower and its global domination both militarily and economically coincided with the high points of neoliberal hegemony at the level of the IFIs. The global shift also affected the allies of NANS at the national level. The radical tendency within the labour movement, for instance, had drawn support from those unionists who had been trained in an anti-imperialist, cold war tradition and who had continued to have close ties with the Soviet Union and its allies. The proliferation of human rights NGOs provided new openings for former student activists who could continue their fight against military dictatorship, increasingly in alliance, however, with an 'international community', blurring earlier notions of imperialism. For instance, efforts by progressives to retain control over WIN (Women in Nigeria) the leading radical women's organization, could not arrest but rather accelerated a process of disintegration and the multiplication of separate, non-political NGOs in its place (Ibrahim and Salihu forthcoming).

The problem of internal democracy A problem that came out clearly at the Kano workshop was the weakness of the internal democratic structures of the student movement (Mustapha 2005; Salihu 2005). This was particularly associated with the dual structures of command where the politically more committed cadres, as organized in the PYMN (Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria), maintained its own 'shadow'

structure of decision-making with secret meetings before all major NANS events, taking decisions on strategy, recommending who should stand for office, doing much of the tough organizing, travelling up and down the country, liaising between campuses and groups, representing the student movement in the interaction with its allies, and participating in political party work. The parallel structures operated at both the national and local level, alongside the formal NANS structures. They were particularly decisive at election time. Of course, these committed, mostly self-sacrificing cadres provided much of the cohesion and drive of the movement. Much of the remarkable achievements accounted for above are difficult to imagine without their contribution. It is also quite understandable why such a parallel structure of command could be seen as justified or even indispensable in the deteriorating security situation that was faced by the movement with leaders rusticated, victimized, and persecuted, and constantly trailed by state security, and with repeated attempts to penetrate, divide and control the organization.

The system, however, cannot be explained only with reference to state repression. It also expressed the revolutionary aspirations of the movement, its ambition to build parallel structures throughout society, allowing ultimately for a revolutionary shift in power, away from the current political elites and ruling classes into the hands of popular democratic forces. As Hauwa Mustapha (2005) puts it, it was a distinctly male, secretive comradeship where women felt excluded or were seen as second-rate members who could not be fully trusted. The parallel command structure within NANS generated its own democratic problems, leaving the impression that the formal democratic processes of the student movement did not reflect the realities on the ground and that decisions had already been taken behind the scenes. This was perhaps less of a problem as long as the PYMN itself was seen as reasonably democratic and cohesive internally. But the progressives had their own divisions, partly reflecting the divisions of the left globally (e.g. the 'Militant Tendency'), and were also struggling for power among themselves. The situation was exacerbated by the June 12 process when the alliance politics of the left factions was penetrated by ethno-regional divisions, that simultaneously spread to other fronts of the progressive movement, including the human rights groups and the Campaign for Democracy (CD).

The problem of funding The question of funding is of course crucial to all social and political movements. The deteriorating funding situation of NANS is also a part of the picture of decline. Reflective of the respected status of student unionism at an early phase, university authorities were expected to arrange for the check-off payment of student union dues but also to provide a 'matching grant' from university coffers equivalent to what students contributed. With tensions between students and the state increasing, the matching grant was stopped already in 1984, while the check-off was removed as part of the clampdown following the ABU massacre and the nation-wide student uprising of 1986. As membership was made 'voluntary', the collection of union dues by the authorities was now at their own convenience and depended on the good behaviour of the local union. Apart from depriving the progressives of their earlier source of funding and strengthening the hands of the authorities, it also opened up for right-wing student groups that had no inhibitions in collecting money from the state and were willing to do its bidding. Another important implication was to make the progressive student movement more dependent financially on its allies. The proliferation of human rights groups with their own, often foreign, funding offered one important source, especially as many of the activists had a background in the student movement. Simultaneously, however, it made the student movement both less accountable to its own immediate constituency and more vulnerable to the divisive influences of the internal politics of the human rights groups. This further exacerbated the negative impact of the divisions over June 12 as it reinforced the 'south-western' image of the human rights movement, creating new splits, including in the umbrella body of the democratic movement, the CD. As students were dragged into the infighting, not only did divisions reproduce themselves within the progressive student camp, but those students who saw no reason to identify with that camp were now in a position to campaign more effectively on a 'non-political' (often state-supported) platform.

The incessant strikes by the university teachers (ASUU) The strengthening of the 'non-political' camp and the weakening motive for engaging in serious student politics generally were reinforced by the deepening crisis of the university system. The crisis was reflected in particular in the government's irresponsible handling of the grievances

of the university teachers. These were organized in ASUU (Academic Staff Union of the Universities), which had also succeeded in establishing itself as major national democratic force, not the least during the leadership of Attahiru Jega (Jega 1994; Beckman and Jega 1995). ASUU and NANS had consistently worked towards mutual understanding and support. On the most central issues of university reform, on academic freedom, institutional autonomy and democracy, NANS and ASUU shared a common progressive perspective. Jointly they provided a formidable stumbling block for efforts by the state and individual university leaders to establish full control over the campuses. ASUU was of course not just concerned with institutional reform; it was a trade union responsible for the welfare of its members and with salaries and working conditions in particular. During much of the 1980s and early 1990s, Nigeria experienced a galloping inflation which made nonsense of earlier wage agreements and compelled unions like ASUU to be permanently in confrontation with their employers. However, the authorities became increasingly reckless in ignoring the plight of their employees, making repeated attempts to suppress or divide the union. When brought to the negotiating table, the state either procrastinated or entered into agreements which it later failed to honour. This created a permanent crisis in the university system and ASUU was repeatedly compelled to call out its members on strike, without the authorities showing any serious concern for addressing their grievances. It is likely that one calculation on the side of the state behind this irresponsible toying with the welfare of the whole university system was the expectation that constant and prolonged strikes would effectively destroy the alliance between students and lecturers. While NANS leaders held out in demonstrating their understanding and solidarity with the striking lecturers, the disruption of regular teaching programmes certainly taxed the general student population, creating weariness, resentment and an anti-progressive mood that created openings both for state intervention and 'alternative' modes of organizing, including cultism.

The deteriorating material situation of the students The decline of NANS as a progressive force has been widely linked to the sharp deterioration in the material and learning conditions of students (Yusuf 1998). NANS supported ASUU's effort to defend the working conditions of the lecturers because it saw it as part and parcel of the wider need

to arrest the overall collapse of the university system. This in turn was linked to the general decline of the public sector economy. Both the number of universities and the size of the student population had been allowed to expand through irresponsible admission policies without any consideration for the quality of the services that the newcomers to the system would require. University standards were greatly affected both by the numbers admitted and by the falling quality of training at the pre-university levels. Learning conditions were further debased by the lack of basic teaching resources, classrooms, textbooks and qualified teachers. The student hostels were grossly overcrowded and the feeding conditions miserable. The poverty of many students made it difficult to cope with both academic and material pressures, encouraging pervasive corruption at all levels.

Students became the immiserized victims of a collapsing university system. How would they organize themselves and fight for university reforms? How could these starving, overcrowded and deprived students defend themselves against a repressive state and reactionary university autocrats? How were they to resist the subordination of the national economy to the dictates of imperialism, forge alliances with progressive forces in civil society, and reach out in international solidarity with freedom struggles in other parts of Africa and the world? Should we be surprised that the NANS project collapsed? Were students not too busy chasing around for a pillow to put their heads down after another miserable day in a decaying university system?

Are students still a national democratic force?

The Mambayya House debate These questions were put to an audience of students and staff of the Bayero University Kano in November 2003, when a draft version of this chapter was presented for discussion at Mambayya House, the Centre for Democratic Research and Training (CDRT). The overwhelming picture that came out of hours of contributions from the floor was that NANS was dead as a national democratic organization and that the prospects of reviving a progressive student movement under present circumstances were virtually non-existent. While some members in the audience felt that it would be wrong to give up all hope and that it should 'be seen as duty to do everything possible', they had little to offer in terms of evidence that might lend support to such a position. On the contrary, the evidence

that was invoked by most speakers supported a picture of degeneration, fragmentation and general irrelevance. The militarism and corruption that had poisoned society at large had also penetrated the student unions. Leaders and candidates for office paraded themselves as petty generals, driving about with sirens, insisting on preferential treatment at university gates and petrol stations, collecting 'brown envelopes' from university managers and state agents, who were only too anxious to please as it suited their strategies of cooptation and control. Such illicit money was used for lavish expenditure on election campaigns, with multicoloured posters on high quality paper that no candidate would have been in a position to afford in the old days. Just as in Nigerian politics in general, the vast amounts spent on electioneering had to be recovered one way or the other. So the vicious cycle of corruption continued. Those who held on to a hope for a revival kept returning to one powerful argument: the conditions of the Nigerian university system merely reflect the conditions of Nigerian society. To rule out the revival of progressive forces in the universities, therefore, would be the same thing as giving up hope for Nigeria, a pessimism that they thought was impermissible; 'there must be hope'. The hopeful would disagree on the sequence of revival. Some believed that nothing good would come out of the student movement unless society at large changed. They therefore placed their hope in the emergence of new, credible national political leaders. Others felt that the problems of the universities and the society were the same and therefore one could just as well start from the university end.

The place of students in national development While not attempting an argument in terms of optimism and pessimism, the purpose of this concluding part of the chapter is to look into the methodology and possible theoretical openings that could be further explored for those who continue to be interested in the links between student unionism and the prospects for national democratic reconstruction. In a way, the argument agrees with those in the Mambayya debate who suggested that if the problem relates to society as a whole, one may as well begin to do something about what is closest at hand, which for students and academics is the university. In addition, however, one could argue that students and universities have a special place in society that affects their role in national transformation. In revisiting

the NANS experience, we therefore believe that we are not just documenting a piece of history but that there is something to learn from both the achievements and the limitations of the Nigerian progressive student movement, and not just for prospective student organizers but more generally for those interested in exploring avenues for national democratic reconstruction.

University students may be an important actor in national politics everywhere, as suggested, for instance, by the civil rights movement in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s, the 1968 student revolts in Western Europe, the role of students in bringing down the Milosovic regime in Yugoslavia in the late 1990s and so on. The argument here, however, is about the special position of students in Third World countries where bourgeois class forces have not succeeded in consolidating an ability to base their rule on a credible strategy of capital accumulation whereby people are absorbed into gainful employment with an improved standard of living and where a sufficient surplus is generated to maintain welfare services. The immaturity of the ruling class is mirrored at the level of class contradictions where the subordinated classes have yet to organize themselves politically, for instance in working-class movements capable of challenging the rulers and thus also to make them sit up. As argued elsewhere (Andrae and Beckman 1998), the process of bourgeois class formation is linked to the formation of subordinated classes and their capacity to push for discipline from below. There is thus a dual political vacuum; on the one hand, an incoherent and ineffective bourgeoisie and, on the other, subordinated classes that are yet to develop sufficient organizational strength. Imperialism, that is, superior foreign enterprise, backed politically and militarily by core national players, plays a critical role in penetrating, coopting and disorganizing the local bourgeoisie, subverting its ability to take a lead in emancipating national productive forces.

It is in this context that some students think of themselves as the vanguard of national transformation. Their ability to make an impact depends on the development of political struggles. It is only to be expected that the incoherence and immaturity of the bourgeoisie are reproduced in part of the student population, especially among those who aspire to join the current mode of self-enrichment. There are others who feel committed to a professional vision, without necessarily having developed a political consciousness. Many students, however,

share agony and frustration over the backward state of the nation with large segments of society, including members of both the bourgeoisie and the working class. Such students may be gripped by a sense of special responsibility for national emancipation as linked to their relatively autonomous role as aspiring scholars and intellectuals. This is idealism, all right, but an idealism with material roots in the peculiar class relations characteristic of this type of social formation.

