



**The Detainee**  
**A Radio Play**  
**(1965)**

# The Detainee

## Cast

KONU: WOLE SOYINKA

ZIMOLE: BANJO SOLARU

Rec: 28.8.65 (1000-1700)      Studio S.5 : Tape: 7½ TBU 382089

Duration: 27'88'

TRANSMISSION:    5.9.65 : 1118-1148 BST: East Africa : Purple  
                      8.9.65 : 1230-1300 BST: West Africa : Purple  
                      12.9.65: 1230-1300 BST: West Africa : Purple

Cue in:            'You are fat, Zimole ...'

Cue out:          '... (*Clang of Gates*)'

KONU:            Hears? Merely hearsay for you, Zimole? Aren't you in the know?

ZIMOLE:          No, Konu, I am not.

KONU:            No? Well, go on. What don't I know?

ZIMOLE:          The truth. Oh, I suppose sitting here talking to you, it is difficult to remember that you've been ... detained ... such a long time.

- KONU: So it is different, now? Someone else basks in the brightest rays of the torch?
- ZIMOLE: You've been away a long time, Konu ... much longer than I remember.
- KONU: (*Thoughtfully*) The Torch has come a long way, hasn't he? Since those fitful dreams in a London bed-sitter. But what about you? Who pushed you from the ... the centre of grace, and into the shadows?
- ZIMOLE: (*Heatedly*) Can't you keep off that subject of ME at all? I came here to see you, remember?
- KONU: So? You've seen me. First time in five years. So?
- ZIMOLE: We shouldn't quarrel. I didn't come here to quarrel.
- KONU: That's okay by me. But I don't want to talk about me either.  
*(A brief pause)*
- ZIMOLE: Your family, your children, are all right.
- KONU: But Taluba is not.
- ZIMOLE: You've heard?
- KONU: One hears news here, not always accurate, but in general ... especially personal news. The personal news is always accurate.
- ZIMOLE: I am sorry about her.
- KONU: Don't be ridiculous. If it were a simple term in gaol, that would be easier. Even life imprisonment is straightforward. You know you come out after a number of years. But preventive detention ... only a fool expects a woman to wait.
- ZIMOLE: Some women do.

KONU: I don't ask it of any woman. To say, 'Wait for ten years', that, I could do, stupid though it is. But one could still do it. But time indefinite ... you know something, Zimole?

ZIMOLE: What?

KONU: It seems to me a woman must even despise a man who got himself into that kind of mess.

ZIMOLE: What kind of twisted thinking is that?

KONU: Is it? I see a woman sitting down and saying: 'What kind of a man have I got for myself? What kind of a man is it that can be locked up just like that, just at the whim of another man like him? And for as long as that man chooses to forget him?' Well, what about that?

ZIMOLE: You are bitter.

KONU: Forgive me. I should be sweet, I know. *(A pause)* You made me forget. There was something I wanted to say.

ZIMOLE: What?

KONU: It will come back. It strikes me as being important.

ZIMOLE: *(Suddenly)* What's that?

KONU: Where?

ZIMOLE: Up there. Something moved.

KONU: That would be the spy-hole, I expect. They have to make sure you don't pass me a rope to hang myself, or a knife to slit the guard's throat.

