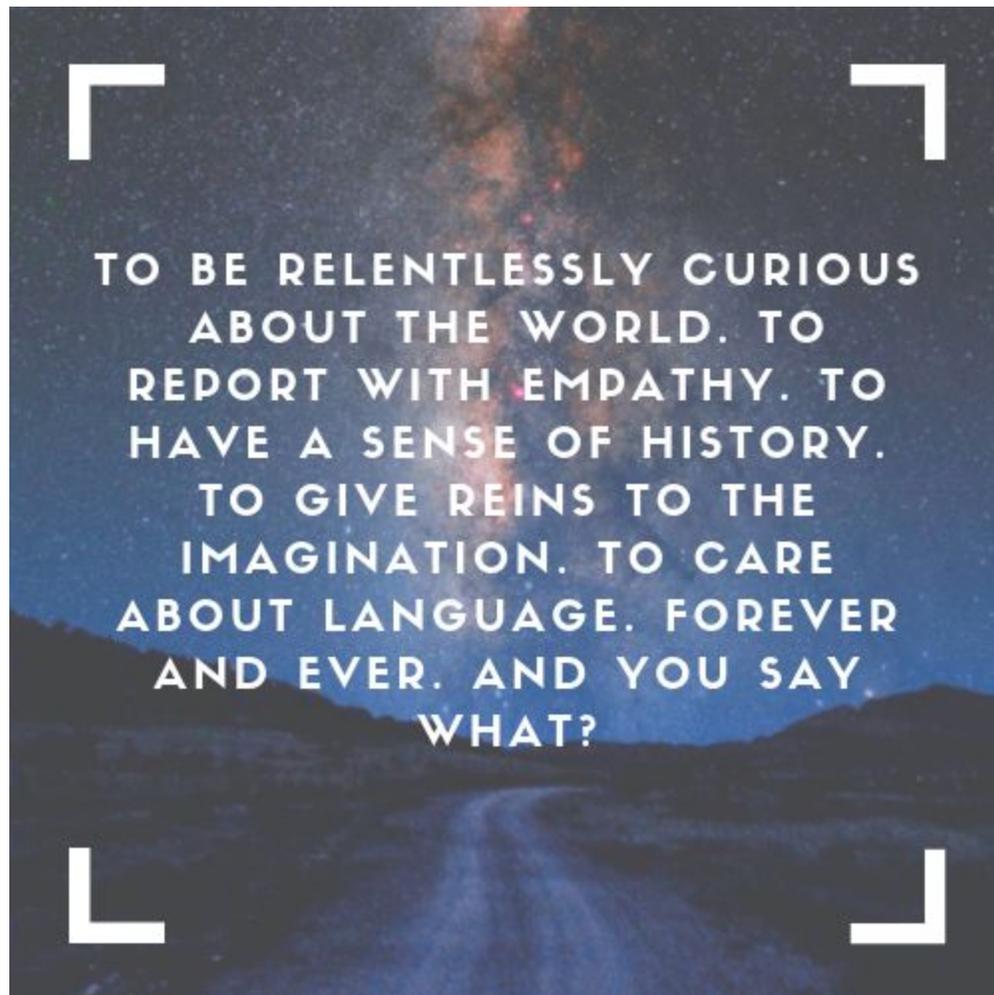




RAPE

THE  QUESTION MARKER





ISSUE NO. 7

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Issue No. 7

I didn't think we would make it to seven, but here we are, still going strong. Since we started publishing in January, we've paid out almost half a million naira to our contributors. And there's a feeling that we are getting closer to a real business model. Let's see how that goes in the next few months.

This month, the cover image is about rape. I interviewed the very wonderful Yagazie Emezi, after her recent exhibition which focused on rape victims. And there are lots of wonderful stories in this issue. I hope you like them. We'll be back next month with more.

Solomon Elusoji

Co-editor

July, 2019

Yagazie Emezi and the familiarity of rape scenes

Emezi's HERE is a series of photographs of rape survivors at the scene of their nonconsensual defilement. Its masterstroke is the ability to create belonging.



The HERE Exhibition opened with a panel discussion. Photo Credit: STER

Solomon Elusoji

She was wearing a green-coloured skirt, black sandals and a loose, greyish t-shirt which had *Tasmanian* scrawled across. On stage, she sounded contemplative, like she was sorting through apples and picking out the best thoughts to show the audience. Sometimes, she was flippant, less eager to speak, more desirous for the people to see and feel the images, so maybe they can take

action. Yagazie Emezi believes art can spur people to seek change. That's why "I want more artists to think consciously about their work," she said.

The crowd left the auditorium and filed into the lobby of the Mike Adenuga-Alliance Francaise centre; glasses of wine exchanged hands and Emezi moved through bodies, shaking hands, getting hugged and reaching

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out, too. From the lobby, the crowd moved again, this time to the evening's centre of attraction - the exhibition room displaying the HERE series, photographs of rape survivors at the scene of their nonconsensual defilement.

Emezi, who is a fairly successful photojournalist (her work has appeared in *Vogue*, the *Washington Post*), started work on HERE in 2016. Then she partnered with the nonprofit Stand To End Rape (STER). She had been seeing images of models being made up as rape victims. But "abuse is not something you can dress up," she said. Sometimes, "you don't see the bruises, or the sexual violence." On the other hand, the images of real survivors set them in the shadows and she felt that was pushing the agenda of silence and shame. "It is like saying 'you should be in the shadows, you should hide your face, you should be ashamed'." Emezi wanted to create something different and, for three years, she worked with volunteer rape survivors to recreate the scene of, perhaps, their darkest moments.

The exhibition room was well-lit, virtually shadowless, brilliantly illuminating the frames on the wall. Each of the photographs were

different, yet the same, featuring a character looking into the camera, stoic, even triumphant. The scenes varied from the kitchen to the bedroom to a car on the street. The crowd lingered, taking it all in. There was a sense of consensus, that it felt familiar - everyone has been in similar scenes; we live and play and work there. And this is HERE's masterstroke, its ability to create belonging and shine light on darkness. Let there be light and the fear and shame and pain, sizzled away, at least for a while.

Emezi picked up photography in late 2015. "It was really out of necessity," she told me over a phone call recently, her voice lazy and firm and blissful. "I was working on different creative projects but nothing was coming through. But during that time I had been taking pictures with my phone; my sister suggested that I try to do it professionally. So I gave it a shot.

"I come from a family of storytellers; I've tried different ways of storytelling. I tried writing, drawing, videos, so when I came across photography, it was just like 'oh there you are, I've been looking for you'. It was just kind of like when you are walking along the road and you meet

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an old friend and you guys just continue walking on the road.”

Since 2015, Emezi has documented the impact of education for girls in at-risk communities, the reality of climate change in Nigeria and explored how trauma survivors, outside the narrative of violence and abuse, adapt to their new bodies. She has been commissioned by Al-Jazeera, New York Times, Vogue, Newsweek, Inc. Magazine, TIME, The Guardian, and New York Times Magazine. In 2017, she participated in the World Press Photo Masterclass West Africa and in 2018 was a recipient of the inaugural Creative Bursary Award from Getty Images.

Her images have a certain, authentic feel; she wants to take reality and preserve it. She follows natural light and plays with it, carefully using it to emphasise, to illustrate. But her sense of narrative, of A to B, is her genius. She likes journeys, long, introspective ones filled with mysteries and, sometimes, wonder.

