

African Voices

Volume 4, Issue 3

November 2002

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Reinventing one's self: An African Perspective
- 2 The Contest
- 3 African News
- 4 Sports News
- 5 Arts and Entertainment

Reinventing one's self: An African Perspective

Kwame Tsikata

If you think Education is Expensive, Try ignorance.

Ghanaian Proverb

I frequently find myself disappointed after foregoing leisure to attend some "much hyped" talk/lecture only to discover that the speakers thump heavily on popular rhetoric. Its like going ten consecutive times on the same roller coaster; it can get pretty unexciting you know. Fortunately, I experienced a way more informative session at the "less hyped" Afrika! Panel discussion featuring Macalester's finest *Africanists* (A term I discovered only recently).

It was simply exhilarating witnessing the modest yet exact pronouncements by Prof Moseley to the brutally sincere yet stimulating assessments made by Prof Samatar. Inspired by the wisdom of the panelists, I started trying to understand how we (Africans of my generation) choose to understand our 'hopelessness' and our supposed sincerity in trying to uplift our people from this never-ending abyss of poverty, self-destruction through wars, and worst of all **Ignorance**. More questions flurried to my mind instead of answers making me wonder whether the answers were worthy of the effort put into the search. I can now understand the frustration of the proverbial fox in *Aesop's fables* who after miserably failing to reach the high grapes on a tree, walks away and mutters how sour the grapes **probably** are.....**probably** being the key word in the statement It's made me further realize the relevance of sometimes searching for the right questions instead of engaging in a blind zestful quest for solutions; it's meaningless to have solutions that are not particular to or appropriate for a situation.

A mundane illustration of this is the cliché example of the baby in a pan of dirty water. It could be tempting to embrace the general solution of throwing away the baby with the dirty water just to rid off dirt. Perhaps if the culprit of the aforementioned horrid act would first think of whether the problem was the baby being dirty or the pan being dirty, the story might have concluded in a more admirable manner.

For me *Reinventing one's self*, as suggested by Prof Samatar during the panel discussion, suggests a redefinition of our thought process towards achieving lasting solutions to the seemingly incurable disease of underdevelopment plaguing the dark and lovely continent. It all depends on whether we: a) choose to dwell on the rape and oppression we have suffered and continue to linger hopelessly in it, or b) Romanticize on our ancient richness and glory in hope for a miraculous revival of some sort, or c) Be realists and practical revolutionaries, who do not just dream, but conceive and apply our well-searched and thought out ideas even if they defy the status quo. In all honesty, I must confess it is quite easy to subconsciously lapse into the first option especially when one goes through those periods of bitterness, and finger-pointing becomes a habit or rather an escapist route; I say escapist because it makes one feel better to constantly think that another (in this case colonialists and neo-colonialists) are completely responsible for all our troubles.

Not to say that I do not lay certain amounts of blame, but I would prefer option c just because I believe everyone has a duty to themselves to carry forth their dreams and create their preferred destinies. Even hate filled individuals such as Hitler, Idi Amin, whoever formed the Ku Klux Klan, and arguably Mussolini, have been able to push forward their hateful agendas, so hey, why not us development-seeking folks! Just muse over this for a second, it might be life transforming! One Love.

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

George Bernard Shaw

**Interested in writing for Africa?
Please submit pieces to African Voices**

**Meetings every other Tuesday at 10:00pm in
the Campus Center or write to
afrika@macalester.edu**

Come and share your knowledge of Africa

The Contest continued on page 3

The postcard arrived on a Friday. It was brought by the local teacher of the small village of Loitoktok, in southwestern Kenya, close to the border with Tanzania. Excited, the teacher sat down restlessly on a seat reserved for special guests. After he had accepted a cup of tea from Mama Mutiso, he translated the message on the card. His voice was vibrant as he read: "THE KIMBO COOKING OIL CONTEST IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT MASTER GEORGE MUTISO WA MBESA IS THE WINNER OF A RED LAND ROVER."

"A land rover, a land rover," the teacher said gesturing with his arms at the same time stomping the ground with his feet. "Congratulations. A whole, moving land rover."

