OLADIPO AGBOLUAJE

Mother Courage and Her Children

(Scenes 1-3 and 9-12)

An adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage, this drama was premiered at Nottingham Playhouse in February 2004 before touring the UK. The production, directed by Josette Bushell-Mingo, starred Carmen Monroe in the title role.

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RADIO VOICE: Chief of Armed Forces Field Marshal Jigawa of the West Africa Union of Independent States is conscriptin

RECRUITER: This sun will kill us. Why did you choose a shade-less spot? Aren't you black enough? No wonder we can't find anyone to recruit around here. It's the sun that makes us Africans dishonest people, I swear.

SERGEANT: Ah, ah, Oga^1 Recruiter, that one is over the bar.

RECRUITER: OK, how many boys have we recruited? Have we not approached at least twenty starving villagers? I turn round to get the conscription form, before I say "nail your thumbprint here," they have dashed into the nearest undergrowth.

SERGEANT: Life is too easy for our people, Recruiter. Tell them you need a Champions League war, they eye you as if you are not well. It's simple maths. The nations that fought the First and Second World Wars are First and Second World nations. We that did not fight any world war, we are Third World. We fight our wars the wrong way. We should use propaganda to identify the Great Satan and to justify seizing another nation's resources. Invite the international media for proper coverage and make sure our website is updated regularly with news, views and outtakes. If we fight this wall sti0002 Tc0.4(stiwr wars t.2(fore89)2)-6.R30.0vS(e)3.4i-89stiwr wars -7.4(sm-89)2Fched.

Sound of a radio playing a popular tune. Drawn by EKET and OPOKU, a mammy-wagon rolls in. On it sit MOTHER COURAGE and NGOZI.

MOTHER COURAGE: Mornin' oh, Sargi-Sargi. How body?

SERGEANT (Blocks the way): Body dey inside cloth. (Inspects the wagon) I respect

this your genetically modified wagon. Who you be?

MOTHER COURAGE: Market people. (Sings)

MOTHER COURAGE: It's the praise name people gave me in Monrovia. I broke through rebel lines to the Government sector during a bombardment. I had fifty loaves of Ghana Bread in my wagon. They were going to spoil. I had no choice.

SERGEANT: So it is Ghana bread that brings you here. Your particulars.

MOTHER COURAGE: (Pulls out a bundle of papers from a tin box and climbs down

off the wagon) You and your paper government. Is that library enough for you?

SERGEANT: Don't be funny with me! Respect these stripes. You must have a licence for your wagon. You know that.

MOTHER COURAGE: I'm old enough to be your mother, you hear? Mind how you address me. Don't think because of war, some of us have forgotten our customs.

Colonel Mensah never asked me for licence. And you, ordinary Sergeant, behaving as if you don't have a mother.

RECRUITER: Sergeant, I smell insubordination in this Mama. Our camp needs obedience.

MOTHER COURAGE: What your rat-arsed camp needs is food.

Belgian for my liking. I was with a Calabar man then. I could have married Francois but he was driven out of Nigeria.

SERGEANT: Why?

MOTHER COURAGE: The frogs in our area disappeared. Our neighbours accused

Francois of hunting them to make white man's juju. (Points to her other children)

Anyway, they are birds of different feathers.

SERGEANT: They all have different names?

MOTHER COURAGE: You've never heard of such a thing before?

SERGEANT: (*To* OPOKU) So your father's from Lapland, *abi*?

SERGEANT: I'm documenting this for our records. (He writes) And you're from Ijebu in Nigeria. How did you reach this side?

EKET: I don't fear any bloody war.

SERGEANT: Exactly! Army life is recommended by the best morticians. See me. It keeps my skin young and healthy. I joined at seventeen.

MOTHER COURAGE: You're not seventy yet.

SERGEANT: Soon.

MOTHER COURAGE: Soon seventy bullets in you.

SERGEANT: Mama, you are cursing me that I will soon be killed?

MOTHER COURAGE: The gods know. You don't believe? What if I tell you I can see if your credit has expired?

OPOKU: Mummy is a seer. She can tell you your tomorrow.

RECRUITER: Tell Sergeant his future. Who knows what the gods have in store?

