**Introduction**

Nigeria is among the ten countries most vulnerable to climate change, and prospects are grim for relief from the forces unleashed by these changes. One global economic risk assessment concluded the following:

> The regions facing the most increased levels of risk are West Africa and the Sahel. The region’s increased risk is reflected by the inclusion of West Africa’s largest economy, Nigeria, as the world’s sixth most at-risk country in our assessment (Verisk Maplecroft, 2014).

The table to the left, based on information from the USAID Nigeria Climate Risk Profile (henceforth USAID), p. 1, provides a summary of the global climate impacts that were outlined at the 2015 Conference of the Parties in Paris:

> I will begin with a summary of the current situation in Nigeria and follow with proposals that have been offered for mitigation.

**Agriculture**

According to the Pan African Center for Climate Policy (PACC), northeast Nigeria, the savannah, and the Sahel are the most vulnerable to climate change, with significant risk of drought, crop and livestock loss, widespread tribal conflicts, range wars between herders and farmers, and the Boko Haram insurgency.

Though productivity is low, agriculture remains the main source of income for over 80% of the rural poor, who rely on traditional farming methods. Furthermore, pastoralist herding – 90% of production – depends on an unconfined range and traditional diet for livestock, which is accompanied by significant belching and flatulence of harmful methane gas. In addition, the widespread use of palm oil creates significant processed palm effluent. Bush fires precede every growing season, and less than 1% of cropland is irrigated. Movement to cities and emigration is steadily reducing the percentage of Nigerians in rural areas; nearly 50% of the population now lives in urban areas.

**Water**

According to USAID and the World Bank’s Climate Change Knowledge Portal (WB), Lake Chad and other large water bodies are shrinking, and large river systems, including the Niger River basin, are subject to a long-term decline in water flow, with increasing conflicts over use and ownership of water. At the same time, the oil-rich Niger delta is at risk of flooding, with rising sea levels already resulting in erosion and the loss of some oil wells. Floods in 2012 resulted in $9.5 billion in damage to petroleum infrastructure and a loss of one fifth of Nigeria’s oil output. Twenty-five percent of Nigeria’s growing population lives along the coast, exposing it to rising sea levels, floods, erosion, and intrusion of saltwater.

(Continued on page 3)
**President’s Column**

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much”

Helen Keller

by Jim Clark, (12) 64-66

It has been heartening to see the number of you renewing your memberships since our email appeal in late November. Heartening because it means that we can continue to fund the many projects our organization has been supporting for several years now. These efforts have been reported and documented in our Friends of Nigeria (FON) newsletter from time to time, but just to highlight, last year FON was able to donate nearly $40,000 to support our vital work in Nigeria. All these funding dollars have come directly from contributions by our members either in the form of direct donations or the payment of annual dues.

As important as it is to all of us to support our projects, it is equally as rewarding to read your stories in our newsletter demonstrating that the spirit of service and community that came alive over 50 years ago among us twenty-somethings is still alive and well (well, mostly!). While we may see some of you occasionally at annual meetings or talk by phone, email or text, we know you are out there and that we still share that common bond.

In the late 1990’s, all our various groups came together under the FON umbrella with an expanded mission:

> To promote a sense of community among Nigeria Peace Corps alumni and other friends of Nigeria, to support the interests of the Nigerian people, and to educate the public about Nigeria.

While our mission has changed a bit, the spirit of our members has not. Thanks to our newsletter editor Peter Hansen and his staff of editors, contributors and proofreaders, we are able to read quarterly of the kinship and respect our members feel for each other and for our friends in Nigeria. Most of the time, the news is good but sometimes it’s not so good, as demonstrated by the growing list of those who are no longer with us. Nevertheless, we move on and your support makes it possible for us keep moving on – publishing our newsletter, maintaining our website, and hosting our annual membership meetings – doing these important things that serve to keep us in touch, maintain our sense of community and share your news with others. Renewing your membership (or even joining for the first time!) enables us, together, to do just that.

It’s still early, but we’re moving forward with our planning process for our Thursday, July 16, 2020 annual meeting in Seattle. Fortunately, several FON members living in the greater Seattle area have contacted me offering to assist in this process, but it’s not too late for you to join in this effort. (Contact me at: wjclark016@gmail.com or 336-269-3452.)

Our committee will hold its first meeting in January to discuss a variety of planning issues such as registration costs, speakers, lodging and a variety of other details that must be ironed out for a successful meeting to take place. The FON one-day meeting is always scheduled the day before the main program of the NPCA PeaceCorps Connect conference gets underway. Both the NPCA conference and our FON annual meeting will be held on the University of Washington campus in Seattle. The NPCA is working with the university to make dormitory lodging available for those wanting to stay on campus, which would also be available for FON members who may wish to choose this option.

All sessions of the FON annual meeting will take place on the UW campus in a space provided by the university affording members easy access to their dormitory lodging or to the many nearby hotels for those desiring more private accommodations. Details about these lodging options will be available in our Spring newsletter and on our website www.friendsofnigeria.org. If you’ve never been to Seattle, this is a great opportunity to experience and explore the great Pacific Northwest and visit some of the attractions this beautiful area has to offer.
Nigeria and Climate Change
(Continued from page 1)

Health
Less than 40% of the population has direct access to potable water. Charcoal and wood fires predominate in rural areas, and air pollution—expected to increase with rising temperatures—is a serious health risk. In urban areas, warming temperatures and floods are bringing greater risks of cholera, malaria, diarrheal deaths, and other diseases (USAID).

Poverty
With a poverty rate of about 50%, inequality is increasing. The overall population is expected to surpass the third most populous nation—the U.S.—by the 2050s (USAID). In their 2018 New York Times article, Bill and Melinda Gates describe the threatening interactive effects of poverty, population growth and climate change:

“[As] extreme poverty disappears from many places, including China and India and, increasingly, many countries in Africa, it gets more and more concentrated in the most challenging places in the world. Poverty is especially stubborn in a group of about a dozen countries in sub-Saharan Africa marked by violent conflict, severe climate change, weak governance, and broken health and education systems. More and more, extreme poverty will be a feature of life only where people’s opportunities to overcome it are brutally limited.

[These] dozen countries are growing faster than every other place in the world. In the United States, women have an average of two children. In Nigeria, the average is five. Births are concentrated in the places where poverty is concentrated. Based on current trends, a growing proportion of babies will be born in places where adults have to devote most of their resources to survival, leaving very little to invest in their families, their communities, and their countries. This dual phenomenon of persistent poverty in fast-growing places explains why, by 2050, more than 40 percent of the extremely poor people on the planet are projected to live in just two countries: The Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria.

Energy
Abundant supplies of oil and gas qualify Nigeria as having a “resource curse,” with accompanying corruption, weak governance, and, historically, a civil war. It is ironic that despite its rich natural resources the country generates one of the lowest per-capita quantities of electricity in the world. Daily production averages only 30% of installed capacity. Most rural communities remain off the grid, and 60% of the population lacks access to electricity. Gas flaring is an enormous waste, with Nigeria ranking as the seventh highest emitter globally. According to Bloomberg & Pope (2017, pp. 171-172), “In offshore oil fields in Nigeria and Angola, virtually all of the natural gas coming out of oil wells is flared, even though a few miles to the east are economies desperately short of electricity (which natural gas can generate) and fertilizer (for which natural gas is the major feedstock) . . . [I]t is often easier for [companies] to persuade local officials to ignore the requirements and let flaring continue—sometimes even bribing them to do so.” As time goes on, sources of energy will be increasingly compromised by climate change, with coastal flooding of energy and gas installations, declines in water flows for hydro projects and agriculture, and continuing low levels of investment in solar and wind energy (P-ACC).

Possible Mitigation Measures

Figure 1: This pie chart shows the relative weights of the key elements of Nigeria’s priorities for mitigating the climate change threat, as presented at the 2015 Conference of the Parties in Paris in Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) – from which the chart was obtained, p.12.

Highlights
According to the INDC, the mitigation action that would bring the greatest development benefit is reducing air pollution, indoors and outdoors; this step would produce immediate health and social benefits. Research shows that investment in clean technologies brings greater resource efficiency and produces more knowledge and jobs than investments in dirty technologies. In addition, fiscal reform can be an efficient mitigation action, since it releases significant resources that can be used to fund investments in more efficient infrastructure.

KEY NIGERIA INDC MITIGATION MEASURES – a summary of the major benefits of greenhouse gas reduction that could be achieved by 2030 (INDC, p. 3)

| Potential Reduction of Greenhouse Gases (in million tons per year by 2030) |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Economy-wide energy efficiency | 179         |
| Efficient gas power stations | 102        |
| Work toward ending of gas flaring | 64         |
| Climate smart agriculture | 74          |
| Reduce transmission losses | 26          |
| Renewable energy | 31          |

One of the most important but difficult investments is harnessing electricity at gas flare sites to create microelectricity grids to reach poor communities remote from the national grid. Such an investment could reduce tons of greenhouse gases. Reforestation by planting green belts around urban areas would be another important contributor to renewable energy (WFB).

Transportation is also a priority, key measures being a shift from air to high-speed rail and moving passengers and (Continued on next page)
freight from cars and lorries to buses and rail, with tolls for roads and car emissions (60% of cars are over 11 years old), and reform of petrol and diesel subsidies. With agriculture, the focus should be on the savannah, particularly the Sahel, to include improved methods of production for crops and livestock, reduced burning of brush, better range management for livestock, and drought-resistant agricultural systems.

**Family Planning**

In *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming* (2017), Paul Hawken, et al., identify 80 tested solutions to reverse climate change. They identify family planning and the education of women and girls, as the strongest joint solution to reducing the production of carbon dioxide in the medium and long term. According to Nigeria’s National Population Commission (2018), only 17% of Nigerian women use birth control, and only 12% use modern methods. Nineteen percent of married women want a family planning method but don’t have access to one.

**Communication**

Mobile phones and digital information offer significant potential for addressing climate change. Many Nigerians have “leap-frogged” expensive fixed-line technology to adopt mobile technologies. Data from Forenbacher et al. (2019) indicate that 71% of the population uses mobile phones as a primary platform for communication and accessing the Internet. Mobile technology has the potential to serve as a “bridge” across the digital divide and accelerate economic growth in developing countries like Nigeria.

