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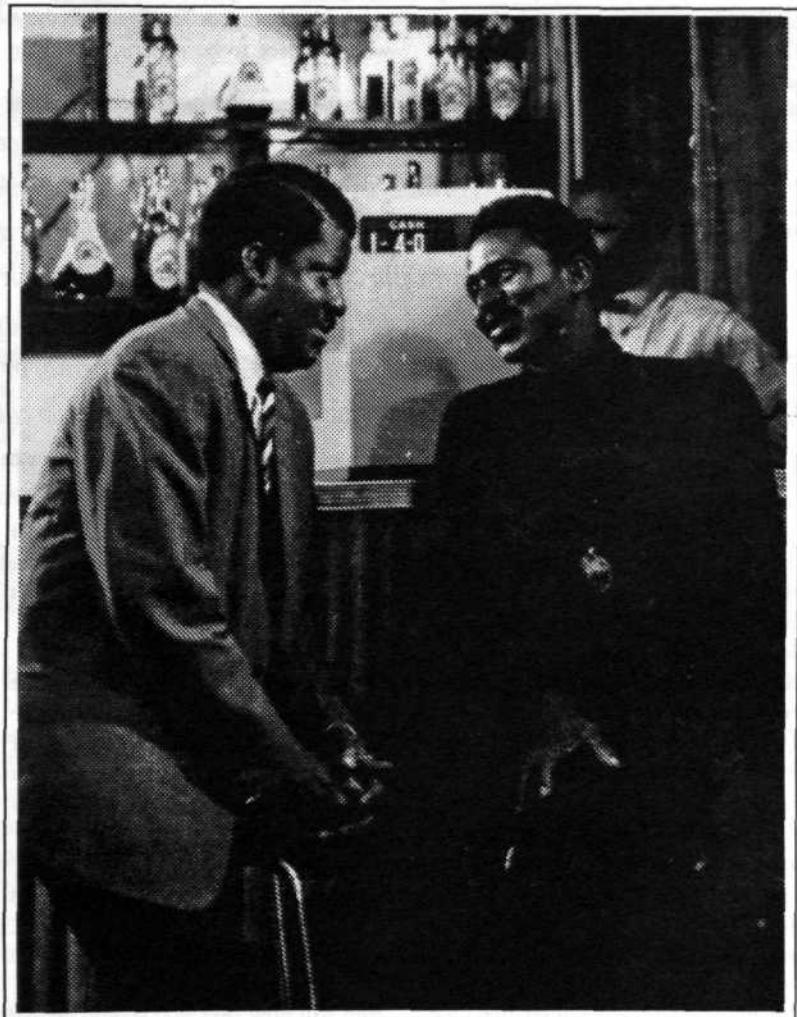


# A BETRAYAL OF THE CREDO GROUP

DAPO ADENIYI

Dapo Adelugba professor of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, one of the most prominent in Soyinka's recapitulations about life and politics in Nigeria's 1960s was still insisting some weeks ago, when contacted to comment on the widespread belief that Wole Soyinka was the gunman that switched the Western Premier's tape in the NBC studios in Ibadan. Adelugba made very vehement refutations in favour of his friend (whom he prefers to call 'my senior'). What he like all the others did not know was that the cat had finally been let out of the bag and that the playwright had finally confessed.

He admits however that he was Soyinka's constant companion to his hang-outs in Ibadan, especially at the 'joint' called Risikatu (named after its proprietress) which Soyinka alludes generously to in the book, *Ibadan*. Adelugba would recall only faintly the faces of other characters like the thug, Kodak later to be elevated to a comrade when he shed his old ways of pocket picking on his return from imprisonment. But those others who doubled as members of Soyinka's private army as well as being actors in his acting companies Adelugba remembers - since many of these are still around till today. Among them is Ibadan University acting teacher and a former head of the department of Theatre Arts, Femi Fatoba. There are also Tunji Oyelana the musician and Wale Ogunyemi, a playwright and Fellow at University of Ibadan's Institute of African Studies. Jimi Solanke now lives in Ile-Ife within an arm's length. All of these were junior



The late Femi Johnson with Dapo Adelugba in the hotel scene of the film *Kongi's Harvest*.

members of Soyinka's Credo Group. All of them persist even until now in their heated denials which in effect is their way of expressing solidarity with a friend.

