

Global Safari

Global Safari:

*Checking In and Checking Out
in Pursuit of World Wisdoms,
the American Dream,
and Cosmocitizenship*

By

Zekeh Gbotokuma

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Wisdoms, the American Dream, and Cosmocitizenship

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In Memoriam



This book is dedicated to my beloved parents, **E. G. Sua** (1928-2009) and **Lucia Yenda** (1930-2013), both of whom made their transition and safari to the afterworld. My father passed away in July 2009 and my mother passed away in December 2013.

*Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine
Et lux perpetua luceat eis
Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum
Quia pii sunt.
Requiescant in pace!
May they rest in peace!
Bapema na boboto!*

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FOREWORD

ANYONE WHO KNOWS OR HAS MET THE AUTHOR OF THIS WELL-WRITTEN AND INTERESTING BOOK knows he is quite an intelligent, well-spoken, excellent writer, and ambitious man. Dr. Gbotokuma has authored two books including *Obamænon: The Gospel of Glocal Change, Hope, Understanding and Leadership for a Networking World*. He has also edited and co-edited several books including *A Pan-African Encyclopedia* (2003).

I met Zekeh S. Gbotokuma in Rome, Italy in 1982 while he was studying philosophy at the Gregorian University and I was studying medicine at Catholic University. As young African students, we strived to make a difference in Italy for all African students. Together, Dr. Gbotokuma and I formed Rome's first African student organization, called the African Students Association in Rome (ASAR).

Dr. Gbotokuma and I led delegations to represent African students at numerous political and social gatherings. His ability to speak and write French, Italian, English, and German made him very popular in the African student community as well as enabling him to present issues confronting the African community to leaders of various credible organizations. I am proud to be selected amongst his friends to write the foreword for this book.

Global Safari reveals the hardship Africans experience while traveling, studying, and working in Europe and in the USA. Being away from the motherland and close family puts one in a depressed state of mind when financial needs are not met. It reminds me of the struggles I encountered as a student in Rome. Relating to Dr. Gbotokuma's life, I left my parents and close family in Liberia and traveled to Italy to become a medical doctor. Before entering the university, I had to live in Perugia, Italy to learn Italian and become fluent in the language. I felt depressed but had to struggle to continue my studies because I wanted to become somebody one day! *Global Safari* tells of the struggles he experienced while trying to study to eventually become a Roman Catholic priest. He speaks about his close contact with Pope John Paul II while serving as an acolyte during one of the Easter masses. Battling over whether or not to become a priest after studying as a seminarian and return to his native land, Zaïre, now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was one of the most

difficult decisions he had to make. He reveals his love for the opposite sex and wondered if he could sustain a life of celibacy and chastity in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church.

This book should be read by anyone who leaves his or her motherland and travels to other parts of the world to seek something they must have – be it for education, earning money, increasing one’s skillset to learn a trade, or any other purpose. It should also be read by others to understand both why people from developing countries travel to Europe or the United States of America and the struggles they encounter while trying to make a living or to obtain a better education in order to contribute to society.

In conclusion, *Global Safari* will help Westerners understand that Africans are just like all other nationals and should be given the respect that they deserve. The book should also serve as a reminder to all African and developing countries’ students that people from a modest background or limited opportunity can become great philosophers, educators, doctors, and lawyers later in their lives. Determination is the key! People who migrate to an unknown land to seek better educational and work opportunities should be seen as heroes and heroines or cosmopolitan citizens because of the risks they take to fulfill their dreams, while yearning for international understanding, to contribute to a global society. *Global Safari* demonstrates the resilience and strong-will of Africans living in the diaspora. Therefore, I strongly encourage everyone to read this book. Dr. Gbotokuma’s accomplishments illustrate a good example of a “cosmopolitan citizen.”

Dr. Mohammed S. Sheriff
Ambassador of the Republic of Liberia to Italy
& Permanent Representative to FAO, WFP & IFAD

PREFACE

Global Village

THIS BOOK IS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. IT IS ALSO A TESTIMONY. It can be read from three perspectives. First of all, it is the history of a life; secondly, it is a description of the process of an education, that is, an inscription in a system of values. And, finally, it witnesses to the patience of a search for meaning and its imperatives.

One might alternatively view the book from two angles, one semiological and the other hermeneutical. These two adjectives should be transparent. In effect, they assume an autobiographical narrative that can be understood from a classical understanding of two intellectual domains. Using a definition from the *Order of Things* by Michel Foucault, by semiology, one would understand the capacity that allows one to describe critically social signs, and by hermeneutics, the knowledge that permits one to read and comprehend meanings. These two definitions come to illustrate evidence. When critical, ethnocentrism is not a disease. Instead, as a discourse on a cultural distinction, it might become a semiological and a hermeneutical interrogation about oneself in time and in space.

