

THE INTELLECTUAL AS POLITICAL ACTIVIST
IN RECENT AFRICAN FICTION

by

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The idea of an intellectual in the contemporary African context always poses a difficulty of delimitation. In its normal and objective usage, the concept encompasses those individuals in a community who are distinguished not only by the ability to read and write, or to be formally learned in some advanced course of studies, but more specifically by their application of those accomplishments in the appraisal of events, situations, and natural phenomena. The intellectual would then subject these observations to rigorous scrutiny in order to arrive at some solutions to social and physical problems in their environment. In addition, the intellectual attempts to persuade others to accept his proposed solutions. The advanced educational attainment of the intellectual is emphasized when he is thought of in terms of "the independent man of letters, the scientist pure and applied, the scholar, the university professor, the journalist, the highly educated administrator, judge or parliamentarian."¹

Until recently, the educated African was a retiring and cautious individual who, partly because of the intellectual and social gulf which existed between him and his countrymen, preferred to live in isolated retirement rather than become embroiled in disputatious misunderstanding with the un-educated who form the majority of his people. He was often an object of distrust and of persecution. Antagonistic forces constrained many intellectuals to hold ideas which could lead to the upliftment of their people. Moreover, since formal education in Africa is relatively new, and the number of the educated who feel sufficiently confident in the handling of the official foreign language is few, although educated Africans think about the affairs of their nations, only a small percentage could be regarded as intellectuals in the strict sense of also being vocal in the expression of their ideas or of attempting through the written word to influence others to their persuasion. This has led one writer to assert that "If we use the word 'intellectual' in its accepted sense denoting somebody whose primary occupation is elaboration, or interpretive dissemination of general ideas... The individuals who compose the new African elites are not intellectuals but graduates."² In the realm of politics, in particular, the educated African was disturbingly reserved. The sense in which the word "intellectual" is used in this paper is that of an African with a basic formal educa-

tion (not necessarily of university level) who thinks about issues, discusses them, attempts to find solutions to them, and makes efforts to lead others and persuade them to his viewpoint.

METAMORPHOSIS OF INTELLECTUAL COCOON

Overt political theme in the African novel is a latter development than the theme of cultural assertion. Even though the African novelist has always been well-informed about political developments on the African continent, his response, at first, was to leave political matters in the hands of professional politicians, while he supplemented their efforts through emphasis on the cultural aspects of the African liberation struggles. The unique exception to this, in the early years is Peter Abrahams' A Wreath for Udomo (1956). Even in East Africa, where Ngugi made forays into some political activities of the Emergency period in Kenya, he concentrated on the social and cultural upheavals consequent on these political activities. When emphasis from the delineation of Africa's cultural past shifted after the achievement of independence to the presentation of contemporary society, the novelists, to a large extent, focussed their attention more on social injustices than on political activity. A few novels, like Gabriel Okara's The Voice (1964) Ekwensi's Jagua Nana (1961) and Beautiful Feathers (1963) and Achebe's A Man of the People (1966) incorporated some politics in their representation of the contemporary scene, but a niggling feeling persisted, however, that politics was not the proper subject for creative writing. This was expressed in such views as: "If a novelist feels strongly about a political issue he should simply write a dissertation on it."³ But in 1967, Soyinka had blamed the political malaise in Africa to the ostrich posture of African writers whose lack of response to "the political moment of his society" contributed to the pervading chaos which had caused a mood of disillusionment:

In the movement towards chaos in modern Africa, the writer did not anticipate. The understanding language of the outside world, "birth pains" that near-fatal euphemism for death throes, absolved him from responsibility. He was content to turn his eyes backwards in time and prospect in archaic fields for forgotten gems which would dazzle and distract the present. But never inwards, never truly into the present, never into the obvious symptoms of the niggling, warning, predictable present, from which alone lay the salvation of ideals.⁴

A sudden awakening of the intellectuals, including writers, has raised the battle cry for public activity which will be directed towards the establishment of judicious social and political order. The need to employ literature as guide to political and social directions is argued as imperative because of the historical needs of the continent, which stands midway between the crumbling of an old established order, and an imperfectly understood modernity. In such circumstances, literature with tendentious themes, which are relevant primarily for the political and social ideas which they embody, has arisen. A new phase has begun in the late 1960's and early 1970's which, though incorporating social and political anatomization of the novels of disillusion, transcends them to offer solutions to the ills they expose. The African novel has boldly taken up the political theme. There is a greater discussion of the conduct of governments and their failings, and the consequences of this failure for the people over whom the governments legislate. This development has necessitated the projection of intellectual political activist characters who conceive their role as pertinent in helping to determine the future direction of their societies.

