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first to be published by their authors. The editors have injected new voices and new perspectives into African women's literature. The diversity of thematic concerns as well as the variety of form enhance the unique worth of this anthology. The format adopted by the editors provides vital biographical and bibliographical information about the contributors. Recognising the need to introduce the new comers, this format makes the Anthology a resource material of a kind.

Toying Adewale-Nduka and Omowumi Segun have broken the culture of silence with a bang. These dynamic young talents are equally poised to revitalise Nigerian curricula and encourage a reading culture. WRITA has already started a tour of some Nigerian cities to promote Breaking the Silence. These women will stop at nothing to see their dream come true in empowering young Nigerians towards a new attitude to reading and promote creative interests and skills. By putting together an exclusively female collection which is also published by women writers, women are re-inscribing and re-creating themselves in response to older writers like Molara Ogundipe-Leslie.

The themes range from traditional to contemporary and topical issues. Some stories recast oral myths and folklore in a brilliant way while most reiterate problems that are peculiar to women. Burning contemporary social reality - failed bank, corruption, the other woman and her child, extended family's intrusion, are presented with a new consciousness. Women are portrayed not as passive suffering victims like older heroines but we see women responding positively or aggressively to intimidation. Women are also presented as facing contemporary challenges and sometimes helping each other to come to terms with their problems. Specific references to feminists, Beijing and women's empowerment, and social change removes the veil of fiction to show the zeal of these writers and the urge to bring fiction close to their gender ideology. Many of the writers seem to say, 'resilience and resourcefulness will take women a long way.'

Nigerian women writers have indeed come a long way as the tellers of their own stories and the publishers of their newfound good news - to recreate themselves. These stories have shifted women's image in Nigerian literature from marginal liminal positions to the centre. These new voices are creating new images as they concern women's reality. I met these two young literary crusaders at the British High Commission in Ibadan recently. I had a chat with both Toyin and Omowumi and I was left with no doubt that these bubbling budding artists will go a long way to project Nigerian women's writing onto the threshold of renewed vigour at the turn of this century. Judging the likely trend from the genius of these duo, we are indeed at the intersection of a womanist literary renaissance.

Mary Modupe Kolawole. Associate of the African Gender Institute, recently returned from the University of Cape Town to Ife where she lectures in literature.

When is a Nation?

Segun Ayobolu


In 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 time-bomb 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