

## LETTER TO MAGA

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Lagos, Nigeria

My dear Maga - I know you are dying to be rich. Die no more and live, for this letter will make you rich beyond your wildest dreams. My offer to you is too good to be true – and it is! Only a fool would spurn such an offer. I know of your anguish, your humiliations and the doubtful pleasures during the decades you spent climbing the greasy pole in the Big Apple. This is your opportunity to be free, to strike it rich, to net billions from the country you left behind – the land of magic and surprise known as Nigeria.

I have been discovered! I am the long-lost blood brother of the one and only Michael Jackson. Forget the fiction that Michael Jackson is dead. The black soul singer turned white megastar is alive, singing and dancing here in good old Nigeria. You can take my word for it, because I also happen to be Michael's twin. I am sure you would not want me to write a book as fat as Alex Haley's *Roots* to trace the lineage of Wacko Jacko and my very close consanguinity to him. Let's make the money first and we can go into the details later; suffice it to say that Michael's homecoming to Nigeria was quite emotional and indeed traumatic. While the CNN, BBC, VOA and so on were blasting the news of his so-called death Michael suddenly manifested in Lagos, Nigeria. The wacko one could not but break down and weep when memories came flooding of how our great-great-grandfather was sold into slavery via the Long Juju of Arochukwu and how, centuries later, the African spirit of obi, aka obeah, entered into the randy man who ended up siring the weird one and me, one in America and the other here in Nigeria!

Magical Realism, I hear you say? Let us leave that watered-down and adulterated brand to the opportunistic literati. Are we in Africa not all supposed to be brothers and sisters? And who doesn't know that reincarnation happens to be our major staple here? Michael used to employ lookalikes so he could appear in two places at once but now that his lonesome soul has found me I am in such demand that I also need lookalikes. And together we have a game such that we appear and disappear and the world looks on in wonder, not knowing the difference. Now Michael can be everywhere at once. Maga, I have to report the happy news that I have through Michael mastered the art of omnipresence!

You can guess that Michael's transformations in the course of his long career make our doubling game a trifle complicated for a still-black man like me. I haven't yet had the benefit of the surgeons' plastic arts but really that's of little consequence. Our public has grown used to mere impersonators – which I am not. All sorts of dubious people have masqueraded as our benefactors, but this godly country desires nothing short of a messiah and Michael auditioned for that part long before he landed here and met me.

I'll let you into the enchanting details of my deeper-than-skin bond with Michael when we meet at the Waldorf Astoria to spend a bit of the huge fortune accruable to us from this Nigerian saga of MJ. Imagine the spin-offs from the unprecedented story of my once secret life as Michael Jackson's twin: Hollywood mega-movies, global TV series, blockbuster Broadway hits, heavy

book contracts, you name it. Yes, big bucks, fast life, yet there is more to this deal than pots of money. What I shall be offering you, my friend, is a dish best served cold – revenge!

I will come to the end of our particular knife in due course but I will begin with certain formalities in case you want to share this investment opportunity with any of your trusted associates. The main rule of the Nigerian game is that once a deal clicks here you will be due to almost instantly become richer than your peers. Ask England's golden boy and number one captain of business, Mr. Branson of Virgin Atlantic. I'm sure he will come your way soon. I may spot him myself passing overhead in one of his hot-air balloons and you never know where he will turn up. After the happy-go-lucky Branson got a letter awarding him the ownership of our national airline he said he was headed for outer space next. And Nigeria Airways, that which could have passed for a woebegone harlot, magically turned into a delectable virgin – yes, Virgin Nigeria!

Take my letter for it, and make your own Nigerian fortune. Don't make the mistake of one overly suspicious foreign investor who actually got the letter before Branson but was wasting his time thinking of 419, the so-called Advance Fee Fraud named after the most popular section of our Penal Code. Now the swashbuckling Branson has made his kill that potential, and ill-fated, investor has gone quite mad. He's acting funny like the German professor who missed out on owning a Nigerian brewery when he started staggering after drinking two bottles of Nigerian beer, and was heard complaining aloud: "I asked for beer but you gave me alcohol!"