*(A brief pause)*

*(Cell doors opening. Footsteps marching away down concrete corridor.)*

- KONU: That would be the last batch for exercise today. Everything is done in shifts. Too many at once and they could attempt to break out – that must be the reasoning behind it, right?
- ZIMOLE: But you are only detainees. I'd always thought ... I mean, what we imagine is a camp, a sort of field camp, the sort of thing a construction company might erect for its workers. Complete freedom of movement inside the camp ...
- KONU: Really, Zimole, don't try to make me believe you're as stupid as that!
- ZIMOLE: But that was the way we planned it! And I've never had cause to believe it was different. I swear. You must believe me. We even planned for things like barbers' shops, a small film theatre ...
- KONU: For your propaganda films?
- ZIMOLE: Well, undoubtedly that would come in, but so what? Only not this – it's just like a prison!
- KONU: It's taken you a long time to find out.
- ZIMOLE: I don't know how things took this form. Or when. It certainly wasn't like this at the start. I couldn't have guessed that I would find you in a prison uniform or anything like that.
- KONU: Well, it's not so bad – about the uniform, anyway. You could say the uniform has been tailored to fit the room. Those national garments of ours would be too unwieldy for our 'austerity' space. And there are no diplomats around to impress with 'magnificent robes' – that's the favourite expression of the foreign press, I remember.
- ZIMOLE: Yes ... I suppose that's true ...
- KONU: *(His tone gets more and more clipped with heavy sarcasm)*  
We are hardly the United Nations, or even the headquarters of the OAU. We are not even the prison camp of the Nazi war criminals ...

- ZIMOLE: All right. Enough now.
- KONU: So you see, you mustn't start feeling we are underdressed or anything. We have cut our coats according to our size, or at least had them adapted for our circumstances. There is no need to feel sorry for us ...
- ZIMOLE: (*With sudden violence*) But I swear to you, Konu, if I'd any idea, I ...
- KONU: Yes? What would you have done? (*Pause*)
- ZIMOLE: All right. Nothing. But understand, Konu, I won't lie to you. Even now I do not give up the idea. The principle! The necessity is totally inescapable. We are young, we are in a hurry, and there are misguided people who will never understand that some sacrifice is always necessary for a nation which means to achieve something. (*He gets progressively warmer*) The police cannot cope with everything. They are muscle-bound by what they cannot do under the old colonial laws. The judiciary is choked by all sorts of habeas corpus nonsense, which lets loose men whom they know are dedicated to obstructing the nation's progress. Progress! Progress, not hair-splitting and verbal trickeries and pseudo-idealists jargon. Just Progress! To decide on a policy and be confident that the end is the thing and it must justify the means ...
- (*Konu begins to laugh softly.*)
- No, I do not expect your reaction to be different. You have a right to be sceptical. ... Look, I only want you to believe one thing – we never designed this place for punishment, never.
- KONU: You have a very short memory.
- ZIMOLE: What do you mean?
- KONU: That speech, every word of it is familiar. Oh, maybe the arrangement has varied somewhat. I can see you've been gaining experience. But it took me right back to the House of Assembly, and you under the towering symbol of the Torch, seconding the

motion for the Preventive Detention Act. You were so ludicrous, you and your dramatics, spinning round in one of the hammiest gestures ever seen in any professional theatre and screaming – ‘That Torch, that Torch, is meant to be a guiding light. But we must never, never hesitate to use it as a fire, to scorch obstructive undergrowth!’

*(He collapses, laughing.)*

ZIMOLE: Yes, and then you got up to reply ... was it then? ... Yes, you did. You couldn’t wait to reply, I remember.

KONU: *(Who hasn’t stopped laughing)* Yes, I couldn’t resist sending up your performance there and then.

ZIMOLE: Madness! It was plain madness!

KONU: Oh, I had yet to learn that tyrants cannot afford a sense of humour. It’s the weapon they fear most.

ZIMOLE: *(Shouting)* I was not offended! If you think I had anything to do with it ...

KONU: You? Do you think I meant you? What were you but a mouthpiece, even at that stage?

ZIMOLE: But there was no need to push it as far as you did. I interceded and you were even placed on the Implementation Committee. You should have accepted.

KONU: Yes, that was what you told me. For you, I had only been playing to the gallery, nothing worse. My poor friend, my poor loyal intercessor – tell me, have you never heard the lines of that American Negro poet, I forget the name; anyway, they go something like this:

Because my mouth is large  
With laughter, do you not know  
I cry?  
Because I dance, do you not know  
I die upon my feet?

Roughly those sentiments anyway ... Listen, those are more dancing feet for you.