The predicament of the African intellectual who tries to intervene in the problems which face his country is represented by that of Gabriel Okara's Okolo of The Voice who

started his search when he came out of school and returned home to his people. When he returned home to his people, words of the coming thing, rumours of the coming things, were in the air flying like birds, swimming like fishes in the river. But Okolo did not join them in their joy because what was there was no longer there and things had no more roots. So he started his search for it.⁵

This search for it brings Okolo into a head-on collision with the rulers and elders of his country who subject him to persecution. Okolo, forced to adjust his strategy, decides that "this time he would ask the masses and not Izongo and his elders. If the masses haven't got it, he will create it in their insides. He will plant it, make it grow in spite of Izongo's destroying words. He will uproot the fear in their insides, kill the fear in their insides and plant it." (p. 90)

This first wave of intellectual protagonists make little or no impact on their societies, and their frustration and defeat are signalled also by Okolo's dilemma at the insurmountable obstacles in the way as he ruminates about all the changes he should effect: "He will all these do, if only...if only what? Okolo asked, speaking out, but his inside did not answer. And

when he looked, he saw only darkness, the kind of darkness you see when you close your eyes at night." (p.90)

That the intellectual, as a protagonist, has assumed prominence in the novels which deal with the transitional birth pains of African societies is a predictable development. As the political, socio-economic activities of government assume greater complexity, it is obvious that only a mind honed by the same education that created the political actors could comprehend the intricacies and short-comings of the ensuing drama. The analytical mind of the intellectual is very much required in the restructuring of society, in the founding of new roads to progress. The intellectuals are presented, not as ideal creatures, but as people with great potentialities as well as crippling disabilities. Their efforts illustrate both the expectations and possibilities of a better social order for Africa and at the same time, the immense obstacles that lie in the attainment of that dream. The intellectual protagonists of Serumaga's Return to the Shadows, Soyinka's Season of Anomy, Armah's Two Thousand Seasons, and Ngugi's Petals of Blood will be examined in detail for a more penetrating understanding of the characters.*

THE RETURN OF THE SMUGGLER

The most prominent intellectual in Serumaga's Return to the Shadows is Joe Muzisi. The others are Stephen Kiyonjo, Matthew Lwazi, both former classmates of Joe's; and the young engineer, Moses. After his primary and secondary school education in local schools, Joe's Cambridge School examinations first class certificate qualifies him for an automatic scholarship award for overseas study where "he just kept reading on and hanging around in England: law, economics, and a lot more

*The full list of the novels discussed here are:

- Serumaga, Robert, Return to the Shadows, London: Heinemann, 1969.
Soyinka, Wole, Season of Anomy, London, Rex Collings, 1973.
Armah, Ayi Kwei, Two Thousand Seasons, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973.
Kayira, Legson, The Detainee, London: Heinemann, 1974.
Ngugi, Wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood, London: Heinemann, 1977.

he gained by mere osmosis, rubbing shoulders and absorbing" (pp. 42-43). Stephen, like Joe, also goes abroad, sponsored by the country's scholarship scheme, and reads economics. He returns fast to the Planning Unit of his country's administration. Matthew, who obtains a third class in his school examinations does not qualify for overseas study; but the achievement of independence and the Africanization policy which follows in its wake favours him. He undertakes the understudy of a departing Customs and Excise expatriate officer, then takes "one of those mashed potato courses at a Polytechnic in London" (p. 42), and settles down in a high post in the Customs and Excise Department. Moses, educated in America as an engineer, returns to his country and joins "one of the post graduate courses at his own home university to do a bit of rounding off" (p. 133).

Joe's first reaction to the difficult situation in his home country when he finally returns, is to abandon his futile hunt for a reasonable job because of the corrupt processes involved in acquiring one. Cameron Duodu describes the situation in The Gab Boys:

*...They knew that if you got a job from them, you would receive money, so hell, you ought to give them money to get you a job, even if you were qualified for it. And this seemed reasonable to the people who sought jobs, from them - they knew that you only caught a fish with bait. So these guys got little packets of dough here and there and they drank a lot of iced beer with it and got bulging stomachs and puffed cheeks... The only people they don't take dough from were people brought to them by friends.*⁶

Joe has set up his own legal practice to circumvent the expected collaboration. He has come back to Adnagu full of revolutionary zeal to arrest the deteriorating conditions in his country. His first act, however, is a perfunctory one - the buying and smuggling in of guns through a plan with his two former class-mates, Stephen and Matthew. He is not sufficiently motivated to initiate revolutionary action himself; rather, he is contented to "wait, to contribute should anyone else start something" (p. 43). Meanwhile he establishes a lucrative business, owning a chain of butcheries in the country. Before the action in the novel starts, Joe, Stephen, and Matthew have so lost sight of their initial concern for the state of the country that they bicker over their personal gains in the transactions of smuggling, not only guns, but now also beef, for profit.

Moses, like Joe, has come home with "great ideas about development, and a desire to show those damned, insulting Yankees that Africans could really pull it off." (p. 132). His disillusionment sets in while he is taking a course at the home university. He discovers the lack of initiative and curiosity among students who had been "highly intelligent, the cream of the young men at high school; but now sealed and waiting to be delivered to their respective pigeon holes" (p.133). Like others, he is corrupted with the passing of time. He bribes his way through customs to obtain expensive and rare art collections, drinks, and other objects of luxurious comfort; he even enters into fraudulent criminal transactions to build himself a dream of a house. He describes, quite lightly to Joe, how he obtains "an Ife piece of sculpture" from Nigeria which was

Quite difficult to get out of the country. But nothing is impossible between two lovers of art. I loved the sculpture, and the gentleman at the customs simply adored the watermark on a five pound note. Great connoisseur I was given to understand. I have his particulars should you ever wish to make a collection. (p. 135).

