

<< on the Negritude issue for example where he writes that: 'Soyinka, while criticising Negritude, made the remark which has haunted him, that the tiger does not proclaim his tigritude' (p.90). Then, on the next page, cites Lewis Nkosi's report on the African Writers Conference at the Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda in 1962. Nkosi observed that while the 'older writers like the South African, Ezekiel Mphahlele and the Nigerian, Chinua Achebe, looked by far the calmest, most disciplined and trustworthy, in what appeared to be a company of literary cut-throats, out to get one another at the slightest provocation... (t)he young Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka, went so far as to invent a 'negritude' poem on the spot, while addressing the conference, in a sudden astringent parody of Senghor's poetry and its preoccupations with the African personality, an act of creation which succeeded only too well for it enraged the delegates from French West Africa' (p.91)

Follow-up materials supplied in Janheinz Jahn's *Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing* are absent where the issue is revisited following a 1964 Berlin meeting. There the commentator was reported to have said, 'As Aime Cesaire said, it is quite common for things to be quoted out of context and

for portraits to be issued by foreign critics and even by African interviewers which end up by a little bit of distorting the real image. The point is this that, to quote what I said fully, I said: "A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces". In other words: a tiger does not stand in the forest and say: "I am a tiger". When you pass where the tiger has walked before, you see the skeleton of the duiker, you know that some tigritude has been emanated there. In other words: the distinction which I was making at this conference (in Kampala, Uganda, 1962) was a purely literary one: I was trying to distinguish between propaganda and true poetic creativity. I was saying in other words that what one expected from poetry was an intrinsic poetic quality, not a mere name-dropping.'

A work of this significance and nature in my view is an opportunity to balance out and set records straight, particularly where the novelist's peers are concerned.

This also goes for the references in the book to the Charles Nnolim debate when the critic announced that he had found a source for 'Arrow of God.' Ayi Kwei Armah also suffers in the procession of Ohaeto's poor and imbalanced portrayals.

• A young Nigerian-born writer, Idowu Omoyele lives in London.

Inhospitable streets

Report by Pius Adesanmi

Georges Herault, Pius Adesanmi, Eds.
JEUNES, CULTURE DE LA RUE ET
VIOLENCE URBAINE EN AFRIQUE,
French Institute for Research in Af-
rica, Ibadan & African Book Builders
Ltd., Ibadan, 1997, 419 pp.

REACTING to a 1996 report which estimated the number of street children and youths in Nairobi, Kenya at about 100,000, Jinmi Adisa, a United Nations consultant on conflict resolution, exclaimed jocularly that Nairobi is now taking 'giant strides' in the production of street children in Africa! Comical as it may appear on the surface, Adisa's remark draws powerful attention to a phenomenon which has become one of the cornerstones of contemporary social discourse and political action in this *fin de siecle* - the phenomenon of urbanisation with its concomittant effects of demographic hyper-explosion, economic stasis and social dysfunctionality in the modern African polis.



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Design by Rosalie-
Ann Modder

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When all the structures of modernity and the factors propitious to human development are concentrated in the city as is the case in Africa and the Third World in general, the stage is set for the progressive disempowerment of the rural areas, thus forcing the mass of impoverished peasants to migrate to the already overcrowded cities where amorphous survival strategies occasion serious spatial pressures. This centripetal process, which continually draws rural dwellers to the eldorado of the city, has been canonised in most disciplines as rural-urban migration. The net consequences of this situation are vividly described by Michel Marcus in his report on the International Conference on Urban Security held in Saint-Denis, La Reunion in 1995: *Our cities are full of social malfunctions in terms of the family, education, employment, culture, ethnic relations, relations between young people and adults, the place of women in society, housing, access to land and so on.... Our cities have become insecure, while at the same time failing to provide their inhabitants with the ingredients of sustainable development* (14).

In this equation, space in the African city has become highly commodified and is rigidly governed by a profit oriented axiology. Given that the commodification of space in the African city is complicated further by the factors of marginalisation and unequal access to opportunities, the ground is prepared for the activities of the informal sector and the underworld to develop. Interestingly, recent empirical indices from Africa show that children and youths now form the bulk of urban street actors. Indeed, every African city now has an

army of children and youths for whom the street has become a permanent home. Naturally, these street children construct their own subcultural ethos which are often at variance with the regnant socio-cultural orthodoxies of the larger society. This creates tensions and contradictions which are inimical to the management of urban space in Africa.

In response to this intimidating urban challenge, the Ibadan-based French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) convened an international symposium on the theme, *Youths, Street Culture and Urban Violence in Africa* in Abidjan, the economic capital of Cote d'Ivoire, from May 5-7 1997. The symposium, which was co-sponsored by the French Ministry of Cooperation and the Urban Management Programme of the UN, availed a good number of experts from Africa, Europe and the United States the opportunity of establishing diverse but mutually enriching positinalities on the topic.

