

During the cold war, the enemy was either the USA or USSR depending on where one lived. Since its end in 1989, there has been a multiplicity of enemies again depending on where one lives. To the Kurds, the enemies are Turkey and Iraq; to the Chechens, the enemy is Russia; to the Timorese, the enemy is Indonesia, to the Bosnians the enemy is Serbia and so on.

Beyond national and ethnic enemies, there are global fears that the real enemies of humanity are poverty, AIDS, and global warming. However, these 'faceless threats' are not as easy to hate as the old communist or capitalist bogeys.

One of the greatest dramatists of the espionage of the cold war is the British novelist, John Le Carre, whose Smiley series, televised and filmed throughout many parts of the world, has been on the bestseller list for three decades. Many fans, myself included, wondered what Le Carre would write about next. (In the same way, fans have speculated on what Eddie Iroh will write about if he has finished his novels about the Nigerian Civil War. With the very recent publication of Le Carre's latest novel, *The Constant Gardener*, London, Hodder and Staughton, 2001, we have the answer.

The new enemy is the multinational pharmaceutical industry, which exploits people in advanced and less developed countries but is most dangerously exploitative in Africa.

The plot is based on the Three Bees conglomerate pharmaceutical company based in the US but with global links, which in response to the alarming spread of Tuberculosis worldwide, develops a new vaccine. Despite many problems uncovered during the trials, Three Bees proceeds to donate the vaccine to hospitals and clinics in Kenya and sends researchers to monitor the effects of the vaccine in Kenyan patients. Not only does it not cure tuberculosis, but it also causes very severe side effects, including blindness.

An aid worker, Tessa, the wife of Justin, a diplomat in the British High Commission, Nairobi, and her colleague a Kenyan doctor, Arnold uncovered the conspiracy. Tessa and Arnold were brutally murdered by agents of Three Bees. Justin, who has a passion for gardening and who is "constant" in his integrity, love for and faith in Tessa, under-takes a dangerous quest to uncover the murderers. Justin is the constant gardener of the title. He succeeds in unravelling the tentacles of the Three Bees conspiracy, but at the cost of his own life.

Le Carre explains in the preface that his book is not based on real persons or corporations... "But I can tell you this, as my journey through the pharmaceutical jungle progressed, I came to realize that by comparison with reality, my story was the same as a holiday postcard". It is clear that Le Carre spent time in East Africa and did his homework thoroughly. In the novel, Le Carre voices savage criticisms of "aid" by some pharmaceutical corporations, which donated "30-year-old drugs for malaria... getting million-dollar tax breaks for their generosity, plus saving a few millions of warehousing costs and the cost of destroying old drugs they can't tell" (475).

He lambasts the aid world for its 3Rs; replication rivalry, and rationalization.

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## Nina' Mba's **Insider / Outsider's** **Account**



# The New Global Enemy

the local politicians and officials, who pocket huge bribes, and the western contractors and arms suppliers who walk away with big profits. The victims are the man in the street, the uprooted, the poor, and the very poor. (167)".

As an aid worker explains, "A big part of the grain we drop is grown in Northern Sudan. The aid agencies buy Khartoum grain. Khartoum uses the money to buy arms for the war against the south. The planes that bring the grain to Loki (refugee camp in Southern Sudan) use the same airport that Khartoum's bombers use to bomb

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the Southern Sudanese villages. Why is the UN financing the bombing of Southern Sudan and feeding the victims at the same time?"

Le Carre notes bitterly the culture of the food bag in

"Nigeria's recent experiences in Borno state with Pfizer's anti-meningitis vaccine and Procter and Gamble's "Always" sanitary pads show how relevant concerns about the international pharmaceutical industry are. The allegations of malpractice in both instances were unfounded but the fact that they were raised and the hysteria that resulted in showing how afraid people are of being exploited by the big drug companies and how vulnerable we all are"

Southern Sudan. "Broken or hole, these white synthetic fibre bags, stamped with the initials of the World Food Programmes, are as much a staple commodity of South Sudan as the food they bring (472). This brings back memories for me of the Nigerian

Civil War relief programmes in Biafra.

Le Carre expresses bitter criticisms of Kenya's government under Arap Moi

"...Moi who cannot manage a flea circus with the assistance of his entire cabinet even if there was money in it for him (306). Kibera, a slum in Nairobi of 4 million people, is described graphically '...the valley is rich in deposits of sewage, plastic bags, colorful stands of old clothing, banana and orange peels, cobs."

Nigeria's recent experiences in

ment of Russia and Nigeria, the Noga company, the ANZ bank, and the Abacha family. Even a cursory reading of the judgment (courtesy: This ay, March 3) reveals a rich treasure trove for any writer of political, legal, and criminal thrillers, blockbusters, soap operas, and Hollywood/Bollywood film scripts.

An earlier novel of Le Carre is entitled, *The Looking Glass War*, which would be an apt description of this case which is like the sending into Alice's Wonderland. The judge himself seems to perceive the narrative potential of the case, "Even if the complex issues concerning the events of 17 and 24 September are not amenable to the language of inherent probability... so that in essence the whole narrative, Abuja and London, has to be seen as a whole." On Kanu Agabi, a former Nigeria attorney general, the puzzled judge asks, "What am I to make of this?" and concludes, "the attorney general's mind did not go with his pen."

The scam/stingy/scandal involved an international cast of Russians, Nigerians, Swiss, Lebanese, British, Israelis, and Americans. Two family dynasties confronted each other: Abacha, his wife, uncle, and son, Nessim Gaon, his wife, son, daughter, and son-in-law. Private eyes taped telephone calls and conversations, a video film of evidence given by Mohammed Abacha in prison in Lagos, Baguda's secret notebook, betrayals, murders, blackmail, inordinate greed and theft on a monstrous scale ....all grist to the writer's mill.

The problem, however, is trying to find the hero and the "goodies" in the cast of rogues. The role probably goes to Obasanjo as the anti-corruption crusader, to the Swiss magistrate who pursued his investigations against all odds, and the lawyer for the Nigerian government, Chief Akin Delano. The victims? The people of Nigeria, trapped in the web of corruption spun by Abacha and his collaborators, exploited by political machinery as dangerous to the welfare and health of the masses as any international pharmaceutical conglomerate.

Borno State with Pfizer's anti-meningitis vaccine and Procter and Gamble's Always sanitary pads show how the international pharmaceuticals industry is. The allegations of malpractice in both instances were unfounded but the fact that they were raised, and the hysteria that resulted, show how afraid people are of being exploited by the big drug companies and how vulnerable we all are.

Despite the radical changes in settings, action, and theme, Le Carre is still able to tease out the material in his stock themes of betrayal, complexity and perfidy, especially in the British establishment. The *Constant Gardener* is evidence of Le Carre's versatility and the range of his imaginations and his passionate concern for freedom and justice.

Should Le Carre be wondering about what next to write on, I wish he or John Grisham or Frederic Forsyth or best of all, a Nigerian writer, will look at the recent judgment given in the Commercial Court in London in the case concerning the govern-