Mzee Mbese stared at him with his mouth wide open. Mama Mutiso, his wife, sat down on a box. There was silence in the room. The fire in the corner sprang to life as a twig burned. The pot of Isyo started boiling and brownish soup spilled over the pot, slowly dripping on the hot embers of the fire. A loud hiss followed this unholy union.

Mzee Mbese was the first to speak.

"Landi lova. Ngali?"

"Yes, like the one that passed here last year with the District Commissioner. A huge, new car. All yours."

"My Mutiso."

"He entered a competition. Probably the ones in the newspapers that children are always entering and now he has won. You are his parents and he is only ten years old, so the car is yours." The teacher said standing up and waving his arms. He grinned, his eyes wide open with jubilation.

"I need a drink," Mzee Mbese said stroking his greying head. "I need a drink."

"Ngali yitu. A car for us," Mama Mutiso mumbled. And then the impact of her words hit her and she cupped her head in her hands and said loudly. "Baba Mutiso, we have a landi lova."

"Yes, God is great," The Teacher said for he knew that Mama Mutiso was a committed Christian -- the kind they called converts of the blood of Jesus.

"Amen," Mama Mutiso said raising her arms to the heavens.

"Well, I will, ahh," The teacher mumbled awkwardly.

"Here," he handed the card to Mzee Mbese who gripped it and turned it in his hands as he closely examined it.

"I have to go back to school," The teacher said. No one replied. Mama Mutiso had moved next to her husband and they were holding the card. They linked their hands and The Teacher waved at their unseeing eyes, and walked out, leaving them seated in the dark house, holding hands, their faces like those of children. The news spread like wild fire. Soon, everyone in Loitoktok was referring to the Mbese family as the local tvcoons

. People who before hardly spoke to Mzee Mbesa and Mama Mutiso, came visiting, bringing beautiful gifts. "We are your true friends," they all said.

All of a sudden, the young Mutiso had many new friends. More friends than any ten year old could ever imagine. Every kid had been instructed to be his friend.

Mama Mutiso saw this new change as a miracle. "God works in a mysterious way," she said. "He does not forget his own." She told her husband.

"God had nothing to do with this," Mzee Mbesa said tried to disassociate himself with the Church. "My son filled and mailed the winning entry."

"He is also my son and it is God who blessed the winning entry," She explained to him.

"Shut up or I won't let you get close to the car."

"That is what you think. Who do you think will be the driver?"

"Ha, ha, ha, you make me laugh. Since when did you become a driver? You can't even cook well."

"Leave my cooking out of this," she said, arms akimbo.

"They do not issue licenses to people who are illiterate."

"Are you calling me stupid?"

"I told you to join me in taking the adult classes. You refused. At least I know how to read. I will get the driving license."

"Is something wrong with your head woman?" Mzee Mbesa asked standing up.

"You always ask me that when you know I am right."

"Right? You think a book drives a car? Since when did a ..."

"He was interrupted by a call from outside.

"Hodi huku? Are the owners home?" It was his friend Nzomo.

"Lika, come in. Our house is your house," Mzee Mbesa said as Nzomo poked his head into the door.

They shook hands vigorously, hugged and continued shaking hands without saying a word. Then simultaneously, they started laughing.

"My friend, my dear best friend," Nzomo said as laughter tears rolled down his cheeks. "I always knew that you were destined for higher things."

"Have a seat, Nzomo," Mbesa handed him his stool.

"How is your family?"

"Fine, but not as joyous as yours," Nzomo replied sitting down. He noticed Mama Mutiso. "Mama Mutiso, how are you?"

"I am fine. How is your family?"

"They are fine. The Lord is good."

"The Lord blesses his faithful," she said walking out carrying a pot.

They waited until they knew she was far and then Nzomo turned to his friend and asked,

"What do you plan to do with it?"

"What?" Mzee Mbesa raised his eyebrows.

"Ha, haaa. What? The car. You will have a car parked out there very soon. The only one in Loitoktok. I envy you my friend."

"Thank you," Mbesa said as he dug into his trouser pocket. He removed a black tin and popped it open and then handed it to his friend. Nzomo pinched the dark brown snuff and waited for Mzee Mbesa to do the same. They then placed the snuff in their nostrils, tilting their heads up and sniffing in. They were silent for a moment and then as if a signal had been given, they sneezed loudly. Twice.

