

ON July 17, 2001, the honorable Minister for the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ms Boma Bromillow Jack, launched a special edition of Nigeria Magazine dedicated as a tribute to Dr Garba Asiwaju (1935-2000). This is a historic and most welcomed development. To better appreciate its significance, readers must be acquainted with the background. The foreword to this special edition by Umar M. Abubakar, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the "Tribute to a cultural icon and an administrator for excellence" by the minister do try to provide this background but some amplification may illuminate further.

Nigeria Magazine began in 1927 as an educational bulletin and became a more culturally oriented publication in 1933. It was titled: Nigeria: A Quarterly Magazine of General Interest and on the Table of Contents page, it was described as "for everyone interested in the progress of the country, compiled in collaboration with private contributors and all government departments."

"Private contributors" featured prominently in terms of commercial advertisements. A typical issue of Nigeria Magazine e.g. No. 40, 1953 carried 34 pages of advertisements out of a total of 118 pages. The back cover was also an advertisement. It carried 107 black and white photos illustrating the seven articles in the issue. As a magazine rather than an academic journal, Nigeria Magazine's general tone was light-hearted, witty, humorous and personalized. Generally, the articles covered cultural, ecological, historical and current events and features. This special edition (2001) includes an article from a 1939 issue, "Dances and Plays" by E.C. Murray, the famous art teacher and popularist.

In the 1930s, 40s and 50s, Nigerian Magazine (as it became known) had a literary supplement that provided a forum for aspiring writers and often their first chance of publication. Literary giants such as Ekwensi, Achebe, Soyinka, Okigbo, Aniebo and Clarke all graced Nigeria Magazine. Later on, the magazine was edited for years by the novelist, Onuora Nzekwu (Wand of Noble Wood and Blade Among the Boys).

At the same time, several scholars contributed to Nigeria Magazine articles based on their original and pioneering research, which might not have been published at that stage by scholarly journals. In that way, the magazine served as a kind of academic crucible. Ulli Beier in the 1950s, E.J. Alagoa, F. Ekejiuba, K. Williamsons, Horton in the 1960s are just a few examples.

Nigeria Magazine was the only forum responsible for disseminating and publishing research findings on Nigerian culture and for promoting and popularizing that culture until 1972 when a department of culture was created in the Federal Ministry of Information.

Dr Garba Asiwaju, a lecturer in history at ABU, was the first director of the department and as part of his responsibilities; he took over as the editor of Nigeria Magazine from 1972 to his retirement from the civil service in 1985. He was deeply committed to maintaining the high standard of the magazine as "the most credible documenting of arts and culture of Nigeria. Asiwaju saw the magazine as "serving the intellectual bedrock and professional foundation upon which the federal department for culture was built. (**"Nigeria Since Independence).**"

After his retirement, his lasting input and a corps of dedicated editors sustained the magazine until 1990 when it lapsed.

When Dr Garba Asiwaju died in March 2000, the then minister of culture and tourism, Ojo Maduekwe, during a condolence visit to Asiwaju's family pledged to revive Nigeria Magazine as

Nina' Mba's Insider / Outsider's Account



Hail the return of Nigeria Magazine

the most fitting tribute to Dr Asiwaju (Sunday Vanguard, March 26, 2000). Maduekwe promised it would come out in September 2000: by the time it did emerge, Maduekwe had been moved to the Ministry of Transport. Still, it would have been proper and courteous for his successor to have noted Maduekwe's input in the article or the magazine's editorial.

The cover of the magazine is most attractive: a photo of the National Theatre at night, brilliantly illuminated, with an inset photo of Dr Asiwaju. The back cover is plain white, which is a waste of prime space. There are ten black and white photos (plus two in Murray's 1939 article) and one colour photo of Ms Bromillow Jack.

The magazine is published by the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism and this is a special issue in honor of a former director of culture but in future issues, the ministry should be less intrusive.