SERGEANT: I'm born again. I'm not interested in devilish things.

MOTHER COURAGE: You're still African. Bring your helmet.

SERGEANT: (Gives his helmet to MOTHER COURAGE) It means nothing to me.

I'm a child of Christ. I only do it to reveal our Saviour's power.

MOTHER COURAGE: Whatever. (Brings out a bag of cowries. Chants. Throws some into the bushes) My children, this is how the war will scatter us if we befriend it. (To SERGEANT) Sargi, I do this for you free. This black one—death. The rest represent life. (Chants) I put them in your helmet and shake them together. Pick. Let's see how soon you'll sleep in Christ's bosom.

SERGEANT hesitates.

RECRUITER: (*To* EKET) I don't pick just any gutter-boy. Only the best will do.

SERGEANT: (Picks the black cowry) Nonsense, pagan rubbish!

OPOKU: Oh-ho! He's picked the cowry of death.

RECRUITER: Don't fear. They've not yet made the bullet with your name on it.

SERGEANT: The Lord has forsaken me. You've played me.

MOTHER COURAGE: You played yourself when you joined the army. Oya, my

children. The war will not wait for us.

SERGEANT: Lai-lai⁵! We're taking that bastard son of yours whether you like or not.

EKET: Mama, I don't mind to do army.

MOTHER COURAGE: Shut up you French frog!

EKET: Opoku too wants to do army.

MOTHER COURAGE: Thank you for the breaking news, Radio Africa. All right, then, let's see what your futures hold. (Picks up the helmet, chants and shakes it) RECRUITER: (To EKET) People say that in our regiment we take prayers seriously. Lies, damn lies. Yes, our C.O. is born again and insists on prayers every waking second. During prayer sessions, just imagine getting a blow-job from Miss World. MOTHER COURAGE: Gather round. You want the war to adopt you? Let's ask our cowries. (Gives EKET the helmet) First Born, choose your fate.

EKET chooses the black cowry.

MOTHER COURAGE: (Snatches the cowry from EKET) My mother's head! Was childbirth not painful enough that you will join our ancestors before me? If you become a soldier your life is over! Full stop! Period! Semi-colon! He takes after his father, no sense and foolhardy. The cowries have spoken. Now will you be wise?

EKET: Wise?

⁵ Never.

MOTHER COURAGE: To be wise is to stay alive. It means staying with your mother and if they mock you, laugh at them and go your way.

RECRUITER: Woman wrapper, if you still need Mommy to change your nappy we will take your junior brother.

MOTHER COURAGE: (Contorts EKET'S face into a smile) Laugh, laugh! Ehen, you've shown him. Your turn, Opoku. I trust you; you're only half-Nigerian. (OPOKU picks the black cowry) Qu'est-ce que? Et tu Opoku? Because you are a simpleton? Listen to your mother: be honest at all times. Sargi, help me crosscheck. SERGEANT: It's the black cowry. But how is it possible for myself? That medicine man in Douala told me his bullet-proof juju is best in Africa. He gave me a five-year warranty. (*To* RECRUITER) Her juju must be real. It is catching her children, too. OPOKU: It has caught me but I'll be all right. I hear my mother's word. MOTHER COURAGE: (To NGOZI) My daughter, you yourself make your own misfortune. Stop being kind to everyone. Fate has handed you a half-black cowry. Let's try and change it. I'll pick for you. (Picks for NGOZI. It is the black cowry) This cannot be right! Maybe I did not recite the incantation properly. Another time. (Empties the cowries back into the bag, returns the helmet to SERGEANT and climbs onto the wagon) My children, let us be going.

RECRUITER: (*To* SERGEANT) They are going!

SERGEANT: (Falls to the ground, wailing) I don't feel well. The black cowry is taking effect. Ah, I'm dying!

RECRUITER: Come on, don't be stupid! You've been in the sun too long without your helmet, that's all. Call yourself born again. Pretend to do business with her. (Loudly) Mama, Sergeant wants that belt. (Shoves SERGEANT forward) MOTHER COURAGE: Forty dollars. For you I do it for twenty. (Climbs down)

SERGEANT: Twenty dollars for a second-hand belt? You are not serious. In fact, I can't see well in this sun. Let's go behind the wagon. (*They go behind the wagon*)

RECRUITER: (*To* EKET) Let's go and drink palmwine at that village. I will sponsor you.