By the beginning of the events in the novel, Joe had built a fortune for himself by operating as a lawyer, economist, and rich business man. He has achieved this through a complete disregard of the state of the nation, and the well-being of its citizens. After long periods of agonized thought about his possible involvement in a rescue attempt, he had decided to

let fate run its course, get a small area of safety for yourself and hold on to it. The world beyond, its sufferings and its glories, are only the macabre orchestrations of a band of inherently imperfect men. One's duty was to seek a little comfort and not to be sacrificed on the altar of an idealism pursued by creatures so obviously unworthy of such providence (p. ?).

Stephen and Matthew smuggle in beef instead of the projected guns and sell it to make money. In spite of their complete immersion in the evils of their society, each, individually, blames everybody else but himself for the deplorable situation in which they are all being dehumanized. Moses, for instance, reacts sharply when Joe draws attention to the corruption involved in an account Moses has given about the means through which he builds his house:

I'm tired of you moralizing lot. Tell me, Joe, there've been, let me see how many coups d'état since you came back here with your highfalutin ideas about African Socialism, African Democracy and African you-name-it. We've got it? Eh, how many coups d'état? And what've you done about it? (p. 139).

As a group, the intellectuals in this novel illustrate the weaknesses of those Nkrumah categorizes as "dishonest intellectuals." "For they see the irrationality of capitalism but enjoy its benefits and way of life; and for their own selfish reasons are prepared to prostitute themselves and become agents and supporters of privilege and reaction."⁷

A representative of the intellectuals in this novel, Joe is hampered by a number of disabilities which inhibit his full realization of his self-imposed activist role. He conceives a glorious idea of himself, in his imagination, as the saviour of his people, but lacks the devotion and sacrifice that would bring his dreams to fruition. The most obvious of his weaknesses is his love of comfort and security. As Moses puts it to him, "It's comfort you're after, Joe, like everybody else, and you're not fooling me. You can't fight a revolution from an emerald green velvet sofa." (p. 139). Joe quests for individual survival and turns his back on the sufferings of the less fortunate. He prefers "to leave the matter in the hands of the person who bears the pain" (p. 7). So hardened is Joe in his self-centeredness that his servant, Simon, is surprised at the emotion which Joe displays when he hears of the killings in the most recent coup - "Was it possible that at last death in others was beginning to break through the hard armour of Joe's cynicism?" (pp. 14-15).

Moses is right when he accuses Joe of engaging in a "withdrawal from reality and retreat into false intellectualism." Joe's tendency is to rationalize his selfish actions, quoting from his readings of Francis Bacon, Spinoza, Kant and other philosophers, as well as from the Bible. As he escapes once more to the village to avert the dangers from the most recent coup, he quietens his conscience by arguing:

What good would it do to stay and fight? Get snuffed out without trace in the winds of turmoil-unlamented, unremembered. You must run away and stay to fight another day. But when? When all the goodness is gone and evil inhabits the land? Yet to fight without weapons is merely false heroism. Or is it? A stone is a weapon even against a machine-gun. (p. 5).

INTELLECTUAL CYNICISM

Intellectualism and rationalization often lead to cynicism, the tendency to accept evil as a normal part of human existence. (Editorial emphasis). Because Joe is able to exercise his intellect, to examine conflicting aspects of any particular issue, he is assailed by a paralysis of action, and he often succumbs to that type of hopeless despair which comes from knowing too much. This despair is often another form of cowardice which refuses to face the consequences of actions; for action involves risks which Joe, and others like himself, are reluctant to take as long as they do not feel personally threatened. Threatened is what Joe feels at the beginning of the novel. Events of the previous night when he was roughed up by men in military uniform, and the rumours of a new kind of violence, are sufficient to strike fear into his heart.

Joe needed an extremity of personal assault before he could come to terms with the demands of the situation in Adnagu. This happens when he is faced with the scene of rape and carnage in that country home where he had previously been sure of refuge and security. He is able then to recognize the danger in his former postures. In a lengthy reflection he considers the mentality of the educated which has contributed to the progressive deterioration of life in Adnagu:

...the sense of insecurity among the elite and their eagerness for fast material progress had produced a brand of young men, who though in a sense quite educated, lacked any intellectual commitment to causes. They thereafter became useless as agents of social change and progress since, to the insecure, any change to the status quo is considered a threat. They also became manoeuvrable by those who had little respect for justice and other such nebulous principles of social intercourse. It so happened that those who had the vigour to manoeuvre and change, were the chip-on-the-shoulder, beggar-my-neighbour, dog-in-the-manger little fellows who could not be adequately described by any number of clichés. They were, Joe felt, dishonest in motivation, crude in methods, and ruthless in execution. They always won. But why did they win? Joe felt the argument with himself coming closer home. Why did they win? Was it not because the few young men who possessed enough sense to see the truth behind the pretensions - the young men who had been committed at some stage or another - had allowed themselves to be defeated by the apparent futility at all efforts at redemption?