Students as custodians of the radical nationalist heritage

It is in this context that we can assess the contribution of the progressive student movement in Nigeria. Before we ponder the collapse of NANS as a national democratic force, we must first of all explain why it was capable of developing such a stature for itself, maintaining a prominent position in Nigerian national politics over a long period. Certain traits, especially of the PYMN, suggest that we are dealing with a radical left organization inspired by Marxist and Leninist ideas. In the overall context of Nigerian society, with its hegemonic bourgeois aspirations and business culture, one would expect such left political tendencies to be confined to the extreme margins of the polity. However, this was not the case. On the contrary, far from being ideologically marginal, NANS can be seen as upholding and defending central tenets of the ideological traditions of the national liberation movements, the fight against colonialism, and aspirations to national independence and national development. And perhaps even more importantly, it was seen to be doing so by a much wider segment of the population than would have reason to be sympathetic to the students' cause, not to speak of their Marxist and Leninist ideas. In its opposition to military dictatorship and misrule, the progressive student movement was able to give voice to popular grievances rooted in the aspirations and struggles for national liberation. It acted as a trustee, a custodian and a mouthpiece of such popular democratic aspirations.

The context of collapse It is from such a perspective that it makes sense to situate the collapse of the progressive student movement in the 1990s in the conjunctures of the disorganization of nationalist politics and the crisis that culminated over 'June 12'. The earlier strength of the movement was based on its appeal to national concerns central to the Nigerian national project as widely understood. The

deepening crisis of this project as a result of prolonged military rule and, in particular, the authoritarian manipulation of ethno-regional divisions, resulted in the further disorganization and fragmentation of the Nigerian ruling classes, business groups and the state institutions that they had been able to generate so far. The disarray of the Nigerian national project tended to pull the progressive student movement along in its wake. For some time, the movement had rather been invigorated by the confrontation with an increasingly repressive, militaristic and economically irresponsible state. Both in its own eyes and in the eyes of its many sympathizers in the rest of society, the movement came to shoulder responsibility for the nationalist heritage. However, the contradictions of ruling-class politics caught up with the movement and undermined its ability to continue to act as an autonomous national political force.

The logic of this process can better be understood if we focus on the progressive student movement as the 'radical wing' of a broader, essentially bourgeois nationalist movement, although with strong popular, primarily welfare aspirations attached to it. While some movement cadres certainly expressed themselves in a radical, Marxist-inspired language that went beyond the ideological orientation of this broader nationalist tendency, the strength of their appeal in wider society, however, was basically nationalist. Marx and Lenin were invoked but for many this did not alter the nationalist and welfare orientation of their commitments. This may also help explain why many former radical student leaders resurface in the corridors of power without necessarily requiring any profound ideological conversion at the personal level. An understanding of the progressive student movement as the radical wing of a bourgeois national democratic project may help us to explain the rise and fall of NANS as a national democratic force. More importantly, it may suggest fresh openings for an analysis of the potential of student radicalism as a force in national reconstruction. We may be less impressed by the assumed decline of 'left' political forces globally and the new 'hegemony' of neo-liberal, market-oriented forces. The contradictions of imperialist domination and Third World underdevelopment can be revisited in fresh efforts to develop the theoretical basis for a new anti-imperialist, national democratic platform that may inspire the emergence of new progressive student movements capable of appealing to the rest of society. The NANS experience sug-

gests that the ambiguous class orientation of such movements make them vulnerable to the internal contradictions and crises of the wider national democratic project of which they are only a part. It also suggests, however, that this very ambiguity also allows such movements to interact constructively with broader social forces in society, forces that are rooted in the aspirations for national progress in the face of an imperialist world order that reinforces underdevelopment.

Reconstructing the radical agenda Students' potential to contribute to social transformation is influenced by another, equally important source of class determination linked to the nature of the social relations of production of the 'educational industry' itself and the contradictions they generate. While it may be desirable that there should be a sense of common interests between students, teachers and authorities, in practice this is not what we normally see. On the contrary, as some exercise power over others there are bound to be disagreements over how such powers are being used and how they should be regulated. This is an objective starting point for collective forms of organizing in all student populations. There is also bound to be competition for university resources, and conflicting views on the manner in which these are being put to use. People are differently affected by such conflicts, depending on their position in the system, and they organize and strategize accordingly, both at an individual and collective level. Senior staff, for instance, may see little of the terrible overcrowding and objectionable learning conditions that students confront daily in the halls of residence and may therefore have different priorities when it comes to university spending.

The Kano workshop focused primarily on the NANS experience up to its demise as a national democratic force in the 1990s, although it also highlighted the valiant struggles against the backward leadership of the University of Abuja during much of the 1990s (Bello and Adinnu 2005). There is a risk that the apparent loss of lustre of NANS nationally in the subsequent period and the conspicuous signs of decay at the local level may lead observers of the student scene to be unduly dismissive, and, above all, insufficiently inquisitive about what actually goes on at the grassroots level in the individual universities (and they are many!), even if it is agreed that current student leaders mostly seem to be unimpressive. Any effort to rebuild progressive forces on the campuses,

however, needs to take its point of departure from the multiple areas of conflict of interests that permeate university life. It may be true, as was suggested in the Mambayya debate, that contemporary student leaders (references were primarily made to Bayero University) were insensitive to the real issues confronting the students and were primarily out to promote themselves. Self-promotion and responding to local grievances, however, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In any case, what is happening in this respect requires proper scholarly investigation and we should be wary of rushing to conclusions. We need to find out how current student leaders, including those who are morally dubious and militaristically inclined, actually relate to the contradictions confronted by students in the universities. We need to observe how relations of authority are contested both in the universities and in the unions themselves.

As members of civil society organizations met for a 'summit' initiated by the Nigeria Labour Congress in Agura Hotel, Abuja, in February 2001, a small group of student union leaders had travelled all the way from Ambrose Ali University in Ekpoma in Edo State. They were anxiously waiting to see the President of the NLC, Adams Oshiomhole, and solicit support for their ongoing struggle for justice on that campus. The NLC leader listened attentively and offered advice. In February 2002, at the campus gates at the University of Abuja, where I also happened to be present, student leaders were busily organizing a blockade to confront the authorities over their failure to provide basic amenities such as water and electricity to the students' hostels. These random examples suggest to me that students' continued activism should not be written off prematurely. Such activism often has a legitimate democratic content where duly elected leaders seek to give voice to the grievances of the members whose interests they are supposed to represent. It also suggests that students may be more prone to confront those in authority because of their own ambiguous status and insertion in the class structure of society. Moreover, not only does it point to an awareness that the grievances confronted by students are shared by wider segments of society but that there is a need to build alliances with other organized forces, including, not least, the organizations of the university teachers, as illustrated in the case of the joint ASUU and NANS struggles at the University of Abuja (Bello and Adinnu 2005).

Conclusions: students and the national democratic project In conclusion, it has been suggested that there are at least two major sources of student radicalism that need to be considered when reflecting on their possible role as agencies of national democratic reconstruction. One draws on their role as custodians of the national, anti-imperialist liberation project. This role is motivated primarily by the persistence of the contradictions of an imperialist-dominated and highly unequal world order but also by the students' own mode of insertion in a local class society dominated by an immature and unconsolidated local bourgeoisie. The other source of student radicalism comes from the social organization of the university system itself and the contradictions of interests that it generates. Student grievances, as rooted in their objective insertion in campus class society, simultaneously provide an important bridge to wider popular grievances and alliances in civil society. While the first source may be more on the 'national' side, the second has more of a 'popular democratic' potential. It is the beauty of the experience of the Nigerian progressive student movement that it succeeded in such a significant way and for such a substantial period of time to combine the two into what we have chosen to describe here as a national democratic platform. Revisiting the contribution of the movement is, therefore, not simply a matter of an autopsy; it involves the invocation of a concrete living heritage that continues to have an immediate bearing on the lives of the Nigerian people.

Note and acknowledgements

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own involvement with the Nigerian student movement dates from my period as a teacher in the Department of Political Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1978–87, and from subsequent interaction with student leaders, activists and scholars during my recurring visits, including in particular Ahmed Aminu Yusuf and Nasiru Kura. Joint work on organized interests in Nigeria, including university teachers (ASUU), students (NANS), workers (NLC), women (WIN), lawyers (NBA) and journalists (NUJ) was commenced with Jega in 1994 (see Beckman and Jega 1995). When revising the paper for publication, I have benefited greatly from comments by Dr Jibrin Ibrahim of the Global Rights Group, Abuja.

Three participants in the Kano workshop have sadly passed away: Professor Akin Fadahunsi, the chairman of the governing council of the CRD, and two outstanding student leaders, Abdulrahman Black and Chima Ubani.

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6 | Transnational governance and the pacification of youth: civic education and disempowerment in Malawi*

HARRI ENGLUND

Whenever there is reason to highlight the limited rewards of liberal democracy in sub-Saharan Africa, the national elites are usually the first to be accused. The elites may be understood to include not only the head of state and a handful of other ruling and opposition leaders, but also the wealthiest segments of the commercial class, sometimes complemented with senior civil servants and religious leaders. Critical analyses focusing on elites can be illuminating, exposing those who most conspicuously wield political and economic power (see Good 2002). However, such critiques may also end up obscuring the social and political dynamics involved. They often seem to build on the expectation that if only the self-serving agendas of national elites could be better controlled, transitions to genuine democracy would ensue. The evidence in this chapter shows that certain inequalities are more entrenched than these expectations suggest. I also argue that these inequalities cannot be reduced to 'objective' class antagonisms. My intent is not to exculpate national elites but to implicate a broader cross-section of agents and agencies – some national, others foreign – in hijacking democracy and human rights.

An exclusive focus on national elites as the enemies of democracy can be challenged on at least three counts. First, especially since the onset of multipartyism, elites must be conceived of in the plural, with the new prospects for competition making earlier reciprocity and mutual interests among elites somewhat obsolete (see Bayart 1993). The implications for democratization are, therefore, rather more complex than a categorical condemnation of national elites allows for. In particular, little will be achieved if analysis is guided by, in Werbner's words, 'a bias, notoriously well established among social scientists, against elites, as if they were the curse of liberal democracy' (2002: 130). Pluralism fosters a politics of recognition, bringing to the fore

the long-suppressed diversity of many sub-Saharan nations (Berman et al. 2004; Englund and Nyamnjoh 2004). Counter-elites emerge to challenge those who pursue particularist interests under the guise of national leadership. Because these processes may yield both liberals and warlords, the actual consequences for democratization cannot be determined without empirical investigation. Moreover, much as the widespread imagery of political leaders as 'fathers' and their subjects as 'children' can facilitate exploitation and abuse, the same moral ideas may also direct attention to the rights of dependants (see Schatzberg 2002).

Second, the focus on national elites obscures the appeal of such hierarchical notions among the non-elite. This oversight is especially unfortunate when the analytical purview is extended to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A conspicuous feature of new democracies worldwide, NGOs have attracted considerable donor support as agencies that are believed to provide independent voices.[1] Although the executive directors of some NGOs undoubtedly belong to the educated and affluent elite, much of their work among so-called beneficiaries, often spoken of as 'the grassroots', is conducted by modestly educated and lowly paid officers and volunteers. The evidence in this chapter shows that these NGO and project personnel maintain the same distinctions towards 'ordinary' subjects as the elites. Despite their cherished ability to criticize power, activists, and not least those claiming to promote the cause of democracy and human rights, are quite as much embedded in entrenched inequalities as anyone else and often fail to resist the seductions of status distinctions. Thus, a focus on national elites would miss an important dimension of democratization as it is being introduced to the populace. Taking activists' rhetoric for granted, the focus would fail to notice how their practice actually contributes to maintaining inequalities.

Third, the case of NGOs and various human rights projects not only demonstrates the importance of considering other agents than elites, it also indicates how democratization is embedded in transnational political processes. The focus on national elites is likely to assume specific spatial relations in which power is located in national urban centres (for a critique, see Guyer 1994). Both the masses and NGOs are placed 'below' the state, with critics attaching great hopes to a 'civil society' that would challenge and resist the elites 'from below'. Yet the

fact is that many NGOs and human rights projects depend on complex transnational links for their material and political survival. As such, they may challenge or, as is the case here, support the state not 'from below' but as agencies with capacities that are equal, if not superior, to those of the state (see Lewis 2002; Migdal 2001). A concept of transnational governance is central to the argument of this chapter, pointing out the need to understand how African activists and their foreign donors together deprive democracy and human rights of substantive meaning (see Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Jenkins 2001).

