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African Writers. Many African writers are evidently being helped from the bush-path to the Super Highway of the computer age. Those who wish to or have received the print version of the *Electronic African Bookworm* offered free by the *African Books Collective Ltd.* in Oxford may well feel that an age is dawning in which literary culture and the culture of publishing in general would climb out of the bind of ill-informed conditions and debates.

As both appear to agree, the bottom-line for most publishers is profit such that, as Gibbs writes, unless a subsidy is involved or unless strategic considerations encourage the promotion of a 'loss leader' - in this case a title that will lose the company money in the short term but contribute to profit in the long run -

acceptance (of manuscripts) will be based on business-like expectations that the business will make a profit. Whatever publishers decide to do, the Arusha Report alerts writers to the danger of feckless handling of manuscripts.

Clearly from the standpoint of career positioning, the initial shunning of the multinationals proved that nationalism needed to be made of sterner stuff. Rather than being merely a choice between homebred capitalism and offshore rip-offs, it called for a tougher-minded conception of the social matrix in which publishing is embedded.

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Presidential rallies in colour

BY DAPO ADENIYI

Sunday Tumo-Ojelabi, OBASANJO: JOURNEY TO THE FOURTH REPUBLIC (Presidential Campaign images in colour), Touchstone Books, Lagos, 1999, 70pp

IT is not usual, least of all fashionable, for photographers to work towards exhibitions in colour - monochrome, particularly black and white, is still thought to hold more possibilities, and in fact curiously, more colour, than the multichromatic; what with its solid contrast of black against white, and between, endless possibilities for tones and shades.

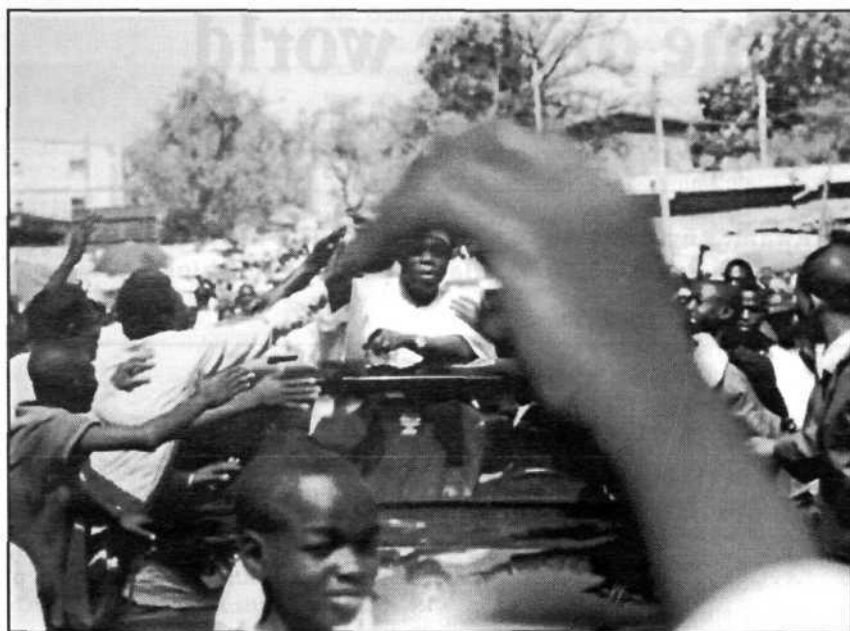
But the images in this collection are those of an electioneering campaign whose burst of energy, and pomp and pageantry, demand nothing less than the very elaborate - prop, costume and banners - which are impossible to recapture in any other way than in their own unrestrained flamboyance. The nature of the assignment therefore puts stress on the function of documentation from the outset, placed contradistinctively to the function of image as art, by which pictures speak, not with any strange or sophisticated tongue, but in the direct, and the plainly decipherable.