*(Footsteps approaching down corridor: sound of returning prisoners: cell doors clang shut.)*

ZIMOLE: You mean that's all the time they are given for exercise?

KONU: It's enough. A short evening stroll, what more can a man desire? Now they can go back to staring at the wall, examining cracks. Or else reading the autobiography of Haruzai, and his volumes of political philosophy – written by his team of ghost-writers.

ZIMOLE: Is that all the reading matter they allow you?

KONU: Don't bother to look round my cell, you won't find any. I cut jig-saw puzzles out of the page, just to pass the time. Tell me something. When will the man start to write his own books?

ZIMOLE: How could he find the time?

KONU: Then let him stop making a fool of himself. Even a child must know he didn't write those things. *(He goes again into a soft chuckle.)* Oh, but the man is a vain thing, vain, and anxious to be all and everything.

*(A pause)*

ZIMOLE: How many of you are in this camp?

KONU: You expect me to know that? Everything about us is top secret. If I suddenly publicised to the world the fact that I am a preventive detainee, I would probably get arrested for being in illegal possession of classified secrets.

ZIMOLE: The reason I asked ... when I came in, you know, walking in the courtyard, I couldn't help feeling, there were so many eyes, watching me. All the way, just eyes, eyes. The space was so empty and huge, endless when I tried to walk round it – I was waiting for the guard to complete his checking you see – so



I walked all the way round. It's fully enclosed by that smooth wall, isn't it? So pointless. I don't see any reason for the wall. It was broken only at the main gate, through which I came. Isn't that the only entrance?

KONU: I don't remember.

ZIMOLE: You don't remember? Don't you exercise with the others in the courtyard?

KONU: I am not allowed in the courtyard. I exercise only in the corridors between that wall you are talking about, and the front-line of the cells. Goes round in a smooth egg-shaped circle. Should say oval, shouldn't I? And that's all I ever see. I've never been in the courtyard. Not that it makes any difference. I could tell you everything about that courtyard. The colour of the earth, the size of it, even the way the others have worn it smooth. It's one of my favourite diversions, listening to the faint steps of the others, saying to myself, now there are twenty pairs of feet, now there are twelve – that's usually the second shift ... Once – I've longed to tell someone this – once I thought I heard footsteps which were different, but not just different, definitely hostile, treacherous, I could only think that they were spies, slipped in among the prisoners to find out if any hanky-panky was going on ... I was quite sure of it. And sure enough, they were followed by whispers. And that was strange, you see, because they are not allowed to speak during exercise. You never hear anything normally except the voice of the guards. Anyway, what could I do? I had no way of warning them. And who would I warn? It's so dangerous to trust anyone these days. Even your own brother.

ZIMOLE: Konu! Konu! For God's sake don't stare like that; what's the matter with you?

KONU: I wasn't looking at you!

ZIMOLE: I never said you were.

KONU: I wasn't looking at you! Don't think I was looking at you.

ZIMOLE: All right, all right. I've said I believe you. I never accused you anyway.

KONU: Zimole.

ZIMOLE: What?

KONU: Don't be angry now, but honestly, the way your neck spills over your collar. Tell me, do you have to wear a collar?

ZIMOLE: You promised ...

KONU: I know, I know ... but the guard now ... for a man like him... But why do I say, for a man like him? How do I know what sort of a man he is? We come from different tribes and he doesn't speak a word of any language but his own godforsaken jargon.

ZIMOLE: What about the guard?

KONU: What about him?

ZIMOLE: You had just begun to say something about him.

KONU: Oh ... just that ... Oh yes ... now he, he isn't fat, not a bit. A perfect servant, by the way, rather like you in a way. He does exactly what he's told ... now don't interrupt ... didn't you meet him on the way? He's quite a specimen. By the way, have you seen Haruzai yet?

ZIMOLE: When? I don't understand.