O yes, what Nigeria has to offer can prove to be too much for the fainthearted. Africa's most populous country is big like the elephant which incidentally used to be the emblem of the wingless Nigeria Airways. In the scramble for, and the partition of, this nation through privatization or liberalization or structural adjustment or globalization or whatever, let's just say that in taking Nigeria Airways Branson has succeeded in grabbing only the tongue of the elephant. The rest of the beast is what is there to be had in our new enterprise, and you happen to be the real McCoy in this hit.

What Nigeria offers in the Michael Jackson business stares you in the face. Believe it when I say that my twin brother Michael struck like tropical noonday thunder! The craft bearing him came down on the Nigerian tarmac with a screech that shook the corporate capital. The megastar of deathlessness disembarked and kissed the soil of his ancestors before stepping on the red carpet and spreading his gloved hands wide, beckoning on the people to behold. There could not have been a greater epoch-making event, trapping the annals and centuries of history and geography in one magic moment. Up from slavery and rising to the giddy heights of universal pop superstardom, Michael returned from fabled death in America to bubbly life in Nigeria as the local boy made good. He is alive here and I am here too, his wonder twin, on our terra firma of some 250 peoples imperiously cobbled together and named after the River Niger by Flora Shaw, the solicitous paramour of Governor-General Lugard, past master of indirect rule.

Like my dear brother Michael this nation is a black phenomenon made for white people like you. We have thrown caution to the wild winds, put aside all pretences of economic independence and now we run the full gamut of foreign investment. Beloved Maga, you need go no further than the hotel to grab all our capital and be up again in flight back to your land. It is a fact of recent history that President Obasanjo – the military ruler turned emperor of democracy - could only be tracked down in airports and hotels across the globe in his interminable junkets aimed at attracting investment through his own personal globe-trotting example. All an advertised foreign investor needs to do now is to show up at the Nigerian airport from where he

is shepherded to a posh hotel for the fast business before jetting out on the next available flight. That's the way we do our business - from the airport to the hotel, and Nigerian capital takes flight abroad. Nobody thought of the remote possibility of surpassing the decrepitude of our electricity company NEPA, (known to us as Never Expect Power Always) which the emperor then re-baptized as PHCN, (Problem Has Changed Name). Yet it has come to pass that the emperor, Enron & Co. turned bad to worse; in short, worst! Truly an unfortunate predicament but later I shall explain just why it is impossible to buck this takeover trend; but then the gain is yours – and mine! For now, Maga, what you should know is that we can be yours for a cold drink, and you will be happy to be ours for that hospitable gesture!

Undeniably, Nigeria and Michael were made for each other. In dropping in on the museum containing the Mercedes Benz car in which the former head-of-state, Major-General Murtala Muhammed, was slain in the wee hours of a Lagos coup morning, we could not but evoke our imperial politicking for all to see. It's a long story, but Nigeria is nothing but a gatekeeper state, one from which you, too, can reap abundantly if you'll just follow my lead.

You see, behind our gatekeepers there is nothing but money-making and so there is everything you could want, Maga. In the museum I initiated Michael into the little known ritual of awakening into democracy dead dictators by glimpsing at their ever-present portraits dotting every inch of the walls. Thus Michael also became introduced to Lord Lugard who amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates of the country with the charge that the South must forever serve as "the lady of means" to keep feudalism alive in the arid North. Lugard's officers were his "whisperers behind the throne" but now, Maga, thanks to the power of resurrection Michael and I, whether as two-in-one or one-in-two, are the whisperers and, dead or alive, we are in great demand, for which you stand to benefit abundantly.

