

<< women. To this end, she convened a meeting of all women's organisations under the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS) with the aim of consolidating her political agenda of obtaining franchise for women as well as proportional representation of women in government. She, however, fell prey to her ideals of universal feminism and loyalty based on gender solidarity and failed to win the support of all the women's organisations including her bid for one of the Egba constituencies in the 1959 federal election. Undeterred, the indefatigable FRK went on to form The Commoners People's Party, a mainly feminist party which failed to take off properly. It would appear - as the authors rightly note that - 'FRK was more effective in the politics against the colonial regime than in the ethnicised party politics of independent Nigeria.' Nonetheless, FRK will always be remembered in the annals of Nigerian history as being one of four female members of the Abokuta Urban Council (AUDC) created in 1950 as well as the only female candidate in the 1951 election. She was also the only woman selected to be part of the delegation

to Britain to protest the Richards constitution. Perhaps, what is most remarkable in FRK's political life is the fact that she showed herself to be an astute and pragmatic politician whose skillful manoeuvres in the international political arena helped to mobilise public opinion in her campaign against the payment of water rates imposed on women in Abeokuta. She was a principled person until the end of her life, but this did not prevent her soliciting help from organisations of different ideological persuasions in the attempt to further her political campaigns.

FRK left a legacy not only for her children - particularly Koye, Fela and Beko who embraced her ideals - but also for Nigerian women. Yet two decades after her death, FRK's vision for Nigerian women has not fully been realised as the political horizon continues to be clouded by men without mettle. *For Women and the Nation* would appear to be a book about the past, it however contains facts that are even more relevant for the future.

Segun, a librarian, is also a novelist.

Dripping with fire and gutter

BY ANKE WEILER-ODUNTAN

Toyin Adewale (German translation by Bettina Obrecht) DIE AROMAFORSCHERIN (EXPLORER OF AROMAS), POEMS AND SHORT STORIES, Edition Solitude, Stuttgart, 1998, 100pp.

INDEED, this collection of about thirty poems and three short stories throws us into a world of rich imagery and exploration, not only of aromas but also colours and visions. The collection deals with manifold topics such as womanhood (*Woman of Cush*) exile and experiences abroad, civil unrest and disorder (*A Tale of Two Vultures, Ken Walls*), experiences with fellow writers but also with getting to term with failed relationships (*House Cleaning*) and, on a more philosophical level, with hope.

This review is basically going to focus on the aspects of the image, aroma, as mentioned in the title of book and the translation of the poems into German language. The

three short stories are only in German and therefore are not discussed here. It has to be mentioned, however, that they are rather weak in comparison to the poems which might be due to the translation.

Aroma and Smells

The colourful and nearly impressionistic intensity of smells into which the reader is thrown reminds us of the streaming of imaginists. The topic of exploration of aromas is introduced in the first poem of the collection *Safari* (dedicated to the writer and human rights activist Ogaga Ifowodo). When Adewale writes 'through the dust searching for your aroma/your safari heart, that curi-

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Toyin Adewale on the steps of the Akademie Schloss Solitude

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ous joy' she does not only talk about the physical smell but also about the essence of Ifowodo's writing. The meaning of the word, the mere superficial scent is broken up here and widened to accommodate a broader context.

In *Eguono* 'the taste of pineapple, baked guavas, periwinkles and mud skippers' add up to the smell of the market in Warri. In *Song of an Exile* 'half-truths bitter-sweet dreams' haunt the hiding places of the exiles. The juxtaposition of 'half-truths' and 'bitter-sweet' leads to a very impressive and intense image here. In the ten couplets of the title poem the *Explorer of Aromas* sets out for an odyssey of smells, decay and waste, exploring heaps of waste, the remnants of the feasts of the rich. In *Olayimika, the first born daughter* it is the first fruit of the loins 'that is seasoned with grace/seasoned with salt.../ your scented one (last stanza). And in *House Cleaning* Adewale gets rid of memories of a past relationship because 'the bedsheet is cured of the smell'. In *Solitude* I Adewale compares the guest of this castle to a spicy mixture ('like an aromatic spice shop'), they are 'smoked English tea'. And again the image of spice comes up when Toyin Adewale writes 'I will be sweet to you/like old spice' in *Answer Back*.