EKET stands undecided.

MOTHER COURAGE: Twenty dollars, last price.

SERGEANT: I just don't understand. Juju with five-year warranty should be genuine or what do you think? For added insurance when we go on missions I send those who want to appear on CNN ahead of me.

MOTHER COURAGE: Don't worry yourself. Continue to use the juju and stay at the back. Jesus is on your side. Here, have some ogogoro. (*She gives him some to drink*)

RECRUITER takes EKET and pulls him to the back.

RECRUITER: Twenty thousand naira, cash in hand. You will become a warrior and fight for your country. Uniform is a babe magnet. You will not remove your trousers and ten women will fuck you at the same time—believe!

EKET is being lured away. NGOZI makes warning noises, to no avail.

MOTHER COURAGE: Hold on, Ngo'. Sergeant is paying. (*Holds up the notes to the sun, bites the tip*) Have to make sure this is not fake. I've been done before. This is Federal Reserve. Sargi-Sargi! All right! Let's go. Ah, where is Eket?

OPOKU: He's followed the recruiter.

MOTHER COURAGE: (

Shoot. Mass graves are being discovered everywhere. The truth is atrocities are being committed by both sides in this increasingly bloody war.

COOK: (Laughs sarcastically) Sixty thousand cedis⁶ for this miserable bird.

MOTHER COURAGE: This steroid-injected chicken imported from Thailand? The general who can die for food won't eat tonight because he cannot find ordinary sixty thousand cedis.

COOK: I can get ten of those for thirty thousand cedis by the roundabout.

MOTHER COURAGE: Under a siege? People are eating relief aid sacks! Maybe you'll get a cricket—maybe, oh. Fifty thousand cedis for a Thailand chicken in a state of siege.

COOK: We are the ones launching Operation SAS.

MOTHER COURAGE: Na that one you go c

MOTHER COURAGE: It still reeks of the mass grave you dug it out of.

COOK: This bull was shitting last night.

MOTHER COURAGE: Obviously it hasn't finished.

COOK: I will dip it in acid if I have to.

MOTHER COURAGE: Dip it well, or the General will think you've poisoned him

with anthrax.

GENERAL MENSAH, CHAPLAIN and EKET enter the tent.

GENERAL: (

COOK: Who?

MOTHER COURAGE: My eldest. They kidnapped him two years ago. He must be making it if he's the General's guest. Did you not hear our hero wants chicken? Luckily, I have one for a special sale price of only one hundred thousand cedis.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Stuffing the chicken*) You see—the boy protects his mother's interest. He delayed the cattle's arrival otherwise you would have told me to stuff the chicken.

EKET: I discovered the herders took the cattle out every night to a bush clearing to sell to city traders. I let them gather the cattle as usual. I starved my soldiers.

GENERAL: Smart.

EKET: Then we attacked. But we didn't realise the farmers had weapons. Mostly swords and knives. But a few had dane guns. And they outnumbered us three to one. They rushed us. Before I knew it they knocked my machine gun from my hand. I started reciting "the Lord is my shepherd."

GENERAL: After reciting Psalm 23, what did you do?

EKET: I started laughing.

GENERAL: You started laughing!

EKET: I was using brain for them. Once I convinced them I wasn't mad we started haggling. Then I said: "Eh? Two hundred thousand francs for one cow is a crime against humanity. I will pay you one-fifty." Bloody illiterates, while they were dazed by my audacity I dived for my machine gun and minced them. When you don't have a spade, a plough will do.

GENERAL: Chaplain, what do you think of that?

CHAPLAIN: Literally speaking, there's no such saying in the bible. It might be in the seventh book of Moses. But our Saviour did feed the five thousand, minus though who brought their own lunches. There was no civil war and no tribes forced to live together so he could ask people to love each other. Things have changed.

GENERAL: (*Laughs*) Indeed! You deserve a drink for that, prophet of Baal. (*To* EKET) Blasted them to hell to save your men from starvation. I hope you covered up

their bodies. Anyway, the bible says, "Whatever you do to the least of my children you do unto me." And you gave them beef to go with their gari so that they may fight for regional unification and for God on the side.