It is crucial for you to understand that the Michael Jackson hit came about because we have more money than sense here, for as the youthful post-war leader Gowon famously said, "Our problem is not money but what to do with it." Poor Gowon, he was promptly overthrown for not knowing what to do with money. Murtala Muhammed saw death in shouting mad at imperialism while the child of fortune, Obasanjo, survived him as the darling of the Western world when he launched Nigeria into the debt business of the International Misery Fund and subsequently handed over power to the civilians in 1979 to democratize deception and graft. The self-advertised corrective regime led by Major-General Buhari aborted the democracy of graft but was itself upstaged in a 1985 palace coup by General Babangida who upped the ante in graft, devaluation and debts until the annulment of the elections of June 12, 1993 forced him out of office in disgrace. All this eventually paved the way for the eventful rule of his bloodthirsty sidekick, General Sani Abacha, who infamously killed Ken Saro-Wiwa. The bad dictator was mad at his very wealthy old friend becoming the darling of the liberal lobby by parading himself as a poor poet fighting for his endangered Ogoni minority. The parade goes on, and it is bigger than ever now the so-called militants and freedom fighters and Boko Haram Islamists are in the pockets of government, armed even, by crews of ballot rigging politicians. Michael my brother is billed to bring into the mix the musical edge to pop the champagne toward your transnational enrichment, Maga.

As a child of HIStory Michael learnt of Nigeria's forged arrival at flag independence on October 1, 1960, to wit, the day the colonial masters became independent of their nation. Michael's sound has borne witness to Nigeria's history of coups and pogroms culminating in the civil war, after which the petrodollar con game overwhelmed the land such that the youngish

Gowon made his money statement on Nigeria's search for how to spend cash. Of course that was an open invitation for the greatest con-tricks perpetrated by our respectable financial advisors – native and foreigner alike – all those pioneers of development who promised us the earth but immiserated the people and took the ground from under our feet! The new ground beneath Michael's feet is all yours for the taking.

Maga, we were all swindled by Uncle Sam's novel super-imperialism. Before the petrodollar game really took off it was the arms business that pioneered "dollar recycling" which of course sounds like the opposite of what it really is. Herman Kahn, the classic cold war warrior and advocate of nuclear warmongering, was so overjoyed by Uncle Sam's new found license to print dollars that he couldn't help announcing it to his circle of friends as "the greatest rip-off in history – we've run rings round the British Empire". But now Maga, from Michael's arrival or reincarnation or whatever in Nigeria, we shall fashion our finest and greatest revenge.

The daredevil Saro-Wiwa said he wanted to disrobe the masquerade of our politics in which he had also played varied supporting roles. But the suddenly beatified Saro-Wiwa wasn't the real trouble. It was that we were starting to run short on masks. Our old European colonial masters turned into economists, financiers and advisors of all sorts, and then our dictators turned into emperors of democracy to please the new imperial masters in America, but it's all wearing thin.

We've arrived just in time to lift the spirits and raise the feel-good factor. You see, the thing is that countries are not allowed to go bankrupt. Everything else can go bankrupt, even banks if truth be told, but not a nation. If you wonder why that should be so, my friend, let me enlighten you: there is just too much money to be made in keeping wrecks afloat! Think about that, Maga, and let me explain our current predicament as well as our fabulous opportunities.

The aspect of Nigerian history that thrills Michael "The Thriller" the most was Abacha's sudden death while eating the apple of two Indian ladies. A man of action, Abacha died in action. Michael could hardly believe the theatrical reversal of fortunes that saw Obasanjo – whom Abacha jailed - being spirited from prison to the presidency like Nelson Mandela of South Africa. Things change but always remain the same. It's a tired old business. We can't perform the South African trick and change colour. That's where Michael lends a truly fresh face; just as Obama did for the White House, and just as all those lesser pop stars did for the G8 mob who want our oil to run swift and cheap. And never forget it my dear Maga, that's always the real deal in these parts. Not for nothing did the late strongman Gaddafi who died fighting say Nigeria is "a big for nothing" country! We've always tried to please Uncle Sam, so now we shall look the part.

The oil price keeps rising while the national economy keeps falling from boom to doom, from each bloom to bigger busts. Our interest in the matter is not the Nigerian economy but the petrodollar game whereby Uncle Sam prints the dollars and the rest of us produce the things dollars can buy. From the days of President "Tricky-Dicky", when Uncle Sam picked up dollar diarrhoea from his expensive sojourn in Vietnam, his condition has taken a terminal turn. The papers and the TV will tell you that Uncle Sam's fiscal incontinence was derived from consuming some exotic property investments. My dear Maga, if you believe that you are not fit for the Nigerian loot due you via the Michael Jackson saga.