She told the Huffington Post in 2016 that she wanted to document life as it truly is in Nigeria. I asked her, three years after, if she had been able to do that. “Of course not. Lagos alone

is a monstrosity of a city when you look at the size and population. But I can confidently say that the miniscule aspect and places that I have found myself in, I have been able to document - places, environment and people - as they truly are. But it would take several lifetimes for everyone to do it, in Lagos, talk less of Nigeria.”

When I asked her how difficult it had been to create HERE, she was flippant. “For me, it’s wasn’t about what kept me going. It wasn’t as if it was an ordeal of work to be done. I wasn’t dragging a heavy ball. It was a necessary aspect of life that I felt needed to be shown through photography.”

Initially, she and the STER team had wanted to get policy makers to attend the exhibition night. “Unfortunately it’s always easier said than done when it comes to inviting key policymakers to come to an exhibition where this sort of discussion is happening,” she said. “Ideally, that would have been the perfect goal. But overall, I think the goal was still met, in terms of the general audience very visibly being impacted by the images. And more than anything, also the panel itself. In my line of work, I don’t go around

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anticipating any sort of reaction, because I have long known and accepted that everybody is different, so will their emotions. So I just remain open to any sort of feedback and comments that people might have had.”

HERE was exhibited in the middle of the serious allegations against COZA pastor, Biodun Fatoyinbo and Emezi hopes the conversation will not peter away. “We definitely want the work to travel. We are hoping that different parties will come by and express interest in carrying the work.”

On stage, that exhibition evening, Emezi had noted that in Nigeria, we “use rape as a weapon of war. It is terrifying.” The mood of the panel conversation she had participated in was morose, as Oluwaseun Owosobi and Angel Yinkore and Abiola Akiode-Afolabi discussed the haunting reality of rape in the country.

To end the phone call, I asked Emezi if she still had hope in Nigeria. “That’s all we have to and can be,” she replied. “If you don’t have hope in your country, then why are you in it?”

You will meet people who say they’ve lost all hope in Nigeria and they don’t care but I think that’s very unfortunate because it leads to a selfish mentality that will never benefit a community or a country. That selfish mentality that I am just going to look out for me, myself and my own. And so we have to remain hopeful and, more than anything we have to continue when we can despite all the horrible things that still happen - we have to maintain a sense of community because Nigeria cannot go forward as a nation if people don’t come together at the end of the day. When that will happen, if that is even possible, I don’t know. But we all have to play our part in our own little way.”



Solomon Elusoji is a co-editor at The Question Marker

The Poet who wrote for Ghosts

Echezonachukwu, the pianist and poet, is a rising star. Emmanuel Iduma of Saraba magazine has described his debut collection as “delightful”. But how will he evolve?



“Eche’s lines are well crafted that everyone feels him. You find love, distress, hope and imagination. You find ballads for the dead.”

Olisa Eloka

One evening last April, Echezonachukwu Nduka was promoting his debut published poetry collection, *Chrysanthemums* for

Wide-Eyed Ghosts in New Jersey, at an April in Paris, an arts and social event hosted by The Somers Point Art Commission in cooperation with The

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Somers Point Business Association, a body that “promotes, protects, and supports the development of a strong business environment in Somers Point and the surrounding communities.” Nduka was the five-day event featured poet. He graced the platform to read from his book. He had on a black beret, a body-hugging top and a jacket embroidered with red flowers and blue stripes. On a fleeting glance, you could mistake him for Okri. With his right hand resting on the microphone stand, he said that his “long name is not a burden anymore.” In 2017, a caucasian Master of Ceremony had had great difficulty pronouncing his name. She had asked him: “How do you say your first name? Can I say ‘E’?” His response was an apt “no.” She had to keep going at it until she got it right.

As he recounted this experience to the audience in New Jersey, laughter erupted.

But Nduka wasn’t joking. He has a thing for propriety. In March 2015, at the Anambra Book and Creativity Festival in Awka, he challenged a guest speaker on the factuality of certain aspects of a research paper on Nri art. The speaker got visibly discomfited. That year’s edition of

ANBUKRAFT was held at King David Hotel, Awka, and organized by the renowned Arts scholar and critic, Professor Krydz Ikwuemesi. Among the special guests were Professor Ben Obumelu who gave an enthralling lecture on the life and work of his friend, the legendary Christopher Okigbo; and there was Professor Chimalum Nwankwo, popular for declaring Okigbo a plagiarist, who discussed his journey as a critic within the Nigerian literary society; Lasse Lau, the Danish filmmaker screened a short film he had recently made. The esteemed novelist, Professor Chukwuemeka Ike arrived late but, eyes filled with nostalgia, hooked the audience with the story of Okigbo’s death during the civil war.

It was at the intellectually powered event that Nduka, then in his mid-20s, wanted clarifications to be made on some misleading bits of the Nri art presentation. “I am from Nri,” Nduka had said, “so I need to be sure of what you’re saying.”

*

Nduka’s father, Venerable Eugene Ekwunife Nduka, was an influential Anglican clergyman in the diocese. Although he was born in Onitsha in

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July, 1989, the religious inclinations of his father saw to it that Nduka spent most of his childhood within the church premises in Awka. Now retired, his father was a strict disciplinarian. “He wasn’t the kind of person you’d want to mess with,” Nduka says. He read extensively and owned an impressive personal library which greatly influenced the young Nduka.

Nduka has an enduring mental picture of his mother. Rose Nwabugo Nduka, a primary school teacher and graduate of Religious Studies, was a lady with “a lot of friends. She made friends with the high and mighty and the low.” She was charismatic, the kind of woman “who would walk into a room and you’d want to know who she is.” When she died, the whole place was filled with people from every sphere of society, a testament to how widely she was adored. She held leadership positions in women’s ministries and she was remarkably “sensitive in interpersonal relationships.” Intolerant of the slightest sign of laziness, she was a “near perfectionist.” She wanted everything to be in its place, a fan of compartmentalization. “She had a very good handwriting, loved music

and sang and danced a lot. She had a charming smile.”

*

The first time Nduka witnessed someone play the piano in church the melody lured him to revel in fantasies. He wanted to become a pianist. Driven by this new numbing desire, he wandered through the market after school, looking up prices of toy keyboards. “When I eventually saw the piano I wanted, I realized I didn’t have enough money to make the purchase, so I made an advance payment.” When he returned home and confided in his father of his intentions to become Mozart, the clergyman and his wife instantly threw in their support. “My mother gave me the money with which I completed the payment.”

A self-taught keyboardist, Nduka’s first audience was his family as he played during morning devotions. And he impressed his father with his musical skills so much that the elderly man was compelled to purchase a standard piano for the teenager. With this act of fatherly support, Nduka became irrevocably bound to a life enormously sharpened by an unflinching love for the piano.

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As a member of the church's Boys Brigade, Nduka participated actively in the group's functions, resulting in his early contact with Death. Striking the band and escorting the ringing ambulance, Nduka and his team would partake in funeral processions and become spectators of graveside theatrics. "As a cadet in the Boys' Brigade, it was our routine at the time to play at funerals, and that included going to the morgue, and also seeing the bodies while we played at viewing sessions," he told Uche Peter Umezurike in an interview. And it was his familiarity with corpses that helped him sustain composure as he played the organ and sang Stephen Adams's Holy City during the Commendation service of his mother, who he lost to cancer on November 30, 2005, when he was only 16.