**Suggestions for Further Reading**

Here are recent books I recommend on global climate change:

**More Optimistic**


**Less Optimistic**

Bill McKibben, *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*, Macmillan, 2019. McKibben is a vocal climate activist. This book concludes with two hopeful observations: development of solar energy can play a major role in combating climate change and aggressive non-violent action holds promise as the single best method for forcing the requisite policy changes.

David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*, Crown Publishing Group, 2019. “The science of global warming has been settled for 40 years, but we have not just continued to pollute – we have accelerated the rate at which we’ve been doing so. Most of the carbon humans have put into the atmosphere has been emitted in the last three decades. At this point, even our best-case scenario will lead us to disaster.”

Nathaniel Rich, *Losing Earth: A Recent History*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2019. A key focus of the book is “the demand that climate change makes on us . . . to feel empathy for the unborn poor of the global south and change our economies to act on the basis of their needs. That’s something humanity has never done before.”


**References**


Greg Barnes
(staff) 63-65

*Kirkus Reviews* has selected *The Beauty Queen of Bonthe and Other Stories of West Africa* (CreateSpace, 2018, pp. 194, also a Kindle e-book), authored by Gregory A. Barnes, as one of its **100 Best Indie Books of 2019**. The seven stories in this collection all occur in the early nineteen-sixties during the transition from colonial rule to independence. Sierra Leone, the locale for five of the stories, is where during which he taught courses in public and nonprofit management and organizational behavior. He was also a prolific scholar, authoring or co-authoring more than 150 papers, presentations, professional reports and training modules.

Blue Wooldridge
(06) 62-65

This fall, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) awarded the 2019 George Graham Award for Exceptional Service to the Academy, to Blue Wooldridge, Professor Emeritus at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). NAPA, chartered by Congress, is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization established in 1967. Wooldridge retired in May 2019 after a 32-year career at VCU.

Tom Wangler
(PC coach) 74-76

*Nigeria: An Ancient Secret Becomes the Adventure of a Lifetime* (Dancing Moon Press, 2019, pp. 314, also a Kindle e-book) is a first novel written by Tom "secret oasis." Accompanied by two of his Peace Corps volunteer friends and a Marine security guard from the U.S. Embassy, he embarks on a search and rescue mission that takes an unexpected turn.

Tom was a track coach in Nigeria, one of 14 PCV coaches who served in the early- to mid-seventies with the Nigerian National Sports Commission.

Gerard Durley
(12) 64-66

On December 12, 2019, The *Atlanta Business Journal* named Dr. Gerald Durley as one of the top 25 Atlantans for 2019. He was honored at a ceremony held at the ZuCot Gallery located on Centennial Olympic Park Drive in Atlanta, GA.

Dr. Durley served as pastor of the historic Providence Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta for 25 years and has been intricately involved in climate change discussions across the country. Dr. Durley is a much sought after speaker and preacher. He serves on many boards and has received numerous awards including the White House Champion of Change Award and awards from the NAACP, the National Urban League and the Atlanta Business League.
A Glimpse of Mrs. O. Soyinka 50 Years Ago

by Ed Gruberg (05) 62-64

As a follow-up to my note in the last FON newsletter, I thought people might be interested in the point of view of Olaide Soyinka, Wole’s wife. It is not easy being the spouse of a famous, controversial, outspoken artist.

When I found out that Wole had been arrested during the Biafra war and couldn’t be reached, I decided to try to contact his wife, whom I didn’t know. I wrote to the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ife and he answered me:

Dear Mr. Gruberg,

Thank you for your letter of 3 June, 1968.

I have now got in touch with Mrs. Soyinka and would advise that you contact her at the following address:

Mrs. O. Soyinka
Medical Library
University Teaching Hospital
Ibadan, Nigeria

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

H. A. Oluwasanmi
Vice Chancellor
University of Ife
Ile-Ife Nigeria

I wrote her and told her I wanted to stage two of Wole’s one-act plays and, through ticket sales, raise some money for his defense. My idea was to show there was international support for him. She replied:

16 July 1968
Dear Mr. Gruberg,

Thank you for your kind interest in the events of Nigeria and also for the trouble you have gone into concerning my husband’s ‘treatment.’

He is still in some undisclosed prison in Nigeria and is still being held incommunicado. Not even I have been allowed any contact with him since the one visit of October last year which was stage-managed for the eve of Enahoro’s disclosure of Wole’s “confessional statement.”

The latest however about him is Radio Biafra’s last week’s news (by the hour) that he has been murdered in prison during the recent anti-Yoruba riots in the North.

There was some tension in the North no doubt, between the Yorubas and the Northerners, but we really don’t know if this degenerated into riots. The military governor of the Western State did deny the riots rumour on his return from a recent trip to the North. But of course so did General Ironsi dismiss the May ‘66 riots in the North, so one doesn’t really know what to think. We believe however that the Biafran news of Wole’s death is probably propaganda stuff to cause division in the Federal ranks. Still, one wouldn’t like to dismiss it out of hand.

I am therefore pressing for an official denial of the news and secondly for his release. Failing this, I am pressing for a public trial as he has been held now for almost a year, completely incommunicado and without a trial and this is where your trust fund can come in useful for the legal actions involved. There must be a positive move now, military regime or not.

My bank address is: ___________

Yours sincerely,

O. Soyinka

1 November 1968
Dear Mr. Gruberg,

The money has been received here at last. It amounted to £103.13s.3d of our local currency and $290 of yours and is being kept carefully in the event of a court trial. I can only ask you again to thank Wole’s many well-wishers over there and to please let them know that he is alive and well and was recently visited by his father at the Kaduna Prison.

I’ll certainly write again when there is anything newsworthy concerning him.

Yours sincerely,

O. Soyinka (Mrs.)

At the end of the war in October 1969 there was a general amnesty for political prisoners and Wole was released from prison. He immediately got back to work.

On 1 August 1970 there was the world premiere of Wole’s new play Mad Men and Specialists, which I attended at the Eugene O’Neill Memorial Theatre Center in Waterford, Connecticut. It is a very bleak play, reflecting Wole’s recent experience, about a humanist doctor “mad man” and his “specialist” son who is a ruthless autocrat. Wole had brought to the U.S. 15 Nigerian actors for the production. It was a busy day as all premiers are. Afterwards there were many friends and critics and playgoers all milling around. I chatted briefly with Wole and Olaide and congratulated them on their new-found freedom. And we went our separate ways.

I travelled to Nigeria in December 1973 staying mostly in Lagos and Abeokuta. I decided to go to Ibadan and visit

(Continued on next page)
A Glimpse of Mrs. O. Soyinka 50 Years Ago  
(Continued from previous page)

the school where I taught and places I remembered so vividly. While there I tried to look up Mrs. Soyinka and find out how things were going. I knew she and her family were living on the campus of the University of Ibadan where she was a librarian. It was the age before cell phones and most Nigerians didn’t have home phones so I decided to just show up and say hello.

I took a taxi to the University and looked for the Soyinka house among many identical faculty houses. At first sight I knew I found it. Brilliant, huge Yoruba carvings sat on the veranda basking in the afternoon sun. I walked up the steps and asked if Mrs. Soyinka was in. She came out to greet me and invited me in.

The house was full of art — extraordinary masks, carved panels, interesting oil paintings. There was an extensive record collection housed on shelves supported by hundreds of irregularly shaped dowels. More carvings and paintings sat on the floor leaning against the wall. She introduced me to her three daughters who were between six and twelve. They were readying themselves for a Christmas party. It was midafternoon and they were supposed to have eaten about 1 pm. She invited me to join them for some food — pounded yam, meat soup, efo with okra. They provided me with a knife and fork while they plunged in with their fingers. I passed on the drink-water.

I asked her how things were. Wole was in Europe. His book about his prison experiences, The Man Died, published the previous year, made his staying in Nigeria impossible. There was no overt banning of his book. But things had also offered a gin and tonic or scotch). Cheers. She refused to believe I didn’t know if it would be considered conspicuous consumption, but it certainly was conspicuous and pretty silly that women were wearing elevated shoes with 3 inch thick soles and 5 inch thick heels. I couldn’t figure out how they even walked in them. “Oh the platform shoes?” She said with a big smile, “I was down in Lagos the other day and I bought a pair.” We both chuckled.

She introduced her brother who seemed to be the handyman/driver for the house. He was a reticent fellow who ate with us without saying a word. With Wole not there someone from the family stayed to help out. It came so naturally to the Yorubas.

The girls emerged in their party dresses. They had a younger brother about three who was too young to be invited to the party. One of the girls was wearing a new pair of patent leather shoes a size too large. She was coming out at the heel. Mrs. Soyinka told me to change to her white shoes. The girl disappeared into another room for a while. Mrs. Soyinka was worried the girl was crying because she couldn’t wear her new shoes. She told the other daughters to assure their sister the new shoes would not be returned. The girl came out looking cheerful and wearing another pair. The girls were taking presents to the party: a box of candies and a set of play silverware (this was, after all, an international academic community). Mrs. Soyinka’s brother drove them over.

So life went on. She worked at the library, raised the kids. Wole was away indefinitely. The future was unclear. We split a beer. She said it was the only civilized drink in the house (although she noticed in the almost ten years I had been away was the increase in conspicuous consumption. She agreed. In a country where the average income was 100 or 150 naira a year there was a class of women spending more than that to go to a party. Dress material could cost up to 50 naira a yard. It took 4 yards to make a wrapper and blouse plus another yard for the headpiece, plus gold earrings, gold necklace, gold bracelets, shoes, purse. Meanwhile the price of groundnut oil for cooking had recently gone from 15 naira to 25 naira for four gallons (a kerosene tin’s worth). I said that I didn’t know if it would be considered conspicuous consumption, but it certainly was conspicuous and pretty silly that women were wearing elevated shoes with 3 inch thick soles and 5 inch thick heels. I couldn’t figure out how they even walked in them. “Oh the platform shoes?” She said with a big smile, “I was down in Lagos the other day and I bought a pair.” We both chuckled.