KONU: No, no. Not your Haruzai, the holy Torch. I meant mine. My little mouse. I'll tell you something. I don't believe all that fairy-tale of prisoners who caught mice in their cells and made friends and companions of them. I should know, I've tried. Well, that guard, that dumb and deaf guard, he's allowed to play Ludo with me every Monday and Tuesday, and Snakes-and-Ladders every Wednesday. Thursday, nothing. Friday, nothing. On Saturday he comes here with a transistor radio, and together we listen to the running commentary on the football match. On Sunday he comes in the morning with the same radio set, and

turns on a church service. And that's the lot. Ludo, Snakes-and-Ladders, football match and a Sunday service. And he never utters a word himself.

ZIMOLE: It's nearly time, Konu. I'll have to go soon.

KONU: He'll come when it's time. He's never late or early. Our games, for instance, last one hour. One hour only. And once, when the football match was a draw, and the teams lined up for the extra time, he turned the noise off and took himself away. Just like that. Obviously his orders were for one hour. No more. He obeys orders.

ZIMOLE: Konu ...

KONU: I was telling you about my friend Haruzai, the little rat. Well, maybe mouse or rat, I've never learnt the difference. But either African rats are simply stupid, or African prisoners are even stupider. But I've never been able to make a friend of that creature. He eats my food and runs away. What do you think of that?

ZIMOLE: What do I think?

KONU: Well, go on, you must have a theory. (*His voice gets slowly angry*) Haruzai comes in here, eats my food and scuttles off before I can teach him to play Snakes-and-Ladders. Am I stupid, or is he? Go on, answer me or get out!

ZIMOLE: I don't know.

KONU: You don't know? Men can be trained to do just as they are told. Even a university graduate and doctor of philosophy like my guest Zimole. But why not that camp rat? Two years I've been at it, and he doesn't want any part of my plans!

ZIMOLE: Two years! Maybe not the same rat.

KONU: (*Bursts into a long laugh*) I see the old brain is still working. Not yet wholly smothered by that fat, eh, Zimole? You know ... even your skull is fat. Yes, fat, if you don't believe me, press your finger in it. See? See? Here, give me your hand ...

ZIMOLE: Stop it, Konu !

KONU: No ... go on, give me your hand ... that's it, just the fingers ... now press in ... eh? What do you feel, eh? Bone or fat, tell me, bone or fat?

ZIMOLE: All right, all right. Let's leave it.

KONU: Now, bring them here. Press them down into mine ... like that. Feel the difference eh? Eh? What did I tell you? Not that it's anything to worry about, I mean, the way you got out of that problem – perhaps it isn't the same rat – I mean, that's really the old brain still ticking fast. We knew what we were doing when we put you in charge of the ideology.

ZIMOLE: I must go.

KONU: Before your time?

ZIMOLE: I'm sure it's nearly time.

KONU: You leave that to me. Time, I can measure time with my eyes closed. Not any time, mind you. Just the hour. That's what that guard has done for me. That's a kind of trade, I suppose. I could set clocks and watches, now. You know, once, just for practice, I decided to time the mildew in that corner ... have you seen it? ... I thought I'd see how fast it spread by the hour. Difficult task you know, but I did it. Watched it for eight weeks ...

ZIMOLE: Konu!

KONU: What?

ZIMOLE: Please, I want you to listen. I ... I just wanted to ask, is there anything I can do for you?

KONU: Is there ... something ... you can ... do for me?

ZIMOLE: Yes. And please, Konu, please, let's talk about that for the few minutes we have left.