The shift of focus from national elites to a broader range of agents and agencies should not be seen as a denial of *elitism* as a central aspect of democratization in countries such as Malawi. On the contrary, the salience of elitism as a cultural disposition appears more clearly precisely when the focus is thus expanded. It is a cultural disposition partially shared by both African activists and foreign donors, a habit of thought and practice that conceals entrenched inequalities in a rhetoric of popular participation. While some aspects of that rhetoric may appear new – such as the appreciation of 'community' as the locus of democracy and development – the ways in which it is put into practice frequently suggest historical parallels with both colonial rule and post-independence autocracy. More precisely, elitism maintains the status quo not by promoting self-professed elites but by associating democracy and development with particular indices and institutions, many of which bear little relevance to the impoverished majority. Those who become, often with support from foreign donors, the vanguards of democracy, are the progressive ones, the enlightened few leading the way out of darkness. In contrast to some definitions of democracy, the starting-point is not the actual concerns and aspirations of the people, their particular situations in life and experiences of abuse, but democracy and human rights as universal, if abstract, values. It is the task of this chapter to show how this preoccupation with abstraction both fosters elitism and undermines substantive democratization.

As a cultural disposition, elitism carries historical resonances with colonialism and is one of the ways in which contemporary transnational governance assumes an undemocratic content. Elitism is inseparable from the actual political and economic conditions it helps to maintain. As an illustration, consider how empowerment, a key concept in the current rhetoric, has become vacuous. When the democratic transi-

tions began with the demise of the Cold War, Malawi was one of the countries where empowerment became closely associated with political and civil liberties, human rights defined as *freedoms* (*maufulu* in Chinyanja/Chichewa). This definition was understandable after three decades of ruthless dictatorship, but its severely confined notion of rights quickly diminished the significance of the democratic transition. Squabbling over political and civil freedoms, the ruling elite and its non-governmental watchdogs effectively silenced public debates on social and economic rights. An impression of robust democratic processes was thereby created, not least for the benefit of foreign donors, but structural inequalities were hidden behind the notion that 'poverty alleviation' was basically a technical issue. Empowerment, in effect, became *disempowerment* by confining the scope of what could be discussed by using the notions of democracy and human rights.

The above remarks do not seek to trivialize political and civil freedoms; nor are they based on a hierarchy of rights that, for example, the 'founding fathers' of newly independent African states deployed to justify repression (see Shivji 1989). The best minds of political philosophy have long since discarded a hierarchy of rights in favour of an appreciation of how various rights and freedoms constitute one another. Amartya Sen (1999: 36), for example, has argued that freedom has both a constitutive and instrumental role in development. Freedom is, in other words, both the primary end and the principal means of development. Sen's argument takes issue with those who have doubted the importance of political freedoms in ensuring economic development. The instrumental role of freedom reveals how 'freedom of one type may greatly help in advancing freedom of other types' (p. 37). Moreover, Sen warns against rhetorical assertions of democracy's contribution to development. 'The achievement of social justice', he writes, 'depends not only on institutional forms (including democratic rules and regulations), but also on effective practice' (p. 159).

Whereas Sen argues with critics and despots who claim that economic prosperity is a more urgent objective than political freedoms, Malawi's experiments with democratization represent the opposite extreme. They demonstrate the perils of isolating political freedoms as the essence of democracy. This chapter explores civic education as a central arena in which the meaning of democracy and human rights is defined in Malawi. Elitism is apparent in the ways in which civic education

contributes to making distinctions between 'the grassroots' and those who are privileged enough to spread the messages. In 1998, James Tengatenga, a Malawian intellectual and more recently an Anglican bishop, was bold, if not heretical, enough to criticize the patronizing attitudes underlying the apparently participatory approaches to civic education in Malawi. Despite their democratic pretensions, he argued, they 'suggest *coming down* to the people. Even when [civic education] is referred to as blending or being one with the people, one can't help but notice the condescension' (Tengatenga 1998: 188; emphasis in original). Tengatenga's criticism may have been too far ahead of its time, or too politically incorrect, to attract the attention it deserved. This chapter takes his criticism a step further by showing how a leading civic education project has marginalized people's insights into their life situations. At the same time, well-meaning activists believe that their knowledge of rights has not yet touched the lives of the masses. Activists seek to 'enlighten' the masses. They refer to this process with the Chinyanja/Chichewa verb *kuwunikira*, which connotes the shedding of light. Activists see themselves as the torchbearers, the ones who bring light to the darkness.

The distinction between those who need help and those who can provide help is familiar from the world of charity (see Bornstein 2003; Garland 1999). Here, as in civic education on human rights, the providers of assistance feel that they have something that others lack. Moreover, the objective is not to upset the balance between those who receive help and those who provide it. Charity differs from structural change, whether by legislation or revolution, in that it presupposes a categorical distinction between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. The former help the latter to sustain themselves, while the distinction itself remains virtually intact. In a similar vein, the civic education project on human rights examined here involves little that would actually enable the disadvantaged to lift themselves from their predicament. The fact that this troubling observation is largely unnoticed in Malawi indicates how natural the distinction has become even among human rights advocates.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the distinction underlying civic education is a consequence of active effort, not a natural state of affairs. The crucial question, in effect, is not *who* does civic education but *how* they assume their position. I present observations from my

ethnographic research among the representatives of a major civic education project in Malawi. Funded by the European Union, the project has a nation-wide network of salaried civic education officers, while the reach of the project is made even more comprehensive by a large number of volunteers, known as para-civic education officers. Research on how these two groups of people are recruited and trained reveals an emphasis on status that few in the Malawian context can afford to resist. The separation of officers and volunteers from the targets of their civic education is a hidden lesson of civic educators' training. Through certificates, closed workshops, common appearance and human rights jargon (often in English), a commitment to the project and its particular world-view is generated. Crucial to this emerging quasi-professional identity are those disadvantaged and poor Malawians, often known as 'the grassroots', who are excluded from the group. The civic education project is, in effect, an instrument of transnational governance. It preempts popular protests by maintaining old patterns of elitism.

Civic education: promises and perils

Civic education is a relatively recent phenomenon in Malawi; one of those interventions that define the 'new' Malawi (see Englund 2002a). Ralph Kasambara (1998), a prominent Malawian human rights lawyer, has described how independent civic education could not take place in Kamuzu Banda's Malawi. Primary schools taught a subject known as civics, giving a deliberately unspecific view of government, while the Malawi Young Pioneers visited villages to impose physical and agricultural training on adults. As with much else that took place in public, the glorification of the country's Life President was an integral part of this activity. Significantly, the public protests that culminated in the 1993 referendum on the system of government needed little civic education to stir them. Although Kasambara describes the Catholic bishops' Lenten Letter in 1992 as 'the first major attempt in civic education' (p. 240), a more accurate description is that it gave a voice to the grievances that had long plagued the Malawian populace. Malawians hardly needed to be educated about 'the growing gap between the rich and the poor' and other injustices. They lacked channels to make their complaints heard.

The referendum in 1993 and the general election in 1994 introduced the need for new kinds of information delivery. The very idea of these

exercises, particularly the concept of free and fair elections, needed to be clarified, not least in the face of persistent misinformation from the outgoing government.[2] Pressure groups, which eventually became political parties, and the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) were among the first to take up this challenge. The PAC included representatives from churches and other religious organizations as well as from the Malawi Law Society and the Chamber of Commerce, and its primary task was to engage in dialogue with Banda's regime. Civic education was largely voter education, while the independent press that began to emerge in 1991 quenched the thirst of literate Malawians, particularly in urban areas, for alternatives to the official rhetoric. The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), then the only local radio station, spread voter education to an even larger audience.

The successful conduct of the elections raised the question of what role civic education would play in a country that had ostensibly achieved universal political and civil freedoms. As Kasambara (1998) has noted, the civic education initiatives of the political parties quickly degenerated into partisan campaigning. At the same time, there was no doubt that whatever democratic reforms the new government was able to launch, information about these new institutions and laws would not reach Malawians by itself. Particularly unfortunate was the fact that the MBC once again became the mouthpiece of the ruling party and failed to be the objective conduit of information that many had hoped; Television Malawi (TVM), established in 1999, suffered the same fate (see Kayambazinthu and Moyo 2002). A study of Malawians' awareness of their rights enshrined in the new constitution and other laws revealed, several years after the 1994 elections, widespread ignorance (HRRC 1999). A similar, more sophisticated study, also conducted several years after the transition, indicated comparable problems in Zambia (Chanda 1999).

The Malawian study, however, has a condescending approach that is absent in the Zambian study. Rather than being content to list the empirical results from a survey on Malawians' awareness of democratic rights, the study speculates on their intellectual capacity to gauge the idea of human rights in the first place. It laments that 'the level of illiteracy in Malawi as in other Third World countries is quite high, so high that many people do not have the necessary intellectual competence and capacity needed to articulate such a subject as human rights' (HRRC 1999: 54, 68). While the study points out that human

rights need not be incompatible with Malawian social and cultural realities, it conveys the need not only for more information on specific legal provisions but also for the education of the masses on the idea of human rights. It is important to keep in mind that condescending attitudes are never far below the surface in the Malawian context of civic education. The evidence in this chapter shows how activists in human rights NGOs and projects have forged a style that asserts their special status in several subtle ways. Their penchant for titles, formal credentials and the English language, for example, resonates with both Banda's vanity (Phiri 1998) and the expressions of power elsewhere in post-colonial Africa (Mbembe 2001).

The contrast to Zambia must not be exaggerated, but it is illuminating to consider how the approaches in the two studies may lead to different notions of civic education. The Zambian study was written by Alfred Chanda (1999), chairman of the Foundation for Democratic Process (FODEP), who stressed the limited awareness of human rights among such groups as academics, teachers and students. FODEP works, in effect, with these and other educated Zambians in an effort to create a nation-wide network of experts who can facilitate others' claims and demands. The aim is not so much to educate millions of Zambians on abstract concepts, or even on specific laws, as to ensure that there are competent persons to monitor human rights violations. In Malawi, on the other hand, human rights NGOs and projects have often assumed the responsibility for training their own personnel who are, in many cases soon after their recruitment, sent to villages and townships to conduct meetings. A notion of 'signposting' (*kulozera*) has been developed by the project that is the focus of this chapter. It refers to civic educators' duty to direct people to relevant organizations and authorities when they receive questions, regardless of whether or not those organizations and authorities have the capacity to assist. 'Signposting' represents, in effect, one of the ways in which the project disengages from a direct involvement in the predicament of ordinary Malawians.

The tireless touring of Malawi by human rights activists for the purpose of educating the populace on the concepts of democracy and human rights has, in any case, given them a *raison d'être* between the elections. Kasambara (1998) ended his review of civic education with the note that it had reached an impasse. Had he written his review

in 1999, when the second post-transition general elections were held, or thereafter, he would have noticed a new boom in civic education. Although several international donors have supported these initiatives, Denmark and the European Union have been particularly generous. The above-mentioned study on Malawians' awareness of human rights was conducted by the Human Rights Resource Centre (HRRC 1999), which had been known as the Danish Centre for Human Rights until 1997. The Danish involvement had begun in 1996 with training activities and various grants for Malawian NGOs. HRRC continued this work, becoming the resource centre that its name suggested with its own library and other facilities. Its grants supported the emergence of a whole range of Malawian human rights NGOs, but the abrupt withdrawal of Denmark from Malawi in 2001 made HRRC dependent on a wider number of donors.[3]

The single most important intervention in the field of civic education took place on the eve of the general elections in 1999. The European Union started to fund a comprehensive project of voter education, known as the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE). While the Republic of Malawi is the official 'owner' of the project, it is managed by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). It also claims partnership with a number of organizations in Malawi and Germany, including the PAC, but in practice NICE uses its elaborate structure of officers to pursue its own civic education project. After the 1999 elections, NICE expanded to cover five thematic areas: local democracy, environment, food security, gender development, and HIV/AIDS and health. According to its own leaflet, the main objective is 'to promote democratic values, attitudes and behaviour at grassroots level in both urban and rural Malawi through the provision of civic education services'.[4] By the end of 2002, these 'services' were provided by twenty-nine district offices, three regional offices and a national office, employing over forty professionals and over ninety members of support staff. The reach of the project was greatly enhanced by over 10,000 volunteers, known as para-civic education officers.