As a PCV, Ed Gruberg lectured at the Government Technical College in Ibadan. He is currently Emeritus Professor of Biology at Temple University in Philadelphia, P.A. He still bikes to his office daily and leads a weekly seminar, Neurolunch, discussing topics in neuroscience. He runs a local community garden magazine, Green Thoughts. He is an elected Democratic Party Committee Person (Ward 15/Division 3) working to elect progressives. After many years, he has enthusiastically taken up sailing again – in Eastern Long Island. He can be contacted at: egruberg@temple.edu
The Famished Road
by Ben Okri
Anchor Books, 1993, pp. 512 (pb)

by Sandra Demerly Wittenbrink, (20) 66-67

This Man Booker Prize winner, published in 1991, is the first of a trilogy. Ben Okri, however, leaves no doubt that he is a poet at heart. Critics have called the work an example of “animist realism” or “African traditional religion realism.” The protagonist in this stunning book is Azaro, “a spirit child.” Many of us, while in Nigeria or later, learned of this concept, which was extant in the ancient religions of the many different peoples who lived there. “Spirit children” enter the corporeal world as beings who are physically frail or at risk in other ways yet they occasionally exhibit monumental power that comes from their spiritual essence. According to the prevailing belief, “spirit children” still actually belong to the spirits, who never cease trying to pull them back into a cosmos vastly different from the earth. They will then have another chance to be born in a stronger, healthier form.

Ben Okri proves himself a master at portraying the events that these determined spirits are able to stage. Do not expect a cast of angelic beings crusading for what humans perceive as favorable. These are, instead, powerful and willful spirits on a mission to recapture their “child.” Their repetitive, often cataclysmic, intervention in day-to-day life is not for the faint of heart. It is in these scenes that Okri’s poetic powers tend to reach epic proportions. Azaro’s life under the influence of the spirits is described with passionate, electric imagery. The frequency of these apocryphal episodes can at times make the plot seem slow moving, yet it also creates a burdensome bulk that replicates how disturbing young Azaro’s life actually is. Okri, amid his vivid depiction of the duality of animist beliefs, gives the reader occasional relief from intense scenes of havoc. Okri has crafted comforting passages that prevent Azaro from appearing to be a victim. Not all the supernatural beings are bent on wielding brute force to retrieve the “spirit child.” The reliable spirits of the natural world do arise when required, granting hope and courage. Even as chaos and destruction threaten to prevail, the author does not fail to hint at a possibility of a merciful outcome.

The novel’s narrative is effective in placing other worldly events amid the daily activities of a poor Nigerian village and its beleaguered inhabitants. Azaro’s parents play a role in his life and struggle to provide basic necessities in an atmosphere of arduous work, danger and a threatening landlord. His father undergoes some dramatic action rather late in the plot. A dominant character is Madame Koto who runs the local bar and eatery. She possesses considerable community influence and recognizes, and exploits, the practical side of Azaro’s presence at her establishment. The clientele seem attracted to him. Wherever Azaro is the spirits are also present. Gatherings at Madame Koto’s eatery often explode into fights and destruction. Attempts at change result in repeating past errors. Is this the spirits’ failure to retrieve Azaro and draw him back to where he belongs?

Most African stories seem incomplete without a touch of political corruption. The Famished Road includes a few scenes of a campaign tainted by wealth and extortion. Ben Okri uses this element to add a moral to his tale. Madame Koto’s public allegiance to the party of the rich fails dismally to improve the quality of her clientele. The somewhat unruly crowd at her eatery is replaced by a den of high-level sleazy sorts.

Another intriguing character who appears and reappears in this novel is Jeremiah, a photographer. He has a kind of unearthly significance beyond what he achieves with his camera. The community occasionally seeks his services to memorialize important events. More frequently they seem to treat him with a kind of fear or loathing, and he is ultimately ostracized. The photographer’s limited role in the story is reminiscent of the attitude of photography of everyday life during our days of Peace Corps service in Nigeria. Did the taking of photos negatively impact the spirit of those photographed? Could this be a kind of prosaging of the current concern over pervasive cameras and the lack of privacy? Could it even be examples of animist belief ringing true to a possible view of contemporary reality? Ben Okri has been quoted as saying, “The magician and politician have much in common; they both have to draw our attention away from what they really are.”

Ben Okri’s father is Urhobo and his mother Igbo. Born in 1959, the family spent the years leading up to the Biafra War moving frequently to protect his mother. Ben’s father, perhaps with an eye to reverse psychology, made his son dust every one of the books in his library, but he warned him not to read them. Of course, Ben did. There was Aristotle, Plato, Shakespeare, Dickens and Twain. This gave him a leg up for his studies in Comparative Literature at the University of Essex.
Book Review

My Sister, the Serial Killer
by Oyinkan Braithwaite
Doubleday, 2018, pp. 228 (pb)

Anne left me sitting outside a WHSmith bookshop at London airport to go and do a bit of window shopping. However, there are four WHSmiths at the airport. She wasn’t sure which one she had left me sitting at but find me she did. Then I wandered off and ended up looking at all the books that I really didn’t need to buy, let alone read. I have a policy of not buying books at inflated airport prices. However, one book caught my eye. My Sister the Serial Killer, by the young Nigerian author, Oyinkan Braithwaite. I had heard this book reviewed on the radio as it had been long listed for the Booker Prize. So without compromising my literary integrity, I waited till I got home before acquiring a copy.

I kick myself now for being so very principled as the sister’s tale would have made the flight back to Canada pass more quickly and taken my mind off the discomfort of coach. The style of writing is short and sharp, and the plot never really flows, but this may be a literary device lost on a chemist. The very short chapters made the 228 pages somewhat misleading. I could have easily read the entire book during the flight home.

The story line is the tale of two sisters, Korede, a straightforward and straight-thinking nurse and her younger sister, Ayoola, a bit of a sociopathic ‘floozie’.

The book opens with Korede, trying to clean up after Ayoola has just stabbed to death, Femi, her latest boyfriend. The sisters then wrap the body in a carpet and drop it off the Third Mainland Bridge. (A mammoth addition to the Lagos traffic chaos built since we were all there.)

The story develops through various scenarios to the point where the two sisters are competing for the love of one of the doctors at the hospital where Korede is the senior nurse. The doctor is unaware of Korede’s love for him but is bowled over by her outgoing and lascivious sister. Add to this a sub-plot of Korede pouring her heart out about her problematic sister to one of her patients, Muhtar. The murder of Femi is only one of a list of ‘late’ boyfriends. Korede confides to Muhtar that she has had to help her sister in cleaning up after each one and disposing of the bodies. But Muhtar is in a coma. As the book draws to a close, he wakes up and seems to have remembered and understood everything Korede has told him.

To be honest, I am a little surprised that this book was long listed for the Booker Prize when up against authors such as Salman Rushdie and the eventual winners Margaret Atwood and Bernardine Evaristo.

Oyinkan was born in Lagos in 1988 but was brought up in both Nigeria and the UK. She has degrees in law and creative writing from the Universities of Kingston and Surrey. She returned to Lagos in 2012 when she was 24. She has published one book of short stories, The Driver, in 2010 and has had various jobs before turning to full time freelance editing and writing.

“A Good Book but not a Great Book” perhaps, but I look forward to reading more books by this up and coming Nigerian author.

Andy Philpot was a VSO volunteer in Nigeria from 1965 to 1967. After emigrating to Canada, he and his wife, Anne, taught in Zambia for three years. After returning to Canada he spent the next 25 years teaching chemistry. Andy joined the FON board in 2001 and served as FON newsletter editor for five years (2002-2006). He left the board briefly but was called back to run the VSO project scheme for some five years. Andy finally left the FON board in 2017.
Interview with Dr. Ndubuisi C. Ezeluomba

by Sara (Kinkel) Hollis, (10) 64-66

Dr. Ndubuisi C. Ezeluomba assumed the position of Curator of African Art at the New Orleans Museum of Art in August 2018. NOMA has one of the most important collections of traditional African art in a public art museum in the United States.

Sara Hollis: Most of our readers served as Peace Corps Volunteers in Nigeria in the 1960’s. Many traveled widely while in your country and some visited your hometown of Benin City. Please give them an idea of your background and your career.

Ndubuisi Ezeluomba: My name is Ndubuisi Ezeluomba (aka Endy), I was born in Ibadan, Oyo State, and raised in Benin City, Nigeria. Although my parents are Igboos, it was my being raised in Benin City that encouraged and prepared me for my eventual career as an artist, art historian of the visual cultures of shrines, and curator of African art. As an artist, I have exhibited some of my works at art venues in Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and the United States. As an art historian, I have taught art history at universities in Nigeria and the United States. And as a curator, I have worked as part of curatorial teams in research projects, such as the Andrew Mellon research project at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, where we were probing beneath the surface of the African art collection at the Museum. I was also in the curatorial team for the 2013 exhibition at the Harn Museum of Art of the University of Florida titled “Kongo Across the Waters,” which explored 500 years of cultural exchange between the Kongo, Europe and the United States, showing the rise of the Kongo as a major Atlantic presence and the transmission of Kongo culture through the transatlantic slave trade into American art (the show toured several venues from 2013 to 2015). Since assuming work here at NOMA, I have set up a focused show, titled “Ancestors in Stone,” that looks closely at the significance of stone in ancestral veneration in African cultures. In collaboration with the Chrysler Museum of Art, we are working on a future project, “Transcontinental Modernism: Jacob Lawrence and the Artists of Black Orpheus.” This show is slated to open at the Chrysler in the fall of 2022, and in the spring of 2023 at NOMA (watch out for the publication that comes with the show).

SH: When we were in Nigeria, Oba Akenzua II was on the throne in Benin City. Chief Ovia Idah was the Court Artist at the Oba’s palace at that time. How have the palace and the art we saw there at that time evolved since the 1960s?

NE: Obviously Benin City has transformed in the last few decades. When we were in Nigeria, Oba Akenzua II was on the throne in Benin City. Chief Ovia Idah was the Court Artist at the Oba’s palace at that time. How have the palace and the art we saw there at that time evolved since the 1960s?