Excluding the reprint of the Murray article, there are nine articles and three pages of poems by Bay Bayo and Manuwa Ikuewumi. One of the most interesting articles is "Africa and the

a publishing house. All the other articles are about aspects of Nigeria's many cultures, in the tradition of Nigeria Magazine while some lack originality ("folklore in Achebe's Novels, "if a Divination." "Political Institutions among the Ngwa Igbo") Several others are more innovative and imaginative: "Hausa Aesthetics," "The song composer in Tiv society" and "Tap Dance in Bonny." Overall, the articles are well researched and presented but are let down by a rather clumsy production and copy editing such defects can be easily remedied in the next issue.

The most important aspect of this return of Nigeria Magazine is that this must not be just the celebrated special edition but the maiden issue of a sustained series of regular publications. That would be the best tribute to Dr Asiwaju. By poignant coincidence, Dr Garba Asiwaju's 93-year-old mother, Mrs Arinola Omojobi Ashiwaju died just two weeks before the launch of Nigeria Magazine 2001.

Certain attitudes or mindsets seem universal and timeless. For instance, prejudice against the profession of law and its practitioners. Readers in Lagos may have noticed recent posters advertising a play "Let's Kill the Lawyers." This is a line from Shakespeare's Henry VI "The first thing to do, let's kill all the lawyers."

While Shakespeare's most famous court scene in Merchant of Venice leads to "justice," this is achieved not by a lawyer/judge but by Portia impersonating a judge: Since this column is about Nigeria Magazine, this is what its editor, E. H. Duckworth wrote in the 1952 No. 39 issue.

"Lagos newspapers frequently contain announcements that I find somewhat depressing, to the effect that certain young men have sailed for England to study law or that, yet another batch of freshly qualified lawyers have landed at Apapa. It is easy for anyone of only medium intelligence, but with enough money to pay the examination fees and the cost of living in London, to pass law examinations. It is nothing to be particularly proud of or to deserve praise from relations or friends. To develop the well-being of our people, we do not need more lawyers, but we do require additional doctors, teachers, engineers and technically trained men and women.

"The profession of law may, for a few, prove a lucrative occupation, but does not create general prosperity. On the other hand, a man with knowledge of industrial processes, of engineering of the building is a potential creator of wealth and useful employment not only for himself but also for many others. In this connection, it is interesting to view the work of Mr Fawehinmi." The article goes on to praise Fawehinmi's furniture factory.

This Day' weekly supplement on law always carries jokes against lawyers, so I guess the following will not offend our learned friends:

A teacher, a petty thief and a lawyer all died and went to the Pearly Gates. Because of overcrowding, St. Peter told them they had to pass a test before entering. He asked the teacher, "What was the name of the famous ship that hit an iceberg and sank?" "The Titanic," she answered, and St. Peter motioned her into heaven.

The thief was next. "How many people died on that ship?" St. Peter asked. "Gee, that's tough," the man said, "but luckily I saw the movie just before I passed away. The answer is 1500." So, St. Peter let him through.

Then he turned to the lawyer; "What were their names?" he asked.

Nigeria Magazine was the only forum responsible for disseminating and publishing research findings on Nigerian culture.

Diaspora in the Strategies for Cultural Diplomacy" by Prof. Joy Ugwu but it comprises excerpts from a paper of that title given by Prof. Ugwu ten years ago. The excerpts were not well put together because there are missing passages (p58-60).

The opening article's title, "Culture and Tourism as Aid (sic) to development in Nigeria" sounds like the theme song of the ministry which to my mind over-emphasizes the tourism part of its mandate. The author, Chike C. Aniakor, documents Nigeria's rich potential for eco and cultural tourism but ignores the oppressive reality which mocks the realization of this touristic utopia. As Chinua Achebe puts it so brilliantly:

"It is a measure of our self-delusion that we can talk about developing tourism... only a masochist with an exuberant taste for self-violence will pick Nigeria for a holiday (Trouble with Nigeria).

Nda Uga's article titled, "Association of Nigerian Authors: Origin and Role in Literary Culture" is a timely analysis of ANA's contributions to creative writing and advocates that it establishes