Finding a NICE job

With its systematic effort to establish an office in every district, NICE is an outstanding example of a project whose coverage of the country is virtually equal to the state. District offices ensure that this

coverage extends to villages and townships through a network of volunteers, closely supervised and trained by full-time officers. 'Every second village' belongs in the orbit of NICE, I was told by the project manager, a German expatriate leading the entire operation from the national office in Lilongwe. Although he and many others in NICE's professional staff emphasize their association with 'the grassroots', the fact is that NICE fits uneasily into a vertical state/society opposition. This opposition – common in the minds of activists, scholars, donors and the general public far beyond Malawi – situates the state 'above' society which, as a consequence, either challenges or supports it 'from below' (for critiques, see Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Lewis 2002; Migdal 2001). Yet NICE, despite the apparent 'ownership' by the Malawian people, is a transnational project that participates in governing Malawi with resources that in many cases exceed those of government departments.[5]

Crucial to the work of governance that NICE performs, even despite itself, are the many subtle ways in which its officers and volunteers create a sense of belonging to an exclusive community of human rights experts. If vertical images are at all accurate in this context, it is 'the grassroots' that are placed 'below' NICE. Among salaried officers, the sense of exclusiveness begins at the recruitment stage. Vacancies for civic education officers receive hundreds of applications, but only a few are selected for interviews. A university degree is not a requirement for civic education officers, and most of them have a background as teachers in primary schools, with some also having experience as journalists. During the interviews, the candidates receive the same set of questions that examine whether they understand the notions of democracy and human rights. The recruitment process also includes an assignment which tests the candidate's acumen to defuse difficult situations during civic education. These situations are typically politically charged, and the candidate is expected to show his or her skill in avoiding the expression of political views. According to the rules of NICE, political partisanship is one of the greatest mistakes that a civic education officer can make (see below). Active members or officers of political parties are not, therefore, allowed to join NICE in any capacity.

After recruitment, several factors serve as incentives to commit oneself to NICE. For civic education officers, for example, a competition

has been established whereby they can earn a salary increase.[6] Each officer is evaluated by the national office every year, and can earn up to 100 points for excellence in civic education, twenty points for administrative skills and five points for some innovation of their own. Every forty points brings a salary increase of 40 kwacha (about $0.55). In 2001, the lowest overall score was sixty-three points, while a regional officer received the best result, ninety points. Para-civic education officers, despite their position as volunteers, are likewise enticed to work for NICE through, for instance, competitions that test their capacity to mobilize 'the grassroots' for public meetings. Districts are divided into zones, some of which follow constituency boundaries and others the boundaries of chiefdoms. Different zones are occasionally asked to compete over the number of meetings that they organize, or over the number of participants in those meetings. The winners get prizes, usually cash, for their efforts.

Frequent workshops and seminars deepen the 'belonging' that officers and volunteers are expected to feel for NICE. Their stated objective is 'capacity building', but, as my account of workshops for volunteers shows later in this chapter, their immediate outcome is an appreciation of the distinction between NICE and 'the grassroots'. Workshops serve this purpose at every level of NICE's internal hierarchy, with officers spending a considerable amount of their time attending them. National workshops, for example, are organized at least four or five times a year by one of NICE's three regional offices and attended by national, district and regional officers. National workshops often have guest speakers, including academics from abroad, and their topics vary from the specific training and administrative skills needed in NICE's work to more general issues pertaining to its thematic areas. Regional workshops, on the other hand, are organized every second month, and they bring together national and regional officers. Regional officers, in turn, have a duty to conduct workshops with district officers. The combined effect of these workshops is that all officers are in constant collaboration with their peers and superiors in the NICE hierarchy.

Workshops have a monetary aspect that represents an interesting contrast to the meetings that officers and volunteers hold with 'the grassroots'. Officers attending workshops not only get their transport costs reimbursed, they also receive daily allowances whose total value, especially among high-ranking officers, can exceed their monthly

salaries.[7] 'We have to give them something,' an officer in the national office remarked to me, but critical to the constitution of hierarchies in NICE's work are the ways in which its officers dismiss similar claims for compensation among 'the grassroots'. The highest-ranking officers have developed a concept of 'goat culture' that is intended to pre-empt any material demands from below that they may encounter during civic education exercises. A regional officer began to explain the concept to me by saying that 'not all is lost to Westernization'. Malawian villages, he continued, still have a community spirit which comes to the fore during, for example, weddings. Villagers assist each other by contributing firewood and food. In a similar vein, villagers who receive NICE for a visit should not expect money but, on the contrary, they are expected to feed officers and volunteers. Eating together, the regional officer said, makes people feel closer to NICE. It gives villagers, he concluded, a feeling of ownership.

The official information leaflet from NICE likewise defines 'goat culture' as a practice that 'intensifies team building by utilising local resources at grassroots level by preparing and eating food together while discussing issues'. Hidden in such statements are the ways in which officers and volunteers actually differentiate themselves from their hosts. Officers are able to hire appropriate vehicles for their travels to remote venues of civic education, often arriving in large four-wheel drives at villages where the ownership of a simple bicycle is a sign of affluence. When I accompanied officers and volunteers during their visits to villages and townships, I observed that officers also freely flaunted their mobile telephones, suits, elaborate hair-dos and high-heeled shoes in front of impoverished village crowds. Under such circumstances, 'goat culture' represents little more than an attempt by the well-off to manipulate local moral codes for their own benefit. Ordinary Malawians have long been exposed to such manipulations, from the concept of *thangata* during late colonialism (Kandawire 1979) to various projects involving 'community participation' in post-colonial times. Common to these initiatives has been the use of idioms of 'assistance' in mobilizing people for projects that, in many cases, have been clearly exploitative.

NICE officers' access to allowances and various paraphernalia of smooth professional life is, in other words, in sharp contrast to how they see their relationship to 'the grassroots'. While ordinary Malawians

are expected to assist NICE officers to carry out their civic education 'services', officers' sense of an exclusive professional community also presupposes their unquestioned devotion to certain hierarchies within NICE. Hierarchical relations permeate the NICE structure from officers to volunteers. While regional officers oversee district officers, office assistants, who from 2002 have also been used in delivering civic education, are most directly controlled by district officers. Volunteers, known as para-civic education officers, also have a hierarchy of coordinators and ordinary volunteers who assume different responsibilities in their zones.

One effect of frequent workshops and strict hierarchies is that top officers are able to monitor closely the messages that civic education puts forward in NICE's name. This is particularly conducive to maintaining the non-partisan status of NICE which, as mentioned, is a recurrent theme during recruitment and subsequent training sessions. For example, when PAC and several other human rights watchdogs engaged in a heated debate with ruling politicians in 2002 over the question of a constitutional amendment to allow President Muluzi to stand for a third term in office, NICE stayed quiet. Its highest-ranking officers convened internal workshops to advise lower-level officers on how to react to questions about the issue from volunteers and 'the grassroots'. Paradoxically, by insisting that officers and volunteers decline to participate in any such discussions, NICE merely served the interests of the ruling party that wanted to spread its own propaganda.[8] At issue is not only a contradiction between NICE officers' civic education messages that exhort participation in public life and their own timidity in addressing political disputes; the issue is also the way in which NICE, an organization with the capacity to reach the majority of Malawians, contributes to undemocratic governance by remaining apolitical on issues that threaten to rip the nation apart.

The pacification of youth

A major challenge that NICE faces in its attempt to remain apolitical are the views and aspirations among its youthful volunteers. Although officially only those who are at least twenty years old can work as volunteers, it is difficult to control this requirement. I have met volunteers who say, privately, that they are as young as seventeen years, while the vast majority of volunteers are still in their early twenties. At every

meeting or workshop I have attended, about two-thirds of the volunteers have been men.

Studies from elsewhere in Africa have shown that youths, particularly young men, are a volatile force in political developments, all too easily enticed into violence (Ellis 1999; O'Brien 1996; Richards 1996). Malawi's two post-colonial regimes appear to have understood this by creating special youth organizations in the ruling parties. During Banda's regime, the Youth League and the Malawi Young Pioneers safeguarded discipline and obedience in their neighbourhoods and villages (Englund 1996). In Muluzi's Malawi, the Young Democrats, the youth wing of the United Democratic Front, grew increasingly important in enforcing loyalty towards the head of state (Englund 2002b). In both cases, physical violence was integral to young people's political role. At the same time, both examples from Malawi also support the observations from elsewhere in Africa that, rather than being a counter-force in society, youths are often manipulated by their elders (see Bayart et al. 1992).

One of the differences between the one-party state and political pluralism is, however, the fact that a larger number of parties and organizations, such as NICE, presents new opportunities for identification. Malawi's young population, on the other hand, also faces unprecedented frustrations as the contradiction between aspirations and opportunities becomes sharper. The new dawn in politics in the early 1990s was not followed by widespread prosperity. If anything, the new government fed unrealistic expectations by claiming to empower youths and women, in particular, through new educational and economic opportunities. The Youth Credit Scheme and various credit schemes for women, benefiting mainly those who were well connected to the ruling elite or who already had profitable businesses, failed to establish small-scale enterprises as viable sources of income generation (Chinsinga 2002: 26). The introduction of free primary school education in 1994 created chaotic scenes throughout the country as the number of teachers did not match the spiralling number of pupils, with unqualified teachers and a lack of teaching materials making quality education a distant dream in most schools at both primary and secondary levels. The pass rate for the school-leaving examinations in secondary schools has been particularly dismal from the mid-1990s onwards. While the pass rate was 48 per cent in 1990, by 1999 it had fallen to just under 14 per cent.[9]

Under such circumstances, NICE's demand for a vast pool of volunteers is bound to be welcomed by youths, who find their prospects for educational and economic success shattered. Many of these youths are not willing to work for political parties, viewing party politics as the deceitful pursuit as the Chinyanja/Chichewa term for 'politics', *ndale*, suggests.[10] They find alternatives to politics in popular culture, churches and other religious communities, journalism and non-governmental organizations. Yet while many of them continue to keep a close eye on politicians' manoeuvres, they are systematically taught to keep their political opinions to themselves once they join NICE.

NICE participates in the pacification of youth as a volatile political force by requiring non-partisanship, on the one hand, and by offering them both symbolic and material trappings to enhance their status and self-esteem, on the other. Although volunteers receive monetary rewards usually only when they attend workshops outside their own areas, the mere fact of belonging to NICE distinguishes them from the rest. NICE volunteers are able to approach directly such local dignitaries as village headmen, church elders and party officials, they conduct civic education and obtain from NICE certain crucial symbols of their special position. All volunteers receive a letter of introduction and a shining white T-shirt that bears NICE's emblem. Moreover, at some workshops regional or district officers present them with certificates. One regional officer described to me, with neither irony nor apology, these certificates as 'symbols of power'. By flaunting certificates and official letters in their houses and during civic education, volunteers participate in their own small way in the display of power that, as in much of post-colonial Africa (see Mbembe 2001), uses such documents as resources for status distinctions.

The desire for status

In order to gain a deeper insight into the process whereby youthful volunteers come to take apolitical civic education for granted, their training workshops must be considered. For ease of reading, I focus here on one workshop, but the conclusions I draw from my participation in it apply, in my experience, to other NICE workshops as well. This workshop was held in 2002 to train volunteers, known as para-civic educators or PCEs. Both a regional and district officer were in attendance and directed the proceedings. Thirty-one volunteers participated,

out of whom twenty-one were men and ten were women. With the exception of four volunteers aged over thirty, all were in their early twenties or even younger.

The purpose of the workshop was to equip the volunteers with skills to carry out civic education, known as *maphunziro*, 'studies'. Most volunteers had already conducted civic education for several months, even years, and the workshop was one in a series of meetings between officers and volunteers. As such, the impact of the workshop was not simply the acquisition of new skills but also a renewed commitment to NICE as an organization. By coming together, volunteers from different 'zones' and full-time officers could negotiate, explicitly and implicitly, what it means to belong to NICE. As my analysis below shows, crucial to this negotiation was the production of certain hierarchies and status distinctions, both among NICE representatives themselves and, above all, in relation to the assumed targets of civic education.