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SH: How old were you when you decided that your career path would be African art studies and museum work? And please describe your academic work leading to your current position?

NE: I was a teenager when I realized that I wasn’t cutout to study for degrees in the sciences. It was also not very easy to come by kids in my time who could question their parents’ choice of academic path. My father wanted me to study to become a scientist, however when I got to senior high school, I realized that science was not a calling for me. I revolted, (Continued on next page)
Interview with Dr. Ndubuisi C. Ezeluomba  
(Continued from previous page)

and miraculously my father accepted and let me do what I wanted. I chose art and have never regretted that move. After high school, I applied for and was accepted to study art and design at the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu, Nigeria. From there I went to the University of Benin where I acquired the Bachelor of Fine and Applied Arts degree, specializing in painting and minoring in art history. Immediately after the compulsory National Youth Service, I went to the University of Ibadan to study for an M.A. in African Studies/Visual arts, under the tutelage of Cornelius Adepegba (however, he passed away halfway into the program). When I finished graduate work at Ibadan, I left Nigeria to study abroad. I returned to work at the University of Port Harcourt until 2011, when I decided to relocate to the United States.

Reaching the U.S., it was difficult finding work, I took on several menial works until I was accepted into the Ph.D. program at the University of Florida, Gainesville. Under the mentorship of Professor Robin Poynor, I graduated with a Doctor of Art History degree. My dissertation, “Olokun Shrines: Their Functions in the Culture of the Benin Speaking People of Southern Nigeria,” received the graduate school dissertation award. It was while doing graduate work at the University of Florida that my interest in museum work was further shaped. I worked as a graduate intern at the Harn Museum of Art, while participating on the team for the Kongo show. I continued to work in different capacities within and around the museum until I was hired to join the team at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia in the fall of 2016. I came to NO-MA from the VMFA in the summer of 2018.

SH: I know you are also a painter. Are you able to maintain that career in addition to your work as a curator and an art historian? How many Nigerian artists are in the United States currently? Whose careers do you follow? Where have you shown here?

NE: These days the volume of paintings I make cannot be compared to what it used to be. That said, I continue to make paintings, but I am also laden by my curatorial and teaching roles. There are many Nigerian artists in the United States. Equally there are several scholars who are also artists. Some of them include: Olu Oguibe, Sylvester Ogbechie, Chika Okeke-Agulu, Moyo Okediji, Bolaji Campbell, Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi, among others. I cannot claim that I am following any of these guys. I am rather influenced by the culture of the Benin people where I cut my academic and artistic teeth. But I am also influenced by the many travels I have embarked on. In my creative works, you cannot ignore the ideas about relocation and migrations. Since I relocated to the States, I have shown my works mostly at venues in Florida. For instance, I showed at the Artwalk in downtown Gainesville in 2014, Museum Night at the Harn Museum of Art in 2014, and the African Students Association event at the Reitz Union of the University of Florida in 2015. My works are also in private collections in Nigeria, the U.K., the U.S. and Austria.

SH: How many Nigerian art historians are in the United States now? Where are they teaching? Are any curators in major museums like you?

NE: Chika Okeke-Agulu is at Princeton University; Sylvester Ogbechie is at the University of California, Santa Barbara; Moyo Okediji is at the University of Texas at Austin; Bolaji Campbell is at the Rhode Island Institute of Art; Babatunde Lawal is at Virginia Commonwealth University; Rowland Abiodun is at Amherst College in Massachusetts, among others. An important curator that emerged recently is Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi. After graduating with a Ph.D. from Emory University in 2013, he became the first African to be hired as the African art curator at the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. He later accepted the position of African art curator at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and he was recently appointed as the painting and sculpture curator of African art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The list I have presented is by no means exhaustive as there could be many Nigerians doing different work in institutions around the country.

SH: Do you find a lot of interest in Nigerian art in the United States at this time? What are your plans for developing the large collection of African art at the New Orleans Museum of Art? Do you plan to begin collecting contemporary African art in addition to the large collection of traditional African art that NOMA currently owns?

NE: There is no doubt that the contemporary art of Nigeria and Africa (Continued on next page)
Interview with Dr. Ndubuisi C. Ezeluomba
(Continued from page 11)

has generated significant recent interest. Sotheby’s in London has dedicated a section for the auction of contemporary Nigerian art, and the volume of sales indicates the importance such works seem to be generating in the consciousness of dealers, collectors and art museums. Immediately I began work at NOMA, I identified the lacuna created by the absence of contemporary African art in the collection. I was quick to point this out, arguing that for us to tell a complete story of the arts of Africa, there was the need to display the works of contemporary artistic creativity. Gone are the days when museums display only traditional objects and make it look as though that is the reality of Africa. The continent did not stop existing, rather it is a continuum, and museums should be bold enough to reflect these realities in their collections and displays. In collecting African art, it must be total and comprehensive. I have been approached by Janet Stanley (Librarian at the Smithsonian Institution), who through her numerous travels to Africa has collected numerous contemporary works of art. She says that she would like for her collection be housed in museums around the country. So, she is a potential starting point in our drive to grow our contemporary African art collection. There will be many to follow. Also, the ongoing collaborative project with the curator of contemporary art at the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia promises to bring together the works of Jacob Lawrence that were created in Nigeria in the 1960s along with other Nigerian and African artists who were practicing at that time. How nice that we can begin our contemporary art addition through this exciting project that is due to show in the fall of 2022 and the spring of 2023 (we are still hoping for a third venue).

SH: Were any of your family members taught by Peace Corps Volunteers in Benin City? Have you met former Nigeria Peace Corps Volunteers?
NE: When I moved to Richmond, Virginia in 2017, I met a retired professor of literature at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richard Priebe, who was among the earliest batch of Peace Corps Volunteers. He was stationed in the Sapele area. Shortly after we met, he was killed by a hit-and-run driver one morning as he was out for his run. Other members of the Peace Corps that I have met and interacted with are Phil Peek, Perkins Foss and, of course, you. Unfortunately, none of my family members were taught by Peace Corps Volunteers. It would have been an honor to have had that opportunity at that time. I wasn’t even born when this batch of Peace Corps Volunteers were in Nigeria. Maybe, I would have been lucky to have met one of them.

SH: We appreciate your teaching with us as an adjunct professor in our Master of Arts in Museum Studies Program at Southern University at New Orleans. I know we have internships at NOMA. How do you view the study of museum studies?
NE: At some point in time, I enrolled in the program but pulled out when I was offered the fellowship to do doctoral research at the University of Florida, Gainesville. I think that the course is a significant one, especially as the number of museums seems to be on the increase. The need to train museum workers to be aware of the changes that are always imminent within museums cannot be overemphasized. The content of the course is robust and can provide students the rudimentary knowledge they need to take up the challenge of working in museums, but it also prepares them for further graduate work in other related fields of study.

SH: What advice do you have for the readers of this newsletter who wish to travel to Nigeria and within Nigeria now?
NE: Nigeria remains a very beautiful country to visit at any time. Recent social upheavals have tended to tarnish the image of the country. That said, there are still areas where one can visit and find peace and quiet. Since the country moved its capital from Lagos to Abuja, they have created a cosmopolitan city with Abuja, where the seat of the presidency is located. Abuja boasts of wide-ranging locations for tourist attractions, as well as security. Besides Abuja, Lagos Island also has excellent sea views and locations where one can enjoy a visit while in Nigeria. The other parts of the country have their own positives and negatives, but you are always warned never to stay out later than is necessary when on a visit to other parts of the country. The art scene too in Nigeria is such that it is better seen than told. I will advise anyone willing to travel to Nigeria to take advantage of these exciting sights and scenes.

SH: Thank you so much for your interview. We in New Orleans are very happy to have you as the Curator of African art at the New Orleans Museum of Art. How can interested former Peace Corps Volunteers contact you?
NE: I can be reached at nezeluom-ba@noma.org, or you can contact me on my cellphone at 718.795.6752 or office phone at 504.658.4108.

Art Editor Sara Hollis can be reached at: drsarahollis@gmail.com
Babatunde Lawal

by Stephen Vincent, (15) 65-67

I never know what day or time Babatunde will show up at my door. Sometimes I see him arrive on his bike. A large blue and lavender hard-bound “University of Nigeria” notebook, crisscrossed with stretch cables, is strapped down on the metal rack over the back wheel. He applies his brakes to pull up in front of my porch. It is ten in the morning. I have no classes to teach. Tall and athletic, he smiles and sits down at the dining table. We do this several times a month. He is writing a novel. He wants to know if I am ready to listen to the next chapter.

“Of course.” He opens the notebook. I can see where his pen has filled a page. He barely looks down at the manuscript before he looks up and, as if from memory, begins to recite the story, including dramatizing the voices of the different characters. Looking me in the eye and gesturing variously with his long, outstretched fingers and hands; we are back in the world of a Yoruba village not far from Lagos. He places us with the witch who is conspiring to outwit her older sister’s successful and only son. He works for the Civil Service where, already with several promotions, he is considered a success. If the sister witch can eliminate him, she is next in line of succession; she will inherit all the family property. Across the table from me, Tunde is a good mimic of the witch’s grating voice and giggle. He enters the space of her world after midnight. Not one rooster has yet to crow. She has a large turtle boiling in a pot over a low fire.

Tunde seems to smile at the prospect; he switches the scene to the bedroom of her sister’s son. In bed he wakes up holding on to his crotch while twisting and turning over and over again. Oh what pain, he says, I have never felt such pain. I must go to the witch doctor. I must get help. A certain kind of story telling glee has come into his voice.

Tunde, I say, have you written any of this down. I am afraid he will forget what he has said and will not be able to do it.

No. This is the third time I have told someone this story today. It gets better each time!

That was in November. It is now March. We are in the University’s large Gallery Lounge. Tunde is standing, reading and performing the novel to a lunchtime crowd of 200 students and faculty members. The witch, her sister, and son appear and disappear. The witch doctor has been able to concoct a fatal brew for the evil sister; now the one to write, she lies on her deathbed. The dark silhouette of a cat appears on the edge of the open windowsill. When the cat leans in, the witch uses the last of her failing strength to spit. The cat catches it on her tongue. Her spirit now secured by the flight of her spirit; she watches the cat leap from the windowsill to flee back into the bush.