*

At Bishop Crowther Seminary, Awka, Nduka flourished academically. In his Senior Class, he found himself in a situation that made embracing poetry an inevitability. He had found a girl irresistible and, thanks to the exciting Literature classes he had had, poetry came to him as the perfect medium of romantic expression. He

wrote the expository piece, his first creative attempt, and nervously sent it across. "She read it and said she loved me, but that God loves me more," Nduka recalls. "She used a lot of big words that made me consult the dictionary. She's married now, with kids."

An Arts student, he was accorded the position of the school's Social and Library Prefect, and simultaneously performed as the school's chapel keyboardist. His literary inclinations made it easy for many to believe in his childhood dream of being a lawyer. However, as the West African Examination Council examinations drew near, Nduka made an announcement that astounded his friends: he was jilting Law for Music.

"When I said I was going to study music at the university, you can imagine the disappointment. A lot of people said 'Oh, you can still be a lawyer and be doing music at the side.'" But despite the unsolicited suggestions from well-wishers and concerns that he was "taking the music thing too far", Nduka's decision was unfaltering. "I was determined to see the end of this piano I was playing."

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Nduka's father, "liberal in academics", assured his dreamy-eyed son of his support. "Even if he was disappointed, he never showed it." In the end, Nduka, as the only student to write Music at the final examinations in the school in 2006, had the entire empty hall to himself, the bored external examiner hovering over him.

When I asked if his mother would have endorsed his desire to study Music had she been alive, Nduka drew a sigh and allowed some contemplative silence, as though digging through his mother's mind, trading perspectives with her. Then he said, his tone quite sceptical, "She probably would have loved me to be a lawyer and still play music, but if she had seen how badly I wanted this, I think she would have let me. She wasn't imposing." More than a decade later, he would dedicate his debut poetry collection to her memory.

On being admitted to study Music at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nduka began to perform in musical concerts, acts through which he was financially sustained. "I didn't really do much with the money, spent almost all on drinks," he recalls, almost amused at his own adventures. On performance, he believes that "the

musician does bring newness and an effective emotional energy on stage as well. For instance, no two stage performances of the same work, even by the same pianist, are the same. Every performance is a new work of art."

If Nduka harboured anxieties as an undergraduate studying an "unknown" course, the visit of the highly successful actor and distinguished professor of music and Igwe of Oko, Laz Ekwueme, to his home one fateful Sunday was a most inspiring experience. Ekwueme had learned that Nduka had majored in Music, and that had prompted the old gentleman to pay homage, bringing books as gifts. This was the definitive validation of the young musicologist's passion.

On graduation, Nduka was retained at Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, as a lecturer after his National Youth Service programme at the institution. He was 23, arguably the youngest staff in the school. He taught Theory of Music, Introduction to Popular Music, Elementary Keyboard Harmony, Popular Music in Nigeria, History and Appreciation of Western Music, Criticism and Musical Scholarship amongst others.

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“Music is not a course you study because you like Davido. It is hard to find a student of Music that does not have a Music background; look at me, before I got admission, I was already playing the piano and all,” he says. “I tried to make my teaching as interesting as possible. If you weren’t told I was a lecturer or didn’t see my

ID, you wouldn’t know.” He was often embarrassed when his students would see him on campus and start chanting their reverential greetings. “I would be in class, lecturing, and students from other departments would come and stand by the window, wondering where I came from. I was that young.



“I’m interested in bringing works by African composers to the hearing of audiences who know very little or nothing about African classical piano music.”

“During staff meetings, I was the youngest, but I never let anyone look down on me because I stood my ground and I conducted myself in a respectable manner. Imagine a meeting where everyone is in their

40s and 50s and you’re there, in your early 20s,” he says, laughing. “I was forced to be an old man as a young guy and to have a high sense of responsibility. My beards were just coming out, some of my students

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were practically older than me. I had two different personalities: In the class, I meant business; if you misbehaved, I would discipline you there. Outside the classroom, I was everybody's guy. We would hang out, go get drinks. They would come to my office and we would talk. One of them came and took my books and ran away. We were close."

He wasn't fated to stay long at his lecturing job. He got admitted to Kingston University, London, where he took on Music, again, as a Masters student.

*

In 2013, as Nduka was lecturing and impressing audiences at concerts, he discreetly began work on a collection of poems. He told Umezurike that "my first draft was ready in 2013, so I would say the process took about five years." He also admitted to an overpowering hunger to be a member of "the league of published poets."

"I sent out poems to literary journals and got my fair share of rejections. But of course, the few publications I got spurred me. When I received the first editorial feedback on my first draft, it was so brutal and

honest that I nearly questioned my artistry. I was limited in style, structure, and scope. I needed to read more than I wrote. I had to rewrite some poems and jettison those I thought were beyond redemption."

In 2016, Nduka was awarded the Korea-Nigeria poetry prize for his poem, Listen. In May of that year, he was listed as one of the most promising Nigerian writers to watch out for. This was also the year he relocated to New Jersey, United States. Last year was a major one for Nduka's artistic career: his short story appeared in Maple Tree Literary Supplement. And in April, he released his first Extended Play (EP) *Choreowaves*, which comprised of eight compositions that includes *Obodom* by Peter Sylvanus and *Ufie III* by Christian Onyeji. "I'm interested in bringing works by African composers to the hearing of audiences who know very little or nothing about African classical piano music. African composers whose works I have performed are as brilliant as their counterparts anywhere in the world."

By mid-2018, Griots Lounge publishers had picked interest in the manuscript he had been working. Nduka has an interesting history with

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the publishing company, an imprint of Yagazie Media Limited, which was established in 2012 by the trio of Bibi Ukonu, Jide Aluka and Jama Onwubuariri. A poem of Nduka's had been published some years back on the company's blog, and "I started admiring him from then," Bibi Ukonu, the Managing Editor of Griots Lounge, told me during our interview via email. "We know what a good poem looks and sounds like. I had written a complete collection then. I knew Eche was up to something, and it didn't take that long for him to prove himself. He started winning prizes and readership."

In June 2018, Ukonu asked Eche for a complete manuscript. "We were lucky he hadn't published it yet. They were 75 poems. I immediately triggered a discussion with him, myself and Jide, who had made up his mind to return to Nigeria and try to grow Griots Lounge again. We then brought David Ishaya Osu into the project." Osu, a fellow poet, worked fervently with Nduka to polish up the manuscript and make it ready for publication. "David edited the work. Eche's poems read like music; classical music," Ukonu said. "Eche's lines are well crafted that everyone feels him.

You find love, distress, hope and imagination. You find ballads for the dead."

I was keen to know why Griots Lounge would take on the publication of a poetry collection. Book publishers are always quick to dismiss poetry as a non-viable commercial form. "For me, I saw it as a rare opportunity for the imprint," Ukonu explained. "And within the imprint, we work as a family unit. We plan together. We judge our works together. We watch each other's back, all the authors and photographer, with the GL team, even our editors too. We knew from the first day that Eche's brand of poetry was good for the global market. And we were determined to push it. We haven't pushed within Nigeria that much yet. We are having a huge event for poetry soon. But more copies would be found in more bookstores around the country this week. We will announce through our online platforms and website."

