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Delving into Chief Obafemi Awolowo's politics

A report by Ayo Onatola on the public presentation of the book, **OBAFEMI AWOLOWO AND THE MAKING OF REMO: THE LOCAL POLITICS OF A NIGERIAN NATIONALIST** by Insa Nolte, which was held in London recently.

THE epoch-making event to celebrate the launch of a well-researched publication on the Sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, by a German and lecturer on African Culture at a UK-based university in this 21st century is affirmative of the personality of AWO, as a prophet without honour in his place, but discovered outside the Nigerian shore to be an epitome of exemplary leadership and a credible manager of men and resources, which future leaders should see as a role model in the enthronement of enduring democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

In the centenary year of his birth, precisely on October 6, 2009, there was a remarkable acknowledgement of the good deeds of one of the foremost Nigerian politicians, the leader of the Yoruba people in Nigeria and the Sage, Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo, SAN, GCFR at an event organized by the International African Institute, London, in collaboration with the Obafemi Awolowo Foundation, and Edinburgh University Press.

The event, which was anchored by Professor J.D.Y. Peel, General Editor, International African Library Series, took place at the Brunei Suite, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Russell Square, London. The two-hour long programme was witnessed by a large turnout of the eminent Nigerians in diasporas, representatives of various community development associations including some other Nigerians who flew into Britain from all over the world and other members of the UK academic community.

The programme coordinator was Stephanie Kitchen, the Chair of the Publications Committee; Dr Olatokunbo Awolowo-Dosumu, the Executive Director, Obafemi Awolowo Foundation, was the Guest Speaker and the Special Guest of Honour was the Ogun State Governor, Otunba Gbenga Daniel. The *Ooni* of Ife, His Royal Majesty, Oba Okunade Sijuwade (Olubuse 11) was ably represented by Mr. Laurie Roullier.

The day was full of erudition to nearly invoking the spirit of AWO which caught the admiration of the foreigners in attendance, going by the introduction of Professor Peel, to speeches and talks presented by Dr. Awolowo Dosumu and Otunba Gbenga Daniel, all of whom cited some of AWO's philosophical sayings dating back to 1950 on what leadership and good governance entailed, but which still elude Nigeria as of today.

Dr. Awolowo-Dosumu, as the Guest Speaker, used the occasion to emphasise the essence of the Obafemi Awolowo Foundation as the research institute for the propagation of the political ideals of Chief Awolowo and what good governance is all about. She highlighted the activities of the Foundation and made reference to the hosting of seminars on such themes as *Nigeria: In search of leadership* and *Nigeria: Democracy and the Rule of law*, which is a way towards encouraging contemporary leaders, as well as citizenry, to make use of AWO's ideas in our

quest for national development.

The Executive Director of the Obafemi Awolowo Foundation did acknowledge the extent of thorough research that was undertaken by Insa Nolte which culminates in the quality book she authored. Dr. Awolowo-Dosumu was quick to add that it is a rich book on the life and times of her father, not only as a frontline Nigerian politician, but someone who, along with his political associates, viewed public offices as opportunities to diligently serve the people.

According to Awolowo-Dosumu, AWO's record indicates that he reproduced the "general cultural politics of Remo - an ethic of enlightenment, accountability and duty to the community" through the Action Group Government of 1952-59. She reinforced the author's description of AWO that "he was respected by his peers for advocacy on their behalf". He was a proud and principled man who did not tolerate what he perceived as injustice and was certainly not prepared to make baseless promises or profess sentiments he did not feel".

Speaking further, Dr. Awolowo-Dosumu said politics to AWO meant that "election promises were made to be kept" and this value made him to be a "Man of the People". Dr Awolowo Dosumu noted that many present-day politicians in Nigeria like to identify with the name AWO irrespective of the variance of their political leanings to that of the Awolowo's political family. She further observed that Insa has touched on some issues which could open ways for further research in future, either by Insa or other researchers, so that "we will increasingly understand the factors that went into the making of the transformational leader that AWO was in life and the extraordinary phenomenon that he has become in death".

As part of the concluding remarks on her nine-page speech, the Executive Director of the Obafemi Awolowo Foundation re-validated the position of the author that what AWO did was to use his prodigious talents to re-affirm and apply traditional, and timeless values of honourable leadership and responsible citizenship to his time, contrary to the erroneous claim that AWO came before his time; the result is the phenomenon that we celebrate today. She referred to the final paragraph of Nolte's book which reads: "the commitment of Remo's rural constituents to political participation suggests that, despite the authoritarian interventions of the colonial and postcolonial state the potential for political transformation and reform exists at the Nigerian grassroots."

Dr Awolowo-Dosumu in her final submission, quoted the last paragraph of AWO's autobiography published 49 years ago, which according to her, is hard to find, as follows: "But in order that our independence may be worthwhile, it is urgent and imperative that we should plan on a much bolder and grander scale. To this end, the governments of the Federation must avail themselves of the

who exhibited transparency, integrity, doggedness and clear commitment to cherished ideals in governance. He stated that, to AWO, politics was not for personal enrichment or treasury looting as exemplified in the events leading to his vacation of Premiership of the Western Region for Late Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola in order to vie for the headship of the Federal House, which he lost.

Otunba Daniel further debunked the claim by some opponents that AWO was a tribal leader. He said rather, AWO was a distinguished democrat and the best President that Nigeria never had. As the head of Government in the defunct Western Region of Nigeria, he successfully implemented free education, free health care, integrated rural development and gainful employment.

It is against this backdrop that the governor declared modelling his programmes after AWO's laudable achievements as his own way to mobilize the people of Ogun to keep faith with the Legendary AWO. He pledged his determination to continue whatever AWO symbolizes while he lamented on the game of deceit played by some politicians, who often dress to look like AWO whereas their activities are incomparable to what AWO stood for on what good governance is.

The author of the book, Insa Nolte, lectures at the Centre for West African Studies, University of Birmingham. Insa, a German, married to a Briton, dressed gorgeously to the occasion in a Yoruba tailor-style gown which was specially designed and adorned with the photograph of AWO to commemorate the centennial birthday of the Late Sage in March 2009. She was accompanied by a few colleagues from her university, together with her father, Prof Hans Heinrich Nolte and husband, Prof Simon Green.

Insa Nolte won the heart of everyone in the audience as she made a speech prepared in three different languages, namely: Yoruba (Nigerian), German and English. She was indeed comfortable to speak much at length in Yoruba, which appears to be jaw breaking to an average German or British citizen. Insa used the opportunity to express her gratitude for the large turn-out of invited guests and the media people. She also acknowledged with thanks the support she received from many individuals and notable organizations she enumerated.

The publishers were overwhelmed to see all the copies of the book brought to the venue bought and not able to meet the demand for the book by other interested readers.

Finally, Professor J.D.Y. Peel used the occasion to present a plaque of the Eminent Personality Award of the Best Governor of the Year 2009 on behalf of the Board of Directors of Music & Movies Entertainment Limited (publishers of M&M Magazine), United Kingdom to the Ogun State, governor, Otunba Gbenga Daniel.

Briefly

Yinka Shonibare to exhibit in US

IGERIAN-born British artist, Yinka Shonibare, will between November 10, 2009 and March 7, 2010, exhibit some of his works at the Smithsonian Institute in the United States of America.

Shonibare, who was born in England in 1962 and raised in Nigeria, currently lives and works in London, where he has gained international attention by exploring issues of race and class through a range of media that includes sculpture, painting, photography, and installation art.