The next day I teach my Introduction to English Literature class. I want to talk about Tunde’s performance. This is usually a smart class and they like to talk and argue over points of view. No one will say anything. I am astonished. It was my impression that yesterday’s audience was totally entranced. I push for a response. Finally, the smartest student in the class breaks the impasse. Many of us think Tunde has power. Short and succinct, the statement is followed by an even deeper silence. They are really afraid. It is as if commenting in any kind of way, positive or negative, will make them vulnerable, terrible or not, to some possible retribution. The class is over. I will never forget.

There is the start of the war. Tunde disappears. I hear nothing. I am back in America. The details may or may not be rich. There is word from someone that Tunde has a doctorate in Art History. He might be teaching somewhere. The thought depresses me. I fear the lively voice of the man who sat at my dining table in Nigeria may now have found himself sentenced to writing dry academic prose. Ironically, I have gradually gone from college teaching into becoming a publisher of poetry, then art books. By this time, about 1990, Tunde’s disappearance has been for almost twenty years.

One afternoon I enter a darkened auditorium at Boston University. It is the annual meeting of the College Art Association. There are panels and presentations. I am here on publishing business. I have looked through the schedule. I have come to an hour of panels on African art research. I recognize a tall man in a rich red traditional agbada on the stage behind a podium. He is showing slides of a Yoruba ceremony in celebration of Oshun, the river goddess of creation, fertility and sensuality. He performs one, then two, then three chants. I can feel the audience become embraced by the intensity and charm of his voice. The writer and performer I knew as a young man and my friend is still alive! Academic life, as I once feared, has not killed him. The voice and imagination, combined with his scholarship, are solidly there. And then some.

I watch him come down the stairs to the side of the auditorium and back to his seat in the front row. There is a small break between speakers. I go and take the seat in the row directly behind him. I lean forward. “Tunde.” He does not turn his head. Mr. Vincent. How are you?

From 1965-1967 Stephen Vincent was a Peace Volunteer lecturer in English and Humanities and the leader of a creative writing workshop at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This story includes reworked versions of accounts be recorded in his journal at that time. He can be contacted at: stephenvincent011@gmail.com
We had been married for two years before becoming Peace Corps volunteers, and we knew that someday we wanted to have children, but having a baby definitely was not on our radar as we settled down in Enugu at the University of Nigeria. Among our close Peace Corps neighbors were three couples, Loren and Keith Cox, Dave and Mary Smith, and Ken and Phyllis Gaal, all Nigeria 7, but the topic of having a baby never came up in our conversations. Almost all of our neighbors on the Enugu Campus were also married couples — most of them members of the Michigan State University team — but only one of them had their children with them and none had babies.

One day, we received a letter from the office of the national Peace Corps Director. It was addressed to all married couples and it strongly advised us “to think twice before having a baby.” Having a baby? We really hadn’t given it a thought, but now we did. The letter listed reasons for thinking twice, so we considered each point:

1. You would need good pre-natal advice and physical examinations from a qualified and nearby doctor.
   
   We had talked with our Peace Corps doctor who lived in Enugu, so this point didn’t concern us.

2. Malaria and other highly contagious diseases are always a threat, especially to very young children.
   
   We were very careful to take our Aralen pills weekly and always slept under a mosquito net, so we assumed these fears were largely unfounded, at least for us.

3. Childbirth sometimes has complications and specialist doctors and medical facilities may be needed.
   
   We knew little about such specialists and our Peace Corps doctor seemed to fill the bill.

4. Babies are much more sensitive to impurities in water and food, so you would need to be exceptionally careful.
   
   We thought we were exceptionally careful, always filtering, boiling and disinfecting our drinking water, and never eating any meat or vegetables that were not well-cooked, so this point didn’t seem to be a serious obstacle.

So, we began to think about having a baby. Would our busy teaching schedules allow it? We both traveled weekly and stayed overnight in Nsukka, where we taught courses at the main campus of the University, but maybe Mama Ruth could stay in Enugu. She had a sufficient number of French classes on the Enugu Campus, and she had added a beginning French class at Queen’s School for Girls in Enugu as well as an adult course two evenings a week in Enugu. At home, we had the invaluable assistance of our cook, Anthony, who assured us that he would have no trouble helping us find a good babysitter for those occasions when Ruth was teaching classes.

We were also very lucky in that a highly competent Ob/Gyn doctor with two M.D. colleagues had recently settled in Enugu. We don’t remember whether we became aware of this doctor before or after Ruth became pregnant (probably after), but we learned about her from a neighbor on the Enugu Campus, an American woman, the wife of a visiting economist. The doctor was from the Philippines and had completed her medical training in the United States. She and her two colleagues had set up a new facility on the outskirts of Enugu. It was a private clinic and hospital — it looked very basic, but it was clean.

Did you know that one of the many wonderful books in the Peace Corps book lockers, which were provided to early volunteers, was entitled The Lamaze Method of Natural Childbirth? We began reading about the Lamaze method and Ruth practiced the all-important deep breathing for when contractions began. Ruth’s contractions did begin very definitely one Saturday morning after breakfast in September 1964. Joe’s job was to immediately find transportation to get Ruth to the hospital without delay, and they both knew that using their Honda 60 was not an option. Months before, when Ruth was only “a little bit pregnant,” she was thrown off the passenger’s seat of the motorcycle when it reared up on its back wheel as Joe kicked it into first gear trying to avoid stalling on a steep hill. “I still have the scar on my knee,” says Ruth.

Ever protective of his young “ma’am,” Anthony had sent word out to his fellow cooks on our campus that Ruth was about to give birth and that a car was needed pronto to carry her to the hospital. Sure enough, as they always did, the cooks came through, and a car was found — with a driver, no less — belonging to one of our MSU friends. Traffic was heavy, as it always was on Saturdays, but we got to the hospital in good time. We were quickly checked in, but we noticed that there were very few people in the hospital. “No worries,” the check-in lady assured us, “The nurses don’t work on weekends.” Thinking about the Lamaze breathing practice, we didn’t give the absence of nurses a second thought.

A few hours later, after much breathing practice, supplemented by Joe’s reading out loud interesting short stories from James Joyce’s, Dubliners, we were abruptly reminded that there were no nurses when the doctor asked Joe to perform a nurse’s task. “Help your wife on to the gurney to take her to the delivery room,” the doctor said. Ruth was experiencing more frequent and intense contractions, but she was able to crawl on to the gurney with some help from Joe, and off they rolled to the delivery room. “Roll!” is an exaggeration since the wooden wheels of the gurney were not entirely circular. Ruth bounced up.

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and down as Joe pushed her to the delivery room.

At the delivery room door, the doctor took the gurney from Joe. “Wait outside,” she commanded him. “The last young American father who was in the delivery room when his wife’s baby arrived fainted and cracked his head on the concrete floor. I had to ignore the mother and just give the baby to give him first aid.” The doctor was serious and emphatic. So, Joe waited outside the delivery room door thinking, “Would I be so weak that I would faint when the baby is born?” And, then he remembered that he had felt pretty queasy watching a natural childbirth movie in a human physiology class as an undergrad and, in fact, three of the six guys in the class had fainted (none of the girls did).

We always wondered if the young American father who fainted was a PCV. Who else?

It wasn’t long before the unmistakable sound of a new-born baby’s cries was heard, and soon after Ruth and baby emerged from the delivery room. Several of our friends appeared – they had been waiting in another room in the hospital – and they wanted to know: “What’s the baby’s name?” Joe blurted out, “Elizabeth Marie or Lisa!” and Ruth said, with some urgency, “Wait a minute! We need to talk about this before we decide.”

So, we conferred and after a few minutes Ruth agreed that Elizabeth Marie was good. After all, both Ruth and Joe had aunts named Elizabeth and they both very much liked “Lisa” as a short form of Elizabeth.

Lisa, Ruth, and Joe were all three put in a room that had a queen-sized bed for Ruth, a baby bassinette for Baby Lisa, and a cot on the far side of the room for Joe. It was (and probably still is) the Nigerian practice to have new mothers and their newborns in the same room, a practice that we’ve noticed American hospitals have now adopted. Lisa was born about 4:00 in the afternoon and, after waiting three hours in our room, we were beginning to hope that supper would be served earlier than the usual 10:00 or 11:00 pm, Nigerian dinner time. After all, we hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast. We were delighted therefore to see a huge roast chicken dinner brought in around 7:30, with the always-present yam and other delicious vegetables. The dinner was taken to Ruth, who had done the major work of the day, and she launched into it with gusto. Sitting on his cot across the room, Joe began to think that nothing would be left for him. Ruth assured him that there would be, but she said, “I am so hungry that I could eat a horse!”

Today Lisa is 55 and the proud mother of four sons and grandmother of three grandsons and a granddaughter. She is also proud of being born in Nigeria and proud that she was given the Nigerian name, Ayodele, which means “love has come home,” by a friend of ours in Enugu.

Ruth, Joe and Lisa returned to the University of Wisconsin-Madison where in 1967 they welcomed a fourth member of the family, Annie, while Joe was earning a Ph.D. in economics, supported generously by a fellowship that was won as a result of Joe’s Peace Corps service. In 1969, they moved to Indiana University-Bloomington, where Joe became a faculty member, specializing in international marketing. Ruth and Joe still call Bloomington home; Annie lives in Sapporo, Japan. Joe, Ruth and Lisa may be contacted at: milleri@indiana.edu.

The average American produces 16 tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually, while the average Nigerian emits only 0.55 tons.

– Sierra Club’s November/December issue of the Sierra magazine
Recollections

Have You Ever Feared for Your Life?

by Frank Stewart, (24) 66-67

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, “A coward dies a thousand deaths, a brave person dies only once.” Be that as it may, I suspect there is a time when even a brave individual fears for his life and seeks to avoid the forfeiture of his or her life. I can still vividly recall the first time I was in fear for my life. It happened when I was very young, just 21 years old.