As demonstrated here, the book contributes to a statement in our time. Here, the history of an exceptional life doubles as a self-analysis of inscriptions that led the author to become Mr. Global. There is, first, an exceptional story. It begins with the passage, apparently innocuous, from a small village in an equatorial region of Central Africa to a Catholic seminary in the Congo. And then, from minor to major seminary, leading the young intellectual into prestigious Catholic universities in Rome. He would serve as an acolyte to Pope John Paul II during an Easter ceremony in Saint Peter's Basilica. This symbolic role became the object of significant reflection for this young adult. This is to say that the book confesses to the difficult conflict between a vocation for priesthood and the human demands of love and their occasional paradoxes. The symbolism of such a tension led the author to a lay intellectual education and a demanding life in Europe, including indeed, Italy, England, France, and Germany. And, finally, a brilliant career in the United States that transformed him into a professor of social sciences and a director of a

leading international center. Life's designs for this village boy have come to qualify him truly as a Mr. Global.

To read this book is to recognise a very talented person. The narrative testifies to inscriptions. There is, first, the assumption of Christianity from early in life; and then there is, secondly, the grammar of a severe education in seminaries; there is, thirdly, a progressive mastering of Western classics at prestigious universities in Rome, and an acquaintance with the best trends in philosophy and theology. In sum, the young African boy has had an aristocratic education. It is paralleled by a different sort of education: work in Italy and in Germany, and classes in England, France, and the USA.

Inscription means access to the values of a cultural past. In this case, these values are those of the best avenues in Judaeo-Christian history. They led the author into becoming, after years of specialization and responsibilities, as the title of this book states from an intercultural perspective, a Mr. Global. Recognition of such implies sentiments and virtues: sentiments of the speaker and, also, admiration of the reader of the author's will to knowledge and, in an exemplary manner, a will to intercultural explorations and dialogues. There is, also remarkable, the fascinating history of the exceptional *parcours* itself that reflects an election which coincides with the narrative itself.

Unsettling somehow, this success story could be characterized from other traces which would bring about vibrant features of a picture in the complementarity of an exceptional education, spiritual challenges, an intellectual vocation, and a search for meaning in an increasingly globalized world.

The language of the book, in the articulation of propositions, decomposes conflicting, yet mastered orders. The foundation is a vision supported by moral presuppositions and precepts. One has here both an order of visible commitments and that of an examination of concrete choices. The level of knowledge testifies to the politics of globalization in three ways. There is, first, a distinction in analysis of doctrines and policies. It transcends nationalities and territories, languages and geographies. It is also a testimony about the administration of diversity in today's world and it manifests ways of transcending cultural traditions and ideologies. This book, in sum, is about the dynamics of a life and its interrogations, and mirrors demanding activities.

One can read it from a classical grid that we have come to banalize. It resolves the tensions between the possibilities of transcultural discourses versus political trends from conflicting histories of ideas. Briefly, it opens three points of entry and it is possible to accent the following. One, the

volume of the discourse of a life assumes the representation of an ideal which is a vocation; a meditation on the complementarity of multiple organizations and programs, it describes tasks in the sacred as well as in the profane; it pays attention to everyday life as well as to the languages of the sciences. Two, the story translates the development of a progression in multiple challenges. And, three, this account emerges from the work and the achievements of a scholar.

The book is a figure and, in sum, it is an eloquent painting in our time.

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IF IT IS TRUE, AS AN AFRICAN PROVERB PUTS IT, THAT “IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD,” then it is equally and certainly true that it takes a global village to raise a cosmocitizen or global citizen. It has taken a global village to assist me in crossing so many rivers, oceans, and borders, and to climb so many rocky and snowy mountains, from the Congo River to the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans; from Congolese hills to Italy’s Monte Terminillo, Normandy’s Mont Saint Michel, Mexico’s Pyramid of the Sun (*El Piramide del Sol*, in Spanish), and China’s Great Wall. Yes, it has taken a global village to raise and educate me. It has taken my family, extended and adoptive families, friends and dedicated teachers to help me through the pains and pleasures of the K-12 education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), my native country, from Bogwabe elementary school to Bobutu and Gbosasa elementary schools; from Bominenge’s middle school to Bolongo’s Notre Dame de Grâce Minor Seminary and high school; from the Equateur’s *Grand Séminaire Régional* in Bamanya to Rome’s Pontifical Urban University, Gregorian University, and *Società Italiana per l’Organizzazione Internazionale* (SIOI); from St. Luke’s Priory School of Wincanton, England to the Goethe Institute Boppard, Germany; from the *Institut d’Etudes Françaises de Touraine* of Tours, France to Liechtenstein’s International Academy of Philosophy; from the University of California at Berkeley Extension to Yale University’s PIER African Studies and Kukulcan Spanish School of Cuernavaca, Mexico, and so on. This long list of institutions of learning is the reason why I stated at the beginning that it has taken a global village to raise and educate the cosmocitizen I have become today. I do not remember all my teachers and educators by name. Some of them may even think that I have forgotten them. However, I am constantly reminded of, and grateful for their good work and even their sacrifices for me. To all and each one of them I give Thanks! *Merci! Danke! Grazie! Gracias! Obrigado! Asanti! Botondi! Xie xie! Arigato! Gamsa hamnida!*

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Guest lectures at African International University, a challenging educational project led by the Nigerian-born Dr. Adebisi of Oakland; at