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The audience sat in hushed silence. But now and then a sigh. Then and again the shaking of the head. Not because it was sunset on 208 Sunset Avenue where the different clans gathered. But because the video-show they have come to watch was provoking, if not indeed provocative.

The documentary titled The Ones They Left Behind is a first-hand account of the African presence in Russia by Dr. Charles Quist-Adade, a professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Windsor. It is a heart-chilling story of the children of African fathers and Russian mothers after the collapse of Soviet-style communism in the former U.S.S.R. There are many heads in the groove now, but who shall save the children?

What can we do, as a people with conscience, to mitigate the effect of racial discrimination against our children? ‘Half-cast’ they are pejoratively called. But ‘bi-racial’ they are correctly indexed. They are not Black, if indeed there are any ‘black’ men on the face of the earth. Neither are they White, if anyone is ever ‘white’. Their colour lies within the continuum of brown and pink. Children of circumstances, now victims of uninformed prejudice. Could the world ever be kind? Could the society ever be humane? Could people ever be reasonable, if not charitable?

You may not have tears in your eyes as you follow the documentary. But, unless you have a heart of stone, you can’t be indifferent to the contrasts and anti-theses of your own existence. As the author summarizes, it is ‘a story of love gone sour, goodwill turned to hatred; a tale of trust and betrayal, ignorance and prejudice, bigotry and racism.’ In it you’re forced to see yourself, the pigmentation of your skin, your circumstances and position in life. You are even forced to put yourself in the picture as you ask questions about the nature of man in the world. For instance, What is in one man that makes him different from others? Does the face of others menace you because of your own feelings of inferiority or pride? The Third World Resource Centre in conjunction with the African-Russian Link, the African Community Organization of Windsor and the Iona College of the University of Windsor, made the presentation of The Bear’s Ugly Face feasible to the international audience. Recent events in Chechnya makes the Bear ever uglier.

In the very educative documentary, we realised that Black presence in Russia predated the communist revolution. Most Blacks then were sailors who later settled along the sea coast of Abkhasia, the southern part of the Russian Federation. They became so assimilated that only their skin colour differentiated them. The initial fifty families soon grew beyond five hundred along the coast. Arab traders joined the fray in the 16th and 17th centuries. Many people however migrated to Turkey after the revolution.

On the other hand, when royalties exchanged gifts between and among themselves, slaves were a commodity. Ibrahim Hannibal was presented to Peter the Great who, on sensing the Black boy’s brilliance, sent him to school in Russia and France. Then the Russian
The light came on in the cozy room after the forty-minute documentary, and there was no smiling face. God made the world and men invented borders. God made men of colours, men made races out of them. As we grow and go, we always leave people behind, can we not make the world a better place for them?