The thing is that we've all had to trade using Uncle Sam's "cheques" but we can never cash them in because his world reserve currency is nothing but his own soaring debts - for which we are all supposed to suffer. Of course Uncle Sam is getting nervous. Saddam Hussein, fallen

star in the axis of evil, wanted to trade oil in Euros, and when Hugo Chavez chimed in with similar wicked thoughts he was added to the same death list. Yet we too have some delinquents who want to trade our oil in support of “Nairaland” and wipe Uncle Sam’s bottom no more. And then there is the matter of our overly friendly production quotas which come courtesy of Uncle Sam’s friends in OPEC – known properly as the Organization for Petroleum Eased Consumerism. My dear Maga, in our humble opinion, what’s required is an entirely new scheme.

Uncle Sam is rushing all over the world like an old colonial district officer looking for shady places to relieve his behind of a thunderous burden coming, as often as not, in the shape of “shock and awe”. Pax Americana was never what it was cracked up to be but this is no joke; we shall be back to civil war if we keep dancing to the same imperial tunes. Do you still wonder why Michael relocated from the land of the Yankees to join up with me, his epoch-making twin brother, here in Nigeria?

Nowadays my poor twin, who did everything to become white, has no need of a mere recording company, Sony that is. Michael says the Sony chairman, Tommy Mottola, was mean. “He’s a racist, and he’s very, very devilish!” Michael cried before hitting these shores. But in this season of freefall Michael has an entirely new patch: Nigeria, the Giant of Africa! When everyone said he was finished Michael courted death and then by “dying” showed everyone what he was worth all along. No wonder his is a restless soul. Now people have been saying the same about Nigeria for years - that we’re finished and done for. Well my dear Maga, aside from our quite normal custom of bringing the dead to life for their gratification and our entertainment, nobody yet knows what Nigeria can do for Michael and what Michael can do for Nigeria.

As you can see, my dear Maga, Michael’s return opens the vista on the yet to be bought off hinterland, the heart of the darkness of the country where new dance steps are honed. Quaint, old-fashioned rural poverty is the perfect setting for Michael to learn a new trade, where characters appear and disappear, transmogrify, die, wake up, drink a beer, kill, make faces and generally have a ball and the audience just have to keep guessing. The band plays the roots, and Michael sings from the heart and the soul. The living, the dead and the unborn all gather, grooving with the son who returned to the land. Maga, this breakthrough into the virgin hinterland is laden with crude riches and mineral bounties that only our association with Michael can dispense.

Michael’s first marketing secret was that when white kids were turning into mad punk rockers, he was a nice black boy. But a bit too nice, he thought. Unfortunately, the release of yet another of Michael’s bestselling albums, *Bad*, in 1987 prompted our brother Jermaine to reply with the song, “Word to the Bad”. Jermaine was only jealous but that song was an omen, and to be honest it was downhill from there, especially as Michael had to cough out \$20 million in 1993 for an out-of-court settlement of child abuse charges before marrying in haste the daughter of the legendary Elvis Presley, Lisa Marie. Now that could have been a great business partnership but, lamentably, the marriage lasted only eighteen months. Then, in 1995, Michael released *HIStory Past Present & Future* yet could only boast of one hit single, “You Are Not Alone”. Sadly my long-lost twin was a lonely man; he was only truly happy in the animal kingdom of chimps and in the company of the innocent. But you see how we have rehabilitated him; he really belongs to us. And you Maga can only cash in as the very first man getting the news from me.

When life draws to a close one is drawn back to the roots. This will come to you also my dear friend; so don’t wait for your own twilight before you come to us again. Fortunately for Michael his roots are in me and I have the skills needed to bring him back to the world. As you

can see, Michael's Nigerian saga has already begun. It's an all-encompassing adventure, from coast to desert, but the appearance of the maverick twins at Osogbo is a hint of the best-kept secret in the world: me, yours truly, the very twin brother of... Hush! Tell nobody about it just yet. Not until the deal clicks.