Implicit in the proceedings was the effort to construct 'the grassroots' as the object of civic education. This was achieved through an explicit focus on volunteers as resourceful individuals who possessed knowledge and skills that benefited 'the grassroots'. Volunteers, in other words, were *made* to appear as those who can assist 'the grassroots'. The distinction hardly exists prior to the arrival of such organizations as NICE. All volunteers come from the same social setting that they are supposed to assist, embedded in many complex ways in local social relationships. Moreover, the distinction between the volunteers and 'the grassroots' was achieved at the workshop not through a discussion of the messages that civic education spreads but by training the volunteers to understand *how* the messages should be presented to their audiences in villages and townships.[11] Striking was the fact that volunteers' previous knowledge about their social world, including their acquaintance with basic courtesies, was made into 'skills' (*luso*) and codified in exotic-sounding English concepts.

The first item on the agenda, after the opening prayer and a discussion on workshop rules and expectations, was the question, 'What is NICE?' (*NICE ndi chiyani?*). Although most volunteers had heard the answer to this question at virtually all the workshops they had attended before, its purpose was clearly to reaffirm both the official answer and the volunteers' commitment to NICE. A volunteer drew the NICE emblem on a flip-chart, and the officers explained at length the

involvement of the European Union and the German agency GTZ. This apparently direct link to the outside world, where affluent white people fund NICE, is crucial to volunteers' identification with the specific role assigned to them in the organization's hierarchy. Volunteers are able to imagine their belonging to a transnational community. It is, moreover, a transnational community that promises an alternative to the networks of patronage that ruling politicians maintain by exploiting foreign aid. Yet a similar desire for access to external links, a similar salience attributed to what Bayart (2000) calls 'extraversion', underlies both the governmental and non-governmental strategies.[12]

Another initial theme, repeated over and over during the workshop, was the non-partisanship of NICE. The district officer, for example, announced that 'we are not politicians' (*ife sindife andale ayi*) and that 'we do not have a party' (*tilibe chipani*). She and the regional officer on several occasions during the workshop used the verb *kuwunikira* to describe the purpose of NICE's civic education. Its most appropriate translation in this context is 'to enlighten', from the concrete meaning of 'to shed light on a spot with a lamp or fire to see a thing' (*walitsa pamalo ndi nyali kapena nsakali kuti uwone chinthu*; Centre for Language Studies 2000: 349). They stressed the need to invite local party functionaries to civic education sessions and to show them equal respect by applauding them when they spoke. The officers also explained that the colours in the NICE emblem resembled those that the Malawi Congress Party uses, but it was every volunteer's responsibility to prevent misunderstandings among 'the grassroots'. In a similar vein, the regional officer later rejected a suggestion from one volunteer to hoist flags on the location where NICE held meetings. Because Malawi's political parties also used flags, he explained, ordinary villagers would be confused if NICE also had a flag.

This effort to avoid identification with political parties – from specific parties to the general manner in which they conduct rallies in Malawi – has an immediately obvious reason. Many areas are sharply contested in current multiparty politics, and the Young Democrats of the UDF, mentioned above, have intimidated and assaulted supporters of other parties across the country. Yet the stress on non-partisanship, coupled with the idiom of enlightenment, also contributes to a distinction in another sense. The representatives of NICE seek to convey the impression that they are not consumed by the passions underlying

political squabbles. In effect, they are not only outside politics but also *above* it. It is NICE that can invite all the parties to its meetings, giving their officials equal representation while reserving to itself the privilege of distributing non-partisan information. As I was able to observe during the sessions of civic education in villages and townships, this non-partisanship provided little 'enlightenment' when the impoverished crowds confronted NICE representatives with questions about the causes of their predicament.

The audiences that civic education officers and volunteers encounter are diverse and often vociferous. Workshops like the one discussed here are, therefore, important in inculcating self-esteem and self-confidence into NICE representatives. In addition to the imagined external links and their position above politics, volunteers were also introduced to certain individual characteristics that set them apart from 'the grassroots'. These characteristics of individual volunteers (*zomuyenereza munthu kukhala PCE*) were initially identified in small groups that subsequently presented their findings to the two officers. A recurrent theme was education, the need for a volunteer to be 'educated' (*wophunzira*), 'someone who has been to school' (*wopita kusukulu*) and 'smart' (*wozindikira*). Each time the regional officer asked others to endorse these characteristics presented by small groups, the response was invariably a loud and enthusiastic 'yes!' (*ee!*). The issue of education clearly struck a chord with the youthful gathering of volunteers. Although volunteers are formally required to have only the primary-school leaving certificate, most of them belong to the category of young people who have, as mentioned, unsuccessfully pursued secondary education. By offering a context where youths can feel that their education has not been wasted, NICE also ensures commitment to its cause.

The emphasis on education is not, of course, merely a consequence of the current crisis in Malawi. It resonates with the fact that formal, Western-style education has represented an unrivalled channel to personal advancement in both colonial and post-colonial Africa (Mbembe 2001; Simpson 2003). The current crisis of expectations and opportunities in Malawi makes the quest for academic success more desperate than ever. During the workshop, volunteers' self-esteem was also enhanced by frequent references to the neat and clean appearance as one of their defining characteristics. Several participants emphasized the need to 'take care of oneself' (*kudzisamala*), particularly by washing

oneself frequently (*kusambasamba*). The emphasis was also on smart clothes, with nobody mentioning modesty in dressing that would suit village settings.

This fascination with appearance and personal cleanliness not only gave the impression that 'the grassroots' had particular problems with hygiene, it also resonated with another legacy of colonialism as a 'civilizing' mission. Several scholars writing about southern Africa, for example, have demonstrated a close correspondence between ideas of hygiene and self-improvement in the patterns of consumption, medical work and domestic relations that various colonial agents introduced (see e.g. Burke 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Vaughan 1991). In Malawi, such patterns have continued to symbolize progress, embodied no less by Banda's puritan style than by Muluzi's flamboyant mode of dressing. Few volunteers can afford suits or elaborate dresses, but many of them at the workshop wore fashionable jeans and the kind of sports-gear that African American youth culture has made popular across the globe. The regional and district officers embodied success by clothing themselves in a suit and a dazzling white dress, respectively.

To situate the emphasis on cleanliness within wider colonial and post-colonial processes is not to produce a far-fetched historical analogy. Large-scale historical processes boil down to such mundane and taken-for-granted dispositions as the emphasis on personal hygiene. It consolidates existing inequalities. As my fieldwork in rural Malawi has taught me, ordinary villagers generally do take a bath once or twice every day, but their poverty does not allow for patterns of consumption that distinguish the well-off as conspicuously perfumed and fashionable citizens. However unlikely NICE's volunteers are to attain these patterns of consumption, the emphasis on cleanliness at the workshop expressed the *desire* for a status that would set them apart from those who were considered to need civic education. By imagining themselves as particularly clean, the volunteers also imagined themselves as belonging to the category of Malawians who have historically had the power to define what progress and development consist of.

The supremacy of English

Another mechanism of status distinction, also resonating with wider colonial and post-colonial processes, concerned linguistic resources. Most participants, and especially the regional officer, spoke a lan-

guage that was a mixture of English and Chinyanja/Chichewa. While English expressions and words often appear in the spoken language of urban dwellers in the region (see e.g. Kashoki 1972; Kayambazinthu 1998; Moto 2001), the regional officer's discourse made a notion of 'code switching' between different languages and registers somewhat spurious. Consider, for example, how he responded to a volunteer's question about involvement in conflicts that occur in villages:

> *Izi zikachitika inu mukapereke lipoti kuofesi. A kuofesi akaona nkhaniyo ndi yofunikadi kuti pakakhala mediation ... chifukwa m'mene mukakambirane nkhani ija ... ambirife sitanapange training ya kufield ya conflict resolution.*
>
> (When these things happen, you should report to the office. When people in the office see that the issue is important, that there should be mediation ... because how you could discuss that issue ... many of us have not done training in the field of conflict resolution.)[13]

Although the substance of the regional officer's reply, suggesting that conflicts should be reported to district offices as few volunteers have been trained to mediate them, could have been expressed in Chinyanja, he chose to formulate his reply with words from English. The impact was to make Chinyanja seem like a language that lacked the vocabulary used in 'conflict resolution', with even 'discussing' (*kukambirana*) becoming a technical procedure that only those who were specifically trained could perform.

Another common strategy among Chinyanja-speakers who want to use English is to introduce English expressions with the verb *kupanga*, 'to do' or 'to make'. In the above extract the regional officer used this verb to refer to 'training in the field of conflict resolution'. The next extract is from his explanation of the difference between 'dominant participants' and 'docile participants'.

> *Amafunikano pamsonkhano, koma kofunika ndi kupanga notice, kupanga control. Pali ena amati madocile kapena timid participants, anthu ofatsa, ali phee. Amenewa kofunika ndi kupanga jack-up.*
>
> (They [dominant participants] are also needed at the meeting, but it is necessary to notice [them], to control [them]. There are others who are called docile or timid participants, quiet people. It is necessary to jack-up them.)

The regional officer used the verb *kupanga* three times in this short extract to enable him to say in English what the activity at issue was. Such uses of English, commonly followed by all participants at the workshop, are based on linguistic patterns that are widespread in the region.[14] They have developed independently of the official Anglo-American standards of English and are inadequate communication tools for, for example, African immigrants in Europe (see Blommaert 2001, 2002). Yet their specific effect in the Malawian setting is to create distinctions that contribute to local inequalities.

Several studies have shown the high esteem that Malawian elites attach to English, with many insisting that their children speak only English (see Matiki 2001; Mtenje 2002a, 2002b; Moto 2003).[15] To be sure, a person's recruitment to a formal occupation usually presupposes a good knowledge of English. Malawians who have the habit of using English in their everyday interactions with other Malawians often seek, consciously or unconsciously, to associate themselves with those few who have succeeded in their educational and professional life. Here they maintain another colonial legacy that had its most extreme post-colonial result in Kamuzu Banda's Anglophilia. He never spoke Malawian languages in public, he always dressed in the most conservative costume to be found in the modern English wardrobe, and he established the 'Eton of Africa', Kamuzu Academy (see Short 1974). However detested he is among contemporary human rights activists in Malawi, his thirty years of rule did much to entrench the colonial legacy of regarding England and the English language as the prime sources and symbols of progress.[16]

The frequent use of English during the workshop supported two tacit objectives. On the one hand, by referring to various skills and methods in civic education in English, the participants were able to make them seem like elements of an exclusive body of knowledge. The participants were, for example, taught that *open air technology* refers to the use of materials and facilities that are available at the venue of civic education. *Information market*, in turn, is a method whereby members of the audience are asked to write down their preferred topics on cards and to display them as in a market. When NICE representatives are unwilling to consider some of the topics, they either ignore them or give the audience *signposts* to other organizations.

Edutainment and *energizers* were also among the technical English

terms that the volunteers were asked to learn. Both refer to the importance of entertainment in civic education. On the other hand, the participants could also detach themselves from 'the grassroots', understood to be dependent on Chinyanja/Chichewa and other Malawian languages, by bemoaning the problems of translation. These problems appeared time and again during the workshop, because, for reasons that were never explained, the regional and district officers used English concepts as the foundation for their discourse. For example, they first mentioned such concepts as 'poster', 'report', 'sitting plan' and 'experience', among several others, in English and then asked the audience to suggest equivalents in Chinyanja. While for some concepts the equivalents were quickly identified, many others prompted volunteers to lament the poverty of Chinyanja (Chichewa), exclaiming, for example, that 'Chichewa is problematic!' (*Chichewa ndi chovuta!*) Despite the existence of, for example, *chidziwitso* for 'poster' and *kaundula* for 'report', *positala* and *lipoti* were established as the translations.

These attitudes to translation were another indication of the desire to associate civic education with symbols and resources that were external to the reality of 'the grassroots'. Volunteers, under the officers' leadership, moved between two languages, one associated with quality education and opportunities, and the other with impoverishment, disadvantage and ignorance. The civilizing and progressive undercurrents become apparent when one realizes that the movement between the languages was one-way. In their efforts to find word-for-word rather than idiomatic translations for English concepts, the participants saw English as the unquestioned source of discourse. If Chinyanja equivalents were not forthcoming, the problem necessarily was in this language, not in English. Here the workshop upheld the inequality of translation that also underlies the official translations of human rights discourses in Malawi and Zambia. The fact that ordinary Malawians, with no background in translation, embraced the same inequalities is a measure of their resonance with wider historical processes.

