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One moment of state terrorism in Africa

The Parachute Drop; by Nobert Zongo; Africa World Press; Inc; Trenton; NJ; USA; 2004; 173 pages

Novel

By Tunde Fatunde

THIS novel written in French, with the title Parachutage, was crafted by late Nobert Zongo, a journalist from Burkina Faso who was murdered under mysterious circumstances along the highway of his country. The killers are yet to be apprehended. This work of art was translated into English by Dr Christopher Wise, an Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington, California, USA.

The original preface to the novel, an unusual literary technique, was written by the author. It contained ominous signs that he was stepping dangerously on powerful toes. When he sent by courier service, the finished version of the novel to Edition Clé, a publishing house in Yaounde, Cameroon, security agents in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, intercepted it.

During interrogation Nobert, recounted how he was given series of blows across his face before he was sent into detention for three months without trial. Why? *The Parachute Drop* was considered a subversive novel and the author was labelled a "serious threat to the State".

The novel commences with a detailed description of instruments of power and terror in the hands of one single individual called "President God Gouama, guardian of the destiny of several million people, a shrine to the imaginary Democratic Republic of Watinbow."

Gouma who came to power through a bloody military coup eventually created a one- party State and was declared: Clairvoyant Guide, Founding Father, the beloved leader and the creator of everything.

Backed by an influential foreign adviser Marcel, General Gouama was supported by Father Paul, a catholic priest because of Gouma's fervent hatred for Marxism believed to be the source of instability in the country. He jailed and murdered several Marxist students' union leaders. He also eliminated his imaginary enemies in the country's armed forces. With the assistance of Marcel, the foreign adviser, Gouama stole from the State treasury millions of American dollars and kept them in his private bank accounts in USA and Switzerland.



His penchant for "free sex" with under-aged girls was unlimited. Gouma's patronage and obedience of local fetishism and cannibalism was tied to his strong belief that some individuals are always plotting to overthrow him. One of the charlatans gave him the following instructions: "Your Excellency, you cut open the belly of a black calf and insert the severed breasts and vagina of a pregnant woman. All this must be done in the casket of a man buried in a cemetery. On the third day, we will extract the three teeth from a skull buried just for you. You must swallow one of the teeth. The two others will be set into a magnificent cane that you must carry with you at all times. If anyone wants to steal your power, they will have to return the three the proper place, which will be practically impossible".

Gouma complied with the injunctions of the fetish priest. However, General Kodio, his Chief of Staff of the country's armed forces organised a military takeover and removed Gouama from power. He escaped to the countryside with a view to plotting his return to power with the assistance of his friend, the president of the neighbouring Republic of Zakro. At the countryside he met Mammadou, one of the students he persecuted. He accused him of selling out the country for his personal interest. Gouama went to Switzerland, collected huge amount of money and started plotting his return to power.

His "friend", the President of Zakro, betrayed him and handed him over to General Kodio. Marcel, the foreign adviser and Father Paul, the priest who previously worked with Gouama, now advised Kodio to eliminate Gouama. And the novel ended with Gouama sent to the firing squad by Kodio.

The novel contains very useful lessons. First, the only thing that is permanent in life is change. Second, nobody can dictate where and how he would die. Third, Africa's underdevelopment can only be stopped if African leaders could mobilise the human and material resources of the continent with a view to improving the working and living conditions of African peoples. Fourth, leaders of the developed world should ensure that both African leaders and their foreign collaborators do not steal financial assistance given to Africa from the developed world. Finally, Christopher Wise should be commended for his professional and technical competence in translating this political novel from French into English.