When Michael beheld a precious old mask at Igbo-Ukwu he knew his return to the roots was complete. The priceless artifact had once been given away to the Queen of England by a Nigerian ruler. The Queen thought she had been given a replica since no serious country would give away this original mask, but she was surprised to her marrow when she discovered Nigeria had given her the real thing. Yes, it is in our character to give but this old mask gave her some trouble such that she sent it straight back, and Michael happens to be the bearer of the treasure-trove.

The sad matter though is that when we really need our masks back our good old colonial master refuses to return them. Nigeria can't be trusted with her own. But it's cool by us to be patronized; whence Michael's emotional initiation into negritude, that ideology of feeling by not thinking. Through the blues of feeling Michael has meshed up the rural and the urban, hitting the city for a Safari among the urban wildlife made from concrete and metal. You'll see that the destitute children of Africa are also being explored as possible means of raising funds. Diana Ross and the forever marriageable Elizabeth Taylor are some of the senior stars who shall team up with us to create funds out of malnutrition and disease.

"There is aid in fighting AIDS," croons the blue NGO weaverbird by my windowsill.

Michael could not believe his luck at the vast riches available while incarnating his many Nigerian roles, especially with the poor for whom he always wanted to play patron saint. Everything is possible in Nigeria. And where else are events timed so well that a dictator dies in the triple sex act and an elected President dies in prison, and both pave the way for a messiah of civil rule, the very emperor of democracy to rise up from the same stable of oligarchs. This beloved country of ours does not have politics; we have arrangements. Call it "Army Arrangement," in the manner of the maverick singing of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti.

With your help, my dear Maga, this is how we shall make our own assent, one step at a time. In these delicate matters Michael has been a willing pupil and you must understand how earnest we are in our extra special enterprise. As earnest as the likes of Bono, that Irish pop star who, having upstaged our radical elements, was invited very cordially by the Western politicians and war-makers to come and beg for us. Those celebrity do-gooders can be relied upon never to put one word out of place; they keep to their own and stick to their scripts so well. All that noisemaking is just a way for the power elite to be born again and live forever; meanwhile our brothers and sisters die at their feet, subjects of their pathos. That is the way of it, Maga.

Every so often our debts are rearranged and we are reorganized and re-enslaved in the latest update of the white man's system. You see, we must not be allowed to fall behind in the race to his global meltdown. Alas, the Irish charity peddlers are part of the ambiguous politics that is called "development". Do they not recall their own bloody history?

"I will say confidently, that if God bless this kingdom with peace and justice, no usurer is so sure in seventeen years' space to double his principal, and interest upon interest, as that kingdom is within the same time to double the stock both of wealth and people... It is not easy, no, not upon the continent, to find such a confluence of commodities." I could not have made a finer sounding statement, but these promising nuggets come from one eminent Englishman, Francis Bacon, and the scheme for the "civilization" of Ireland in 1711. Old Bacon died in debt

and, of course, Ireland was another sad business but, unlike those Irish celebrity beggars and charity peddlers, we must learn from the past, Maga. Michael is a wiser star who knows what it means to be groomed by people with money to burn and power to keep.

In partnership with the UN for the promotion of universal education, Michael will engage in a tax-exempt programme aimed at enriching corporations from the public purse. He will also participate in the raucous launch of a useless book on literacy improvement, courtesy of the same politicians who care so little for education that for many years they would only allot it a mere one per cent of the national budget. Now so called “universities” are their latest business ventures. You should not expect any rebellions in those hallowed, and now private, grounds. They call what is on offer there “guided freedom”- training for zombies to you and me, Maga. But these are just some of the jargons we must adopt and the places at which we must be seen to play the game - the game of speaking of the common good while manufacturing the common bad.

In our great nation we have the winning government and business team: tax-thieves and tax-dodgers united! Only the government-approved billionaires make up the private sector. What can I say to you, Maga? A messiah has to embrace all this badness and corruption before his own purification. Otherwise, there can be no gleaming path to salvation. This is the old law of the holier-than-thou, and today one must also go by the formalities of truth and reconciliation before getting back to business as usual. But our business will be unusual, I promise.