"Pretty good snuff," Nzomo said. "Just like the new car."

"Thank you," Mzee Mbesa said pocketing the snuff box.

"You know I know how to drive?" Nzomo said.

"You know how to drive?"

"Yes, I learned in the army. I know it has been a long time but if I get behind the controls, I am an expert."

"We will see."

"You should get into business. You and I can open a supply company. We carry bags of maize and beans for people and they pay us. We can call it Mbesa-Nzomo transportation company. I will do the driving and you will do the loading."

"We will see," Mzee Mbesa said eyeing his friend carefully. He did not like this sudden move toward partnership.

"As your best friend, I will make sure no one steals from you. You need someone to help you, don't you?"

"I will see," Mzee Mbesa said looking away.

"My best friend, Baba Mutiso, think about it and remember we grew up together like brothers."

That was the beginning of advice.

"Sell it and buy cattle. Cattle breed and multiply, cars don't," the local chief told him, reminding Mzee Mbesa that his donation was expected for the upcoming "road construction," Harambee -- fund raiser.

"Make it a Matatu. You will make a lot of money transporting people," his brother Kenga told him.

"Mama Mutiso, remember we can't walk five kilometres to church when God has provided transport for us all," Sister Esita, the pastor's wife told her.

"I believe the car belongs to the whole family," Mzee Mbesa's oldest brother Chengo told them one evening.

"The whole family?" Mzee Mbesa could not believe his ears.

"Yes. We helped you build your house. We even made sure you got a wife..."

"Get out."

"It is all true."

"I SAID GET OUT OF MY HOUSE."

"You mean our house?"

At that instant Mzee Mbesa did the unthinkable. With lightning speed he picked up a burning log and advanced to smash it into two on his brother's head. Mama Mutiso screamed and his brother ran out cursing. After that incident the visitors who came to see him did not tell him what to do with the car.

News

Adeline Awantang

Blood Diamonds Polished Off, [bbcnews](http://bbcnews.com), www.news.bbc.co.uk.

Countries involved in the diamond trade have agreed on new regulations to prevent "blood diamonds" from reaching the world market. However campaign groups say that the certification process is not rigorous enough to stop armed groups from profiting from diamonds. A BBC correspondent says that diamonds have been to Africa what cocaine has been to Latin America. They have financed wars, fuelled corruption and brought about the collapse of state institutions. He added that the real question now is whether the diamond industry can adopt a system that really regulates itself, ending its tarnished image in which up to 20% of its trade is in illicit stones.

France Holds Tunisia Bomb Suspect, [bbcnews](http://bbcnews.com), www.news.bbc.co.uk.

Eight people have been arrested in France over a suspected al-Qaeda suicide attack outside a Tunisian synagogue, which left 19 people dead. The arrests were carried out by French intelligence agents, the interior ministry announced. The attack took place in April on the island of Djerba. Most of the dead were German tourists. One French person and four Tunisians also died. A spokesman for Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network said the organisation was behind the attack, which he said was revenge for the deaths of Palestinians.

Another pay hike for Mugabe, Independent Online, www.iol.co.za.

President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has been given a 20 percent salary increase, his second pay rise this year, a newspaper reported. Government ministers and lawmakers from Mugabe's ruling Zanu-PF party, as well as parliamentarians from the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) will also receive pay increases, said the paper. Mugabe, who received a pay increase in February, will have the latest salary increment backdated to July, the paper added. Zimbabwe is in the middle of its worst economic crisis with inflation close to 140 percent. About 80 percent of Zimbabweans live in poverty.

Senegal gets new prime minister, Mail and Guardian Online, www.mg.co.za.

Idrissa Seck, one of President Abdoulaye Wade's closest aides, was named Senegal's new prime minister after the government was sacked in the wake of a ferry disaster that cost 1 200 lives. Seck replaces Mame Madior Boye who was dismissed along with the rest of the government in a move the media suggested was linked to the sinking of the ferry Joola in September, one of the world's worst maritime catastrophes. Boye became Senegal's first woman prime minister in March 2001 when Wade sacked his erstwhile ally Moustapha Niassé after tensions developed between the two men. No official explanation was given for the dissolution of the government, in power since May last year, but the Senegalese press had hinted that a new death toll update on the ferry disaster would lead to a cabinet reshuffle.