- KONU: Did you ... come all this way just to ask me that?
- ZIMOLE: Never mind about that now. Please answer what I ask you.
- KONU: That's it! Remember? I said there was something I'd forgotten. I ... I ... wanted to let you know that I heard you've been looking after my children ... since Taluba deserted them. I want to tell you I'm grateful.
- ZIMOLE: You have nothing to thank me for.
- KONU: Just the same ...
- ZIMOLE: I said there is nothing. Nothing now or ever. Don't thank me.
- (Pause)
- KONU: The eldest should be ...
- ZIMOLE: Seventeen.
- KONU: Yes ... seventeen. That's correct. Twelve when I ... went to my first detention camp. I suppose ... I was thinking of them, when I made my first attempt to escape. Made two more after that. All bungled. I was never a man of action.
- ZIMOLE: Konu, I have something to tell you.
- KONU: You have?
- ZIMOLE: Last night, there was another ...
- (Sound of boots coming up corridor: distant)
- ZIMOLE: I told you the time was nearly up. That must be your ...
- KONU: Never. I know the hour, I tell you, and it isn't one yet.
- (The tramp-tramp moves nearer. Obviously several boots)

ZIMOLE: That's quite a number of them.

KONU: Six to be exact.

ZIMOLE: Why are you so sure?

KONU: You should ask 'how'. 'How am I so sure?' Then I could answer, by experience. Anyway, that is not my guard, but six pairs of boots marching in strict precision. Plus one civil pair of shoes, shuffling without character, in between them. In short, a new detainee for the camp.

ZIMOLE: I ... didn't know of any.

KONU: Wait!

*(Tramps of boots: near now.)*

KONU: No, I was wrong. I don't hear the seventh man.

ZIMOLE: You mean the prisoner?

KONU: I don't hear a seventh man.

ZIMOLE: What does that mean?

*(Boots come to a military halt: but no vocal orders.)*

ZIMOLE: They've stopped.

KONU: By the guard's room. I can tell exactly where they stopped, you see?

ZIMOLE: What could they want?

KONU: There is only one answer. It's never happened before, at least not since I was moved here. But they must have come to take someone out.

ZIMOLE: I know of no decision to release anybody.

KONU: Who said anything about release! Transfer most likely. But where to? That's what I'd like to know. Isn't this supposed to be your maximum security camp?

ZIMOLE: Maybe ... yes, I think it must be new security measures. There have been ... disturbances in the capital.

*(Tramp of boots: nearer.)*

KONU: Listen! They've started up again. And ... oh ... this time there is a seventh man.

ZIMOLE: Maybe you were right after all. They could be shifting a detainee.

KONU: No. I didn't hear any cell open ...

*(The boot-tramp drowns them, and comes to a halt right outside Konu's cell. There is a brief manoeuvre, as if the soldiers are taking up positions on either side of the door. Then silence, and one lone pair of boots retreating down the corridor – a mere shuffle by contrast.)*

ZIMOLE: *(He is whispering now)* But they've stopped outside here.

KONU: And that is my guard, waddling back to his little hole. I know the mindless shuffle of his boots.

*(A brief pause.)*

Why have they come, Zimole? Did you bring them? Why are they guarding the door?

ZIMOLE: I ... don't know ... anything about it. But I can guess.

KONU: Am I to be transferred?

ZIMOLE: I give you my word, I don't know anything. Listen, Konu, what I was beginning to tell you ... there has been a new riot. And another attempt was made on the President's life.

KONU:           *(Bursts into a harsh laugh)* And they think I organised it from here?

ZIMOLE:       No, I ... Konu, stop it !

KONU:           *(Still laughing, nearly hysterical)* Oh my comedian god of Africa ... and they bungled it as usual, I expect?

ZIMOLE:       *(Intense whisper)* For God's sake! You forget the soldiers are right outside your cell.

KONU:           *(Still laughing)* That Haruzai was born lucky, or simply born among fools. Ah, Haruzai, how poetic I was in those days ! 'The Torch'. I thought up that name, didn't I?

ZIMOLE:       *(Brusquely)* I don't remember.

KONU:           You or I – which one of us did?

ZIMOLE:       What are you trying to do, Konu? At least keep your voice down!

KONU:           But you must remember how that inspiration came! Yes, it was I after all. I thought that one up, I was always the polite one. Mind you, one could say that some of the credit goes to that cross-eyed landlady. If she hadn't objected to the lights being on so late, and switched off the damned thing ... symbolic, eh? The Torch being born of darkness and all that ... Hey, Zimole, have you thought how much influence British landladies seem to wield on African nationalism? Eh? Have you?

