

# WHO CARES ABOUT THE NOBEL PRIZE?

Hama Tuma

The Noble Prize for Literature. Sorry for taking time to write about a much ado for nothing. Anyways.

This time around also no journalist was waiting outside my apartment. Actually, I suspect no journalist does know where I live and worse , even, who I am .That Said those waiting outside the house of Harukami were disappointed and the hopefuls for Ngugi wa Thingo and Nureddin Farah could hardly hide their disappointment. The prize for literature was given to Kazuo Ishiguro, a Japanese born British writer of The Remains of the Day and Never Let Me Go fame. Africans and the Nobel prize being more less strange bedfellows (with few exceptions like Luthuli, Mandela, Soyinka) I did not expect any African writer to win a Nobel Prize. Which black African anti apartheid writer got the prize for literature let alone for any other category often considered beyond the capacities of the African ? Nadine Gordimer and Coetzee were white South Africans and Chinua Achebe, considered the old man of African (actually world) literature never got the prize. I hope I would be proved wrong but politically radical Ngugi seems to me hardly a candidate for the prize discerned by the dreary old men and women of Oslo. Imagine my surprise to learn that he was expecting the prize and did feel "honored" even to be considered for it by a long distance. My old friend who I had expected would do a Sartre on the Nobel body or a Benjamin Zephaniah on the Queen's OBE. The Rasta Benjamin refused to let ego win over integrity and rejected the OBE. Here is how it was presented at the time.

## " Rasta poet publicly rejects his OBE "

Merope Mills

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*The leading poet Benjamin Zephaniah has publicly rejected an OBE from the Queen in protest at British government policies, including the decision to go to war in Iraq.*

*Writing exclusively in the Guardian today, Zephaniah breaks with the convention that those rejecting honours should do so privately when he openly dismissed the award as a legacy of colonialism.*

*The Rastafarian poet argues that the very name of the Order of the British Empire reminds him of "thousands of years of brutality - it reminds me of how my foremothers were raped and my forefathers brutalised".*

Alfred Nobel invented the dynamite and fed the war machine that caused millions of victims. In any case, he stipulated that The Peace Prize, the only one awarded by a Norwegian committee, was to be presented each year to "the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses." If we look back on the persons give the Nobel Peace Prize we can clearly state that Mother Theresa, Al Gore, Henry Kissinger and lately Barack Obama, the drone man and war monger all over the world are undeserving ones. Kissinger, who should be charged for war crimes against humanity, wanted to give back the Prize (the Nobel Committees does not accept returned prizes) and Obama also did say he did not deserve it having done nothing yet.

I quote a good report on [The Norwegian Nobel Committee](#) and its tendencies:

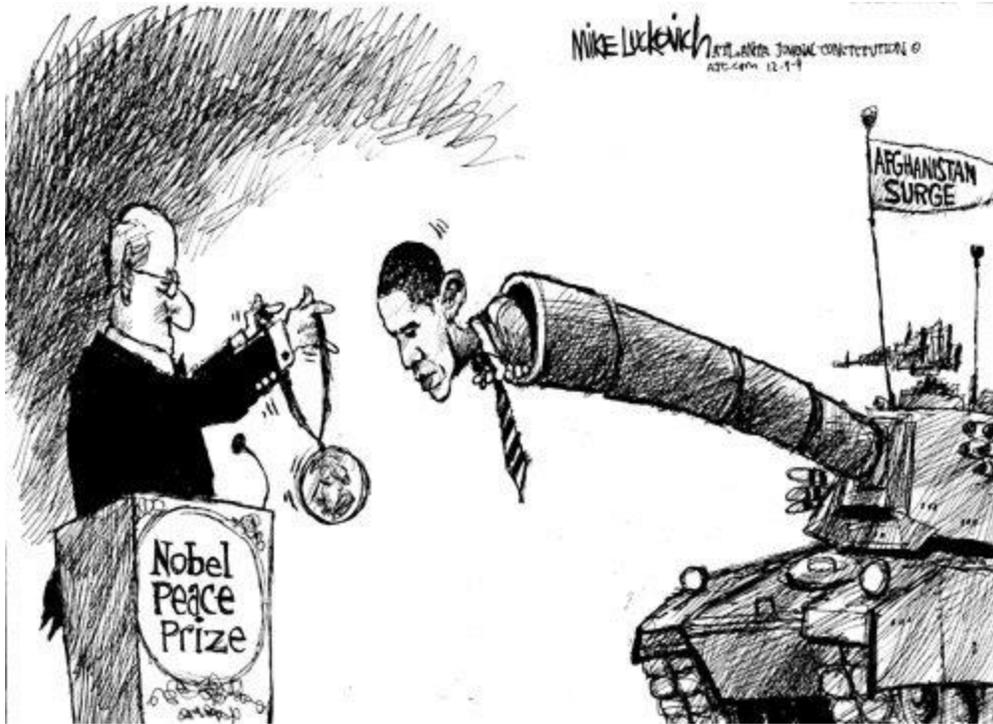
*" You can quickly find out how non-diverse the whole body is - 4 politicians and a lawyer—all of Norway. It is appointed by the Storting - Norway's parliament. This body doesn't reflect the world, nor understands its diversity. Given the homogeneity, it is very likely to reflect the bias of the committee. More than an absolute scale of achievements, it is the causes*