Educating elders

The tacit teachings at the workshop, from personal cleanliness to language use, were crucial to the transmission of more explicit messages. The overt theme was to train the volunteers to acquire 'skills' (*luso*) to be deployed in civic education. While such issues as cleanliness

and language served to enhance volunteers' status and self-esteem, the issue of 'skills' revealed in a more obvious way how a distinction towards 'the grassroots' was a pre-condition for civic education. A central item on the agenda was 'the skill to teach elders' (*luso lophunzitsa anthu akuluakulu*). This item recognized the challenges of conducting civic education among adults, particularly elders, who are customarily seen as the embodiments of wisdom and authority. The very notion of 'teaching' (*kuphunzitsa*), rather than, for instance, 'conversation' (*kukambirana*), betrayed NICE representatives as those with knowledge.

The challenges of imparting this knowledge received somewhat ironical remarks from both the volunteers and the officers, often provoking laughter. A volunteer, reporting from a small-group discussion, observed that 'elders do not make mistakes, they merely forget' (*akuluakulu salakwa, amangoiwala*). The district officer also stressed that 'we do not disagree, we only add a little bit' (*sititsutsa, timangoonjezerapo*). The meaning of elders 'forgetting' and NICE representatives 'adding' something was immediately apparent to the volunteers. Their 'skills' included subtle ways of making elders agree with civic education experts' indisputable knowledge.

The idea that elders' knowledge was somewhat deficient was expressed in various ways. The most common strategy, for both volunteers and officers, was to refer to 'villages' (*midzi*) as one category and to give examples of ignorance and false beliefs there. 'In villages they believe that AIDS is caused by witches!' (*kumidzi amakhulupirira kuti edzi imachokera kwa afiti!*), one volunteer exclaimed. The officers warned, however, against embarrassing elders in public. A better strategy was to solicit several viewpoints on the same issue, and when the right answer appeared, the civic educator would start repeating it in different forms. The intent would be to make the crowd accept the message without appearing to impose it on them. Elders, in turn, would seek to avoid embarrassment by aligning themselves with the emerging dominant view. In their work of gradually overcoming resistance, volunteers would also encourage those individuals in the crowd who appeared to understand quickly the civic education message. Several techniques are at civic education officers' disposal to persuade the crowd to accept their viewpoints and messages. Adults differ from children, it was observed during the workshop, in that they want to feel equal to their teachers.

In this respect, the volunteers were advised to perfect the skill of 'lowering oneself' (*kudzitsitsa*) in order to adopt the 'level' appropriate to the crowd. For example, when teaching youths they should 'take the level of youths' (*kutenga level ya anyamata*), and when teaching chiefs they should 'take the level of chiefs' (*kutenga level ya mafumu*). As with politicians, so too with other social categories – civic educators alone move between different categories at will, enlightening those who remain trapped in their particular world-views and roles. This workshop was one among many to induce the volunteers to regard themselves as being outside and above 'culture' (*chikhalidwe*) no less than politics. 'The grassroots', also known as 'villages', existed as the audience of messages that only civic education officers fully understood.

Several aspects of their training contributed, therefore, to youthful volunteers' identification with NICE and its practice of civic education. These disillusioned school-leavers had found an organization that improved their self-esteem by defining them as intrinsically different from the impoverished multitudes. Certificates confirming participation in training workshops, formal letters, personal appearance, linguistic resources and various 'skills' distinguished them from 'the grassroots'. Consistent with their new status, they would categorically condemn, for instance, villagers' ideas of causation in afflictions such as AIDS, while conveniently ignoring the extent to which witchcraft gripped the imagination of educated Malawians (see Lwanda 2002). Volunteers' particular concern was to 'teach' elders, betraying a generational tension that has increased in the region as youngsters face greater constraints to advancement than their parents often did. Here NICE's pacification of youth also controls inter-personal and inter-generational tensions.

Revelations and hidden agendas

'A Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation is like a lamp in the darkness' (*A Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation ali ngati nyali m'mdima*). With these words ends an audio tape where a Malawian NGO, through the performances of the popular comedians Izeki and Jacob, informs the masses about their constitutional rights.[17] The idioms of light and darkness, of enlightenment, are by no means confined to NICE. Civic education programmes in Malawi on human rights commonly use them to convey how radical the new message is. While the above quotation identifies the NGO itself as the source

of light, activists generally consider their civic education on new laws and democratic principles as having this revelatory potential. There can be little doubt about the need for such revelations. In a country where the only mass medium worthy of the designation, namely the radio, continues to be used as a tool of misinformation by ruling politicians, information on new laws and rights is not easily available. The paramount task of organizations providing civic education is to carve out a space where the substance and implications of human rights can be debated.

This chapter has raised doubts about the success of civic education in Malawi in carrying out this necessary task. Civic education on rights and democracy gained a new momentum after 1999, but its relation to taken-for-granted hierarchies in society remains poorly recognized. My fieldwork among the staff members and volunteers of NICE has made me understand the practical constraints such organizations face. Precisely because NICE is a well-funded project, it attracts ambitious young Malawians as, to continue with the metaphor, a lamp draws insects in the dark. Although these youths are often genuinely concerned about the state of democracy in their country, an effect of their training workshops is that identification with certain quasi-professional markers overrides identification with the targets of their civic education. The allure of status distinctions is irresistible in a country where youths face an unprecedented contradiction between their aspirations and opportunities. After having been fed on a diet of hopes for progress and personal advancement during their school years, the last thing most contemporary Malawian youths expect is to be identified with the poverty and disadvantage where they started from. NICE provides one context to satisfy the desire for status.

The social and economic crisis in which NICE operates is only one aspect of the reason why its civic education may not empower the masses. The crisis undermines the radical potential of civic education when it is combined, first, with a specific view on education and, second, with the impact of the Malawian state on civic education programmes. As mentioned, NICE announces, in its public relations materials, that its main objective is 'to promote democratic values, attitudes and behaviour at grassroots level'. It is this emphasis on values and attitudes that most directly contributes to the possibility that civic education on rights merely maintains entrenched inequal-

ities. NICE's objective, calling for behavioural change, may be seen to address the need to educate people both 'about' and 'for' human rights (see Engelbronner-Kolff 1998: 14). Yet it falls short of enhancing the capacity of the disadvantaged to confront the power relations that underlie human rights violations. No Freirean 'pedagogy of the oppressed' (Freire 1970) is involved in the idealistic belief that right values and attitudes, in the absence of transformative action against structural inequalities, are enough to institute democracy. Especially disturbing is the fact that NICE assigns to 'the grassroots' the duty of changing attitudes. It is a subtle way of avoiding mentioning the wider power relations that make 'the grassroots' the audience of civic education in the first place.

This avoidance of mentioning power, already seen in NICE's insistence on non-partisanship, is essential to the smooth running of the project. The state in Malawi retains considerable influence over the precise content and capacity of foreign-funded projects. As explained earlier in this chapter, the state is not 'above' the donor-sponsored 'civil society' as a more encompassing structure. Some NGOs are superior to the state in their capacity to reach the populace and to offer their employees considerably more attractive salaries and transnational links. Yet the balance between the state and the non-state is precarious, for ever subject to negotiation. A law requiring the registration of NGOs has recently come into force, giving the state a final say in defining legitimate organizations. Diplomatic confrontations are also important weapons in the arsenal of the state to control and curtail the operations of organizations whose foreign donors are represented in the country.

This tension is particularly apparent in NICE's case, because its status as a 'project initiative' is a source of constant ambiguity. While its donors emphasize its 'ownership' by the Republic of Malawi, cabinet ministers and senior government officials have often interrogated NICE's expatriate project manager about its true identity. A presidential adviser has reportedly accused NICE of acting 'like an NGO' without being registered as such. Paradoxically, among expatriate donors and Malawian civil society activists, such accusations serve to strengthen the belief that civic education projects are politically consequential. Rather than seeing these accusations and threats as one way of cowing human rights NGOs and projects into non-political themes, they are

taken as evidence for the impact of civic education. 'We must be getting it right since the government wants to close us', a highly placed NICE official remarked to me.

NICE is, in point of fact, an example of how a civic education project with transnational links contributes to undemocratic governance. As Hodgson (2002: 1093) has noted in a Tanzanian context, while the 'donor community' encompasses a wide range of actors – some secular, others religious; some willing to challenge the state, others acquiescent – most donors prefer to sustain themselves by depoliticizing the interventions they sponsor. The trend is common among externally funded NGOs and projects, with the initial excitement with 'empowerment' in new democracies changing into 'service delivery' (Fisher 1997: 454). Note, for instance, NICE's promise to provide 'civic education services'. From the content of its messages to the ways in which it channels popular frustrations into distinctions towards 'the grassroots', NICE depoliticizes civic education and controls popular challenges to the state and the global order.

Notes

*This chapter is part of a larger study presented in Englund (2006).

1 'The NGO question' has been the subject of extensive critiques. For a selection of overviews and case studies, see e.g. Barrow and Jennings 2002; Bornstein 2003; Dorman 2002; Fisher 1997; Howell and Pearce 2001; Tvedt 1998.

2 Kamuzu Banda, for example, repeatedly warned that multipartyism would usher in chaos in the country.

3 The Danish government announced that corruption and human rights violations had prompted it to withdraw its aid, a criticism keenly taken up by the Malawian opposition and independent newspapers (for an analysis, see Englund 2002b: 15–17). The fact that a populist right-wing coalition came to power in Denmark received little attention in Malawi.

4 'National Initiative for Civic Education: Making Democracy Work – Take Part in Public Life' (a leaflet, no date of publication).

5 For its second phase of operation, extending from 2000 until 2004, NICE was granted 7.4 million Euros by the European Union. Although its district offices do not generally have vehicles and their access to computers is limited, they do not face problems with unpaid bills and salaries that frequently impair the functioning of government departments. The lack of vehicles in NICE district offices is eased by their capacity to hire transport for visits to distant places, while salaries and daily allowances paid at workshops make officers' income higher than they would receive with similar qualifications in government.

6 In 2002, civic education officers' monthly salaries varied between 22,000 and 25,000 kwacha (about $300 and $330). It should be noted that salaries exclude daily allowances paid for attending workshops that can as much as double an officer's monthly income.

7 Daily allowances are important to Malawian professionals in both NGOs and the civil service. For an account of the role they play in Malawian civil service, see Anders (2002).

8 President Muluzi banned all demonstrations on the issue, effectively giving the state media the chance to campaign for a third term without opposition.

9 The dramatic decline in the standards of primary and secondary education was a direct consequence of the Muluzi administration's populist policies. The Educational Statistics for 1997 released by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology revealed, for example, that 3 million pupils attended Malawi's 4,000 primary schools. In Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS), which cater for those who do not qualify for conventional schools, qualified teachers made up just 1 per cent of the teaching staff. In 2000, a presidential commission of inquiry into the crisis in secondary education found that the proportion of candidates writing the Malawi School Certificate of Education ('O' levels) in CDSS had increased from 1 per cent in 1990 to 51.3 per cent in 1999. In 1999, the pass rate in conventional schools was 27.5 per cent and in CDSS 3.6 per cent.

10 In fact, the monolingual Chinyanja dictionary does not even list formal 'politics' as one of the meanings of *ndale* (see Centre for Language Studies 2000: 251). Both meanings that it gives refer to deceit that one practises towards the other, whether in physical or verbal contest.

11 The content of civic education messages is the subject of different workshops, often led by foreign experts on democracy and human rights. These workshops are usually open to full-time officers only, while volunteers learn the messages from the manual Gwira Mpini Kwacha ('Grab the hoe handle, it's morning'; see Cairns and Dambula 1999). Published by the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), it is commonly used among organizations that conduct civic education on democracy and human rights.

12 I stress similarity, because in both cases extraversion brings resources to individuals and organizations to engage in various local and national projects. I have elsewhere discussed the need to analyse further different strategies of extraversion, pointing out how in some religious communities the boundaries between the external and the internal become blurred (see Englund 2003).