The long writes and revisions saw that the working title of the collection had changed twice. The eventual title, *Chrysanthemums for Wide-Eyed Ghosts*, was borne out of Nduka's fascination "by the intersections of love and death, the paradoxical mix of

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sorrow and joy that we often experience as humans” and he further intimates that “chrysanthemums are being shared as an act of joy and love right in the midst of mournfulness” and in the act of scribblings texts on paper “the poet becomes a messenger of the poem.” Nduka perceives poetry writing to be “ritual memory which, for me, is an offshoot of observations, introspection and meditations unfolding in time, claiming and reclaiming spaces with the sheer sublimity that language affords.”

Speaking with Gaamangwe Mogami, the founding Editor of Africa in Dialogue, Nduka, an unflinching Christian, offered his thoughts on the supernatural. “There are spiritual beings that exist on other planes that are connected to the human world in a way. If you consider certain African traditional religions where the worshipers look up to their ancestors and pray to them, then you can see the connection. When certain faithfuls talk about ancestors, there’s a belief that they have transcended to a higher plane, and by being in that place— they are able to offer guidance or protection, as it were.”

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Chrysanthemums for Wide-Eyed Ghosts was printed in the United States, where it has since “sold impressively”, Ukonu told me. The first public reading of the book by Nduka was on the invitation of the revered poet, Emari DiGiorgio, at her monthly event. She would liken the experience of reading the debut work as being present “to the mystery and mysticism of the moment.” While Griots Lounge is yet to disclose the number of copies released on initial publication, the arrival of Chrysanthemums for Wide-Eyed Ghosts on the literary scene was met by insightful reviews. Mandy Pannett described it as a body of “sensitive and beautifully crafted poems” and Emmanuel Iduma of Saraba magazine said it was a “delightful” collection. Brigitte Poirson summed it up as a sort of “poetic symphony.” After labelling it “hermetic poetry” the scholar, Daniel Chukwuemeka, noted that the debut is “sometimes obscure and difficult, in the highly symbolic mould of Soyinkanism, it is a site where subjective language and imagery intersect, with the sound of words as suggestive as the words’ deliberate ordering.” Writing for Praxis Magazine, Carl Terver suggests that

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Nduka's poetry "aspires to fluidity" and "evokes the oral form of African traditional poetry." But he accuses Nduka of letting his profession as a classical musician to interfere "in his creation of imageries in some places."

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Nduka's interests spread beyond the confines of the stage and the grey horizons of poetry and short story writing; he has produced some films in which he performed his poems. A slightly altered and improved transcript of the Where the Road Leads video, a poem of three sections, would appear on the last part of the book. On Valentine's Day, 2015, he was in the United Kingdom, making Console Me, a two-cast short film. "I remember that day because it was the Day of Love and it snowed," he told me. "I don't like many of the videos I did, but I guess it is proof that even back then I was engaged in something productive and shows how far I've come."

That evening at Somers Point, as Nduka read from his collection to a dominantly caucasian audience, it was easy to wonder if the poet understood the significance of his artistic struggles: from accompanying the

brigade to morgues, to the sudden loss of his mother as a teenager, the numbing demise of a close friend, (and a namesake, too); and, with an eye to the future, will Nduka's poetry ever transcend the exploration of grief and ghosts to the expression of ballads of glee, of light? Or will he keep wondering, as he gloomily does in his prosaic fashion, "How do you erase stories etched in scars?" +

Olisa Eloka is a Staff Writer at the Question Marker. His fiction has been long-listed for the Saraba Manuscript Prize.

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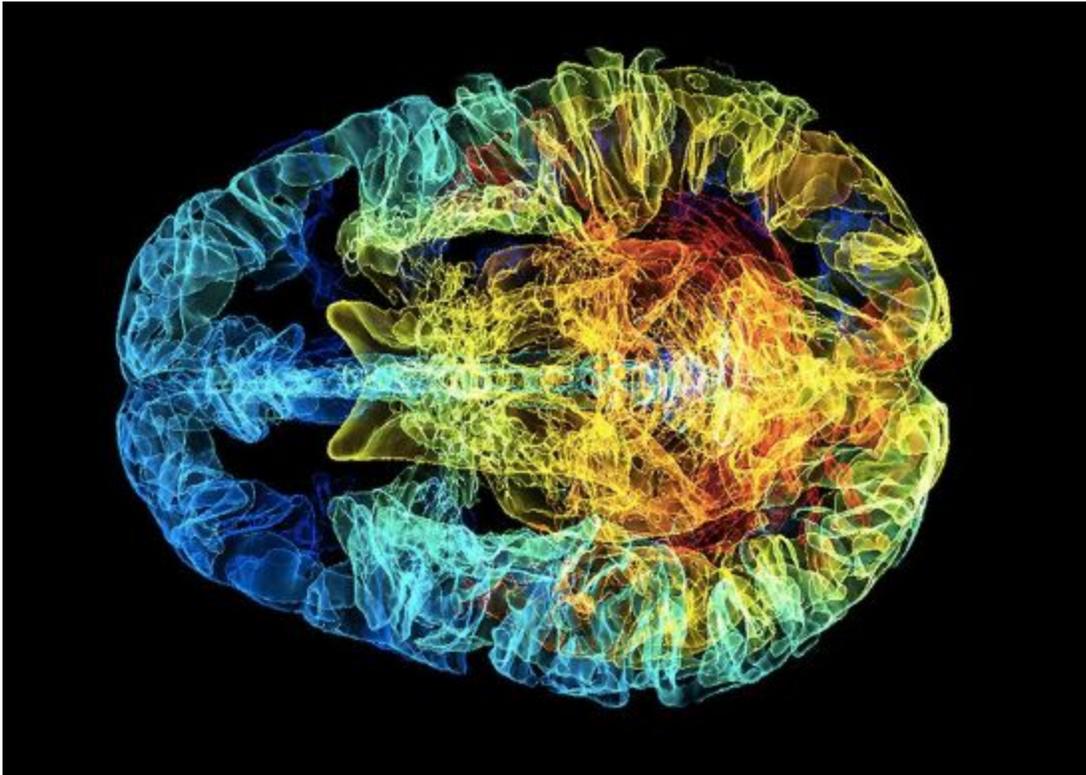
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A short note on the biology of rapists

What if the growing number of sex offence cases is because the caveman is becoming the most adaptive specie on earth?



The human brain develops through complex interaction between nature (genes) and nurture (environment). Photo Credit: Nature

Irene Ibiwari-Ikiriko

I recently moved to a new city where, for a while, I lived with one of my sisters. Every day, after work, I would watch as she conversed with her children about how their day at school went. She ended each conversation with the question: “Did anybody touch your penis/vagina

today?” I remember putting a briefed version of this story up on Facebook and the concerns raised by a few people that my niece and nephew were too young to say penis or vagina. You see, my nephew and niece are only 6 and 2 years old. But I can’t fault my sister. Pick a random day, open a

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Nigerian newspaper and seven times out of ten, you are going to find a rape report, several times involving babies as young as four months. It is sickening.

But who are these guys. Where do they come from. Do we know them? What motivates them? The problem is, identifying a rapist is a slippery task, because they come in different forms: the thug, the doctor, the stranger, the father. We find them everywhere: in the church, in bus parks, in school, at the hospital; everywhere. And they have different tools: secrecy, violence, deception. But perhaps the rapist's ultimate weapon is fear.