ZIMOLE:       *(With angry impatience)* I haven't made a serious study of it.

KONU:           But you should. You should! Didn't one landlady write the national anthem of Nigeria? No, two of them. One wrote the music and the other the words. And if our landlady hadn't switched off the lights right in our faces, I couldn't have thought up 'The Torch'. No wonder they all bring their landladies home for independence celebrations. Have you noticed that, Zimole?



- ZIMOLE: Konu, I have something very important to tell you.
- KONU: Haruzai, the Torch! A flash of inspiration in every sense. And everything fell in place after that. The flag, the symbol, the anthem, the slogan, the ideology – EVERYTHING! A brown, dark brown flag – the colour of cocoa, I think we said; a map of the magnificent continent and then, right in our little corner of it, the Torch, whose rays penetrated every nook and corner, and the seas beyond it.
- (He bursts into another bout of wild laughter.)*
- ZIMOLE: *(Shouting desperately)* You HAVE to listen, Konu!
- KONU: So the Torch was nearly put out last night, eh? So they nearly pissed on the sacred flame?
- ZIMOLE: *(Wearily)* Yes, Konu.
- KONU: Eh? What did you say?
- ZIMOLE: I said yes. But they missed.
- KONU: *(Suddenly sobered)* Oh yes, so you said, ... I remember now.
- ZIMOLE: Konu ... I am sorry ...
- KONU: So am I.
- ZIMOLE: No, no, I'm trying to tell you ... your son ...
- KONU: Eseki!
- ZIMOLE: He was arrested early this morning.
- (A pause)*
- KONU: You are ... you couldn't be mistaken ...?
- ZIMOLE: You forget, he lived with me. There were boots up to my door this morning, the house was ringed with soldiers and they took him away.

- KONU: And what do you think?
- ZIMOLE: You mean ... whether he was really involved?
- KONU: Was he?
- ZIMOLE: Does it matter?
- KONU: No ... no ... I suppose not ...
- ZIMOLE: I... if there is anything I can do ...
- KONU: *(His voice rises from near musing to a bitter note)*  
Rats, cockroaches, running drainages ... I was going to say, I can hear an open drainage from at least two hundred yards, you know that? And when I hear it, I ask, whose blood is flowing in the gutter? Whose weak, criminally impotent tears? Whose black colour has washed into that universal filth, and shown him up in the white complexion we so easily called bestial?
- ZIMOLE: Well, wasn't it?
- KONU: Yes, it was, and is. In fact, it was a white hand that signed the order to confine me in this hell-hole, wasn't it? Well, wasn't it?
- ZIMOLE: Don't blame Haruzai. Blame his advisers, the sycophants who surround him and lie to him.
- KONU: Your faith, Zimole, is touching.
- ZIMOLE: *(Desperately)* The idea is still good, it is still noble and redeeming. There was nothing wrong in what we planned, what we fought for. Even the man whom we chose to lead. Nothing.
- KONU: Except cola nut.
- ZIMOLE: What? What about cola nut?
- KONU: That other boy ... from Nigeria, I think ... remember his favourite prayer?

May the cola nut of power swell our cheeks, but never our heads;  
let it stain our teeth red, but never our hands ... remember now?

ZIMOLE: Yes. And his definition.

KONU: I don't recall that one.

ZIMOLE: 'Power', he always said, 'should be as the bitter cola nut, to be  
tasted only, not eaten for a feast'.

KONU: Yes, it all comes back ... bit by bit ... bitter by bitter.

ZIMOLE: (*Sharply*) Your son is over sixteen, Konu.

KONU: (*Quietly*) I know. He may hang.