Senior members of Soyinka's circle of

friends - The Credo - include the late Femi Johnson, Olumuyiwa Awe and Bola Ige, a former governor of Oyo State, Nigeria. You can expand the list to include Abiola Irele who is the first to play Lakunle in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. Femi Johnson's name

reoccurs often in *Ibadan* and until his death seven years ago remained one of Soyinka's closest confidants: he acted, supped and wined with Soyinka and was in fact, very nearly an accomplice in the 'crime' of the burglary of the NBC. 'The Great Confession' however makes clear that neither himself, nor others like Bola Ige and Muyiwa Awe (an Ibadan professor also) had any foreknowledge. Even so, their denials remained solidly unbroken - Johnson up until his death kept a consistent story: Soyinka was not the gunman in the studio.

Sometimes the Credo members played safer and said, 'Well a court of law discharged and acquitted him so it has to be that he was not the man.'

We are reminded of course by James Gibbs the reviewer that 'Soyinka only got off on a technicality.'

In *The Man Died* there is this scene where Soyinka recalls a meeting with slain Western Nigeria Regional Governor, Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi who became Soyinka's friend also - without ever emerging as a member of The Credo. Before Fajuyi dispatched Wole Soyinka to the North to provide an alternative report on the massacre of the Ibos in the North, he demanded that the dramatist confess to him and also describe how he was able to break into the premises despite the vigilant presence of armed sentries. Soyinka was coy and evasive as usual. He repeatedly reminded Fajuyi that 'the court acquitted me.' But Fajuyi knew what he knew. Soyinka did not outrightly deny it but did not outrightly admit that he was either.

Wale Ogunyemi for his own part repeated the now familiar denial: It wasn't Soyinka. Or rather, nobody knows for sure if it was him who did it. Even so, he would very nearly hint that

he himself knows only too well how the 'crime' of which Soyinka was accused had fitted Soyinka's own nature and temperament too well. And all a reporter needs do to squeeze corroborations to the effect that Soyinka was guilty of the offence for which he was arraigned before an Ibadan High Court was to ask for a recount of the sort of life they all lived, Soyinka's circle, that being, or The Credo, as they would prefer to be called. And then

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Ogunyemi would get really excited and unwind, providing thrilling details, recalling near-death escapades in which they all frequently indulged.

Ogunyemi confides to me for instance how Soyinka once sent him to a police station in Agodi - Iwo Road area of Ibadan to summon a police inspector at a time when he (Soyinka) was still very much a wanted man.

'Tell me, how does a man go on such an errand? A man you know is wanted, whose name would instantly ring a bell anywhere in Nigeria, let alone in Ibadan. And still now says you should go and call an inspector of police from a police barracks! Haa!!!'

Ogunyemi described in detail how he took Soyinka's car and drove out to Iwo Road but was confronted with a very great dilemma. To enter and deliver a message was not the problem in the least, it was dropping that name as the source of the message that was the

trouble. He summoned courage and breathed out Soyinka's name in the end to a man who rather than show a great surprise only asked, 'Ehn...So where is he?'

Ogunyemi concluded by saying, 'After the officer had boarded the car, I took the initiative to drive him round the whole town first to be sure *oga* was not getting into a trap' before he finally conducted him to Soyinka's real hide-out. And no sooner did the two see each other than they hugged and exchanged pleasantries like real close friends. Only then did Ogunyemi heave a sigh of relief.

The procession of the Credo Group members who banded up in 1987 to publish a book in celebration of Soyinka's Nobel Prize for Literature digressed each to comment on the incident. There was no single corroboration of these newly unearthed facts. Only refutations. (The book, *Before Our Very Eyes* was published by Spectrum Books, Ibadan.)

One other fellow, an outsider to the Credo, but who obviously knew so much was the white journalist who was reporting on Nigerian politics in Ibadan at the period. He is none other than Kay Whiteman, now Editor-in-Chief of London-based magazine, *West Africa*. For example, Soyinka (also Maren) tells us that it was Whiteman who revealed to him the whereabouts of the radio transmitter that was smuggled in from Dr. Michael Okpara's government in the East and lodged secretly in the jailed politician Chief Obafemi Awolowo's house. It was with amusement and glee that Whiteman remembered these dramatic moments when he covered the London launching of the book for *West Africa* last July. Soyinka too was pleasantly pleased to have one of the remarkable denizens of an era at his book's launching held at London's South Bank. [GR]