

Reflections of a scholar

From Walter Rodney to Collymore, the Guyana connection in our lives

A correspondent of mine from Mwanza, Tanzania, sent all Kenyans, and me, condolences on the loss of Bob Collymore, our recently fallen Safaricom chief executive. I was duly touched by the sympathies, although I had never had the opportunity to meet the legendary corporate general face to face. But, obviously, no Kenyan or East African resident can truthfully claim that they have not been touched by the activities of Collymore and his associates.

Maybe rather absurdly of me, when I heard that Bob Collymore used to play the saxophone, I was left wishing I could have listened to him blowing away, preferably to the backing of a well-thumped piano, a leisurely plucked double bass and discreetly tapped percussion. My friend Richard, a British-born educationist who has worked most of his life in East Africa, was nicknamed a "sax Maniac" in Rwanda, for his virtuosity on the sonorous instrument.

Richard was a teaching colleague of mine in Machakos, and he and I co-authored two students' guides on George Orwell and Francis Imbuga, back in the 1970s. But he and I had met many years earlier, in Makerere, where we were both graduate students, with me working on "orature" and Richard taking a post-graduate diploma in education as part of his British-sponsored Teachers for East Africa (TEA) programme.

After our Machakos days and another spell of further study, Richard taught for a few years at Kagumo TTC in Nyeri County and later worked as a consultant with the Ministry of Education, playing a crucial role in developing the integrated English teaching programme. Richard is now a native, a *mwenyeji*, indeed a relative of mine, since his spouse comes from the community of my vivyere (fellow in-laws) on the North Coast.

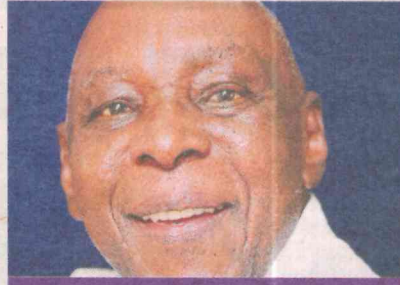
All this might sound like a digression, since we were talking about Bob Collymore, a Guyana-born Brit, who has profoundly influenced Kenyan life. But the links are obvious. Richard and I may not have made anywhere near as significant a mark on our society as Bob Collymore has. We, however, resemble him in our deep gratitude for the privilege that Kenya accorded us, and hosts of others, by letting us live and work here for our benefit and the benefit of our neighbours, who have in the process become, literally, our

relatives. We should, thus, not only mourn Bob Collymore's untimely exit but also seriously reflect on the potential contribution of people like him to our well-being and development. This is particularly important at this time when we hear and see some big cats trying to bare their xenophobic teeth and tribal claws to stir up trouble among the populace. Granted that there are and should be rules and regulations governing the presence and employment of people in our society, the threat of violence against one's neighbours is simply not acceptable.

This is all the more important in the light of the East African Community, about which I keep vociferating. I vaguely remember, for example, Rwanda announcing that all that Kenyans needed to work in that country was their national identity card. The other day, I went into a photographic shop near the Martyrs' Shrine in Namugongo, Kampala, and the shop assistants there spoke Kikamba. I was delighted. My optician, at a shopping mall nearby, is from Chogoria, I believe, and the list goes on.

Anyway, Bob Collymore's Guyanese origins set me wondering how such a small and "far away" country could have given us in East Africa such giants of social, economic and intellectual significance as Bob Collymore, Cecil Ethelwood Miller and Walter Rodney. The late Cecil Miller was our Chief Justice in the troubled late 1980s. He had, however, settled in Kenya in the 1960s, at the invitation of Mzee Kenyatta.

Walter Rodney, on the other hand, hit us like a hurricane in Dar es Salaam in the late 1960s. Those were the times of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa (socialism) and the Arusha Declaration,



AUSTIN BUKONYA

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and all revolutionary roads led to Dar es Salaam. I smugly claim Rodney as my mwalimu, although only by association, as he was a historian and we literati would only taste of his fiery rhetoric on the few occasions he gave public talks. Anyway, it was partly out of his Dar experiences that Rodney first developed his greatest legacy to Afro-diasporan thought, the uniquely incisive text, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

My most beloved and respected Guyana-connected acquaintance, however, is Prof Waveney H. Olembo of Kenyatta

University. I do not know if she remembers our being interviewed together for our Department of Literature jobs in 1978. I still recall noticing her slightly "Transatlantic" accent, in our conversation both before the interview and at the lunch that the Principal, Mr John Koinange, offered us afterwards. But I did not want to pry at the time.