ZIMOLE: I don't really know him at all; he always kept to himself.  
Spoke very little. I wasn't allowed to speak to him, so I couldn't  
even tell you what I myself suspect. My first thought, in fact,  
was that it was all a plot to discredit me finally. The last two  
years have been rough.

KONU: Whatever happens, don't place yourself in any danger. If  
necessary denounce him. I mean that, denounce him. If he is my  
son, he will understand.

ZIMOLE: Meaning, the way you also understand.

KONU: Let's not talk about that. All I say is, if he was involved in  
any way, he knew what he was doing. Don't try to shield him.  
He will have no regrets.

ZIMOLE: Let's wait and see.

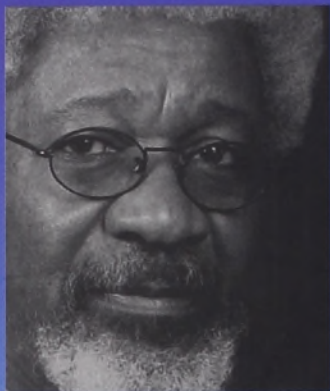
KONU: We all do what we want to do, what we think needs to be  
done as long as we find the courage for it. If my son found the  
courage, then he can take whatever comes. Don't endanger  
yourself.

(*The guard's footsteps approach.*)

- KONU: There is my dutiful friend now. Your time is up.
- ZIMOLE: (*Urgently*) What I came to ask you is, do you want me to send the other children out? I can, now, without danger. Later, it mightn't be so easy. I am fast becoming a marked man myself, and this last business ... after all, Eseki was my ward ...
- KONU: Send them to a relation, but not out of the country.
- ZIMOLE: You haven't thought! That was only your typically stubborn reaction!
- KONU: No. They must not stay with you any longer – that much is clear. I mean, for your own safety, they must remain here, within the country.
- ZIMOLE: Think. For heaven's sake think. If the worst happens they shouldn't be here. Let them grow up in a little freedom outside this ... this hell!
- KONU: (*Very quietly*) If the worst happens, they should be here. Let them know what fear is, so they can choose to fight it or live with it. I want them all to have that choice. Don't take them out of the country, Zimole. If you do, don't ever come near me again.
- ZIMOLE: As you wish.
- KONU: In so far as I can wish, or will anything, do this for me. Leave them here.
- ZIMOLE: All right.
- KONU: And now, your hour is up. (*Suddenly he is chuckling silently.*)
- ZIMOLE: What now?
- KONU: Forgive me. I suppose I was staring again. But really, that neck of yours! It really is a sight!
- ZIMOLE: Good-bye, Konu.

*(A heavy, long-drawn sound of metallic gates being drawn shut, a heavy clang and a slam of bolts, a very final kind of sound.)*

THE END



This is the first publication of two early plays by Wole Soyinka, *The Invention* (1959) and *The Detainee* (1965). In some ways these plays represent a seedbed for Soyinka's later and longer works – for instance, the absence of a central theme-bearing hero in *The Invention* reflects the hesitant beginnings of Soyinka's non-realist theatre. The plays show the young Soyinka as vocal commentator on the abuse of power and social injustices perpetrated by both European and African leaders.

Widely regarded as Soyinka's first play, *The Invention* depicts disturbing race-instigated events taking place in the winter of 1976 in Johannesburg, South Africa; in choosing this futuristic setting, 1976, the year in which the apartheid system would begin to crumble, the 23-year-old Nigerian playwright perhaps displays a certain prophetic power. *The Detainee* – a radio play – resembles *The Invention* in its prophetic aspect, foreshadowing the playwright's own imprisonment in 1967, but also pointing to certain aspects of Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*.

These are works of theatre, meant to reach the heart of the community through performance. Soyinka himself is acutely aware of the dynamic quality of theatre – the space of interaction between audience and stage.

'Dr Motsa has put us in her debt by bringing these plays to our attention, for they not only afford us a more complete view of the Soyinka corpus, but also enable us to grasp the thematic and expressive continuities within that corpus.'

– F. Abiola Irele

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