After I completed college, I joined the Peace Corps. I had always wanted to see the world and to participate in an enterprise or program assisting people in the so-called Third World. When I first submitted my application to join the Peace Corps, the application asked me to list the two countries of my preference. However, the application stated that if I were accepted into the program, I would not necessarily be assigned to either of the countries I had listed.

Ethiopia had been my first choice and Nigeria was my second. Eventually, I was accepted as a prospective Nigeria Peace Corps Volunteer and was sent to the University of California, San Diego to be trained. When I arrived on the university campus in June 1966, there were a variety of trainers who were assigned the task of shaping up us newly arrived volunteers: returned Peace Corps Volunteers from Nigeria, Nigerian nationals, and professionals in different fields. Our group of trainees would be sent to Nigeria to live and work as rural agricultural specialists.

Agricultural specialist? That was ironic. The only thing I knew about farming was the fact my grandparents owned a large farm and I would go there when school was out for the summer. But I never participated in any type of meaningful farm work. What I did at my grandfather’s place was basically ride my grandfather’s horses and in his wagon. So, truth be told, I knew absolutely nothing whatsoever about farming, but I was going to learn while undergoing Peace Corps training at UCSD.

One of the very first things I encountered in meeting Nigerians were their frequent comments about my appearance. I was constantly told by Nigerians that I looked like “a Northerner” or a “Hausa-Fulani.”

There are three major ethnic groups living in Nigeria, although there are hundreds of other smaller groups. The Igbo, who live primarily in the southeast; the Yoruba, who primarily live in the southwest; and the Hausa-Fulani, who live primarily in the northern part of Nigeria. Adding to the mix was the fact that most of the southerners were Christians and the northerners were overwhelmingly Muslim.

Immediately upon my arrival in Nigeria, in October 1966, I noticed an obvious tension in the air. The country was under military rule and members of the military were treated with deep respect by the local civilian population. Even females would get up to give a soldier their seat on a crowded van or bus. And the soldiers loved the deferential treatment they were given by the local people.

There had been two military coups in Nigeria, prior to my arrival. The first coup in January 1966 was led by southern military officers. The coup resulted in the deaths of the religious and political leader of the north, the Sardauna of Sokoto, and the prime minister of Nigeria, also a northerner, as well as many others. All four of the country’s regions, Northern, Western, Mid-Western and Eastern, were placed under direct military rule and each region was ruled by a military governor.

The second military coup in July 1966 was led by northerners and resulted in the death of Nigeria’s military head of state (an Igbo) and the Western Region military governor (a Yoruba). The coup also resulted in what some called a pogrom against southerners (primarily Igbos) living in the Northern Region. However, although the new Nigerian leader hailed from the Northern Region, he was not a member of the Hausa-Fulani group, but rather from a small group called the Tiv. Fearing for their safety, thousands of Igbos had fled the north and made their way south, often back to their ancestral homeland, but others moved to the Western and Mid-Western Regions.

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Have You Ever Feared for Your Life?
(Continued from previous page)

I was stationed in the Mid-Western Region in a little town called Abudu, located some thirty miles or so from Benin City, the capital of the Mid-Western Region. So, here I was, a young Peace Corps Volunteer thrust into this volatile cauldron of religion and sectionalism that was slowly pulling the country apart. And in the Midwest, my physical appearance made me stand out. Fortunately, for me, (but I didn’t think of it that way initially, only in hindsight) I quickly became known as the “Black American” by some of the Benin and Abudu citizens, especially those within the police and military.

Soon after I arrived in Abudu, during a blackout, I broke my arm falling down a flight of stairs at the hotel (the Mogambo Palace Hotel) where I lived. Blackouts were not unusual in Benin during that time. In fact, they were rather routine! After falling down the flight of stairs, I immediately knew my arm was broken. A group of soldiers in the hotel quickly came to my aid, took me to the hospital, and remained there with me while a Nigerian doctor, who had practiced medicine in New York, reset the broken bone and placed my arm in a cast and a sling.

Over time I became like an adopted son to a local military figure by the name of Colonel Endonseri, who frequented the Mogambo Hotel where I was living. He often came to see me and would occasionally take me with him on “inspection trips” as his “American son.” He never went anywhere without a squadron of soldiers, and over time, I became well acquainted with his two main bodyguards.

Nevertheless, I was always reminded by ordinary, everyday Nigerians that I looked “like a Hausa-Fulani.” Consequently, I thought it best to always carry some form of identification with me. This was especially true after my arm healed and I was living alone in Abudu. I had a motorcycle for transportation, and I would use my driver’s license at various roadblocks. There were roadblocks throughout Benin and the surrounding towns and villages during that time. But I thought it wise not to always carry my passport with me, thereby reducing the odds of my losing it.

Following my first few weeks in Abudu, I had met a female Peace Corps Volunteer whom I spent a lot of time with. We eventually became very good friends. We traveled to events together, and she would stay over at my place on weekends, and I would stay over at her place in Benin City at various times.

One weekend, while she was visiting me, we decided to go to Onitsha, a major marketplace in Eastern Nigeria, the homeland of the Igbo people, to do some shopping. For some strange reason, I had this gut feeling that I should take my American passport with me for additional identification purposes. In fact, a passport is the very best form of identification in a foreign country.

When we arrived in Onitsha via a van crammed full of people, my attention was quickly attracted by billboards with words on them saying “Know your enemies” and “Report spies within your midst” with pictures of Hausa-Fulani people. I initially thought very little of the billboards but immediately noticed that we were being stared at everywhere we went in the marketplace. Not only were we stared at, but we were being pointed at by people talking in hushed terms. I thought they were staring at us because we were two young Americans, one white and the other black, walking and holding hands.

After we finished our shopping, we went to get a cab to take us back to Abudu. The cab driver looked us over closely, rather intensely at me in fact. He then told us to get inside the car and he would be right back. Well, he did return! But this time with a howling mob brandishing machetes and other assorted weapons intent on killing us. The mob rapidly descended upon the cab, yelling, shouting, and gesturing angrily. Fortunately, we had the presence of mind to quickly lock the car’s doors and roll up its windows.

It was a hot, humid day but we knew we would be far safer with the windows rolled up. The mob started striking the car with sticks, machetes and anything they had in their hands. Some started beating on the windows with their fists. Frustrated that they could not drag us out of the cab, they began to violently rock the car back and forth, while hammering the cab with weapons in their hands in an effort to gain entrance.

My female companion began crying, saying “They want to kill us, they want to kill us!” I too knew that was their intent, but at the same time I tried to calm her with reassuring words. At that point, I realized all too well that the mob had been told by the driver, and maybe others, that I was a Hausa-Fulani (northerner), and that I was a spy. But I also became angry with myself for having gotten her into this predicament. I was pretty convinced that eventually I would somehow be dragged out of the car and killed but hoped she would be spared since it was obvious for everyone to see that she was a “European” as whites in Nigeria were called.

Fortunately for us, the loud commotion caught the attention of a military official. He, and a group of soldiers, waded into the mob and ordered them to stand back. They obeyed his order while still angrily shouting in the Igbo language and menacingly waving their weapons.

The officer motioned to me to roll down the window. He asked where we were from and why we were in Onitsha. I rolled down the window on my side of the car a few inches and told him that we were Peace Corps Volunteers from the United States, and that I lived and worked in Abudu. I also explained to him that my female friend was a teacher, who taught at a women’s college in Benin City. He then asked me for identification. Fortunately, I had heeded my instinct and brought along my American passport. I produced my passport and handed it to him. He looked at my passport picture closely, and then stared at me. He next asked where in the United (Continued on page 19)
The obituaries that follow were edited by Ray Carpenter. (25) 66-68. Please send obituaries, death notices or questions to: rpcarpent@gmail.com. Individuals whose obituaries appear below may have died quite some time ago, however, it is the policy of the newsletter to publish obituaries as they are acquired.

Michael R. Hebert, (20) 66-67

Mike Hebert passed away on October 21, 2019 at the age of 75.

Mike was born in Long Beach, CA, and earned a B.A. and M.A. at UC Santa Barbara in Sociology. Later, he earned a Ph.D. in Educational Philosophy at Indiana University. Mike played volleyball at UC Santa Barbara.

After Peace Corps he coached both men’s and women’s volleyball at the University of Pittsburgh for four years. He then moved to New Mexico for three years where he coached women’s volleyball.

In 1981, he became the women’s volleyball coach at Illinois in the Big Ten. Mike’s teams won four Big Ten titles and made two NCAA Final Four appearances for the first time in team history. At the end of his 13 years his teams had won 323 games.

He moved to Minnesota in 1996 and over the next 15 years his teams amassed a record of 381-137 with 14 appearances in the NCAA tournament and three in the Final Four. Mike was Big Ten coach of the year five times and was inducted into the American Volleyball Coaches Hall of Fame in 2006.

Mike was a teacher, innovator and a passionate ambassador for the game. Many of his players maintained personal and professional contact with him in their lives as coaches, professional players and teachers.

He leaves his wife Sherry, his daughters, Hillary and Becky, and three grandchildren.

[Source: The News-Gazette, Champaign, IL]

Terry L. Robison, (13) 64-66

Terry Lee Robison of West Valley City, UT passed away July 3, 2013 at age 71. She was born in San Francisco, CA, the only daughter of Grant Y. and Willette Wetzel Robison.

Terry was a graduate of San Francisco State University and served in the Peace Corps for two years. After marrying, she lived in Japan and Guam while her former husband served in the Navy.

She lived for many years in Hawaii on the islands of Molokai and Oahu.

Terry was a wonderful pastor’s wife and impacted many people lives. She often substitute taught at the high school level and in her later years was an ESL instructor at Hawaii Pacific University.

She is survived by her son, David Jay Inouye of Yokohama City, Japan and two granddaughters. She will be remembered by all who knew her as a caring and loving person.

[Source: Salt Lake Tribune]

William G. Saltonstall, (staff) 63-65

William Gurdon Saltonstall, died on December 18, 1989 in a Lakeville, MA nursing home at the age of 84.