Swazi king's marriage lawsuit postponed, Independent Online, www.iol.co.za

A woman who sued Swaziland's monarchy to prevent the king from marrying her daughter postponed her lawsuit indefinitely, saying she doubted she had any chance of winning. Lindiwe Dlamini had asked the court to force the royal family to release her 18-year-old daughter, Zena Mahlangu, from a royal guest house. Mahlangu and two other women were picked up by King Mswati's aides in September after the king decided they would be his 10th, 11th and 12th wives. Mahlangu had also told Dlamini in a telephone conversation that she "accepted her present position as the king's fiancée". However two court officials were denied access to Mahlangu to obtain her views about her impending marriage first hand. Mswati, Africa's last absolute monarch, can marry as often as he pleases. His father, King Sobuza, had more than 100 wives when he died in 1982 after 60 years on the throne. It is usually considered an honour to have one's child chosen as a royal bride.

The Contest continued...

Rather, they tried to develop a strong friendship with his family.

Mzee Mbesa watched all this with fascination. Now I am important, he thought. They come and talk to me as if they like me. Do they think I am a fool? I can see beyond their small schemes. They are all planning to destroy me. He remembered the way some people had treated him before. The chief called me a dog once, he remembered. Now he comes here every evening to discuss important issues with me. He thinks I will give him a ride in my car. Just wait. I will show all these people. Even now my wife is mad, he told himself. Talking of God and miracles. And the way she keeps on nagging me about hitting my brother. I should have picked a bigger log. One of these days I am going to beat her up and remind her who the boss is.

Because he was always thinking, Mzee Mbesa became more and more silent. He would sit outside his hut wearing a sullen expression. He was planning his revenge.

As all this went on, Mutiso, the ten year old who had filled and send in the winning entry was confused. His parents told him that he had made them rich but he could not understand all the fuss. Since the good news had arrived, his parents had been arguing every night. He would lie and listen as they insulted each other. No one asked for his opinion.

A week after the news arrived, The Teacher brought back another postcard. This said that the car would be delivered at the local school, which was also the post office, on the coming Wednesday.

"They will probably bring it in a Lorry," The Teacher said.

"No, they will drive it here. That is what they do, to make sure it is running well," Nzomo said.

"I hear that nowadays they have planes called helicopters that bring heavy things," Mama Mutiso was told by her friend Leah.

As the day approached, a small committee was selected to plan for the reception of the car. Money was contributed to buy a suit and a dress for Mzee Mbesa and Mama Mutiso. The Teacher got a new pair of school uniform outfit for Mutiso, from the school's storage.

The local church's choir met for extra hours and practised a new song which hinted that the Mbesa family was chosen by God.

There was a lot of excitement as the appointed day arrived. School was cancelled and the weekly market suspended. According to The Teacher, the car would be delivered at the same time as the mail, at noon.

The night before the big day, Mzee Mbesa sat outside his house still making his mind of what to do with the car. He did not consider asking his wife for her opinion. What do women know about huge responsibilities? He asked himself. Then an idea started forming in his mind

A makeshift stage had been constructed. The Teacher was on the stage clad in his best clothes; a brown corduroy suit, red shirt and pink tie. The suit was too tight for he seemed to have a hard time breathing. He would occasionally open his mouth wide and breath in deeply. He was saying:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, today is a great day for our town. This is a day of blessing. A day of development."

The crowd cheered. Just then someone spotted the Mbesa family walking toward the meeting. There was more cheering as the crowd parted into two to allow their new "tycoons," to pass. When they got to the stage, The Teacher raised his arms up and the crowd kept quiet. He cleared his throat and opened his mouth to speak. Mzee Mbesa beat him to it.

"My brothers and sister," Mbesa said scanning the crowd. "Many of you have wondered what I will do with the car." He paused. The silence was deafening as the people waited.

"I have decided to take the car with me on a trip to Nairobi and I will not come back."

"Over my dead body," his wife pushed him aside and shouted. "I will sell the car and build a new church."

Mzee Mbesa recovered and punched his wife on the back. She fell down on the crowd.