That they then escape into an intellectually respectable cynicism. And then with the proper amount of humour, suitably dehydrated, they turned their cynicism into a weapon to defend their comfortable detached existence. But is this not a betrayal of values as well? A betrayal even more vicious than straightforward cowardice and vindictiveness. In fact a betrayal so vicious that only the ruthless mind of an intellectual could stand it through its ability to cerebration, detach, analyse and explain? Joe found himself asking: isn't this me? Me and the comfortable sofa and music. Me and the escape to the country home. Me and the money. But that could not be. He thought how he always felt strongly about things, but he could not move a mountain alone. Then it struck him that, maybe everybody else he despised had come to the conclusion by various ways...If only he; and other people, like him, would exert their weight in public affairs then there would not be so much room for the triumph of the mediocre. (pp. 56-57).

The scene where Moses and Joe confront each other with their hypocrisies and imperfections is an illuminating one. They succeed in tearing off the veil behind each other's self-deceptions and reveal themselves in the naked light. Equally revealing is the quarrel scene between Joe, Stephen, and Matthew. Only when these men have exposed the motivations for their actions do they finally arrive at the truth of the matter, and divest themselves of their selfishness and inertia. While Stephen and Matthew are irrevocably lost to the cause, Joe and Moses, deep in their hearts yearn for a better ordering in the Adnagu society. While Joe is entangled in paralytic rationalizations and evasions, Moses' own difficulty has been his inability to muster support from other intellectuals. He has consequently resorted to a desperate individual gesture of opposition by digging trenches to trap soldiers wherever trouble erupts.

Serumaga is clearly suggesting through the conduct of these intellectuals that it is to the failure of the intellectual to rise up to his responsibility that the continued deterioration of African societies should be attributed. Nothing worthwhile is ever achieved without bitter struggle and sacrifice. The mouthing of slogans and pious intentions are useless if they are not matched with concentrated physical action. The fortuitous meeting of Joe and Moses augurs well for the future of Adnagu; for while one is a man of theory, the other is of action, and therefore they complement each other. They form the nucleus of a body of intellectuals who will work with the masses to revolutionize the system of Adnagu.

SOYINKIAN 'HUMANIST' INACTION

Soyinka's Season of Anomy projects two activist intellectuals - Ofeyi and Isola Demakin (the dentist). Ofeyi makes an interesting case study of the confused state of mind which a western European and colonial education leave in an educated African. Ofeyi initiates action against the corrupt system of Season of Anomy. He has thought out carefully, and analyzed the conditions of society; he also proposes a remedy, a socialist one which he translates into African equivalents, with Aiyero's communalism as a guide to the building of a new society. As a humanist, Ofeyi conceives his strategy in terms of a gradual education of the masses about their rights in society and how they are, with the existing socio-economic set up, deprived of those rights. In spite of his incisive perception of the problems of his country, and the possible solutions of them, he is surprisingly irresolute in applying drastic measures for the execution of his plans. Nkrumah had divided the intellectuals of post-independence Africa into three categories - the "capitalist-ideologists," the advocates of "mixed economy," and thirdly the "revolutionary intellectuals." Of this third group he writes:

It is from among this section that the genuine intellectuals of the African Revolution are to be found. Very often they are minority products of colonial educational establishments who reacted strongly against its brainwashing processes and who became genuine socialist and African nationalist revolutionaries. It is the task of this third section of the intelligentsia to enunciate and promulgate African revolutionary socialist objectives, and to expose and refute the deluge of capitalist propaganda and bogus concepts and theories poured out by the imperialist, neo-colonialist and indigenuous, reactionary mass communications media.⁸

Ofeyi clearly belongs to this third group. He has no difficulty in propagating the ideology required for mass re-orientation of ideals; what he finds reprehensible is the practical aspect of translating the desire for change into reality. He finds the Dentist's doctrine of violence most unpalatable, arguing: "We are discussing means. I don't want to foul up the remnants of my humanity as others do by different means." (p. 135). It is difficult for Ofeyi to accept that "When a revolutionary ... is attempting to destroy an archaic feudalism what is fundamental is not the civil and political rights of the feudal lords, but the economic and social rights of the oppressed masses."⁹

Ofeyi confesses, right from his first meeting with the Dentist that to him violence is reprehensible, but that all logic points to its indispensability "I see it. I recognize it. I must confront it." His inability to accept wholeheartedly the inevitability of violence in their particular context becomes a major source of great weakness in him. Like Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus who vacillated from beginning to end on whether to repent or not to repent (as advised by first, the good, and then, the bad, angels Ofeyi holds constant inconclusive dialogues with himself about the justification of violence. For him,

There was something a little unnatural in this process of resolving the ethics of assassination, preparing oneself to accept or reject the cold-blooded necessity with a minimum of feeling. Demanding in return only the residual sensation of a freed conscience, exhilarated, a dreamless sleep, the knowledge that one has taken decision on behalf of the guiltless inmates of over-crowded prisons of innocents disembowelled on the point of stakes, shot in the silence of their homes, pauperized and degraded by a totalitarian maul, brained by leprous accretions that even devoured their own fingers in the reckless pace of gluttony (p. 136).

Ofeyi is reluctant to supply the Dentist with the information of who, among the four prominent pillars of the Cartel, should be eliminated first. He remonstrates over the assassination of the Jeku-supporting judge. The extent of Ofeyi's indecisiveness over the need for thoroughness and ruthlessness for a proper execution of a revolution, becomes apparent after he had taken the Dentist on a visit to Chief Batoki's residence. The Dentist had insisted on this visit as a reconnoitering manoeuvre preparatory to Batoki's assassination. Ofeyi's intention is quite different.