EKET: That's why I picked up my machine-gun and blasted them to pieces.

GENERAL: You are a young Bokassa. Soon I will introduce you to Field Marshal Jigawa.

EKET: I saw him on television, outside his multi-million dollar mansion standing beside his custom-built Limousine. Sir, he is my role model.

GENERAL: Already you resemble him. You are like a son to me, Eket. Brave soldiers are as scarce as an honest arms dealer. (*Shows* EKET *a map*) See. Even with Operation SAS we are not doing well.

MOTHER COURAGE: (Plucks the chicken angrily) Useless General.

COOK: I know the man can die for food. Why is he useless?

A soldier does even peace-keeping

My woman's love seems not enough

For you a warrior rough and tough

Lend me your ears my soldier boy

A bit of common sense employ

You'll be a proverb for the foolhardy

Because you refused to listen to me

The soldier held his love and laughed

I am warrior king, don't be daft

Next time you hold me to your breast

Will be against my medal-filled chest

The woman stepped back, began to quiver

As she begged, "Love beware of the river"

MOTHER COURAGE sings from the kitchen, banging on a pan.

Lend me your ears my soldier boy

A bit of common sense employ

Don't become a proverb for the foolhardy

Because you refused to listen to me

EKET: Who's that? (EKET enters the kitchen. Embraces MOTHER COURAGE)

Mummy! I don't believe it! Oh, wonderful day! What of Opoku and Ngozi?

MOTHER COURAGE: They are fine. Ngozi is with me. Your brother is paymaster of

Fourth Marine Corps. I tried to stop him from joining. At least he's not seeing action.

EKET: Are your feet OK?

MOTHER COURAGE: A bit. You see I have to wear slippers all the time.

GENERAL joins them.

GENERAL: Are you Mama Eket? Welcome! I need more of your children, oh.

EKET: You heard us? You heard my heroic story and the General's praise for me?

MOTHER COURAGE: I heard. (Slaps EKET)

EKET: Yeh! You slapped me for stealing cows?

MOTHER COURAGE: For not surrendering when those herders trapped you, stupid.

Am I not always telling you to be careful?

GENERAL and CHAPLAIN laugh.

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RADIO VOICE: (Advert) You've been marching for days. You come across a village filled with women. It's time to bring out Camouflage Condoms. Specially designed for black men on the go. With their unique ribbing system, Camouflage Condoms give maximum comfort. Ca

MOTHER COURAGE: (*To* OPOKU) Take your pants. No woman will marry you if you keep leaking like that. Make sure you use protection when sleeping with the battalion's financial records.

OPOKU: (*Embarrassed*) They are safe from all kinds of liquids, Mama.

MOTHER COURAGE: And don't soil your father's name by running away with it,

Good enough, he said I was a babe

In truth I was his bit of rough

He just needed to get laid

They said it was the policy

Of cross-pollination

Public relations of a sexual kind

They termed Fraternisation

MOTHER COURAGE: Don't forget your headtie.

ASHEWO: Forget it.

MOTHER COURAGE: Learn from her, Ngozi. Don't marry a soldier. Love is God's free gift. Anything free is too good to be true. Even with us civilians love is risky. Because you're a woman you become the man's slave. Be grateful you can't talk. There'll be no quarrelling.... Look, it's our General's cook. What are you looking for?

Enter COOK and CHAPLAIN

CHAPLAIN: Eket sent me to you. Cook came on his own. He likes you.

COOK: (Hisses) I came to receive some fresh air. Don't mind him.

MOTHER COURAGE: What is Eket's problem? I've no more money for him.

CHAPLAIN: Actually, I was sent to his brother, the paymaster.

MOTHER COURAGE: He is not here. He did not give his brother money to hold.

He's trying to exploit him. (*She gives* CHAPLAIN *some money from a purse she keeps in the folds of her dress*) Give him this. Using system to exploit a mother's love. Shame on him.

COOK: How much is this? Add more! He's off with the division and who knows, to his death. When he dies now you will start wailing. You women: callous now and regretful later.