Her brother, the carpenter, jumped onto the stage and hit Mbesa on the head with a hammer. He collapsed, stunned. Chaos erupted as relatives fought it out. The Chief, blew his whistle and The Teacher called for order but no one paid attention.

Suddenly, someone shouted, "THE CAR!"

Everyone froze. Mama Mutiso stood up. Mzee Mbesa sat up. All eyes were turned to the road where dust whirled and floated in the air as a vehicle approached. As it got closer, people strained their eyes to make out the shape. It got closer and closer and the crowd got more excited. Someone started clapping and everyone took it up.

Then the vehicle arrived and the first shock hit them.

It was an old van that was used as a Matatu. The driver of the van, perplexed, switched off the engine and stepped out. Everyone stared at him. Not knowing what to do, he waved at them. No one waved back.

The Teacher approached him.

"You were supposed to make a delivery today. A land rover," he told him.

"Oh, that? I have it." With that, the driver reached into the car and pulled out a box addressed to MASTER GEORGE MUTISO WA MBESA.

The Teacher ripped open the box and removed a small, red toy land rover with a card attached to it that said: Congratulations For Winning The Kimbo Toy Contest.

The only person smiling was the rightful owner of the car: Master Mutiso.

(c) Alfred N. Mutua, 1996

Sports News

Kagabo Ngiruwonsanga and Getiria Onsongo

Soccer

India's record-breaking Nigerian

The Lagos born Nigerian striker, Chima Okorie is a trend-setter in Indian football: his success has led to a steady influx of African players to India. Chima arrived, as a twenty-one year student in July 1984 to study architecture in Visakhapatnam University, and his football skills were discovered accidentally. After playing for his university, he moved to play for a local team in Calcutta, Mohun Bagan. In 1991, Mohun Bagan changed their century old tradition of not recruiting foreigners and made Chima the first player to break the 500,000 rupee (approx 10,000 Dollars) barrier. Over twelve year period he was top scorer in the Calcutta league a record seven times.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

Egypt tipped to host 2006

Egypt is likely to be as the host nation for the 2006 African Nations Cup. They look set to win by default, as a result of the flaws in the bids of other competing nations. The competing countries - Algeria, Egypt, Ivory Coast and Libya will each make 30-minute presentations before the committee selects the winning bid. Ivory Coast, the only black African country in the race, is in the middle of a military rebellion and Algeria - acknowledged as having the best bid - is similarly stricken by civil strife. Libya, the outside bet for the tournament, is regarded as a pariah state by the West and choosing it could have a negative effect on Caf's efforts to promote African football on the global stage.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

African spice adds flavour

The flavour of the month in the English Premiership has a distinctly African tang to it. Look closely at the teams currently lording it over the Premiership and the key ingredients adding spice and zest are African. African players were long distrusted by English managers who harboured doubts over their stamina, commitment and heart for combat in one of the world's most combative leagues. But the influx and influence of continental coaches to the Premiership has brought a shift in thinking. After scoring Goal of the week a few weeks ago, Kanu of Nigeria has a staggering 5 goals to his credit. Other African players who have made an impact in their teams include Kolo Toure and Aliou Cisse

Athletics

Kenyans sweep NYC Marathon

Rodgers Rop led home a Kenyan one-two-three in the New York Marathon on Saturday while his compatriot Joyce Chepchumba won the women's race. Rop beat countrymen Laban Kipkemboi and Christopher Cheboiboch into second and third as the East African country confirmed its distance pedigree.



Arts and Entertainment

Tendai Gadzikwa

African Film: The Next Generation

“The African terrain is now contested, caught between global ideologies and local customs. As the Continent modernizes, its cinema portrays the evolution of new cities, new migrations and new selves. Displaced populations are forced to forge new lives in increasingly dense cities or move abroad. New neighborhoods are formed, becoming refashioned African villages. Western popular culture mingles with ancient myths. African migrants journey to Europe and the Americas, seeking economic opportunity or fleeing civil war, changing their host countries even as they themselves are changed.

African and Diaspora filmmakers reveal this global movement, ranging from political dramas of anti-colonialism to social comedies of postcolonial city life, both at home and abroad”.