It had been a largely deceitful intent, a form of special plea which came from feeling that only a mercenary assassin would pursue the death of a man whom he had encountered in the most mundane domestic context. After that the victim ceased to be a faceless cipher, a factor in a social equation which must be subtracted for a working formula (p. 189).

This is in spite of Ofeyi's knowledge that Chief Batoki was the "subtlest strategist" in the Cartel organization. Chief Batoki, among many other criminal perpetrations, had suggested the ingenious evil plan to his accomplices, of recruiting

white South Africans into his country's Secret Police because of the successful way in which they had held down the majority blacks in their country. But Ofeyi has had a long personal association with Batoki and his family, and so, he as enemy "to him, was not faceless, not without flesh and blood. Ties, even pleasant recollections of past association. Batoki especially he knew, had supped often at his family board, even flirted inconclusively with his precocious daughter Biye." (p. 143). This association obstructs Ofeyi's dedication to the cause, by making him want to spare Chief Batoki the fate to which his acts condemn him in a revolutionary context. As Ofeyi and the Dentist drive out of Chief Batoki's residence, Ofeyi's double-crossing deceptiveness is revealed:

The Dentist asked, "And how is the Batoki family?"

'Pitiable as always.'

'What?'

'I wish you had witnessed that shabby family scene... no, don't waste your time on Batoki. He is not worth killing.'

The Dentist's face hardened and he turned a faintly supercilious glance on Ofeyi.

'Shall I put that another way for you? What about this: the family is suffering already, don't bring any more misery upon them. Or: their opulence and self-indulgence has brought them to happiness, so let them extort and mutilate those who resist to their heart's content. Or this one: in spite of the thousand deaths that can be laid at his door, Batoki is a man of deep family attachments...'

'All right, that's enough. You know nothing of my relationship with that family.'

The Dentist narrowed his eyes in suspicion.

'Oh, I see. Was that why you took me into the house? To see Batoki en famille? And pity him?' (pp. 190-191).

Although he knows more than the Dentist about the atrocities which had been perpetrated at the instigation of the Cartel, and rehearses them so constantly in his mind that they raise for him "the dreams of Anubis, the jackal-headed one," in which he had "hit on the only salvation and bared his teeth, pronged and flaring just like the swarm whose spear-point snouts were aimed in unison at his throat" (p. 159), on many occasions Ofeyi acts as though his mission has been forcibly imposed upon him. The temptation to abandon the struggle in midstream is strong. It comes first at a stage during his corporation's

sponsored tour of foreign countries where they hoped he would learn more about the promotions business. By the time he encounters the Dentist he confesses to being "at that stage of self-pity, negativity and I don't know what else. Maybe you've been through it also, the stage at which one asks, what is the bloody use?" (p. 101).

Another temptation had come in the person and quiet peaceful assurance of Tailla, the Indian girl whom he meets at the airport simultaneously with the Dentist. Meeting her again in her brother Chalil's house in Cross River, "A wild improbable idea rose from within and suffused him - why don't I marry this being and forget the outer chaos?" (p. 238). The pressure to accept the indispensability of violence in the struggle, however, is what oppresses him most, condemning him to that unenviable paralysed state from which he could see his obligations clearly, but feels impotent in their fulfillment. Like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsamane, he wishes that he were able to absolve himself of his responsibility:

If it were possible - yes, that was the grim temptation - if it were possible to ignore even the unformed, irrational whisper, the purely psychic intuition to succumb to the peace of amnesia, expunge all knowledge and define freedom as the freedom not to listen; to read only the official newspapers, to avoid conversations, refuse to open letters whose origins could not be immediately identified and thus evade the cry of distant suppliants, to shut off the strident radio and exist only in the sterilized distillation of the experiences of others, to cling only to the moments of insulating sensuality...! (p. 136).

Ofeyi's vacillations stultify the revolutionary effort; it becomes increasingly difficult for him and the Dentist to co-ordinate their activities. The Dentist is forced more and more to act in isolation without consulting Ofeyi, of whose support he is not always certain. After the incident of the Batoki, the Dentist could no longer rely on Ofeyi's objective appraisal of the individual members of the Cartel organization. Having watched preparations of the Big Four for "the real blitz," the Dentist fails to consult Ofeyi over his plans to stop the four men since it was the first opportunity of getting them together as "they were meeting to plot the fine details of this horror" (p. 217). Ofeyi understands the crippling nature of his indecision.

For a man of his knowledge and perception, Ofeyi is remarkably naive in his under-estimation of the Cartel's

inhumanity. He seems to conceive of a revolution as a sportsman's game - bringing his offensives right to the enemy's door with undisguised glee, contriving a dramatic escape from the trapped boardroom, dashing with Zaccheus through the deserted roads to Shage Dam, or slipping through police and army roadblocks without being apprehended. All the Dentist's warning and insistence on the urgency of action fall on deaf ears; for Ofeyi romanticizes the idea of revolution. The cruel, uncompromising holocaust from the Cartel catches him unawares, when the news from Cross-River "resurfaced in serpentine coils, asphyxiating, ringed him with a paralysing knowledge of futility in thought or motion" (p. 91). His reaction is to feel repulsion, a disbelief in the existence of individuals who could plan such a monstrosity.

