

# OKIKE

AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING



NUMBER 9

EDITED BY CHINUA ACHEBE

# OKIKE

*An African Journal of New Writing*

Published three times a year

Number 9 : December, 1975

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Annual Subscription: \$9.00, £3.00, N5.00

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## Kofi Awoonor Arrested

Readers of OKIKE will be distressed to learn that Kofi Awoonor, our Contributing Editor, was arrested at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, on December 31 and has been held in detention since then. The Ghanaian authorities have not given any reason so far for his arrest and detention nor allowed his family or friends to contact him.

It is sadly ironic that Kofi Awoonor whose outstanding talent and achievement have given Ghana a place of high honour in contemporary African writing should so soon after his return to that country suffer imprisonment without charge or trial.

We of this journal, which Kofi has regularly graced with his writing, do appeal to the authorities in Ghana to restore his liberty to this fine poet, novelist and literary scholar.

February 16, 1976

Chinua Achebe



Nkem Nwankwo

## THE SCAPEGOAT

"No, thank you very much," the voice, harsh and depressed, rasped through the cheap recorder, "I am no prophet. No."

"Waitin be that one?" somebody asked.

"The man just de craze" another volunteered.

The proud owner of the cheap recorder fiddled with some buttons to improve the quality of reception but only extinguished it altogether. The curious audience who were seated around a rough table laden with corked bottles of beer, jostled for places near the recorder. Urgent voices berated the owner.

"Abi you no fit play your own recorder?"

"Which kin man ne this?"

"The man na only journalist. They no sabe do anything."

"Give chance!"

"Commot for that place, you hear."

In the commotion, a few bottles of beer were overturned sending the rancid smell of beer to mix with the dead fish odour of the surrounding air. At the same time, cries of anguish announced the ruin of some favorite, shiny party dresses.

The owner of the recorder, wounded by the remarks, had snatched his possession and was angrily slouching away with it when he was halted by a shrill voice.

"Whosai ee de go?" A huge coal black hunchback was standing at the head of the table.

"Since you people no want to hear . . ."

"Shut up!" said the hunchback. "Bring that ting here make I hear."

"Yessir," said the journalist slouching back.

"Shut up!" said the hunchback for the benefit of the crowd, slashing the air with his fingers and finally bringing his right fist to the table toppling more bottles.

The crowd looked at him with great respect for he paid for all the beer.

"Give us more beer!" shrieked the hunchback adding an inaudible curse. A boy ran to him with obsequiously extended hands.

The hunchback dipped his hands roughly into the pockets of his white robes, came up empty and cursed violently. "Get

us the—you with the mouth of a pig," he gestured in the direction of the boy.

The boy stood stiffly obsequious but adamant. Young though he was, he had a vast experience of these big spenders and of their strategies of bluff when they were spent.

The hunchback searched frantically in the caverns of his billowing robes and still came up with nothing. None of the other drinkers offered to help, instead there was an unusually loud chatter as if to drown the embarrassment of the moment.

"Wey madam, you son of a —?"

"I de here," said madam who apparently had been keenly interested from a distance. A huge mass of flesh lumbered from a strategic corner of the pub and stood before the hunchback.

"Oga, wetin?" she asked deferentially.

"That thing with the —" the hunchback made a threatening lunge at the boy who retreated in mock fear and good-naturedly humoured the hunchback from the safety of distance.

"But, oga, we no sell for credit," said madam in as wheedling a tone as she could manage.

"Who want credit?" shrilled the hunchback dipping futilely into the robes again. Finally, it occurred to him to try his trousers and this time his hands came up clutching a few sodden notes which he tossed to the madam. She handed the notes to the boy with a wink of approval, and then instead of returning to her place placidly settled among the drinkers.

The pub which was variously known as Hilton Palace or Paradise was a sprawling shed made of wood and rusted aluminum. The drinkers had laid small rough tables end to end to make a party table, which dominated the long rectangular eating room. It was a busy morning; other customers came and went leaving half-eaten food and wet tables around which flies clustered.

The rest of the building was cut into little cages. In one, a dumb and deaf waiter guarded a huge refrigerator and from it reluctantly dispensed beer. In the next, a blowsy woman ladled out bowls of garri mixed with palm-oil stew.

There were other poky rooms, rented by the hour. Men constantly led sour-looking women into these. They would emerge, a few minutes later, with expressions of sheepish discontent.

























































































































































































































































































