A photographer on the campaign staff is in the immediate, concerned about moments, re-enacts moments, recreates scenes of note for public speculation or inspection almost with sworn objectivity. Even so, it takes thousands of such moments to complete or relive the experience of campaign-

ing through Nigeria - a few in some African countries. What to leave out or include presents the greatest difficulty, the very task of choosing, returning yet again the whole question of the photographer's leaning in the middle of disparate and conflicting roles, each vying for prominence: the photographer as a diarist or as an artist. Duty at once takes the side of the former but intuition, his own authentic self, sides with the latter. This nature of difficult blending is evident in the ultimate selections.

Bland images that offer little meaning beyond the obvious, sharply contrast those coded with several, perhaps endless, layers of meaning. Some of the more obvious types represent the photographer's own private reminiscences, or side glimpses, on subjects which others would ordinarily spare no thought. *Private Guards and Ota farm* are representative of this. The use of ostriches as home guards has not yet become widespread in Nigeria. Their effectiveness as nightwatch is known to only a few; the Private Guards of the title were taken in a millionaire politician's homestead, while the spiked oil palm of the latter symbolises the presidential campaign base, the principal's

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Held in their grip?
© Sunday Tumo-Ojelabi, 1999

farm retreat from which the team's thrusts across the nation commenced. In the line of private memories also is the tripartite, *Eagle's Wings*, one of the earliest sequences of three pictures which register their impressions in tow. As with the other sequences in the collection, one or two picture frames tell only a part of the story, until there is a complete reading.

This device of coupling of images brings a film-reel effectiveness to the narrations. They produce an illusion of motion, one of the ways Tumo's training in cinematography at Ife probably strains to find expression. Aside from the scriptural resonances in the choice of caption, *Eagle's Wings* holds one memory - of one day, unbeknownst to the rest of the nation, when the principal might have crashed to his death together with the entire campaign staff. The schedule was densely packed, accompanied by intense flight regimes of the campaign season: the first picture captures the protruding wing of the craft, triumphant over rain-pregnant clouds below, and a vision of Nigerian earth from underneath.

The photographer it seems cocks his ears in three directions and uses what he learns about his subject in his creative and documentary work - the public arena, his private life (a photographer after all enjoys the same intimacy as a barber) and the assessment of critics (which qualitatively, oftentimes, is no more than an extension of the rumour mill). The solitary picture, *Held in their grip?* is one striking example. What originally must have been a hapless flight of the arm from a mem-

ber of the cheering crowd is caught mid-air, the President-to-be's very face secured in the fold of the unknown man's palms. Tumo configured this snap, listening to public banter; before the election, it was widely circulated that the PDP presidential candidate was no more than a pawn on the well-contrived chessboard of certain powerful Nigerians, particularly the retired generals. Here as in a few others such as *Will he gag the press?*, an innocent scene is loaded with meanings of purely the photographer's own coinage.

But even this discourse confronts a direct refutation in another pictorial representation, *Hail Nigerians 11* which shares only the rapture and the warmth of the other two of its own sequence but operates subterranean layers of

signification. We observe the incoming president in this frame turning in a direction quite opposite to that the people are bound. Underlying is the message - and this begins to percolate to the same public - populist acclamation would not prevent this one president from, (in his persuasion), choosing a course differently from the rest of us; also many surprises may be awaiting us in the months to come.

Perhaps one of the more enduring artistic values of this collection is the interaction between image and distance but more pointedly where the photographer breaks beyond mandatory constraints imposed by the colour bar. Unforgettable in this regard is *Victims of the power cut 1* where Tumo makes effective use of natural light. In this wise, twilight, powered by the rising sunlight, washes an ordinarily depressing visage with patterned rays on a northern Nigerian wall.

The pictorial excursion recording moments during Chief Obasanjo's journey towards the Fourth Republic, which includes a sunrise series containing his final triumphal ride through Abuja's gates, leaves him affectionable. And this exceeds even the presentation of reconciliatory moments with some of his hottest rivals.

For me, through Tumo's handicraft, neutrality seems long discarded to the winds. Through some inexplicable manipulation of the lenses, his images trade a confidence that becomes difficult to ignore; he goes to present - and succeeds I think to an extent - a leader that we can accept; a leader, to borrow again from him, that we can trust.