The great weakness of majority of Nigerians is the thinking that success is all about enterprise without knowing the meaning of the white man’s greatest industries of usury and speculation. Forget nation-building, development and so on. That was all back in the 1970s. Real goods and services are only two per cent of the action in the world now. We’re at the end of a war-torn road, Maga. You wonder what’s become of the other ninety-eight per cent, don’t you? My friend, it’s all in world speculation. Welcome to Casino Capitalism! This is where we must set up shop and you, my old friend sitting there in the Big Apple are perfectly placed for this venture. Ignore all the wishful chit-chat about fair trade and so on. Two per cent, Maga, only two per cent! Come and meet me instead; I am as ever ready to lead you to the source of new riches via our Michael Jackson project!

All we hear about is democracy and transparency, but see how your liberals and pseudo-democrats come to train the African leadership in the real art of 419! The famous Mr Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner for Economics, was shunned by the World Bank for not agreeing on absolutely all these matters of global 419, but he only tells half the truth. And this will come as no surprise to you if you know who gives that particular Economics prize. Not the Nobel committee as in Literature; bankers are the ones making that award, Maga.

Do not doubt the art in the capitalists’ economic outlook. People must suffer; such is life, but in their eyes Africa is a centre of excellence in this respect - a reminder to everyone everywhere of how fortunate they really are as the rug is pulled from under their own feet. Apparently we in Africa are even “under-polluted”, which means naturally that we have golden opportunities for toxic dumping. After all, is it not unthinkable these days that people live from the common lands? People must play the property game. Only then can they come to know what it means to be winners, as we shall be in our own style.

So let us go to the Casino, Maga. I know you are no God-fearing man so one can even gamble there on national debts; millions are to be made buying and selling the bonds. The trick is not to be caught holding the dead ducks when the wheel of “speculative attack” turns. Yes, far-away

fortunes are made from strife and collapse. You once said you don't enjoy casinos, Maga, but really, my dear friend, you are already living in one unless, of course, you have left the planet without telling your friends who still happen to reside here. Little wonder Michael is back here...

You must beware of the mind-bending computations in your fellow white man's economics; they don't add up if you have a future in mind. Their economists are paid to persist with mathematical impossibilities. Their dismal science is getting more so by the day and if truth be told, they've already written-off most of this planet as a bad debt. This must be why the ever adventurous Mr. Branson and certain other captains of industry are looking for new business in outer space.

Fear not Maga, the members of our celebrity cohort have their feet on the ground and are not looking skywards for new business ventures. Let the others get onwards and upwards, we are planning to get even, and the Michael Jackson venture I am putting forward happens to be the clincher.

The African Union will no longer recognize "government by coup." That would be progress if democracy today was not coup at the polls. Before their rehabilitation as star-struck lovers of democracy our Generals arranged things in preparation for their own economic deliverance. As usual they looted and paid out more never-to-be-fulfilled contracts to their fraternities before adopting the master's two-brands-one-product-no-trouble democracy. But now there are whispers that really our leaders are too corrupt, too greedy and perhaps the Giant of Africa ought to be brought down a peg or two – and that Nigeria is not as indispensable as was once thought. But believe me, Maga, we're not finished yet. It could be our historic destiny to save the world from greed of a much greater degree while the MJ music plays!

Do you believe the face is a window on the soul, Maga? I do not. Our colonial masters, old and new, laugh at our exaggerated and unsubtle "politics of the belly". Yet we see behind their cultivated masks and perfected expressions. Greed shows itself in odd ways and if you want to see blind avarice, look through my eyes at the distorted features of our partners who think they've landed on the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity which in fact we are offering you, my old friend.

The MJ pilot campaign for a mobile phone company was vandalized by area boys who threw mud over the billboards. They were sorely vexed by the slogan, "Be what you want to be". Some reporter told how those boys shouted: "We vex say na so so lie dem don dey lie again!" Our partners' loss can be your gain, Maga, if, unlike them, you follow my advice.