LENIN-TROTSKY PARALLEL

As a pair, Ofeyi and the Dentist, in the parts they play, could be compared to the roles of Trotsky and Lenin in the Russian revolution. At one point, Ofeyi admonishes the Dentist for "over-doing the Lenin bit." (p. 102). The Dentist's concentration on the work of liberation recalls Lenin's dedication to the revolution in Russia, as described by a biographer:

The one subject in which Lenin was vitally interested was the impending revolutionary overthrow of the Tsar in Russia. With an intensity of concentration that was a constant source of wonder to his contemporaries, he turned his enormous analytical and organisational powers to one question; what could men do to help bring about the revolution in Russia?¹⁰

Many of the Dentist's characteristics seem to have been cultivated from a study of Lenin. His discipline takes such forms as refraining from drink while on duty. His insistence that Ofeyi help decide on the order of "eliminations" stems from his need to plan. The Dentist confesses to a narrowness of interests. He despises the world of fiction, is selective about his interests in the arts, explaining: "It is a habit of discipline I have acquired with time. As for Lenin, no, he merely distrusted those aspects of the arts which he found will-sapping. A natural precaution." (p. 102). All this sounds very much like Lenin:

The mature Lenin did not seem to have the doubts and indecisiveness, nor the predilection for irregular habits and a bohemian existence, which were the hallmarks of the Russian revolutionary émigrés in Western Europe in the first years of this century. He was so matter-of-fact and direct in his range of interests, that the

*intellectuals who were his contemporaries, and indeed many of his subsequent biographers, have found it difficult to understand him... Those who did understand him as Trotsky did to some extent, realized that the tight focus of his interest and his ability to command obedience of other men were two sides of the same coin.*¹¹

On the other hand, Ofeyi, like Trotsky (who was not only interested in the revolution, but also in the liberal arts, especially poetry, on which he wrote treatises and gave lectures), has varied interests. His affair with Iriyise distracts him from the work he started, so that he abandons it half way to go in search of her after her abduction by agents of the Cartel. Ofeyi's interest in music influences his alliance with Zaccheus and his troop and what he makes of them for his mobilization campaigns. He composes lyrics to take his mind off the enormity of his undertaking, admits to hunting when he gets the chance. He is the typical bohemian with his love of wine, women, and song. In all this he differs from the Dentist as Trotsky differed from Lenin:

*Lenin concentrated all of his energy, all of his time, on the revolution. Trotsky, although always speaking from a revolutionary Marxist position, was also a commentator on life in general, on morals, literature and art, drama and music; his interests were more diffused than Lenin's and in this respect he was much more the prototype of the Europeanized Russian intellectual. He was, however, more of an activist much more attuned to the possibilities and drama of the revolutionary process itself...*¹²

Therefore Trotsky was unable to realize the highest level of leadership. This is also true of Ofeyi, whose attitudes and approach to the task of reform and regeneration can also be compared to those of China's Dr. Sun Yat-Sen:

Because Sun was aware of the stupendousness of the task, the progress of the Revolution as envisaged by him was intended to be a process of evolution. With the exception of the initial struggle against the warlords, nowhere in Sun's teachings can advocacy of violent means be found. Everywhere the measures he urged look forward to a gradual process of change and progress...

Clearly such a programme, if and when successfully carried out, would guide China's Revolution along the safest and most useful course. It was in the

practical implementation of the programme that many questions were left unanswered. In the last analysis, Sun combined in himself the qualities of a great intellectual, a great humanitarian, and a great idealist... The cynics made a point of ridiculing Sun as "Ch'ieh jen Shuo meng" ("madman paraphrasing a dream").¹³

It would seem that Soyinka modelled his two intellectuals on Lenin, Trotsky, and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen.

The Dentist is an ideal revolutionary. This is not surprising, since prior to his alliance with Ofeyi he had been undergoing training for revolutionary struggles, which would include the use of arms and an ideology of the revolution. He is strongly motivated, not only in the desire to cleanse his country and set her on a more rational system of government, but also for the "settlement of the scores of betrayal." The Dentist would love to liquidate the conspirators who hounded him and others out of their training for liberation work in Africa.

The Dentist is uncompromisingly logical, and so totally committed to the cause that he cares nothing about the fate of those who deserve to be eliminated in order to achieve the desired objective. He works with "a lonely concentration of the will" and "appeared to have set his course on the only possible sanity, leaving the rest slaves to rationalist or emotive fantasies." (p. 140). Having established his strategy of elimination of key figures in the Cartel organization (through assassinations), he pursues it with a single-mindedness that brooks no evasions. For maximum effect, he exposes himself to risks, sometimes having to get near to victims since "I cannot afford an error in decision because I cannot repeat the same trick twice." He is so intent on the work, that he plans to start with the most dangerous jobs, on the deeply calculated rationale that "each successful elimination makes the next doubly difficult. My role survives on borrowed time; that time must serve the most effective purpose" (p. 142)-

Throughout the course of action in the novel, the Dentist proves more effective than Ofeyi. He pursues the four big pillars of the Cartel to Cross-River, misses them by a hair's breath; but, even then, the work of rescue and reorganization after the Cartel's monstrous offensive is carried out by the Dentist. He so creditably discharges responsibility that by the end, Ofeyi is constrained to accept his leadership.