At New York's 8th Annual African Film Festival held earlier this year, a new wave of vital indigenous African film was on display, striving to capture the lives of contemporary Africans. There were two major themes of the festival, one of which was "Spotlight of Southern Africa", which featured films from Zimbabwe and South Africa, that deal with historical and current issues facing the region, including the migration of Africans and African Americans to post-apartheid South Africa and the effects of the AIDS crisis on young women. The second theme, "Africa Is ..." spotlights the work of second-generation African immigrants, who are making films about their struggle to belong to two worlds. These films explore how new immigrants maintain and transform African culture, how urban spaces are reshaped, and how these migrations challenge traditional notions of nationality and citizenship. The following are reviews summaries of a few movies that were highlighted:

God is African

Akin Omotoso, South Africa, 2002, 90 min.

God is African represents a new spirit in South African film, one aimed at breaking down cultural barriers, exposing xenophobia, and portraying a new consciousness of what it is to be African. The film is set in a university campus where youthful optimism seems to permeate the student's outlook on life. Reality intrudes with the death sentence of Ken Saro Wiwa, Nigerian writer and environmentalist. Femi, a Nigerian student tries to politicize the student body, but he is confronted by both a hatred of 'kwere- kwere' (foreigners) he had not experienced before and a cynical disinterest in what goes on in the 'other' Africa.

Karmen Gei

Joseph Gaï Ramaka, Senegal, 2000, 84 min.
Wolof and French with English subtitles

Director Joseph Gaï Ramaka has completely recast the Bizet's classic *Carmen* using the finest musicians and choreographers in Senegal. Djeinaba Diop Gai (left) is a revelation, whose proud portrayal of *Carmen* and intoxicating dancing set a new standard of sensuality. Ramaka complicates the sexual tension further through the bold leap of making her the first bisexual *Carmen*. Director Ramaka explains: *Carmen* is a myth but what does *Carmen* represent today? Where do *Carmen*'s love and freedom stand at the onset of the 21st Century? Therein lies my film's intent, a black *Carmen*, plunged in the magical and chaotic urbanity of an African city.

L'Afrance

Alain Gomis, Senegal/France, 2001, 90 min.
Wolof and French with English subtitles

This winner of the Silver Leopard for Best First Feature at this year's Locarno International Film Festival looks at the problems of migration and identity faced by most young Africans in Europe. Set in Paris, the film centers on El Hadj, a young Senegalese student whose legal residency has come to an end. He is torn between his wish to remain in Paris and his desire return home and serve his country. Juxtaposing images of El Hadj's sometimes troubled memory of Africa with the harsh realities of young Africans living a penurious existence in downtown Paris.

Temporary Registration (Immatriculation Temporaire)

Gahité Fofana, Guinea, 2001, 78 min.
French, Fulani, and Susu with English subtitles

The son of a Frenchwoman travels back to Guinea to find his biological father but is mugged on arrival. His friendship with an endearing tramp and the discovery that his father is an old, wasted alcoholic frame this shimmering portrait of a rootless generation. The town and its inhabitants are the object of a meeting - that of a silent but determined man and those who host him - a troubled milieu, a kingdom of wheeling and dealing and nightclubs

Mangwana

Manu Kurewa, Zimbabwe/UK, 1998, 26 min.

A car crash in the Zimbabwean bush brings about a chance encounter between two men who have never met on equal terms. Archie, an aging Scottish farmer, needs to get his truck out of a ditch, but no help is at hand. He demands assistance from Sekuru, an elder of the local village, but nothing can be done until daybreak. Sekuru feels he must offer Archie shelter, and Archie, though distrustful, is compelled by circumstances to accept. Neither man is comfortable with the situation. Can the night and the experience bring any possibility of change?

A-Z — A Commentary on Post Apartheid

Teboho Mahlatsi, South Africa, 2001, 50 min.

Video. English, Afrikaans, Zulu, and Xhosa

Commissioned by the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg, South Africa, to make a 5-channel video installation, Mahlatsi traveled throughout the country to ask South Africans of all colors, religions, and walks of life to free-associate with each letter of the alphabet. From hundreds of interviews, he has cut together a collage that illuminates the many faces of the new South Africa.