He was born on November 11, 1905 in Milton, MA, and was educated at Phillips Exeter Academy, where he later taught history before becoming the school’s principal from 1932 to 1963. From 1963 to 1965 he served as Peace Corps Country Director in Nigeria.

William graduated from Harvard College, where he was president of the student body and fire marshal of his graduating class, the highest elected undergraduate office. He also earned an M.A. and a J.D. from Harvard.

He was an avid sailor and author of Ports of Piscataqua, a maritime history of Portsmouth, NH, published in 1941.

He was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the board of visitors of the United States Naval Academy; and he was a trustee of Colby College, Southeastern Massachusetts University and the Educational Testing Service.

William is survived by his wife Katharyn, three daughters, two sons, a sister, two brothers, 16 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

[Source: Chicago Tribune]

Robert H. Scheppeler, (02) 61-63

Robert Henry Scheppeler was born July 26, 1937 in Grand Prairie, TX.

He earned his B.A. and M.S. at the University of Texas, Austin. Robert later earned a Ph.D. at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

Robert served in the Texas Air National Guard. He was one of the first Peace Corps Volunteer to serve at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Robert had a number of professional positions including director of McDonald’s Observatory Visitors Center in Ashland, OR. He also worked as a disc jockey and talk show host for Jefferson Public Radio and as a printer/publisher for Arvin Publications. He was one of the first American scholars to be granted access to Germany for research after World War II.

Robert had many hobbies at which he excelled including astronomy, reading, photography and gardening.

He passed away on November 1, 2019 at the age of 82. He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Vincenette, his children Thomas Desmond, John Francis, Marcia Aline and David Henry, as well as seven grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

[Source: Curry Coastal Pilot, Brookings, OR]

Fred Scott (Staff), 67-68

Fred Scott passed away on March 30, 2013 in Cheltenham, MD, at the age of 83.

Fred served as Peace Corps Regional Director in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria. After working as a social worker with gangs in Los Angeles, he became a probation officer and then moved on to the U.S. Department of Commerce. He was tapped for the Peace Corps job while with the DOC.

Upon his return he attended Howard University where he earned an M.A. in African American History. He then worked for the Department of Education in Washington, DC.

Fred also served in the armed forces, joining the Army at the age of 15 and

(Continued on next page)
In Memoriam
(Continued from page 18)

upon completion of that tour he joined the Navy where he displayed a love of boats and the sea. He became an avid sailor and spent a considerable amount of time researching and writing about the sea. He even constructed a boat from a kit that his “gang kids” gave him.

Fred was well known as a storyteller, a writer and a history buff. His first wife’s father was a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor and this gave Fred the incentive to research and write on the history of war and the contribution of the African American soldier. Fred is survived by his wife, three daughters, one son and five grandchildren.

[Source: Kalas Funeral Homes, Edgewater, MD]

Robert Skapura, (friend) 65-67

Robert Joseph Skapura was born on June 9, 1942 and passed away peacefully on August 22, 2019.

He was a contract teacher at St. Patrick’s College in Asaba and met his wife, Catherine, (15) 65-67, in Ogwashi-Uku in 1965.

Bob lived fully right up to the moment of death. He loved canoeing, traveling, riding on his Vespa, playing bocce ball, teaching computer classes, reading, eating out with friends and telling stories. Despite his adventurous life, he died the way he would have wanted, suddenly, and in the comfort of his home.

He leaves his wife of 52 years, Catherine; his son, Neal; and his sister, Joni Stebbins. He was predeceased by his son, John, and his parents.

[Source: Catherine (Liddell) Skapura]

Don Thomas Warholic, (24) 66-68

Don Thomas Warholic was born April 3, 1942 in Ansonia, CT. He received his B.S. in Archeology from Indiana University at Bloomington in 1965. Later, in 1974, he received an M.S. in Vegetable Crops at Cornell University, where he worked in the Department of Vegetable Crops as a Research Associate in weed control of fresh market produce, processing and vegetables.

Don served in the Peace Corps from 1966 through 1968 in both Nigeria and Somalia.

Professionally, Don was a member of the Northeastern Weed Science Society, the Finger Lakes Beekeepers Club, the Izaak Walton League, the Nature Conservancy, the Adirondack Council and the National Audubon Society. He was an avid fisherman and a life member of Trout Unlimited.

Don passed away at the age of 48, on October 4, 1990, of a brain tumor. He was married to the former Jean Martin of Freeville, NY, who survived him. He was also survived by his mother, two sisters, two brothers and numerous nieces and nephews, uncles and aunts.

[Source: www.findagrave.com]

Have You Ever Feared for Your Life?
(Continued from page 17)

States I came from. I told him. I also said the female Peace Corps Volunteer came from New York. After a few more questions he was satisfied that we were indeed Americans. He then turned, and looking directly at the sullen crowd, angrily berated them, and ordered them to leave the area. He then summoned the cab driver and sternly said something to him in Igbo.

After the crowd evaporated, the cab driver got in the car and started grinning while apologizing profusely. However, neither of us was in a state of mind to respond to him. For a time, we deliberately ignored him, but finally, after what seemed like a very long period of silence, I said angrily, “Look, don’t talk to us. You tried to kill us.” We were convinced that he was the person who was directly responsible for inciting the mob.

When we arrived back in Abudu, we hastily exited the cab, and haughtily threw the fare money at him. We then walked off, not saying a word to him. We did not want to show any respect or acknowledge his humanity whatsoever. We arrived back at my place deeply upset regarding the incident. Once inside, my friend broke down and sobbed while in my arms.

For a long time, I was deeply scarred by this scary experience. I am convinced to this day that had it not been for my white female friend being with me, who obviously was not Nigerian, or even African, the mob would probably have killed me while I was walking in the marketplace or later in the taxi.

Not long after this frightening incident, my friend decided to leave Nigeria for good.

This episode reminds me even now just how dangerous mobs are. I don’t like mobs or the mob mentality. I simply won’t join any mob of any kind, whether the actual physical kind, or the social media kind.

Over time there would be other instances where I became the target of an individual or individuals plotting to kill me for one reason or another, but that incident in Nigeria brought out a certain resolve not to be afraid. I became to a degree fatalistic after that incident. And I still remind family and friends of an Arabic proverb that I am particularly fond of, to wit; that my fate is “written on the wind.” I suppose on that day long ago in Onitsha, the wind was in my favor.

Following his Peace Corps service, Frank Stewart had a variety of work experiences (Peace Corps trainer, Teacher Corps, doctoral student in International Education, Lecturer at UC Santa Barbara, Law student, employee in the Santa Barbara Probation Department, and teacher in a variety of settings, including a California state correctional facility), but he eventually became a high school AP History teacher — retiring after 30 years. “BEST JOB I ever had!” He has traveled to some 50 countries, published articles, and authored a book to be published this spring (2020).
Sowore Released

The Department of State Security (DSS), on December 24, 2019, released Omoyele Sowore, the presidential candidate of the African Action Congress in the February 2019 elections. Charged with treason, money laundering, cyber-stalking and insulting President Muhammadu Buhari, Sowore had been in the custody of the DSS since August 3, 2019, in spite of two court orders granting him bail. On November 14, two groups, ‘Free Sowore Now’ and ‘Take It Back Movement’ had stormed the official residence of the Nigerian High Commission to the United Kingdom, demanding his release and that of his co-defendant, Olawale Mandate. They had also demanded the release of Sheikh El-Zakzaky and his wife, and journalist Agba Jalingo.

Before his December 24 release, Sowore had been released on bail on December 5, 2019, but re-arrested the following day after a court hearing on fresh charges. A viral video had showed him on the floor, with members of his group trying to shield him from arrest by DSS operatives. This had attracted intense criticism and pressure from around the globe, including from members of the U.S. Congress. The DSS had denied that they had arrested him in court, saying that when Sowore stepped out of court and sighted DSS operatives, he ran back into the court where his supporters mobbed him, chanting ‘you can’t arrest him.’ They said there were no DSS personnel in court and the drama by Sowore’s supporters was orchestrated. Following the incident, Sowore’s lawyer, Femi Falana [SAN], had intervened and driven Sowore to the DSS office where he was taken into custody again. Explaining why they had re-arrested him barely 24 hours after he was released, the DSS said that, after his release on December 5, Sowore had addressed a group at the Transcorp Hilton, Abuja, and re-assured the group of his intention to create anarchy in the country.

Sowore’s recent release is an answer to his wife’s prayer for a ‘holiday miracle’ where he would be cleared of all charges and re-united with his family in Howarth, New Jersey. (Source: Reuters, 12/6/19; edition.cnn.com, 12/6/19; www.pulse.ng, 12/6/19; hbc.com, 11/9/19; The Guardian [Lagos], 11/14/19, 11/15/19, 11/21/19, 12/2/19)

Nigerians Evacuated from South Africa

Following xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals, Peace Air made good on its promise to evacuate Nigerians from South Africa. The Chairwoman of the Nigerians in the Diaspora Commission, Abike Dabiri-Erewa, had said 640 Nigerians had indicated interest in returning to Nigeria. On September 11, 2019, 178 Nigerians were evacuated. They were received on arrival by the Chairman of Peace Air, Chief Allen Onyema, who burst into tears as the evacuees cheered and thanked him for his magnanimity. A second batch left South Africa on September 17, 2019. (Source: edition.cnn.com, 9/9/19; Saba- ra Reporters [New York], 9/16/19; Reuters, 9/10/19; Premium Times Nigeria, 9/17/19)

Lupita Nyong’o to Star in Americanah

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel Americanah has been adapted into a 10-episode series by HBO Max. Americanah tells the story of Ifemelu, a young woman who grew up in Nigeria during a military regime, but who migrates to the U.S., while her boyfriend, Obinze, moves to the U.K. The story follows their struggles and experiences as immigrants, a narrative that rings true today especially with the anti-immigrant sentiments in the West. The series will feature Oscar winner Lupita Nyong’o and will be written by Danai Gurira, a Tony nominee for the Broadway show, Eclipsed. Lupita Nyong’o and Danai Gurira both starred in Black Panther. Americanah is one among several films and television shows written, directed, and produced by people of African descent, who are committed to shining a light on Africa and its diverse cultures. These new works show a departure from Hollywood’s hitherto generalized portrayal of the continent as a monocultural, war- and disease-infested zone. (Source: Vulture, 9/13/19; www.tvline.com, 9/13/19; Quartz, 9/15/19; face2faceafrica.com, 9/15/19)

Fighting Boko Haram Through Spiritual Means

The Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Tukur Buratai, asked religious bodies and organizations to join hands in the fight against terrorism by reorienting their members against negative ideologies that fuel terrorist activities. He made this call on September 30, 2019, at a spiritual warfare seminar with the theme “Countering Insurgency and Violent Extremism in Nigeria through Spiritual Warfare.” Buratai stated: “It is easier to defeat Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists than their ideology because...”