Our compatriots are making noises from below wailing about lies heaped upon lies; like the unemployed urchins who vandalized our billboards. And now the workers boo and jeer in public when they are supposed to sing the national anthem. But don't lose any sleep over the antics of the plebeians. Good business is always done with their "shepherds". Back in the Babangida dictatorship days I remember the labour leader known as Paschal the Rascal. He would always whisper into the ears of the Chief-in-General before every public rally: "I have to say some harsh words against your policies to please the rabble, but I remain your dear comrade after this time out!"

The rabbleroising labour leader Adams rode the tiger campaigning for state power in Obasanjo's empire of democracy only to see his electoral victory stolen in broad daylight, just like a goat can be stolen from its owner. As ever, determined not to end up in the belly of the tiger, Adams upped the ante in the struggle of winning back his mandate. But there is no real

mandate to hold as long as our people are organized as if Queen Victoria were still on the throne in England. It's our modern duty to upend the ignoramuses for good, Maga.

With our “anything-goes democracy”, labour is like Gulliver, pinned to the ground by a thousand twines made from the laws handed down by the colonial masters and kept up-to-date by our homegrown oligarchs. History is a strange business, my friend. Labour here is harnessed by shifty union leaders and repressive laws almost a century old. In this respect we still await 20<sup>th</sup> century liberties but now that we have already reached the 21<sup>st</sup> century we find that the 19<sup>th</sup> century is in vogue everywhere! Nothing could be more appropriate for this young but old-fashioned country. I don't mean to sound confusing, my dear Maga, but we live in confusing times and humanity is ready for a quick march from tragedy to farce, especially in this great land.

For the power of “leadership” here is like *ogbanje* or *abiku*, that is, the spirit children who die after every birth only to be reborn endlessly to wreak havoc. Surely, not unlike our Emperor of Democracy who was accused of stealing his own son's wife and fathering children by her. As it was in General Abacha's bedroom, it is business as usual – even in life, death and the afterlife. And then there was President Yar'Adua whose greatest gift to his followers was to hover for weeks between all three. Michael my brother of course knows so much about life, death and the afterlife, and he was very much on hand when the dying president was smuggled in at midnight with all the dollars in tow.

It is in the line of the Michael mission to channel the loot to the ever expanding church of “NGOism”. He is poised to peddle liberal pamphlets and toothless campaigns for the latest hand-me-down causes. In the official jargon which, of course, we have carefully studied, the acronyms run thusly: NGOs = Non-Governmental Organizations; GONGOs = Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations; BONGOs = Bank Organized Non-Governmental Organizations, not to mention all the assorted think-tanks that also promise to change the world at no political cost to the ruling classes! Take the GONGO devoted to empowering women which sacks the sisters for joining a union. Having briefed ourselves about these fishy operations we have prepared very enlightened pronouncements safe in the knowledge that our elite audience expects every possible deceit in the interest of their own “development.” We are in great business, Maga. A tear for Mother Africa!

You will never cease to be surprised at the roll-call of grasping hands, each more eager than the last to extract our endorsement of their particular noble cause. Nor are they choosy about who else they mingle with, which is so much the better for us. For this is how the most disreputable prophets emerge from near death and exile to mount the saddle of power again, for our leaders are at once victims and perpetrators in power. It is incumbent on them to do and undo one another. Coming out from behind our own rock of exile we shall glide through their troubled ranks and make our hit.

Perhaps you know that historic piece of advice: “The best time to buy stock is when blood is running in the streets.” In polite company today it's called “buying the dips”. I am sure you think I am trying to disturb you, Maga, trying to weaken and undermine your faith. Let me utter an old proverb then: “Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is worse.” And so what will the revolution of your forgotten masses, or your African brothers and sisters, or even your ethnic bloc, have to hold or overthrow after everything has been bought and sold and we are left with nothing? It is there in the Bible that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the gates of heaven. But our pastors dazzle their congregations with

their full Gospel business talk and tell us that we misunderstood; that we only need to throw more money at the problem and heaven will surely be ours, Amen. And, after all, did not a company poll carried out on behalf of Nigerians – unasked – call us the happiest people on earth? Say it, brother! And Michael will do a fast jig.