In my final year at university, I took my first anatomy course on vertebrates where they taught us about certain parts of the human brain. One of my favourites is the minute, almond-shaped amygdala. You see, the amygdala is part of the limbic system - the portion of the brain dedicated to emotions (yes, not the heart as we've been made to believe). The amazing thing about the amygdala is its role in perceiving and reacting to our fears and those of others.

The rapist skill is his/her ability to act on and react to fear - what does my victim fear? How do I put them in a situation that amplifies that fear? What do I fear that they might do? How do I avoid this? Although these questions might presume that the sex offender has a larger and more functional amygdala than the average human, it is not so; their adrenal glands (which is not part of the limbic system) might be overworked, but the amygdala's size remains constant.

The human brain develops through complex interaction between nature (genes) and nurture (environment). Some genes are translated into the proteins that lead to expression of neural patterns (responsible for how we remember and act on memories) in our brain.

While genetic mutations and certain diseases have been linked to psychological disorders, becoming a rapist is not as a result of genetic mutations (to the amygdala or the entire brain), nor is the trait heritable. Although some people are of the opinion that vices run in families but it's mostly an environment thing, not genetic. The Human Genome Project completed in 2003 identifies at least

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20,000 genes and does not recognise a gene for acting on the fear of others.

One day, I watched a man touch a lady's crotch on the very busy Rumuola road in Port Harcourt; he did not make a run for it even as the woman's screams attracted passers by. After staring him in the face for a few seconds, recognition hit her - she had just been 'molested' by a mad man. The explanation people around gave in order to calm her that day was this: "He probably became mad from abusing women." Does this mean every rapist has the tendency to develop a dysfunctional state of mind? A deviation from or challenge to my theory of lacking genes for vices is in cases where serial rapists, just like serial murderers, suffer from disorders. However, the percentage of choice rapists continues to rise - rape as a form of punishment, rape as a form of satisfaction and rape in all its details - taking ownership by coercion, including "sweet talking."

According to Darwin, natural selection picks the most adaptive species to survive, as the least adaptive becomes extinct. However, it has been centuries since Darwin first proposed the theory of evolution and the caveman supposedly identified as

extinct. What if Darwin was wrong? What if the caveman still exists and has blended into our species? What if the growing number of sex offence cases is because the caveman is becoming the most adaptive specie on earth? †

Irene Ibiwari-Ikiriko is a contributing writer to The Question Marker. She received a first class degree at the University of Port Harcourt for studying biology education and loves to explore educational systems around the world

Finding a rape fix

Is it possible to end rape? Probably not, but the crime should be properly accounted for.



To mitigate rape, we must stop going in circles. Photo Credit: The Financial Times

Adaobi Peter-Kingston

In 2001, a biologist and anthropologist teamed up to publish *A Natural History of Rape*, a book that used evolutionary biology to explain the causes of rape and to recommend new preventive approaches. Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer said they wanted to challenge the dearly held idea that rape is not about sex.

They were contending with the feminist writer Susan Brownmiller's 1975 assertion that rape was motivated not by lust, but by the urge to control and dominate. "Rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear," Brownmiller had written.

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But Thornhill and Palmer disagreed. "Rape is, in its very essence, a sexual act," they said. In other words the scientists were categorising rape as a natural, even if undesirable, phenomenon in nature. Rape, to them, is a consequence of evolution. "We fervently believe that, just as the leopard's spots and the giraffe's elongated neck are the result of aeons of past Darwinian selection, so also is rape."

One should stop at this point and carefully critique this position, which rests on the curious premise that men are biologically hardwired to procreate and will do anything possible to achieve that goal, even rape. The science is clear: men, generally, have a higher sex drive than women. But, of what use is this knowledge when discussing rape prevention? Thornhill and Palmer say this 'male desperation' realisation should put an end to the idea that the way women dress does not provoke the rapist into action. In other words, if you want to reduce your chances of being raped, watch the way you dress.

The duo also argue that unsupervised dating in cars and private homes accompanied by alcohol be curtailed. If we want to live

in a rape-free society, men and women should only interact in public spaces. Also, if we want to live in a murder-free society, no one should leave their houses; we should all live alone, in separate huts; to procreate, we can send semen and eggs through postmen who deliver the packages to standalone doctors in isolated laboratories.

It is a waste of time to delve into the negative response to Thornhill and Palmer's 'groundbreaking' book (one evolutionary biologist described it as "the worst efflorescence of evolutionary psychology that I've ever seen"), but their ideas of the "naturalness" of rape lives on. Rape isn't natural, shouldn't be. To impose the jungle theory of evolutionary biology into the human construct of society should be unacceptable. Just because murder is an evolutionary trait doesn't mean we have to make room - adjust - for it. We are not going to keep cities safe by asking people to lock themselves indoors after sundown. That's capitulation.

Is it possible to end rape? Probably not, but the crime should be properly accounted for. The rapist, not the defiled individual, should be the headline. That's the way we treat

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most other crimes, by focusing wrath on the perpetrator.

For all of Thornhill and Palmer's apparent academic exhaustion to use animal kingdom behaviour as a foundation for constructing human values, it is essential to note that their conservatism is steeped in history which facilitated the perpetuation of rape. Brownmiller, of course, was right; rape, essentially is about power. And until those dynamics - Female Status, especially - are radically altered, we will continue to grope in the dark, finding a switch that isn't there. +

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Obasanjo's Letter

Although Nigeria's ship has been tipping long before Buhari became its captain, he has accelerated the rate of the impending collapse.



Obasanjo and Buhari are both former Military Head of States

Sanusi Anslem

In 1992, as Ibrahim Babangida toyed with the transition to civil rule, Olusegun Obasanjo penned a letter, called the media and sent a copy to the Head of State. "In the name of political engineering, the country has been to a political laboratory for trying out all kinds of silly experiments and gimmicks," Obasanjo wrote. "Principle

has been abandoned for expediency." The letter didn't change the world (June 12 and Abacha went on to happen), but Obasanjo has not stopped writing. After he left Aso Rock in 2007, he continued to send more letters to his successors. Goodluck Jonathan received a bunch, one of which was an 18-paged verbiage detailing the numerous ways in which

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Jonathan had failed the country. Current president, Muhammdu Buhari is still receiving them, including one where he tried to discourage his fellow General from seeking re-election.

His latest one is about insecurity.

Since independence, Nigeria has hopped from one security crisis to another – from the Western political crisis in 1964 to the coup and counter-coup of the late 1960s to the subsequent Civil War to the religious and ethnic motivated violence in the North, to militancy in the South-South. Now there is Boko Haram, worsened by a rising surge of kidnappings and armed banditry across the country.

But what is essentially different with the Buhari administration is the growing mistrust among Nigerians against it, especially among non-Fulanis. There is almost a consensus, even if not entirely backed by empirical evidence, that the current wave of violence in the country is being perpetuated by Fulani herdsmen whose endgame is to colonise the entire country. This is Obasanjo's concern.

In an interview with Dr. Pauline Baker at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in July 2015, Buhari

unequivocally stated that the benefits of his governance will be focused mainly on the parts of the country where he received 97 percent of votes rather than those who gave him five percent. He described his decision as the “political reality”. The inference was that the South-South and South-East, which had voted for the incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan, would get the shorter end of the stick. For a country with old cracks on her walls, this was the beginning of a series of poor political leadership. Buhari's political insensitivity has brought us to what Obasanjo now sees as a “tipping point.” Although Nigeria's ship has been tipping long before Buhari became its captain, he has accelerated the rate of the impending collapse.