Translation

The German translation generally captures the intense mood of the poems. However, there are a lot of inaccuracies in most parts of the translation that may even change the message of the text. Also the rhythm of the verses is not always kept and the translation is clumsy in some places. Below some examples of the translation from German into English by re-translating the German version into English:

In *Safari* 'in this land we love with pain' becomes 'in this land love is pain'. 'Bones sold into bank accounts/ a deposit, waiting for barbarians' is translated as 'bones, that lie on bank accounts/ a deposit is waiting for barbarians'. In the original version it is actually the bones that are deposited into the account and are waiting whereas in the translation the deposit is separated from the bones. In *Mitaire* 'you are like a cloud' becomes 'you are a cloud'. 'Like crushed eggshells/the yolk flees their hands' is turned into 'crushed eggshells/the yolk flees their hands' (*Song of an Exile*). Here, the comparison between the shells and the yolk is invalidated. The passive part becomes active in *A prayer I* when 'a woman you cannot/feed with bread alone' is translated as 'a woman does not feed/on bread alone'. The message of the poem *A*

Tale of Two Vultures is completely changed when 'impaled on the moon/a boy's head is banging for justice' is turned into 'impaled by the moon/he bangs a boy's head, demanding justice'. The 'he' referred to can only be the 'gongbearer' introduced in verse 1 part 11 of the poem which does not make sense in this context. Nearly embarrassing is the quotation from stanza iv of *Naked Testimonies* that is also printed on the cover page: 'it is I/Striding upon my high places/Shield my voice/I walk in fire' the penultimate line is turned into 'my voice my shield'. Here the meaning of the line is changed from a voice that needs to be protected to a weapon that protects.

Also notable are inaccuracies in the punctuation through which certain phrases are

grouped together where they should not (for example in *Answer Back*).

Altogether it can be said that it is very laudable to make Adewale's impressive collection available for a readership that is not firm enough in English to read an exclusively English edition. However, it must be stated - and this is valid for basically all translations - that the translation should only serve as a guide and if possible, should be compared with the original. It is also unfortunate that this carefully produced book is basically only distributed in Germany. It would be desirable for the author that this fine collection of poetry and short stories be accessible to a wider readership.

Anke Weiler-Oduntan until recently was project coordinator for the Heinrich Boll Foundation in Nigeria.

Commitment to biography

BY NINA MBA

Chuks Iloegbunam, IRONSIDE: THE BIOGRAPHY OF GENERAL AGUIYI-IRONSI, NIGERIA'S FIRST MILITARY HEAD OF STATE, Press Alliance Network Limited, London, 1999, 250pp

NEITHER in the biography nor at the launch of the book in Lagos on October 28, 1999 was any explanation given as to the meaning of the title of the book or when/how Ironsi was bestowed with the title *Ironside*, although there were many references to it and to the word 'warlord' at the launch. 'Ironside' was not created as a nickname for Ironsi. It is a word of ancient lineage in England (and in English). In 1642 when the English parliament and King Charles I were at war, Oliver Cromwell a devout Puritan and parliamentarian organised a new and more effective military force. This army imbued with strict discipline, high morale, religious fervour and advanced democratic ideas came to be known as the 'Ironsides' and played a significant role in the victory of the parliamentary force (known as the Roundheads). However when parliament hesitated to execute the

King, Cromwell (also known as Ironside) turned on parliament, divided it and it was the Rump of that parliament which executed King Charles in 1649. England then became a republic known as the Commonwealth and Cromwell ruled it as a dictator as the Lord Protector until he died in 1658. In 1660 Charles II was restored and sometime early next century the UK may expect the ascension of Charles III.

One may speculate on certain interesting ironies in attaching Ironsides to General Aguiyi Ironsi (for instance, it was the rump of the Nigerian parliament which 'handed over' the government to Ironsi and the January 1966 coup leaders did possess a moral fervour and advanced ideas akin to the original Ironsides but the point is simply that the reader is entitled to that information. Pini Jason, the reviewer of the biography at the