SEASONS OF INTELLECTUAL EXILE

The first intellectual to challenge Kin Koranche's government in Armah's Two Thousand Seasons is Isanusi whose vocation it was to preserve the peoples' traditions. His honesty, fearlessness, and far-sightedness are manifested in his advice of non-co-operation with the forces of neo-colonialism represented by the white men at the Stone House in Poano. Being alone in his vision of a better life, Isanusi makes no immediate impact on the state of affairs in Anoa; on the contrary, he is easily isolated and neutralized through banishment. Isanusi makes his greatest contribution to the cause of revolution while in exile. He takes up, as his special assignment, the education of the young in the history of the nation and in the ideology of revolution, interpreting the society's history and providing a basis for the evaluation of new experience. Isanusi possesses the single-mindedness, concentration and capacity for endurance which make a successful political activist. He not only suffers exile, but he puts the time so spent into good use, accumulating information about the enemy at Poano for future use. When the time comes for other sacrifices, he endangers his life and is finally killed in the struggle. His last act is characteristic; for he ensures the death of his assailant in order to save others and the struggle.

The actual work of political struggle in Anoa is organized by the twenty young initiates who had advanced further than any others of their age mates in the initiation processes. Having completed the first sets of the initiation rites with others, they were "left to float to the knowledge of a craftsmanship of the soul, the vocation of those who used to be the soul guide of our people, the rememberers of the way" (p. 138). Their education in political ideology is completed by Isanusi through whom they discover a mission for their life's work of liberation. Isanusi cautions them that "the way things have become, if you do not want to be parasites you need time in which to think of what else there is to be" (p. 165). The slavery, which the young people taste at the hands of their oppressors, is a strong motivation for them to undertake political struggle.

The initiates acquire the qualities of ideal political activists partly because of their own understanding. Their extensive education has revealed vast expanses of knowledge; for, according to the narrator,

A thousand varying things happened before our soul was open to absorb their meaning. The veils of the first initiation, the second initiation and the third, all these veils hid parts of the truth from us. It was not till the veil of the final initiation has been

torn - a terrible tearing - that understanding broke in on our violated souls. Then it was that uncomprehended stores, senseless fragments, joined other pieces from which they had been forced apart and the truth of our lives was whole - a terrible wholeness (p. 136).

The teachings of Isanusi complete their preparation. They accept the hard realities of the work they are to embark upon - sacrifice of comfortable lives; unpredictability of the length of struggle; the uncertainty of eventual outcome; the anonymity of their sacrifice. Their work cannot be so completed in their lifetime as to win them "triumph in the public place" (p. 243), since it is "merely the necessary work of preparation against destruction." They form a tightly knit, disciplined group, with Abena as leader. Her qualifications for leadership include her superior understanding, her patience and capacity for concentration.

THE THINNING OF PRISON WALLS

Legson Kayira introduces two intellectual activists in The Detainee. Sato is a graduate of Arizona State University and a former teacher of mathematics. The other is Chande. They are both opposed to the government of Sir Zaddock; and for this, they are in detention at Snake Camp. They are both confident in their cause and fearless in the expression of their ideas. Since they are already in detention, their actions are limited. However, they spare no effort to spread disaffection for the government and support for the cause among those with whom they come in contact. They even attempt the demoralization of the agents of oppression. Paka, Jancha, Tango, are constantly reminded that by having to keep surveillance over detainees, they are just as restricted in their movements and actions as their victims. Sato, for instance says insolently to Jancha,

"Now you listen to us Mr Jancha man... You may think yourself king but don't forget that you and we stand together in the same circle. We're all secluded from society. Do you perhaps consider your presence here a promotion?" (p. 151).

These intellectual activists while in detention, buoy up their spirits by discussions of politics, and denigration of the idea of detention camps. This has the effect of sharpening their own ideas, inculcating these ideas in their fellow detainees, and bringing ridicule on the government of Sir Zaddock. The confidence, and therefore resoluteness of the intellectual, derives from a knowledge of carefully laid plans which make Sato and Chande have absolute faith in the integrity of their exiled colleagues who, they are certain, are "suffering with us in spirit and, more important, they've not abandoned us or

the cause. Soon they'll return to lead our country to freedom and happiness." (p. 158).

THE INDIGNITY OF SERVITUDE.....

In Petals of Blood, Chui represents the class of intellectuals who, quite early, join the band of oppressors and exploiters because of the material benefits that such an action brings. It is unbelievable that Chui, who was a young radical as a student in Siriana, could undergo such transformation as to perpetuate those practices when he becomes head of the school for which he had led a strike as a student. His insensitivity to human suffering grows in proportion to his wealth and prosperity. The progress of Nderi Wa Riera, the Member of Parliament for Ilmorog district, is an eye opener to how this conversion is achieved:

There was a time when Nderi wa Riera was truly a man of the people... He was in those days also one of the most vocal and outspoken advocates of reform in and outside Parliament. He would champion such populist causes as putting a ceiling on land ownership; nationalization of the major industries and commercial enterprises; abolition of illiteracy and unemployment and the East African Federation as a step to Pan-African Unity.