Prior to the symposium, Professor Georges Herault, IFRA's erstwhile director, had commissioned eight city-specific papers from seasoned scholars. The cities are: Abidjan (Alain Sisoko), Dakar (Ousseynou Faye and Momar-Coumba Diop), Johannesburg (Mart Shaw), Kano (Olawale Albert), Kinshasha (Tshikala Biaya), Lagos (Jinmi Adisa), Nairobi (Deyssi Rodriguez-Torres) and Umtata (Eghosa Osaghae). The submissions of these scholars in their various papers formed the epistemological pivot of the symposium. Discussions bordered mainly on the need for fashioning out appropriate methodological paradigms for apprehending the phenomenon of street children; the need to put the amorphous dysfunctionalities of the African city in proper perspective as well as a close examination of the interface between

street culture and urban violence. Other issues examined include the identification of the 'trigger issues' responsible for the high incidence of street deviance in African cities, the role of the state and the civil society in the area of intervention strategies. The role played by the familiar binarism between tradition and modernity in frustrating intervention efforts was also discussed.

With regard to methodology, participants were of the opinion that only a multidisciplinary approach could enable the scholar to grapple with the complexities of the phenomenon of street culture and urban violence. They however noted that the scholar must ensure that his findings are not merely a reflection of his own idiosyncratic perceptions. Apart from this problem, the symposium also had to address the thorny question of defining who precisely is a street child. This task was made all the more difficult by the obvious fluidities of the concerned subjects in terms of age and identity. Quoting Schurink (1993:5), Osaghae described street children as:

All categories of boys and girls who have not reached adulthood, for whom the street in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied buildings, wasteland, etc.) has become the habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, who are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by their families or responsible adults and in no position to assert the rights due to them as youths, be they children on or of the street, runaways or throwaways.

The symposium went ahead to establish three categories of street children on the basis of their mode of street occupation. They are: mid-career street youths, temporary street youths and

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career street youths. While a good number of these actors work in the informal sector (street hawkers, bus conductors, car washers, porters, car guards, beggars) others are involved in illegal activities (pickpockets, shoplifters, area boys, touts, rapists, drug dealers, etc).

While the African participants reasoned that the major cause of the phenomenon is the widespread poverty occasioned by the wrongheaded foisting of Structural Adjustment Programmes on weak African economies, the French participants argued that the main causal factor should be located in the break up of the family and the progressive erosion of traditional control systems. This disagreement notwithstanding, the symposium noted that the overall effect of street deviance in Africa lies in the generation

of stress, chaos and, ultimately, violence. One of the participants, Stephane Tessier, addressed the issue of violence at length. Rather than view violence as a phenomenon generated by asocial street actors as is often the case in social science practice, he preferred to construct street actors as victims of the psycho-social, symbolic and economic violence produced by the larger adult society in the public space.

Consequently, Tessier argued that the forms of violence which street children inflict on society should be seen as a response, a sort of counter-violence to the violence they undergo. Examining efforts made in various African countries at stemming the tide of the ugly phenomenon, the symposium observed that African governments, apart from erroneously seeing all street actors as public enemies, often tend to perceive private initiative (by

NGOs) as affront. Thus, rather than complement each other, governments and NGOs see themselves as competitors. The symposium also noted that government effort is largely ineffective because the African state has collapsed and can no longer meet its social obligations. The action of NGOs were also criticised as being 'sympathy-driven.' At the end of the three-day symposium, wide-ranging suggestions and recommendations were made to the appropriate authorities but Jinmi Adisa insisted that 'there can be no solution to all the problems we have discussed in the last three days so long as our society does not learn to invest in its own people.'

•Adesanmi, was the rapporteur at the Abidjan symposium



6.1
Uche Nduka

A Rhyming Diary

Sanya Osha

Uche Nduka **CHIAROSCURO**, published by Yeti Press, Bremen, 1997, 200pp.

EXILE isn't always a pleasant experience for many artists. And this is probably truer in the case of literary artists who have to make greater effort in capturing the native smells, colours and textures of their homelands. The fact of exile usually disrupts or severs these nostalgic sensations. But fortunately, Uche Nduka's latest offering of poetry, *Chiaroscuro* passes through the crucible of exile and emerges on the side of poetic maturity. Nduka has certainly grown in stature since the publication of *Flower child* (1985). In that collection,

Nduka had already laid the map of his future preoccupations: life, joy, art and, need one add, individualism. The last characteristic propels him invariably towards a sometimes strident cosmopolitanism. In other words, he becomes the ultimate post-colonial/post modernist figure amalgamating and dismembering geographical realities and often divergent cultural codes with random, even if productive, glee.

But exile is surely far from the foreground in *Chiaroscuro* as Nigeria in all its awesome diversity seems to mark out the collection's tra-

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