13 Three dots represent micro-pauses of more than two seconds. They do not represent, for example, omitted words.

14 See Simpson (2003) for examples from Zambia on the uses of 'jack-up' in local English. A further example of the distinctions between civic educators and 'the grassroots' is the fact that this kind of language featured more in civic educators' internal workshops than during their sessions in villages and townships.

15 A case in point is Malawi's parliament, where English has all along been the only language, despite many parliamentarians' evident difficulties in expressing themselves in it. Many Malawians, including parliamentarians, have recently become more positive towards a bilingual or multilingual language policy for the parliament (see Matiki 2003). However, a counter-opinion claims that a parliamentarian's inability to speak English means that he or she 'has not been to school' and is therefore incompetent, see e.g. 'Aphungu asamalankhule Chichewa', Tamvani (*Weekend Nation*), 7–8 June 2003.

16 Another well-known aspect of Banda's contradictory character was his respect for Chewa ethnicity and language (see Vail and White 1989). It is worth mentioning that this respect was largely nostalgic, even if it contributed to consolidating his power in the Chewa heartlands of Central Malawi. Banda saw that the proper place of the Chichewa language was in the villages, embedded in timeless traditions, while advancement through the science and education of the modern world was possible only through English.

17 *Dziwani Malamulo a Dziko Lanu* ('Know the laws of your country'), audio tape produced by the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation with funding from the GTZ-Democracy project, no date.

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7 | Identity and knowledge production in the fourth generation

NANA AKUA ANYIDOHO

This chapter asks the question, 'What is African about African Studies?' or, phrased differently, '*Where* is the African in the study of Africa?' What is the link (should there be a link?) between location and scholarship, between belonging and knowledge production, between identity and representation? This question, long a subject – sometimes a subtext – of debate, is not one we can afford to dismiss as we look back over the state of knowledge production about Africa, in order to chart new courses.

Why is this an issue for the fourth generation?

Why are identity and knowledge production issues for a new generation of African scholars? It is not because they are a novel concern, but precisely because they are perpetual challenges, requiring every generation to offer a response for its peculiar circumstances. Let me refer to an incident at a CODESRIA conference in Accra in 2003 to buttress the point. A paper had just been presented on the politics of representation of Africa in US academia. Quickly another participant stood up to question the relevance of what goes on in the United States to scholarship produced on and about the continent, suggesting clearly that this was a preoccupation that we (as African scholars) could well do without. Without placing too much of a burden of proof on this incident, it did bring to mind the generational standpoints that Mkandawire (1995) refers to in his typology of African scholars(hip). I noted that the author of the paper, the relevance of which was called into question, was a younger scholar working in the United States, for whom issues of representation in American academia arguably had personal and immediate resonance. The questioner was an older colleague based on the continent. The latter had the profile of a member of the third generation whom Mkandawire describes as primarily homegrown, and which lacks the impulse of its immediate predecessors to

'speak back', or to defend its scholarship to non-African arbiters. It may be that the older scholar's comment was an expression of this generational orientation. In the same way, the paper-presenter may have been attempting to map out the terrain for the scholarship of *his* generation. The concerns raised by his paper reflected the general truth that scholarly work about Africa is affected by factors 'extraneous' to the continent, and even more so in an increasingly globalized era. The intimate nature of today's society demands an attention to events in one end of the world that may have a ripple effect on the other end. The events of the past few years alone have proven that we cannot afford to think of 'the global village' as merely a cliché. Moreover, as bilateral and multilateral agencies move away from obviously coercive modes of Structural Adjustment to more subtle but, perhaps, even more effective control strategies, the local becomes integrated perforce into the global. Alongside these trends are emerging theoretical perspectives that laud the fusion of ideas and cultures. It is imperative, therefore, that we maintain an awareness of the confluence of political, social, economic and ideological forces that influence our scholarship.

How, then, do we take account of and draw on the global to re-envision an African Studies that is firmly situated in Africa? The importance of this question is highlighted by the very use of the term African Studies. In this chapter, I give it the common-sense meaning of the gamut of intellectual production about Africa. However, the label has taken on a peculiar slant, denoting an area of knowledge in Western educational institutions removed from the 'mainstream', and housed in specific programmes. By contrast, there are few programmes or research centres on the continent that bear the nomenclature 'African Studies'. It appears that the centres of knowledge production about Africa are located outside the continent, if one thinks in terms of the ability to determine the nature of available knowledge, and to ultimately shape how Africa is viewed and engaged with by the rest of the world. It is in the context of this reality that I introduce the idea of insider scholarship as a way of balancing locations of power in African Studies.

From where do we speak? Questions of location and positionality

Insider research can be understood simply as the practice of research within a group with which one identifies as a member. This definition,

however, belies the many meanings that are brought to bear on insider scholarship, and the contestations around *who* belongs to *what* group.

The idea of identity at the heart of this chapter references the related concepts of *location* and *positionality*. Positionality refers to the identities of the researcher in relation to the 'researched' (Wolf 1996). In other words, positionality indicates contextualized and relational locations such as nationality, ethnicity, race, class, education, religion, family affiliation, ideological leanings, epistemological perspectives and philosophical orientations. Positionality is contextual because it takes account of the circumstances in which knowledge is produced, and relational because it concerns both the subjectivity of the researcher and the subjectivities of others.[1]

Positionality is an important concept because it has implications for the nature of knowledge produced, and how that knowledge is received. This is a truth that has been painfully self-evident in writings about Africa. Positioning themselves as missionaries or administrators, non-Africans made representations about Africans from self-declared locations of authority. Those representations were validated by non-African audiences (and even by African readers privy to these works) because they came supposedly from 'enlightened' sources speaking on behalf of those incapable of speaking for themselves. One reaction of African scholars to this untenable state of affairs was to claim that we could produce similarly 'worthwhile' scholarship *despite* the fact that we were Africans. A second response was the attempt to reclaim representations of ourselves by asserting that our scholarship was legitimate precisely *because* we were Africans. It is this second rationale that has buttressed the practice of insider scholarship.

Unpacking 'insider scholarship'

Insider scholarship has been around for a long time under many names: indigenous ethnography, auto-ethnography, insider research, native research, endogenous research, research competence by blood, introspective research (see Messerschmidt 1981; Reed-Danahay 1997). It is noteworthy that many of these designations come from the field of anthropology which has been in the eye of the conceptual storm around insider scholarship. Anthropology has been long defined by its study of Other cultures. What then happens when the anthropological

gaze is turned inwards, when the Other becomes the researcher and her own subject? The blurring of the lines between researcher and subject has led to much soul-searching in anthropology, and has also resulted in wider interdisciplinary discussions. The field of African Studies has been powerfully influenced by this debate because of the importance of anthropology as a foundational discipline in African Studies programmes.

Insider scholarship is not a new research practice, therefore. What *has* changed are the terms in which it is debated. When, in 1981, the anthropologist John Aguilar made his often-cited contribution to a book on the subject of insider research, he acknowledged the near-crisis point to which the increased incidence of insider research had brought his discipline. Aguilar attempted to take stock of this trend, presenting a painstaking tally of the relative merits and demerits of 'outsider' and 'insider' research. The essential criterion was how each 'method' could help or hinder objective, unbiased, scientific research. Aguilar concluded his lengthy examination with a few paragraphs querying the notion of an absolute insider or outsider. By contrast, there is now increased emphasis on the epistemological and political dimensions of insider research, rather than on methods and technique. To illustrate, a relatively more recent set of essays on auto-ethnography (Reed-Danahay 1997) speaks extensively to the difficulty of defining national, ethnic, racial or geographic memberships, and thoughtfully explores the influence of complex and dynamic identities on scholarly activity.

A major catalyst for insider scholarship is the general disaffection with positivism. A corresponding embracing of subjectivity opens up representation to interrogation. The point has been increasingly brought home that, to an extent, all representations are interpretations. We can no longer assume that one person, using 'scientific' methods, can get at the Truth. What we have, rather, are versions of truths told from different viewpoints or positions.

The theoretical development that problematizes representation is powerful because it immediately creates space for multiple realities. Feminists and post-colonialists, for instance, can juxtapose old representations against new ones from the margins (Gandhi 1998). In this way, insider scholarship can be used strategically as a tool to counter colonizing representations of non-Western subjects (Narayan 1997), which are often the basis for political and economic exploitation.

Research by 'natives', 'indigenes' and former 'Others' are thus situated within the larger socio-political project of decolonization and self-determination.

The contours of the theoretical and political move towards self-representation were traced in the years when African nations were celebrating or anticipating their release from the moorings of direct colonial domination; the opportunity for self-definition – for a deliberate construction and dissemination of self-representations – was a giddy prospect. Identity became an oft-visited site of analysis. The goal was either to fashion out new identities, or to reclaim pre-existing identities, to counteract the hegemonic presence of the 'European' image. One example, perhaps overused because of its salience, is that of Negritude. While Negritude can be described in a number of ways, fundamentally, it sought to affirm a distinctive African way of being that was set up in opposition to the (perception) of the European's. In other words, the proponents of Negritude aimed to present a set of representations about Africans created from an 'authentic' location.

For those who engage in this admittedly political project of self-representation, the aim is not to collect varied representations, but to *replace* 'harmful' representations with more realistic, more 'authentic' accounts from the 'inside'. And yet the very paradigm that makes room for different representations is at the same time an obstacle to this political end: if representation is mere interpretation, as some would contend, then can one be more 'right', more 'true' than another? And if there are no fixed identities, can one make claim to an inviolable insider status as validation for one's representations?

Critiques of insider scholarship

Over time, other orientations have emerged that proclaim that there is no best location to produce knowledge; that, rather, there exist multiple, equally viable locations. Ideological perspectives such as universalism, cosmopolitanism and Créolité have been proposed as more useful and accessible metaphors for identity, and more encompassing of the contradictions of contemporary life. These approaches do not attempt to tie Self to race or ethnicity, language or culture. Rather than opposing tradition to modernity, the urban to the rural, and the African to the European, 'identity is destabilised and de-essentialised and rendered heterogeneous, plural and uncertain' (Lewis 1998).[2]

From these and similar perspectives, the first objection to the idea of insider scholarship is that it promotes a totalizing conception of identity. A related critique is that scholarship based on race, geography, nationality, ethnicity, gender, etc. is essentialist and essentializing. Third, insider scholarship is opposed on the grounds that it gives credence to the very Self–Other distinctions that it tries to question. I will respond to these objections briefly here, and then more fully in the next section where I argue for a rethinking of insider scholarship.

The first point to be made is that there is growing realization that people constantly negotiate various identities in the ordinary business of living. Consequently, the insider–outsider dichotomy is de-emphasized in favour of an understanding that every researcher is simultaneously an insider and an outsider in any research situation (Zavella 1996). The claim to insider status must, therefore, be indexed for context to prevent it becoming totalizing. It should be used as a marker of one's location in a carefully delineated research situation.

The second critique suggests that the very idea of formulating an insider identity with respect to a societal, national, cultural or other grouping runs the risk of essentializing that group. However, this is not necessarily problematic if we realize that all social categories we appeal to are essentialist in that they are social and historical constructions (Fuss 1989). The real question is not the nature of these categories but the ends to which they are put. Fabien Boulaga states that 'race is not a logical or scientific problem, but a political problem in search of an absolute, metaphysical justification' (quoted in Mafeje 2000). We can add that geography, nationality, gender and ethnicity are similarly political, and can be selectively retained for their political utility.

Finally, the charge that insider scholarship reinforces homogeneous stereotypes of the native, the indigene and the Other/Object (Lal 1996) is perhaps the most damning for African scholars who would want to envisage their work as a way of deconstructing colonial images of their people. I view a quick dismissal of insider research on these grounds alone as either a facile denial of differences in location, or a wilful ignorance of the politics of the production and use of knowledge. If subscribing to an insider status is reminiscent of colonial notions of Self and Other, it is because those distinctions do exist, have been perpetuated, and would continue to operate even if African researchers chose to ignore them. A more practical response to this

political reality is strategically to occupy those locations in order to reconstitute them.

