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unveils the theoretical basis of an African womanist ideology with its intervening act of palaver-palava. Most practically, *Africa Wo/Man Palava* places eight Nigerian female writers and thirty novels in contemporary perspective, the texts as counter-narratives which respond to their male predecessors and contemporaries. These include the pioneering work of Flora Nwapa, the ‘juju fiction’ of Adaora Lily Ulasi, the ‘been-to’ novels of Funmilayo Fakunle, Ifeoma Okoye, Zaynab Alkali, Eno Obong and Simi Bedford. Essentially, the new writers are read as constructive activists in nation-building and their novels as narratives of nationhood.

The absence of one, if not two, remarkable new female novelists in the developing literary canon cannot however be ignored. Omowunmi Segun’s *The Third Dimple* (1992), winner of the prose fiction prize of the Association of Nigerian Authors in 1991 and Mobolaji Adenubi’s *Splendid* (1995), winner of the more prestigious All-Africa Okigbo Prize for Literature and a high contender for last year’s Noma Award could have enriched the palaver sauce in the same brief but insightful manner that Martina Nwakoby’s *A House Divided* (1985) is treated.

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**Women's voices, Dynamic voices**

*Mary Modupe Kolawole*


At a time when many observers and critics cry out that the Nigerian literary scene needs a fresh vitality, new voices and new vision have been injected into our literary production. The new anthology of short stories *Breaking the Silence* is a unique addition to existing anthologies of African short stories and a turning point in the nation’s literary canon. Its uniqueness is revealed in the title as well as the editors, two emergent female talents and the publishers, Women Writers of Nigeria. It is a landmark in diverse other ways. Since the emergence of women pioneers in the 60s, the previously male dominated literary scene has revealed the quest for feminine self-expression. The first generation of women writers including Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie and Mabel Segun have progressively attempted the crusade of self-assertion to bring to life the famous Yoruba proverb, ‘Owo ara eni la fi ntu iwa ara eni se.’ A second generation followed in the steps of their precursors to highlight the female intervention in Nigerian literature. Ifeoma Okoye, Tess Onwueme and Zaynab Alkali punctuated the creative arena to continue the womanist tradition. The third phase of Nigerian women’s writing has begun at a crucial moment. With the death of Nwapa and Sofola, some critics are beginning to hold their breath as they wonder about the continuity of women’s literary creativity in Nigeria to fill the gaps.

*Breaking the Silence* is a timely assurance both in terms of the collection of new, young and undocumented women writers and the image and scope of the anthology. Apart from two contributors, Mabel Segun and Ifeoma Okoye, the other seventeen writers are relatively new comers who made their debut in the last few years. Indeed, some of the stories are the
When is a Nation?

Segun Ayobolu


N his celebrated 1974 interview with the journalist, John Agetua after the publication of The Man Died, Wole Soyinka gave poignant expression to his perception of the social utility of literature. ‘For me’, he declared ‘a book is a hand grenade which you detonate under a stagnant way of looking at the world’. Two and a half decades after that encounter, Africa’s first Nobel literature prize winner has certainly not changed his view. His latest literary offering, characteristically provocative and captivating, is a veritable timebomb which is bound to explode indolent, self-serving assumptions as regards the parameters of the national question, the character of the State and the foundations of nationhood in contemporary Nigeria.

Spurred primarily by the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, widely believed to have been won by detained Chief MKO Abiola, The Open Sore of a Continent is perhaps the most penetrating and disturbing contribution to ongoing debate on the future of Nigeria. Along with the June 12 debacle, the Ogoni struggle and the subsequent execution of its foremost symbol, writer and environmentalist