CHAPLAIN: What is your own, Cook? To die in this war is a blessing. This is a religious war, not just a war for regime change and regional unification.

CHAPLAIN: Don't mind them. Our Life President only wanted to liberate their mineral resources from their Eternal Dictator's clutches. If not for him all their country's money would be in America instead of Switzerland.

COOK: Exactly. (Sarcastic) Your President only wants true African liberation. A man of his integrity had to stop the Dictator from exterminating his people when they refused to cede their land to the multinationals. Then he discovers that they prefer living under a bloodthirsty bastard. What to do? He starts killing them, too. Then he brings in Western businesses to teach those left how to be civilised democrats by working as underpaid labourers. Poor man, he removed food subsidies at home to fund the war, even though his people screamed, "Not in my name!" But he's a religious man. Church on Sunday, Mosque on Friday. God is on both his sides. Without doubt, the President is a man whose moral compass points North. (Laughs cynically)

MOTHER COURAGE: You're not Nigerian, or else you would not be talking about our President in that manner.

CHAPLAIN: And you eat his food aid.

COOK: I cook his food and sell the food aid on the black market.

MOTHER COURAGE: He will be Life President because people follow his lead.

Ministers talking of God-given duty and mora

NGOZI is parading around in ASHEWO'S headtie, imitating her walk. Suddenly, the sound of rocket fire and automatic rifles. Drums. MOTHER COURAGE, COOK and CHAPLAIN leap from behind the wagon with their glasses in their hands.

QUARTERMASTER: (Rushes in) The rebels! A surprise attack! (Runs away) MOTHER COURAGE: My washing, oh! My clothes! (Tries to rescue her washing) COOK: The General needs his cook! Courage, later, so we can talk properly. (Runs away)

MOTHER COURAGE: Your pipe! You've left your pipe!

COOK: (From afar) Keep it for me.

MOTHER COURAGE: What kind of bad head is this. And we were making money.

CHAPLAIN: I must disappear too. It is written, "Blessed are the peacemakers." A designer agbada⁸ would cover my uniform most stylishly.

MOTHER COURAGE: I don't lend out clothes even if your life is in danger. I won't fall for that trick again.

CHAPLAIN: If they see my uniform, they'll know I'm of the President's Church.

MOTHER COURAGE: (Gives him an agbada) Take. I will never learn. Go on.

CHAPLAIN: God bless you, Mother. I will stay here. The rebels will suspect a man running around in a designer *agbada* during a firefight.

MOTHER COURAGE: (Sees NGOZI with the headtie) Yepa! What are you doing with that tart's headtie? You want to catch AIDS? And with the rebels approaching? (Snatches it off NGOZI'S head) They will turn you into an instant prostitute. See,

⁸ Agbada: flowing robe worn by men

she's even wearing the shoes. Off! (*Tries to take the shoes off* NGOZI'S *feet*) Chaplain, I beg, help me take these shoes off her. I'm coming. (Goes to the cart) ASHEWO: (Returns, powdering her face) The rebels are coming! New customers for me. Who has taken my headtie, oh! I left it here. The rebels will think I'm cheap, dressed like this. I cannot even find my mirror. (To Chaplain) Do I look all right? The powder is not too much?

CHAPLAIN: You look fine.

ASHEWO: Who has taken my shoes, oh! (NGOZI hides the shoes under her wrapper) I left them here. Now I have to return to my quarters with my bare feet. (Exits)

Enter **OPOKU** *running, with a small box.*

MOTHER COURAGE: (Enters, her hands filled with ash. To NGOZI) Here, Mama's special powder. Guaranteed to make you man repellent. (To OPOKU) What's that? OPOKU: My unit's cash box.

MOTHER COURAGE: Get rid of it. You are now Retired Paymaster.)

that I can point to Mecca. They're still not sure about us but they need a canteen. We are prisoners but so are foetuses in a womb.

CHAPLAIN: (Eating greedily) Mother, we must ration our intake. After all, we are

EYE-PATCH: Allah rain blessings on you, sister. Have you seen any soldier from the Fourth Marine Corps?

NGOZI, frightened, runs away, spilling the drink. The two men look at each other and withdraw after seeing OPOKU.