It is important to point out that this debate about the value of insider scholarship is not mere abstraction, or simply an opportunity to score academic points. It is fundamentally a political question, as Narayan (1997) implies when she observes that discussions about identity and representation can be wielded strategically either to empower or to disempower scholarship. Insider scholarship is most commonly associated with Western-dominated academic spaces, into which the insider is allowed so that she may represent her people to Western audiences. Such a strong link is assumed between the scholar and 'her' grouping that she is seen as speaking for others, in which case a specific national/cultural/ethnic/gendered identity may be highlighted to give the greatest credence to her representations.[3] In such an instance, the question is not how good her representations are, but how good a representative *she* is judged to be by her audience (ibid.).

In a paradoxical manner, the insider is at one and the same time privileged as the voice of many Others and marginalized by having her scholarship constrained to the local and the specific. Some African scholars may revel in the status of the resident insider, while others resist the label, repudiating all ties to any one group so they may speak more 'universal' truths. Under these circumstances, the critiques of insider scholarship appear to have merit: insider scholarship does indeed become totalizing, essentialist and stereotypical in assuming a unitary location for the scholar, and in encouraging uni-dimensional representations of a people. It is my argument that the theory and practice of insider scholarship can be redeemed from such unfavourable associations.

Recentring insider scholarship

The common charges levelled against insider scholarship are based on assumptions about audience, about the purpose of scholarship, and about locations of power. I propose a redefinition of insider scholarship that takes into account these elements of audience, purpose and power.

Insider scholarship has often been preoccupied with re-representing 'insiders' to 'outsiders'. One definition of insider scholarship has it as

> a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them ... [T]hey involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms *to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding*. (Pratt 1992, quoted in Reed-Danahay 1997: 7–8; emphasis added)

The political aspect of insider scholarship is clearly acknowledged in the above statement. However, the single-minded goal Pratt advocates of 'infiltrating' or injecting our ideas into the 'metropolis' only endorses the dominance of that which it seeks to topple. Such scholarship I find inconsistent with the political end of self-representation. I am advocating an adjustment in perspective so that insider scholarship is not used principally to indicate one's relationship to supposedly more powerful Western audiences.

In the task of orienting itself better to negotiate a new era, the fourth generation has to balance the respective outward and inward orientations of the second and third generations (Mkandawire 1995). Our ambition cannot be merely to speak (back) to an outside audience. Insider scholarship should be local scholarship in terms of its reference points. The local should be the focus of our scholarship – as its audience, its primary beneficiaries and its agenda setters. In this way, we gradually move power back to the centre. On the other hand, centring African Studies on Africa and Africans does not mean a neglect of the global currents of ideas, or of the imbalance of power. The move to the centre is a crucial starting point. A necessary and complementary move is from the centre outwards.

'Shared struggle' as basis for insider scholarship

I offer the idea of *shared struggle* as a means of realizing the potential of insider scholarship while avoiding its pitfalls. 'Situated knowledge' is a useful foundational concept, in that it acknowledges differentiated locations, and affirms these locations as starting points for the production of knowledge. From the foregoing, the question of *where* you stand is important, because every research project, and indeed all scholarship, has its basis in the personal.[4] Locations are, however, mobile because each person inhabits multiple locations within and

across time. To avoid an identity trap, the question of what you stand *for* should be as important as where you stand. In this way, a discursive space can be created for 'an imagined community of … intellectuals that rise above national, racial, and gendered boundaries in the articulation of politically responsible representations' (Lal 1996: 200). Mohanty similarly appeals to the notion of imagined communities of resistance, proposing that

> it is not colour or sex which constructs the grounds for these struggles. Rather it is the way we think about race, class and gender – the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. Thus, potentially, [scholars] of all colours … can align themselves with and participate in these imagined communities. *However, clearly our relation and centrality in particular struggles depend on our different … locations and histories*. (Mohanty 1991: 4; emphasis added)

The last sentence, without prejudice to what precedes it, does imply that the ability to be engaged in a particular struggle – and even our understanding of what the struggle is about – is influenced by experiences of gender, class, geography, class, race, etc. As Mkandawire advises, while one would want to encourage mutual respect and a sense of 'a community of scholars working on Africa' (1997: 35), the power relations underlying knowledge production about Africa continue to keep African scholarship and African scholars outside of the centre. Mkandawire proposes that by 'sheer numbers, existential interest and proximity to the reality African scholars will play an important role in the generation of knowledge about Africa' (ibid.). I suggest that an 'existential' interest connotes lived experience which, while not synonymous with 'biology or physical location' (Asante 1997), frequently correlates with such demographic characteristics. It is difficult for someone with an existential interest in the continent to give up on African Studies (and, I suppose, on Africans) as one Africanist scholar has famously declared he has done.[5] Existential interest, or lived reality, is likely to inform a commitment to a certain kind of scholarship. 'Because we are all, researchers and subjects, the products of our history and culture, an experience of social and political exclusion is likely to shape more critical thinking and writing about such experiences in the collective, structural domain' (Motzafi-Haller 1997: 217).

In sum, while a particular background may make certain types of

scholarship more likely, there is a level of choice. It is not the mere fact of 'native' birth that is important, but rather the connection we make between our experiences and our research. In other words, the idea of shared struggle respects nationality, geography, race, gender, etc., but does not make these labels the sole basis on which scholarship is evaluated.

How does all this relate to the *practice* of scholarship?

To leave this discussion at a rhetoric level, without having it inform the way we conduct our work as scholars, would be unhelpful. What I present here are ideas that bear reflecting on, not as a one-time exercise, but as an integral part of our scholarship over time. I call for greater self-reflexivity.

Collins (2002) maintains the need for the scholar – especially one who is in a position of marginality – to map a personal epistemology for her work. At various points in our careers, and for specific research ventures, we should ask ourselves: 'On what basis do I claim insider status?' In my own case, if I call myself an insider as I conduct research on low-income, rural Ghanaian women, I am saying that my position within that defined context, at that particular time, is that of someone who by lived experience and by shared interests is a member of a delimited group. I am 'claiming a genealogical, cultural and political set of experiences' (Smith 1999: 12) that I consider to be the basis of my research. But, again, we have to allow that others in the research context also define our position. Personally, I have to recognize the ways in which I may be considered an outsider by the women I do my research among; the ways in which they would highlight aspects of my identity (such as education, urban residence, socio-economic status) which I choose to make secondary to my 'genealogical, cultural and political' locations. In other research contexts, there might be differential emphasis placed on each of these identities. It is the context that defines what being an insider is, rather than some prior label, and it is important that we be attentive to how the constant shift of positionality (that is, of identity in relation to location) affects our scholarship.

Again, scholarship based on shared *struggle* implies that research is political both in intent because it is value-driven, and in effect because representations have consequences. It has often been said of African scholars that we do not have the luxury of doing 'mere' academic

research. I dare say this is not a condition of African scholarship alone. It may be more accurate to say that, perhaps, Africans, for the reasons discussed in this chapter, need to be more self-conscious about the fact that research is a political exercise.

Finally, the idea of insider scholarship as *shared* struggle means that research should be inclusive. It cannot be an imposition of one's agenda on others. The struggle itself, as I have stated, has to be a process of negotiation.[6] It is recognizing that the presuppositions, the ideas, interests and values with which we invariably enter into research may not be those of the people with whom we do research. I am mindful of this in my own work because of my presumption in speaking on behalf of 'my' research participants. My research agenda is motivated by dissatisfaction with development paradigms that are applied, sometimes indiscriminately, by our governments and by international development agencies. I am wary of the harm they cause when they do not take into account the context of people's lives. My research project is being carried out in obvious hope that it will influence policy-making. Therein lies the danger. If the targets of these programmes do not share my critical perspective, do I put down their non-participation in my struggle as evidence of false consciousness? Can I come out of the research experience having taken on their struggle – even if their struggle involves strengthening the very programmes I critique in my research? Since insider research attempts to represent both the/a struggle and those involved in it, it is representation both in the sense of speaking *about* and speaking *for*. Alcoff cautions that 'the practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation' (1991: 29). This is an indictment we should avoid if we intend to engage in scholarship that affirms African peoples as centres of power and knowledge. Self-reflexivity is always key.

Conclusion

I conclude this chapter by reiterating the value of insider scholarship for a new generation of scholars. The locations to which insiders lay claim do not make them better scholars (Anyidoho 1983) or necessarily lead them to present their conditions and those of others in a more reliable manner. A badge of 'insiderness' cannot replace critical analysis or be a cloak of immunity to having one's representations challenged

(Narayan 1997). However, with self-reflexivity and with intentionality, insider scholarship can be an important basis of knowledge production.

Notes

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1 It is important to note that the identity of the scholar is informed not only by self-identification but also by the identities imposed on her by the circumstances of, and the people involved in, the process of knowledge production. While acknowledging that one's identities are not wholly self-determined, for the purposes of this particular discussion I foreground that aspect of positionality that is somewhat within the conscious decision-making of the scholar.

2 Lewis was speaking in specific reference to Créolité but the statement holds true for similar orientations to the question of identity, that oppose what they would perceive as the essentialization of identity and, by extension, the production of knowledge on such grounds.

3 Alternatively, aspects of a researcher's identity may be used to devalue her work, as may happen when she is charged with not being an 'authentic' representative of 'her' people. De-authentication is equated with 'Westernization', which is evidenced by formal schooling, high socio-economic status, residence outside one's home country, etc. As Linda Smith (1999) points out, this is a disingenuous practice by which our scholars are accused of being disenfranchised and therefore incapable of relevant representations, while the 'indigenous' people are dismissed for lacking the conversance with the discourse of academia to speak for themselves. Who then can speak? Smith asks.

4 Much of what we identify as our research agendas derives from questions to which we have a personal interest in finding answers, phenomena that fascinate us and points we want to prove. There is no such thing as disinterested research.

5 The text of Gavin Kitching's 'Why I gave up African Studies' was widely circulated on African Studies-related listservs. As I understand it, Kitching made a presentation of the paper at a conference in Adelaide, Australia, in 2000. As much controversy as this declaration stirred, it should not have shocked those who have read Paul Tiyambe Zeleza's (1997) brilliant satire of an uncannily similar scenario in *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises*. For further debate on Kitching's papers, see *African Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 7, no.s 2 & 3, 2003 at <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/index.htm>.

6 I credit David Donkor with this insight.

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Contributors

Olusegun Adekoya is a Professor of Literature in the Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria. A specialist on Wole Soyinka, he has published several insightful essays on the writer's works. *The Inner Eye: A Study of Wole Soyinka's Poetry* is in the press. A collection of poems – *Guinea Bites and Sahel Blues* – was published in 2004. He is married and has twin sons.

Gbemisola Adeoti is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. He did his Ph D in English at the University of Ibadan. His areas of teaching and research include Dramatic Literature, Poetic Traditions, Literary History, and Literary Theory. He co-edited, with Wole Ogundele, *IBA: Essays on African Literature in Honour of Oyin Ogunba*. He is the author of *Naked Soles*.

Nana Akua Anyidoho is a doctoral student in the Human Development and Social Policy (School of Education and Social Policy) at Northwestern University. Her research interests centre on the socio-cultural context of development. Before entering graduate school, she taught junior high school, worked in community development and as a business consultant.

Björn Beckman is a Research Professor in the Department of Political Science, Stockholm University, with teaching and research experience mostly from West Africa. His books include *Organising the Farmers: Cocoa Politics and National Development in Ghana* (1976), *The Wheat Trap: Bread and Underdevelopment in Nigeria* (1985) and *Union Power in the Nigerian Textile Industry* (1998), both with Gunilla Andrae. His current work is on African trade unions.

Harri Englund is a Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, UK, and a Reader (Docent) of African Studies at the University of Helsinki. He has carried out extensive research in Malawi on cultural, social and political processes. His most recent book is *Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor* (2006).

Jude Fokwang is doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto, currently preparing a thesis on urban youth subjectivities in Cameroon. He obtained his MA with distinction from the University of Pretoria. In 2001, he was a laureate of the Social Science Research Council's fellowship on 'African Youth in the Global Age'.

M. S. C. Okolo is a Lecturer at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria. She studied Philosophy at the Universities of Calabar and Ibadan. In 2004 she received the CODESRIA Prize for her doctoral thesis.

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