*that this group wants their Western audience to know about.*

*Some causes are dearer to them - sh as Irish and Israeli issues that have generated nearly a dozen Nobel laureates, while other causes not so much. Some groups such as the top US politicians get a disproportionate share of the awards (close to 15 US politicians have been awarded), as this is the only little lever a tiny nation has got over the world's superpower. The committee is made of normal people and succumb to the same set of trends and fads just like any of us. The Nobel Peace Prize is a very political award that is given mostly for what the committee wants to see rather than what they saw. Or in other words, it is ostensibly about the future than it is about the past. For instance, when Obama was given the prize as soon as he came to the office, it was not for any achievement he did. It was the Nobel Committee's pressure tactic to steer Obama into a path they think as peaceful. In 1993, they gave it to F. W. de Klerk - last South African President of Apartheid era who gave way to Nelson Mandela the following year.*

*Although it sometimes honors great individuals, the award can often be silly. In 2001, United Nations was given the award at a time when they were getting more dysfunctional & irrelevant than ever. The EU was given the award in 2012 at a time the organization was risking an implosion following the trouble in Greece & Cyprus. Yasser Arafat & Israeli leaders were given in 1994, just for getting into the same room and talking. It is not about what happened, it is about the future and not the past.*

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I am very sure that some of my friends who may claim they know me would say that my views on the Nobel prize, especially as concerns Literature, has a certain the grapes are sour tone to it. I disagree but they have the full right for their ah ahs and ho hos. Bob Dylan, for all his protest songs (in my book Joan Baez did better in this field also), claimed he never had any message and considers all art as meaningless. The prize for literature given to him is thus strange to say the least. But then again, the Nobel for medicine has been given to the Portuguese neurologist Egos Moniz who invented lobotomy and the prize for literature to Dario Fo . Why was Al Gore given the Peace prize? For his claimed invention of the internet or sudden and publicized concern for the environment? The Nobel Committee reflects Norway, a predominantly lily white conservative society that has revealed its real self by its condemnable treatment of refugees and migrants. Politically, Norway has stood aligned with the super power. In short, Ngugi is in for a waiting for Godot situation or as we say in Ethiopia waiting for a Monday that will never come. I will like to be proven wrong of course.

Our African "giants" of literature are not faulted by their prose, poems or style and skill. Their melanin is to be blamed and I still wonder how Soyinka made it in the first place. Crudely, the former French president Sarkozy said that Africa has not entered the doors of civilization. Forget Axum, Songhai, Timbuktu, Zimbabwe and all the other historical civilizations in the continent as a whole. The new French upstart called Macron also blamed our mothers and sisters for producing many children and hampering the development of the continent. Forget colonialism, neocolonialism and the glaring plunder of Africa by France itself. In the field of literature African writers have difficulties of finding a publisher to begin with. Except a few famous ones, new writers do not make it unless favored by the powers that be for their conformity with the American MFA directives. Some publishers openly tell African writers to put in their stories a white character (favorably of course) and to reduce unpronounceable names. I worry for Madagascar and Sri Lankan authors in particular. African authors who write in their own languages hardly ever find good translators and the very many translators of Daniel Steel, Jeffrey Archer, and other such authors into Amharic, for example, leave much to be desired to put it mildly. That being the case, no book written in Ngugi's mother tongue, in Swahili, Amharic, Oromigna, Somali, Shona, etc can be a candidate for any international prize.

All said I still would like to tell journalists not come to my front door next year expecting me to get the prize. The grapes maybe sour, I do not care, but I want to inform the Nobel Committee not to bother as I will not accept their prize. By the way, no Ethiopian or African source has ever given me a prize. As an Ethiopian I am very comfortable with it. As Gibbons said we Ethiopians slept for thousands of years forgetful of the world by whom we were forgotten.