OPOKU: Oh, you've spilled it, now. Why are you making face? Something in your eye? I don't get you. Anyway, I have to go. There's no way around it. (He stands up. NGOZI tries to alert him to the danger. He shrugs her off) I wish I could understand you. I know you mean well. If it's the drink don't worry about it. Save some for another time, eh? (He takes the cashbox from the wagon and puts it under his shirt) I'll return in a while. Let go. See you soon.

OPOKU pulls himself away and runs off. She is distraught. MOTHER COURAGE and CHAPLAIN return. NGOZI rushes up to her mother.

MOTHER COURAGE: What is it? What's wrong? Did someone hurt you? Where is your brother? Calm down and tell me. He has taken the cashbox away? I will kill that boy. Calm down! Use your hands. Ehen, ehen. There was a man with eye-patch. CHAPLAIN: The eye-patched man is a rebel spy. Did they arrest Opoku? (NGOZI shakes her head and shrugs her shoulders) We're finished! MOTHER COURAGE: (Takes a rebel flag from her basket. CHAPLAIN attaches it

to the mast) Dance the Hyena Dance.

Voices in the background. Enter SERGEANT and EYE-PATCH with OPOKU as their prisoner.

OPOKU: I'm not the one. I saw this man running away. He had a big bulge inside his danshiki. He is the person.

MOTHER COURAGE: You see? A classic case of mistaken identity. It happens. I'm a great judge of people. My name is Mother Courage. Of course you know me. Everybody knows me. This man's face is honesty itself.

SERGEANT: We are looking for the cashbox of the Fourth Marine Corps. We know the face of the soldier in charge of it. It is you.

OPOKU: It is not me!

SERGEANT: Bring it out or you are finished, take it from me. Where is it?

MOTHER COURAGE: If he was the one he would have shown you where he kept it.

When he is not stupid. Open your mouth. The Sergeant is giving you a chance.

OPOKU: But I said it's not with me.

SERGEANT: Follow us, then. We will get it out of you. (They lead him off)

MOTHER COURAGE: (Shouts after them) He would say if he were the one. He is not stupid. Don't break his arm!

She runs after them.

Later the same evening. CHAPLAIN and NGOZI wash glasses and polish knives.

MOTHER COURAGE: My son's story has got K-leg. We can talk to the Sergeant, so long as we pretend Opoku is not one of us, otherwise we will join him in front of the firing squad. It is a money matter. Has Ashewo come? I passed her on the way back. She is bringing her colonel boyfriend who wants to set her up in business.

CHAPLAIN: You're not planning to sell the business, are you?

MOTHER COURAGE: How else am I going to raise money for Opoku's release?

CHAPLAIN: But how are you going to live?

MOTHER COURAGE: God will provide.

Enter ASHEWO, with an old fat Colonel.

ASHEWO: (Hugs MOTHER COURAGE) Mother di Mother! You again. (Whispers)

I've sold him the idea. We need just a little push. (Loud) This is my business advisor.

I heard that you want to sell your wagon. I want to enter the business.

MOTHER COURAGE: I want to pawn it out for a while, that's all. This wagon, you can't find it easily during wartime.

ASHEWO: (Disappointed) Only for pawn? I heard you were selling it. I'm not sure I want it anymore if it's only for pawn. Or what do you think, Colonel?

COLONEL: Whatever you say, sugar in my tea. I'm behind and in front of you, one hundred per cent.

MOTHER COURAGE: It is for pawn only.

ASHEWO: But you said you were desperate for money.

MOTHER COURAGE: Then I should sell my life away? This wagon is all I have.

MOTHER COURAGE: See, over there, where those men are squatting? They sell wagons there.

ASHEWO: What's your problem? Colonel, well? Should we buy or go find another wagon?

COLONEL: We can go looking.

ASHEWO: That gives us two weeks to have fun, and you know how I love having fun with you.

CHAPLAIN: She has/

ASHEWO: (Sharply) Shut up!

ASHEWO: When can you repay me?

MOTHER COURAGE: Two weeks, even one week, self.