The Islamic fundamentalists, on their part, have supposedly more egalitarian pretensions although they could hardly say a word about the single shoe stolen from one of their sponsors while he was at prayer in his own mosque. Yes our illustrious former “Chief-in-General” known as Maradona, after the Argentine footballer who scores with “The Hand of God”, and his comrades lurked in the fundamentalist business, just like their American masters once did so freely. Sometimes all the whispering can be heard – sometimes it reaches the ears of the people. We will never find out who took one of the Nigerian Maradona’s luxurious pair of shoes while he was at prayer but the useless shoe left behind at the door of his shining mosque was perchance the illiterates’ sign for its bootless and power-hungry owner. Michael says we need not be too concerned about an unplanned association with this scurrilous footwear theft. We had just dropped in to Minna for a photo opportunity at Maradona’s mosque and shamelessly someone swiped just one of Michael’s sanctified sandals too. But Michael tells me there is no such thing as bad publicity at this point in our enterprise, and of course he speaks from long experience.

Now is the time to taste the meat in this deal, my dear Maga. As you can see, we have raised our profile to new heights. And now we are ready for a triangular deal which requires your services in the Big Apple. You are the foreign partner. I am the local middleman. Then there will be our celebrity-loving officials and politicians on call. Just think of Michael Jackson alive again and standing alongside our World Bank-minted ministers. Think of the headlines that are coming, Maga. Nothing will match the semi-official resurrection of Michael Jackson in Nigeria. The national anthem band will be at the ready and happy to strike up his more popular tunes. You think I am unhinged, but please be patient for a little longer and I will tell you of our delicate scheme.

Timing is all you need to play your part to perfection, Maga. We know how you have persevered in the media business and, as the saying goes, if you can make it in New York you can make it anywhere. With us, Maga, you will conquer the Big Apple more than anyone because you will become *the* Voice of Nigeria! You laugh at such a preposterous idea, don’t you, Maga? Who would want that label, you think. But with our resurrection now ready to be validated by our elite, to be marketed by our business partners, to be pamphleteered by GONGOS and BONGOS, all that is left to us is to prostrate before God in church, Allah in mosque and Amadioha in shrine. Now, don’t you agree that’s a story for you, Maga? As I say, timing will be everything in this scheme because we shall feed you the choicest bits of news way ahead of the pack. All our high-level encounters will be your property first. You shall be the Voice of Nigeria when all eyes of the world are looking at the phenomenon hitting this land like no other. Yet all this is still only half the proposal I have for you, my old friend.

Not for nothing, I’ve written at length to tell you the economic and political woes of your old country which is beset by “democracy.” But our situation is not so very different from that which pertains in your new country, Maga. Is it not difficult to distinguish “commander-in-chief” from “celebrity-in-chief” in your vending machine system? Money goes in and out comes the terminator minus his hi-tech gizmos for instance! Well now, imagine our “Arnie” cut from our own cloth. Our policies shall not be nobler since we feel we have done quite enough to help others with our cheap oil. Unlike our past emperors of democracy we shall be speaking of

slowing production to raise oil prices – in other words, the popular long-term policy for us but which is dreaded in all rapacious consuming nations today. Maga my friend, you will be at the centre of a storm and you will be amazed at the impact of such talk when it sprouts at our highest levels. Expect a technological revolution at least; practically overnight the White House will be solar and wind powered. The electric car that was bought up and killed off by the petrol cartel will zoom again. The NIMEX in New York will be in a frenzy of speculation like no other and may have to be regulated as was done during the World Wars. The U.S. Dollar swindle that has now given us socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor will be left half-naked. The Federal Reserve may not survive at all, for which there will be tears of joy!

With our scheme, instead of taking more ruinous loans we shall have our own renaissance in which you can share! Things will be getting worse for you and your new compatriots, so take this opportunity to make it rich while you can. As long as we have our “black gold” there will still be more to our Central Bank than Uncle Sam has to his. Trust me. This is a neat job. Just fax to me your bank account number...

I am, as ever, your comrade in business from the Gatekeeper State.