The Nigerian Constitution requires a sitting president to spread the appointment of his cabinet members across the 36 states but it makes no such requirements regarding appointment of security chiefs and heads of various federal agencies. Under Buhari, security chiefs have mostly come from the north, a phenomenon which Obasanjo has criticised in the past. There have been grumblings from different quarters about such a thing as a

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“Fulanization/Islamization agenda” being sanctioned by the President (Buhari is Fulani). Even if this theory is laughable or conspiratorial the President’s posture regarding the increasing spate of killings, banditry and kidnappings is worrisome.

What began in one part of the country has spread to others, leaving slain bodies and the searing cries of loved ones in the wake. But the only sound from Aso Rock is silence punctuated by a couple of not-so-reassuring, self-serving press statements. And Nigerians have subsequently resolved that the State can no longer protect them. By no means can that be a good thing anywhere in the world.

Despite earlier claims of having “technically defeated” Boko Haram, the group continues to maim people in the North. Then the farmers/herders clashes started severally and were mostly ignored. Early reports announced occurrences in remote areas of Plateau and Benue states. The reports went on intermittently, growing in volume of casualties and frequency of occurrence, shifting into new towns and states. We read about Agatu, Barkin Ladi, and Uzo-Uwani. Now it is

everywhere. Mass cries and burials changed nothing. What could have been easily nipped in the bud degenerated into a monster that now requires more to quell. Now all eyes rest yet again on the President whose disturbing silence and lack of action on the matter only confirms the theories that the actions of these herdsmen who happen to be his “kinsmen” is sanctioned, or at the very least, tolerable to him.

And then came the conversations surrounding the RUGA settlement – a policy that might have been good for the country if not for its untimeliness and manner of proposed implementation.

It is on the back of this increasingly deteriorating security situation that the former president penned his latest letter, referencing the recent death of Funke Fasoranti, the daughter of Chief Fasoranti, a leader of Afenifere in the South-West, as well as the lamentations of various group leaders across the country. Obasanjo criticised Buhari for the “mismanagement of [our] diversity” which is “our greatest and most important asset”.

All the concerns addressed in the letter are palpable. Obasanjo lists avoidable outcomes of this brewing

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hotpot should it go unaddressed as soon as possible and none of them looks pretty. He recommends the collaboration of different members of society including present and past Heads of State and Service, traditional rulers, leaders at every level of society, and concerned members of civil society.

No doubt, this will not be Obasanjo's last letter to a sitting president. Although this ought to be the last thing said about the country's deep-rooted security problem before drastic actions are decisively taken. Before any solution can be successfully carried out, the president needs to show that he is the President of all Nigerians and not just a faction. He needs to show his commitment to the Nigerian project and that means bringing everyone to the table. He also needs to take proactive steps towards resolving the slowly growing but insistent grievances being made by the Shiites through their protests. Only then can we utilize this two-edged sword that is our diversity to our advantage and also, just maybe, reduce the rate with which Obasanjo will need to churn out letters. ✚

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Reading China

Ovigwe Eguegu reviews Charles Okeke's second book, 'Natural Allies'.



Africa and China have moved closer in recent decades. Photo Credit: The New York Times

Ovigwe Eguegu

Natural Allies: Reconstructing the Africa-China Relations for Sustainability

by Charles Okeke

191pp.

This book echoes the sentiments of many: involvement with China has

been, for the most part, a good decision for developing African economies. Written by a China-based African scholar, *Natural Allies* aims to provide some fresh perspective on China-Africa relations.

The introduction offers a summary of the book's purpose – to review the actions that made China a success story, and how Africa can adapt some

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of these political and economic policies to its own context and benefit.

It also highlights a key commonality in the origin of modern China and Africa countries as victims of European imperial exploitation, as well as the role of African countries in China's ascent into the UN. It also points out the Chinese contribution towards the independence of African countries and the institutional frameworks, such as FOCAC and BRICS, through which the relationship has been conducted.

The author also frames the situation between Africa and its main foreign partners, the EU, the US and China as one where Africa has to choose because it needs only China:

“The U.S offers technical support to Africa, while EU especially France supports with military and intelligence but China with its soft power and economic partnership appears to be the only plausible ally Africa needs moving forward”

This assertion ignores the importance of the EU and US in African affairs, especially in the areas of trade, security and investment.

There are other quotes which require repurposing and adequate defence. The introduction fails to identify what exactly makes Africa and China natural allies, which is worrisome as this makes up part of the book title, and thus could be viewed as misleading the prospective reader. It also omits Russia's considerable influence as a key player in China's political stakes.

The next chapter, Africa and China Relations in Retrospect, offers several accurate posits regarding how China's strategic interests align with Africa's, as the relationship is not based on a past of imperial control, but on attempts to best synergise interests.

However, the jump to a retrospective view of Sino-African relations may be jarring, as there is no appropriate build-up; perhaps a more-detailed preliminary chapter on past Africa-China relations and how things have (or have not) changed would be a beneficial addition, rather than the brief history summary given in the introduction.

The structure of the book is passable, but further editing to ascertain a more logical chapter arrangement may be necessary. Written in a first-person tone, the

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book aims to be formal but sometimes comes off as informal, as evidenced in this questionable postulate from the introduction:

“China and Africa bond has gone beyond just victims of same European imperialism or oppression but into a more—siblings kind of relationship. The rate of African leaders visit to Beijing and the number of times past and present leaders of China has visited Africa validates my claim.”

It bears mentioning that a rise in trade and high profile diplomatic visitations is not sufficient to declare both Africa and China as ‘siblings’.

Also, more excerpts and references with infographics may be useful to the visual reader, as the oft discussed aspects of trade, involving large financial and or commodity exchanges over the years may require bar charts or other such descriptive media for easier visualisation.

The third chapter brings into focus the economic dimension of Sino-Africa relations. The author presents facts and figures to describe the origin and nature of China’s economic ties with Africa. The author posits that China intends to show Africa a viable alternative to western economics. The

TAZARA, which is one of the earliest Chinese funded capital projects in Africa, example is given. TAZARA was a Tanzania-Zambia railway project to link copper rich Zambia with a port in Tanzania. Zambia’s goal was to boost its export of copper in the 1960s when the price of copper skyrocketed. The World Bank declined to finance the project, then China stepped in with a thirty-year interest-free loan that was used to construct the railway to completion in 1975.

This chapter goes further to discuss the foundation and institutionalisation of Sino-Africa economic relations by talking about FOCAC and how it has served as a mechanism which allows for bilateral agreements on projects across the continent.

Perhaps to offer a balanced perspective on Sino-Africa economic relations the author makes mention of the effect of cheap Chinese imports on Africa’s indigenous textile, footwear and clothing industry.

The fourth chapter was well written and convincing; it starts off by exploring Africa-China cooperation in world politics. The author quotes Chairman Mao: “It is our African friends who have brought us back to the United Nations” to highlight the

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important role independent African nations played in the emergence of modern Chinese state in global politics. He also noted that China played a role in Tanzania's Salim Ahmed Salim being elected Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1962. The author goes on to give a quick glance of China's foreign policy in relation to Africa: Debt reduction and Afro-optimism are two of the seven listed policy principles. The former was a surprise to me, given the geometric rise of Africa's indebtedness to China.