Then he was flooded with offers of directorships in foreign-owned companies. 'Mr. Riera, you need not do anything; we do not want to take too much of your busy and valuable time. It is not that we believe in white and black partnership for real progress.' The money he had collected from his constituency for a water project was not enough for piped water. But it was adequate for a security for further loans until he bought shares in companies and invested in land, in housing and in small business. He suddenly dropped out of circulation in small places. Now he could only be found in special clubs for members only, or in newspapers - photographed while attending this or that cocktail party. As if to reinforce his new social standing, he took a huge farm in the Rift Valley. But his most lucrative connection was with the tourist industry. He owned a number of plots and premises in Mombasa, Malindi and Watamu and had been given shares in several tourist resorts all along the coast. (p. 174).

....AND REDEMPTION IN STRUGGLE

In contrast to these men, Ngugi presents Karega, who has grown from a life of poverty, attended school in Siriana, but some rough experiences in life turn them into a flaming political activist. Karega's conviction of the need for revolutionary changes of the system in Kenya comes to him through his own first-hand experiences in suffering. He needs no other tutelage, for he says, "Man is a thinking being from the time he is born to the time he dies. He looks, he hears, he touches, he smells, he tastes and he sifts all these impressions in his mind to arrive at a certain outlook in his direct experience of life." (p. 246). Unlike Ofeyi or Joe Musizi, whose lives have been very comfortable, and whose involvement in political activism starts from a theoretical rationalization, Karega's is rooted in actual life. With his eyes open, and his thinking faculty on the alert, he fathoms the depths of Kenya's malaise. He communicates his restlessness and dissatisfactions to others, persuades them to act and even leads protest actions against organized authority.

Karega had led a student strike at school in Siriana, for which he had been expelled. He organizes the villagers at Ilmorog to seek alleviation during the period of drought. After the marathon epic march to the city, Karega's eyes are further opened. He discovers that he is not alone in his craving for change. The lawyer in Nairobi and masses of workers are dissatisfied with the status quo. Karega widens his knowledge about political resistance through the reading of books. He finds out about China's rise from a humiliated, colonized race to a free, enterprising nation and, wondering about the best method to employ in solving Kenya's problems, reflects:

After all, the British merchant magnates and their missionary soothsayers once colonized and humiliated China by making the Chinese buy and drink opium and clubbed them when they refused to import the poison, even while the British scholars sang of China's great feudal cultures and stole the evidence in gold and art and parchments and took them to London. Egypt too. India too. Syria, Iraq... God was born in Palestine even... and all this knowledge never once deterred the European merchant Warlords And China was saved, not by singers and poets telling of great past cultures, but by the creative struggle of the workers for a better day today. No, it was not a people's past glories only, but also the glory of their present strife and struggles to right the wrongs that bring tears to the many and laughter only to a few (p. 301).

Karega reaches full maturity as a political activist when he works in the Theng'eta Breweries and has ample time to work out his strategies. Other workers "called him the silent one because he worked in silence, observing, annotating, now and then arguing with one or two workers" (p. 303). He comes to the conclusion that,

The true lesson of history was this: that the so-called victims, the poor, the down trodden, the masses, had always struggled with spears and arrows, with their hands and songs of courage and hope, to end their oppression and exploitation: that they would continue struggling until a humane kingdom came: a world in which goodness and beauty and strength and courage would be seen not in how cunning one can be, not in how much power to oppress one possessed, but only in one's contribution in creating a more humane world... (p. 303).

Once his ideas crystalize Karega throws himself into the purposeful activity of organizing the workers into powerful trade unions which can negotiate meaningfully, and without reprisals, with the employers of labour. Karega pursues this mission with concentrated singleness of purpose. He is a good example that nothing is better than experience as a foundation in good motivation.

Once these intellectuals accept the roles of activists in the envisaged transformation of their societies, they are confronted with economic, socio-political systems which need to be overhauled and so oriented as to serve the needs of their respective nations.

NOTES

¹Edward Shils, The Intellectual Between Tradition and Modernity, London: Moulton and Co, 1956, p. 12.

²Stanislav, Andreski, The African Predicament, London: Michael Joseph, 1968, p. 141.

³Elechi, Amadi, "The Novel in Nigeria", Afriscopes IV, 11 (1974), 41.

⁴Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State", The Writer in Modern Africa, ed. Per Wastberg, New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969, 21.

23. ⁵Gabriel Okara, The Voice, London: Heinemann, 1964, p.

⁶Cameron Duodu, The Gab Boys, London: Andre Deutsch, 1967, p. 125.

⁷Kwame Nkrumah, Class Struggle in Africa, London: Panaf Books, 1970, p. 39.

⁸Ibid

⁹Laurie S. Wiseberg, "Human Rights in Africa: Toward the Definition of the Problem of a Double Standard", Issue IV, BNo. 4 (Winter 1976) 7.

¹⁰Victor E. Wolfenstein, The Revolutionary Personality, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967, p. 27.

¹¹Ibid, p. 26.

¹²Ibid, pp. 29-30.

¹³Pin-Chia Kuo, China: New Age and New Outlook, London: Penguin Books, 1960, pp. 28-29.