In any case, Waveney Olembo and I were soon to become close colleagues and friends, and she and her husband, Prof Jotham Olembo, have always been major inspirations to me in both my professional and scholarly struggles. Prof Waveney Olembo's particularly impressed me with her hands-on approach to the much-feared genre of verse, or poetry. Her method, illustrated in her publications, like *The Music of Poetry*, has guided hundreds of her students to become not only outstanding teachers of literature but also lifelong lovers, and even creators, of verse.

Lecturing and writing were, however, only part of this energetic and highly motivated woman's activities. Apart from being a pillar of strength for her family, sometimes through very difficult times, she was, and still is, an ardent advocate of girl child education. I believe she was a leading actor in the early days of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), which plays a pivotal role in sponsoring female students and scholars all over the continent.

It may have been a long journey for Prof Waveney Olembo, from her native Georgetown, Guyana, to Nairobi. But it was certainly well worth it for Kenya and Africa.

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Bob Collymore.



Walter Rodney.



Justice Henry Cecil Miller.

Arts & Culture Diary



Richard Kimathi.

ARTIST DISPLAYS WORK ON METAL AND CANVAS

Artist Richard Kimathi is holding an exhibition of new work on metal and canvas at One Off Contemporary Art Gallery in Nairobi. Organisers say about the display, titled 'Wounds': "This is a powerful snapshot of the entire Kenyan political state of play: Though voting takes place, nothing ever changes. The actors may (sometimes) change but the plot remains the same; the entrenched elite grows richer while the growing poor grow poorer. These are the manifestations of a captured state where, in a vicious circle, a handful of people who have grown so immensely rich by the plunder of state resources, now wield an influence so strong..."

DISPLAY ON SUPREME LAW ONGOING IN CITY

Alliance Francaise de Nairobi is hosting an exhibition on a project to create an illustrated version of the Constitution. "Buni Media (producer of the political satire show The XYZ Show) has been working on adapting the Kenyan Constitution into a graphic/illustrated format to make it more accessible to all Kenyans," organisers say. "It has so far illustrated Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6 and 11. This exhibition will feature a selection of illustrations from these chapters that aim to explain and demystifying the legal jargon in an entertaining and engaging way." The display will close on July 28.

SAWTY POETRY AWARD SEEKS ENTRIES

The Sawti Poetry Prize is open for submission. Those interested in participating should respond to the following text: "Poetry as Preservation" - Exploring poems that seek to identify, rework and archive narratives of preserving a life, a language, a memory, a history or a practice". Submissions should be in English, Arabic or Swahili. The award is run by Sawti Project. "This prize is our contribution towards efforts to engage with local and diasporic East African writers," they say. For more info, go to sawti.co.uk/poetry-prize/.

By Carlos Mureithi. cmureithi@ke.nationmedia.com

WEEK'S

TODAY

'CHURCHILL SHOW' Laugh Industry will stage the Churchill Show Naivasha edition featuring Dan 'Churchill' Ndambuki tonight at the Buffalo Mall, Naivasha. Those expected to perform at the show dubbed 'Twende Naivasha' include Hamo and Sleepy David. The show will start at 7p (regular), Sh2,000 (VIP).

VANILLAS LOUNGE

The Vanillas Lounge opposite East African River, hosts rumba night rumba shows are held on Fridays. For women every Wednesday for the first 50 lady customers reggae fans, it is Reggae spot with best of reggae.

BILENGE MUSICA DU

Bilenge Musica du Cor Kalend will stage rum to tomorrow at the Dr in Nairobi's South B. Wednesday and Friday at the Benelux Lounge Doonholm in Nairobi. Entry is free.

CLASSICS SHOW IN

The Kenya National Theatre and tomorrow host the best of classics from the best of classics from the Today shows start at 7p start at 3pm. Entrance

MARTINIS LOUNGE K

The Martinis Lounge K host a variety show featuring music by the resident cocktail bar are martin mixed grilled (*nyama choma*) dishes from 6pm until

AMITIE MUSICA IN MC

Mombasa-based rum led by Crispine Tambwa the Zaituni Club. Mear perform later tonight at in Mikindani. Tomorrow perform at Backyard

JULY 20

SIR ELVIS AT HORNBI

Pop! Elvis the music dub to be Ong perf DJ C of *nyama choma* and will be jeans, boots and a show will start at 5pm

JULY 25

ERIC WAINAINA IN W

Roots International pr Live on July 25 at J's Afro-fusion musician featuring an evening of the best favourites like 'Daima' 'Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo'. ends at 11pm.

AUGUST 3

KISII NIGHT NAKURU

The D-lux Hotel opposite on August 3 host Kisii Those expected to perform Sungusia, Mr Ong'eng Babu Gee and Vucky Lawrence Nyakundi. E

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