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James
Gibbs

PROFESSOR Kofi Agovi, whose sudden passing was announced as 1996 drew towards a close, was a critic and writer with wide interests and strong opinions who shouldered diverse responsibilities. He died at the height of his powers, having just been

given new responsibilities and when looking forward to tackling new projects.

Hailing from Western Ghana, with links to Half Asini and Tarkwa, Agovi was a student of English at the University of Ghana, Legon, towards the end of the Sixties. Then known as 'Jim' Agovi, he was a resident of Mensah Sarbah Hall and a member of a talented undergraduate year. As a student in a Department just beginning to rethink the role of literary studies in an African university, he benefited

from the presence in the University of Kofi Mensah, Ime Ikideh and Abiola Irele, each of whom had started to make an impact as a writer or critic.

After graduating with a good degree, Kofi Agovi proceeded to the University of Stirling to undertake further studies. There, under the supervision of Robin Mayhead, he wrote an MA thesis on novels of social change that was subsequently published in Ghana. On his return to Legon, Agovi's interest shifted from fiction to drama, and in 1979 he earned his doctorate from the University of Ghana with a thesis submitted to the Institute of African Studies, entitled 'Kundum: Festival Drama among the Ahanta-Nzema of South West Ghana.'

Periods lecturing, mostly in African Studies, Legon, but also elsewhere, including the University of Calabar, were combined with opportunities to travel beyond the sub-region

As can be seen from his essay 'Cultural Presence in Japanese Theatres: An African's Experience of Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku' published in 1984, Japan and Japanese theatrical traditions made a deep impression on him. He spent extended periods in the United States of America and continued to travel whenever possible. Shortly before his death he spent time in Norway.

Remembering

Agovi's concerns, reflected in the publications that earned him a professorship, included interest in major issues and he made trenchant contributions to important debates. Titles of particular significant essays include: 'Is there an African Vision of Tragedy in Contemporary

Kofi Agovi

African Theatre?'; 'The Aesthetics of Creative Communication in African Performance Studies'; 'The Philosophy of Communication in Traditional Ghanaian Society: The Literary and Dramatic Evidence'; 'New Directions in The Ghanaian Theatre of the Eighties' and 'Towards an Authentic African Theatre.'

Agovi was also concerned about the operation of

the mass media - of which he had first-hand experience. A selection of his writings in this field were collected together in a volume entitled *Ruling a Sovereign People* published in 1980.

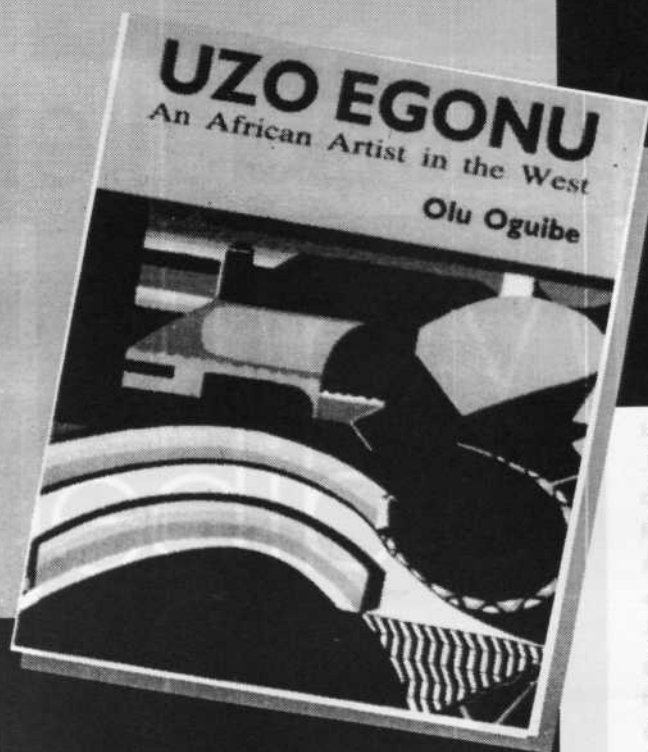
In the life of Kofi Agovi research, teaching and public affairs were combined with academic administrative tasks and to these were added numerous other responsibilities. In 1994 he proved himself as the organiser of an international conference in Accra and it seemed likely that further opportunities for similar endeavours would present themselves. Shortly before his death, he was confirmed as Director of the Institute of African Studies, Legon,



Kofi Agovi

and many looked forward to the day when he might become the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana.

At the beginning of 1996, in his capacity as Acting Director of the Institute of African Studies, he wrote a moving tribute for Mrs Efua Sutherland. No one can have anticipated that at the end of the year, the much younger Kofi Agovi would also 'dance and join the ancestors.' His passing leaves many hopes unfulfilled, and a distraught family to whom he was devoted. It also leaves those who knew him with vivid memories of a strong personality and great abilities. These will not fade. **GR**



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