(Continued on next page)
while we degrade the terrorists and their havens, the narrative of the ideology grows the group…Religious bodies and organisations in particular, which interface regularly with the grass roots, should be in the forefront of this spiritual battle and fashion ways of stepping up their roles. It is a well-known fact that terrorism and terrorist groups cannot be eliminated by mainly military actions. This means focusing our efforts on the underlying narratives through ideologies employed by these terrorists to lure innocent citizens into their fold. The need to defeat the ideologies of Boko Haram and ISWAP is based on the awareness that it is the ideologies that enhance their resources and help to recruit new fighters to their fold and as such; kill their ideology and the terrorist movement withers and dies.”

Ustaz Christian Okonkwo, Director of Islamic Centre, Afikpo, agreed with Buratai’s suggestion, saying that people are indoctrinated by the preaching and teaching of their religion or through their attachment to their particular tribe or race, so any attempt to change the narrative and behaviours of these people should start from the same source from which they were indoctrinated.

Buratai is not the only government official who believes that terrorism could be defeated by spiritual means. The governor of Borno State, Babagana Zulum, had engaged 30 Muslim clerics to pray for a return of peace to the North East. On October 5, 2019, he met the devotees at the Ka’aba located inside the Al-Haram mosque in Makkah where he expressed his gratitude for their continued prayers. (Source: The Punch [Lagos], 10/1/19; The Guardian [Lagos], 10/9/19; P.M. News, 10/8/19)

Sex for Grades

A film that exposed sexual harassment in universities in Nigeria and Ghana has sparked outrage on social media. The documentary used undercover journalists in its investigations. It showed Dr. Boniface Igbeneghu, a lecturer in the Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, making inappropriate requests and threats to a BBC journalist posing as a 17-year-old prospective student. The University of Lagos said it was “highly embarrassed” by the allegations and pledged to investigate them. It sacked Dr. Igbeneghu and closed a staff room known as the “cold room” where lecturers usually met with female students. The Foursquare Gospel Church, where Dr. Igbeneghu was a minister, asked him to step down from his post. The documentary also featured two lecturers at the University of Ghana, both of whom denied any wrongdoing. The University of Ghana pledged to investigate the two men but said the film did not prove the lecturers offered grades for sex.

Aisha Buhari, Nigeria’s First Lady, reacted to the film, saying, “It is no longer enough to sweep allegations under the carpet or force victims to withdraw their allegations, victimize or stigmatize them.” The wife of the Ekiti State governor, Bisi Fayemi, said she was a victim of sexual harassment. “It is time for us to speak up and speak out for those we need to stand with and not silence them. Because the culture of silence has endured long enough,” she said. (Source: edition.cnn.com, 10/8/19; The Guardian [Lagos], 10/8/19; Newsweek, 10/8/19)

Wedding Bells for the President

The social media space was in a frenzy in October with rumors of President Buhari’s intended marriage to Sadiya Umar Farouq, the minister in charge of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development. The rumors were fueled by Mrs. Buhari’s return from London, after a very long absence, the day before the supposed wedding. Her return was seen as an indication that she had come back to claim her territory. As well as a wedding invitation card bearing the names of the couple, video clips and pictures capturing the ceremony were circulated online.

These rumors gained traction because none of the parties involved dis-
Saving Lives, One Glow at a Time

The story started on November 14, 2015, when Virtue Oboro gave birth to her son, Tonbra. Virtue’s mum, a nurse, came visiting and noticed the yellow coloration of Tobra’s skin and eyes. They returned to the hospital where little Tonbra was diagnosed with neonatal jaundice and needed to be placed in a phototherapy unit. All the available units were occupied, but another mother asked that her child be taken out of the unit where he was so that Tonbra could take his place. Immediately Tonbra was placed in the machine, there was a power outage, so doctors had to perform an emergency blood transfusion to sustain him.

Traumatized by the experience, Virtue, a product designer, started to learn more about jaundice and how she could help other parents and health care providers overcome the challenges she had faced. With a group of medical professionals and biomedical engineers, she designed the Crib A’Glow, a low-cost, phototherapy unit that will treat jaundice by helping to break down the excess build-up of bilirubin in an infant’s blood. Each unit measures 1.00m x 0.5m x 1.00m and glows with a blue light. It is powered by the Sun and can be disassembled and moved around.

Virtue Oboro’s company, Tiny Hearts Technologies, sells the unit for 150,000 naira ($415) and rents it out at 3,000 naira ($8) per day. Tiny Hearts also produces disposable phototherapyblindfolds, conducts training programs and has launched a sensitisation initiative called ‘Yellow Alert’ to raise awareness of pregnant women and health workers regarding neonatal jaundice.

Crib A’Glow was launched in 2016 and has saved the lives of 1,250 babies. (Source: www.medium.com, 5/6/19; www.irex.org; www.unilever.com; www.tinyhearts.com; www.radianthealthmag.com, Issue No. 13 – The Taboo Issue)

When the Jacks Came Visiting

Jack Dorsey, the CEO of Twitter and Square, was in Nigeria November 7-11, accompanied by four Twitter executives. While in Nigeria his itinerary included a visit to Nigeria’s most innovative tech companies. He held town hall meetings with industry stakeholders where he announced that Twitter would expand its workforce in Africa in 2020. He also announced that he would move to Africa for three months in 2020. His visit is expected to see more Nigerian developers hired by Twitter and the launch of Square in an African country. Many hope that Twitter, which has proven to be a powerful tool for social change, will start to educate people on how to understand and use its features properly. Despite what many say was a productive visit there was grumbling among journalists who were not allowed to ask questions during the Q & A session. Dorsey was also criticized for not meeting people who have championed social causes on Twitter using hashtags.

Alibaba’s Jack Ma was also in Abuja for the Digital Economy Forum on November 14, 2019. He was accompanied by a team of Chinese businessmen. He noted that Nigeria had a large vibrant population of young people, excellent innovations and a strong economy, and said his team would like to assist Nigeria through the four E’s: E-infrastructure, E-entrepreneurs, E-government, and E-education. Some of this support will come from the Jack Ma Foundation – Africa Netpreneur Prize Initiative, which will award $10 million to 100 entrepreneurs over a period of 10 years. The visits point to a growing interest in Africa’s potential, expected to produce half the world’s population by 2050. (Source: Quartz, 12/9/19; www.benjamindada.com, 12/10/19; The Cable, 11/14/19)

Nigeria’s #MeToo Movement Suffers a Dent

A high court in Abuja dismissed the suit filed by Busola Dakolo against Pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo, Nigeria’s Gucci Pastor and General Overseer of the Commonwealth of Zion Assembly (COZA). The Judge said the matter was empty and sentimental and was aimed at cruelty and not obtaining justice. He ordered Dakolo’s counsel to pay a fine of 1,000,000.00 naira for wasting the court’s time. Busola Dakolo’s accusations in July 2019 had triggered a #MeToo hashtag on social media and saw many women coming out with their own stories of rape. Pastor Biodun, as he’s fondly called by members of his church, denied he raped her. (Source: www.pulse.ng, 11/14/19; The Guardian [Lagos], 11/14/19; The Punch [Lagos], 9/20/19; www.legit.ng, 11/14/19; www.thenativemag.com, 11/20/19)

A Witchcraft Conference

There’s nothing like the mention of witchcraft to spook out Nigerians, and this is what happened when the Prof. B.I.C. Ijomah Centre for Policy Studies and Research at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, announced it would be holding an international conference on witchcraft. Reactions to the news were heated with some people accusing the University of promoting sorcery rather than academic excellence. The controversy and ensuing debate prompted protests from students and members of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) who demanded that the event be cancelled. The organizers, who insisted the aim of the conference was to demystify witchcraft, gave in to the pressure and changed the conference topic from ‘Witchcraft: Meaning, Factors and Practices’ to ‘Dimensions of Human Behaviour.’

Despite the furor that preceded the event, the conference was opened with a prayer by a Catholic priest, and the University’s Christ Church choir sang the opening hymn to a hall filled with people. In her opening remarks, a director at the centre, Prof. Egodi Uchendu, said, “This conference…seeks to determine amongst other things, the intelligibility of witchcraft, the principles that underpin it and the impact it has on human society.”

(Continued on next page)
The Re-Naming of a President

In their December 11, 2019 editorial, the Punch newspapers announced they would henceforth prefix the name of President Muhammadu Buhari with the rank of Major General and refer to his administration as a regime. It said it was taking this stance as a protest against the autocratic rule of the Buhari-led government, which has abused and violated the rights of Nigerian citizens, different arms of government, the press, civic society, democratic institutions, and those seeking self-determination. It said, “The entire country and a global audience are rightly scandalised by the unfolding saga over Omoyele Sowore and the unruliness of the DSS and government; but it is only a pattern, a reflection of the serial disregard of the Buhari regime for human rights and its battering of other arms of government and our democratic institutions...Major General Muhammadu Buhari ran a ham-fisted military junta in 1984/85 and old habits obviously run deep. Until he and his repressive regime purge themselves of their martial tendency...Punch will not be a party to falsely adorning it with a democratic robe, hence our decision to label it for what it is – an autocratic military-style regime.”

Punch announced that all their print newspapers (The Punch, Saturday Punch, Sunday Punch, Punch Sports Extra) and digital formats, especially Punchng.com, will adopt this practice.

Punch also noted that some state governors have emulated the same intoler-
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