The next Chapter was about migration between Africa and China, but largely glossed over the topic. Then the book dives deep into some of the main issues that dominates the China-Africa relations debate.

One is the dumping of cheap Chinese imports and their impact on textile and clothing industries across Africa. The author's coverage of the issue is hardly a defence of the Chinese nor a harsh criticism of government on both sides of the equation. Regardless, the author's approach to the issue offers a good explanation for anyone seeking to understand how Chinese goods benefit Africans because they meet

Africa's needs at a relatively low price point. He goes further to mention the push back from many African countries who have filed complaints against China with the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Perhaps in an attempt to clear any assumptions that dumping is illegal, the author points to the fact that dumping is not prohibited under the policies of the WTO.

The book's coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was written from the perspective of how Africa fits into the mega project which China hopes will transition its economy into a fully industrialised one. The author states that Egypt, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zambia and Angola are the countries Chinese business critical to the BRI will be located. The omission of Kenya from the list of countries can't be ignored, as Kenya's Lamu port is what really anchors Africa to the maritime Silk Road. Although he later mentioned that a Chinese news outlet reported that Kenya was one of the countries currently benefiting from the BRI. What is missing from the author's take on Africa's place in the BRI is a clear distinction between which Chinese funded projects are primarily for BRI and which are built

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specifically for the interest of African countries. Such a distinction would have gone a long way in addressing critics who draw comparison between infrastructures built by colonial powers – to extract resources from Africa – with today’s Chinese funded infrastructure.

The title of chapter eight, “Africa-China relations: not a win-win affair” sees the author argue that Africa is getting the shorter end of the stick in its relationship with China. Here the author China’s environmental and labour disaster in Africa and how Chinese development aid may be counterproductive.

Towards the end of the book the author explores the areas China can assist Africa, if the relationship is ever to become a win-win. He highlights the role China can play to facilitate Africa’s industrialisation. For example, China has been involved in building industrial parks in countries like Ethiopia and Nigeria. More of such projects can reflect China’s commitment to the industrialisation agenda of African countries.

Technology transfer is another area the author argues China can do more to make balance its relationship with Africa. However, the book seems to

consider having more Chinese technology firms expanding operations across the continent as equating to technology transfer, as opposed to handing over scientific knowledge via training, cooperation in research and development and joint ownership of technology via African investment.

The following chapter presents Chinese military activities (the most visible is the Chinese military base in Djibouti) in Africa as something Africans should welcome. Although military cooperation isn’t inherently a bad thing, the book did come off as a calculated defence for Chinese military expansion into Africa; it describes China’s defence policy in Africa as unique without any substantial evidence to back the claim.

In chapter 11 the book discusses Africa within the context of geopolitical contestation between global powers. The scramble for Africa is an old problem, and China, the relatively new kid on the block, is presented as Africa’s partner of choice. Some of the reasons given are convincing, the author points to China’s remarkable investment in building infrastructure across Africa over a short period of time. Also

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China's emphasis on trade as opposed to aid makes China a suitable partner for Africa. The book goes on to examine Africa's relationship with other global powers like the European Union, the United States, and India, but with a special focus on criticisms coming from the US about China's growing presence in Africa.

Many African observers still point to euro-centrism as one of the reasons postcolonial Africa has remained underdeveloped. So, the audacity of the author to offer sino-centrism in the concluding chapters as a way forward for Africa has to be applauded.

However, while the book draws similarities and differences between Africa and China, it fails to clearly discuss how the differences between Africa and China could impact the former if it goes on to emulate China. Beyond investments and infrastructure, the geopolitical impact should Africa adopt the Chinese model and/or prioritise Chinese-led platform for international cooperation like BRICS were not deeply discussed.

The pro-China intent of the book is evident, but it may benefit from further editing of the tone to reflect the gravity of the subject, as well as a

subchapter detailing the less beneficial aspects of Sino-African relations in current years (to provide a more balanced perspective). Also, the book seems a bit rushed; proper defence of several arguable quotes with appropriate numeric referencing in the footer sections of the pages is required, to improve the professional bearing of the text.

There were many points in the book when the author made it seem as though Africa is one country with one government, due to how he repeatedly emphasised what Africa should do or what China should do in dealing with Africa.

The book also makes assumptions of the reader's understanding of complex policy issues surrounding Sino-African relations, and may benefit from a minor paragraph in its Introduction, offering links to catch-up documents or starter books for the policy novice. +

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World War Two and the Desecration of African Memory

From time to time, the black man reinforces the argument that he is the wiper of his own heritage, the chief orchestrator of his own dehumanization.



Africans fought in World War 2

Olisa Eloka

When the Nazis, in the cause of territorial expansion, invaded Poland and bombed Warsaw in September, 1939, the prompt declaration of war on the Third Reich by Britain and

France must have come to many as unsurprising. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's assurance of "peace in our time" no longer counted. Hitler had broken his nonaggression pact

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with the British, and the result was a world in flames. Soon the Japanese military would stunningly attack Pearl Harbour, compelling Theodore Roosevelt into drawing the battle line between America and Hirohito's empire. The fascists had long taken power in Italy and Benito Mussolini had become one of Hitler's strongest allies. The tide of the war swung in Germany's favour once France surrendered, and the swastika was lifted high in Paris. Winston Churchill, the 1940 successor of Chamberlain as British PM, had inherited an explosive situation. The British Empire was threatened almost on all fronts, and they faced a peculiar trouble in Asia, no thanks to the all-conquering Japanese army. There was not enough manpower or instruments to respond to the Axis threat. And in no distant time, Britain was looking down at Africa for men, for sustenance, in a war in which legends would be made and myths dismantled.

A bulk of the African soldiers came from Nigeria, one of the darling colonies of the British Empire. The natives had different reasons for enlisting in the army. Some volunteered to fight for the British Empire because they longed for

adventure in distant lands, others were simply picked up from the streets and their homes and thrown into the lorries of the conscription teams. The Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, was a pupil when the conscription band invaded the mission school and took away his teacher, in broad daylight. Capturing the war years in fiction, Chukwuemeka Ike recounted how pupils were guided into bushes to harvest rubbers in the spirit of Win The War effort.

In January, 2013, I had an interview with Ichie Ignatius Ezeonyeka, a veteran of the Burma war. I arrived at his large homestead that morning in Umuchu, Anambra state, with Harmattan deeply entrenched in the air. He sat on a bench in the veranda of his bungalow, his walking stick right beside him. Within arm's reach was a stool on which there was a bottle of gin. At 98, his body was frail but his mind gave away fascinating strength. "The war was fought from 1939 to 1945," he told me. "I went there in 1941. We [the African soldiers] went there. On our way there, in the ship - there was no aeroplane - people were dying like fowls. Some of them [African soldiers] came with charms, but the powers in the sea subdued

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their charms. No charm works in the sea. All the powers in the world, they come from the sea. The ogbanje and others, when they die, they all go back to the sea where they came from. The powers in the seas are too much. Thieves don't survive war. No rogue goes to war and survive."

"During the war," Ichie Ezeonyeka continued, "we all took our guns and started marching forward [toward the enemy]. You are not allowed to look back; why are you looking back, did you keep anything behind? You are not to cough. If you look back or cough, it means that you are a saboteur. The enemy is in front, so why are you looking back? If rain is falling, you don't look for shelter; the rain will beat you very well; if the sun is shining, you are not allowed to hide anywhere. That's why the British are better than us, they are more disciplined. We here, if small thing happens, we'll start shivering."

Barnaby Philips' award-winning documentary, *The Burma Boy*, and 2014 nonfiction classic, *Another Man's War*, captures with wide insight and introspection the story of Isaac Fadoyebo, who enlisted into the West African Frontier Force as a teenager and had the ill fortune of been gravely

wounded in Burma during a Japanese onslaught. The 2012 Caine Prize winning story, *Bombay's Republic*, by Rotimi Babatunde was about a Burma veteran

These men, drawn from all crooks and cranny of British West Africa, engaged in the legendary Burma campaign, an exercise in which thousands perished in the jungles of Asia. After many military defeats, the 82 Division of the West African Frontier Force British West African soldiers were able to salvage Burma from the claws of the Japanese Empire in 1945. That was the year Mussolini was murdered and hung in Italy, and Hitler and his mistress committed suicide in the Berlin bunker, their corpses burnt to the chagrin of the Soviet army. Two American atomic bombs were all it took to bring the irrepressible Japanese Empire to her knees.

On his reward for putting his life on the line for the British Empire, Ichie Ezeonyeka told me that he "wasn't given anything. I heard other soldiers were getting money but I never got any money. I returned from the war in July 1945."

The African soldiers that survived Hitler's War returned with

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breath-taking tales and heightened pan-African view of their home politics. They had fought alongside their British comrades and “in the ‘green hell’ of the Burmese jungles, Africans discovered first-hand that the British were not infallible. The myth of racial supremacy was shattered and survivors were emboldened to think in new ways,” wrote Phillips. The generally accepted myth of White invincibility had been broken. These African soldiers would be ardent champions of nationalism and African independence.

Over the years, acknowledgement of the participation of Africans in the Burma campaign had waned. These men of valour would be dubbed as The Forgotten Army. The world celebrated the 70th anniversary of WW2 in 2015, and while the West adorned its heroes with accolades and worship, the silence of the African press was deafening. It appears that Africans, despite the activism of the 50s and 60s, still have little or no grasp of their history, no sense of appreciation of definitive moments. An hour that goes undocumented could be ruled out as non-existent; this annihilation of memory is the greatest scare confronting the African

story. Almost all the highly informative and expository historic texts on African participation in WW2 were written in, and published by the west. Today, many Africans are unaware of the continent's decisive involvement in North Africa and Asia during Hitler's War. While some African intellectuals condemn the imperialistic gesture which sees the flourish of African artefacts in western museums and the continuous propagation of "white" values over local content, I wonder how many equally campaign hard for the improvement and upgrade of our institutions; for the thorough nurture and extensive support to art curators and historians. Has anybody investigated the destruction of the Mbari houses, the Igbo traditional museums, in Owerri by the former governor of the state Rochas Okorocho on account that the mud buildings are “fetish” as I was told. From time to time, the black man reinforces the argument that he is the wiper of his own heritage, the chief orchestrator of his own dehumanization. How can African memory thrive, in all its glory, when its survival largely rests in the patronizing palms of the West? ✚

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RAPÉ

The End of Udi

An alien invasion wrecks an African city.



"I was overwhelmed with terror." Photo Credit: The New York Times

Abdullah Salisu

There was a sudden change in the clouds — a twirl — a shooting light flashed across the sky. Like a signal, every eye rose to its call. All the kids raced down and gathered at the clear field — the village square — before the older ones could get there. It was nothing we had ever seen before. Looking tiny at first, it became larger as it drew closer to the ground. The

once alluring light became so bright that it caused dizziness. A blaring sound followed.

Suddenly, I felt wetness around my ears. I looked around and noticed that most people gathered around were bleeding from their ears. I screamed. The last thing I remember was a blackening sky.

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When I drowsily came to, I found myself lying prone on the hard ground. I groaned in pain, and it felt as though something had hit me on the forehead. I could barely understand what was happening as people were running through the dusty storm; the wind's howl was unimaginably frightening. I struggled to get back on my feet as wailings and screams filled my head. I was terrified. Yet, in the blur of it all, I could sense a strange presence crawling on my skin. Something breathed in the dark storm. Slowly, it dawned on me — something terrible was preying on us! Udi was under an attack.

Cloud-to-ground flashes struck severally in the distance. The storm was growing fiercer and darker. I could barely see my skin. It was with my sixth sense that I made out the shapes of things in the darkness that shaded us there and then. It is really euphemistic to say that I was overwhelmed with a wave of terror and frightened beyond my senses.

As I found my feet, I beheld a silhouette, rising in the dark. There! Beyond large, its hind feet sunk into the very ground, and I, transfixed, watching it. It looked like an oversized mosquito with sticks underneath its

long V head, like some mythical creature only heard of in grim old witches tales. I shuddered, nearly choking on despair as my mind tried to grasp the frame of the unfortunate reality I had chanced upon! Its eyes were glowing green and pulsating; I felt hypnotized by its gaze.

Luckily, I slipped my skinny self away, just as its slimy tentacles made attempts to latch on to my legs. I ducked into a hole in the ground and trembled under the cover of darkness. I sat still, right there, in the midst of the screams of terror, cowering like a cornered field rat. I can vividly recall the horror and screams as the thing and its kind vacuumed the unlucky ones from Udi through a thin stream of light, into an endless void in the sky.

On that day — I do not know what got us through — I know it wasn't bravery or some kind of benevolent spirit that kept us till the atmosphere became quieter. After, all that could be heard were the clanging of metallic objects and the rustle of bushes and awkward sounds from things being swirled around by the whistling breeze. At times, I squeezed my eyes tightly to prevent dust from entering it. I could see familiar pathways sprawled out as the storm settled.

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One after the other, we crawled out of our hiding places, our saving graces. Mine was a small hole and the number with me was far greater than the hole could hold. Be that as it may, we managed, crumbled upon one another until the place could hold no more. I stepped out — still trying to recover from the shock.

I scanned the area, hardly able to gulp what was left of my beloved Udi. While the younger ones wept, we the older ones braced ourselves to search through the ruins for other signs of survivors. We found no one!

From nowhere, Gisha, the mad dog, dashed swiftly in-between my legs. Startled, I chased after her with my eyes until she disappeared. Suddenly, everybody was making a crazy dash. Udi can no longer serve as an abode for man! I immediately spoke to my heels too; after all, for the eyes to see no evil, the legs are the immunization needed!

*

It is a full moon to the day today, according to the time of man - the day on which the gods deserted my people, leaving us to our misfortune. The news broke the internet. Yet, whatever is the truth about the 'thing' I chanced upon, of the mysterious

attack that swept out an entire community, remains unknown.

And here we are, the survivors, in a remote building on the fringes of the capital city, where they keep us, door-to-door, locked away in underground cells; quarantined, to kill the mystery with us.

harmattan haze night.

. . . I hear prison hall whispers.

. . . quietly complots.

The FG contrived — to release an agitprop — with an armed insurgent group; the press conference is on-air, concocting the alien invasion as another tragic terrorists' attack on a Northern village: headline reads, 'No Survivor!' ✚

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