ASHEWO: I'm not sure again. Colonel, advise me now. (*Takes* COLONEL *aside*) She has to sell the bloody thing, don't mind her, playing tough with me. I can get the money from the Major. He is ready to die for me. He says I remind him of Jennifer Lopez, but with a bigger bottom.

COLONEL: I've told you not to even smell the same air as that hardened pimp. I have money more than him. I will buy the wagon for you. I will buy ten wagons for you. ASHEWO: You do enough for me already. I spread myself about only so that I don't burden you. But if you think the Major is a pimp, and since you are my one and only advisor, I will do what you say.

COLONEL: Exactly.

ASHEWO: Because you are the one that said so.

COLONEL: (Salutes) See me standing to attention.

don't square me. I will show you the money later. (To COLONEL) Colonel, go on ahead of me. Just bear me in mind for tonight.

COLONEL: What else do I have to think about—the war?

ASHEWO: Just remember...

COLONEL: Safe sex is no sex.

ASHEWO: Colonel-di-Catholic! I want to do a stock take. (She kisses him. Exit

COLONEL. She climbs into the wagon) You no get better shoes?

MOTHER COURAGE: Which stupid stock take again! The wagon is already yours.

When are you going to talk to the Sergeant? After the execution?

ASHEWO: OK, let me count the shirts.

MOTHER COURAGE: (Pulls her down by the wrapper) You looter! So soon you've forgotten about Opoku. Run! Don't tell Sergeant our relationship to him. Say you're his girlfriend, God knows they'll release him on compassionate grounds.

ASHEWO: That is not funny. I've organised with One-Eye. He should be waiting for me in the bushes.

CHAPLAIN: Where else do you meet men?

ASHEWO: Shut up!

CHAPLAIN: Haggle. Don't just offer him the whole amount. Start low and let him bid up. One thousand dollars should be enough for them.

MOTHER COURAGE: Ashewo, don't haggle. My boy's life is at stake. Run! CHAPLAIN: But how are we going to feed? Your daughter isn't exactly God's gift to men.

MOTHER COURAGE: I'm banking on the cashbox. They'll reward Opoku's honesty.

CHAPLAIN: My dear, it would be easier to believe in God. You think Ashewo can do the deal?

MOTHER COURAGE: Of course. See how badly she wants my wagon. And for how long can she depend on financial aid from the Colonel? Oya, to work! Ngozi, wash

MOTHER COURAGE: No way. I've worked for thirty years. This one is already twenty-five with no husband. I still have to look after her. It's fifteen hundred or finish.

ASHEWO: What's my own? He's your son. (Exits)

MOTHER COURAGE avoids looking at CHAPLAIN and NGOZI. She sits down to *help* NGOZI *wash the cutlery*.

MOTHER COURAGE: If you like, break the tumblers, you hear? They are not ours anymore. Don't look at me like that! Opoku will return to us, even if I have to pay the whole two thousand. With a few thousand naira we can stock up and start again.

CHAPLAIN: The Lord will provide.

MOTHER COURAGE: Dry those tumblers properly. (*They wash the cutlery in silence.* **NGOZI** *suddenly runs sobbing behind the wagon*)

ASHEWO: They said no. I told you. One-Eye wanted to leave instantly. He said what is the point. The drums will start beating soon and they'll pronounce judgement. I begged him to hold on for one minute while I get back to you again.

MOTHER COURAGE: All right, give him the two thousand. Run! (ASHEWO runs off. They sit in silence. CHAPLAIN stops washing the glasses. The sound of drums in the distance) Did I bargain for too long?

CHAPLAIN stands up and goes to the back. MOTHER COURAGE remains seated. It grows dark. The drumming stops. It gets light again. MOTHER COURAGE remains still. Enter ASHEWO, distraught.

ASHEWO: What kind of mother are you, putting your business first? The rebels gave your son eleven bullets. Normally they give ten. They discovered he supports Manchester United. The real danger is that they think he kept the cashbox here with you and that you know him. They are bringing him here for you to identify. I beg you don't know him, oh. Let me hide Ngozi from all this. (MOTHER COURAGE shakes her head) She knows?

MOTHER COURAGE: She knows. Bring her here.

ASHEWO gets NGOZI who goes to stand beside her mother. MOTHER COURAGE holds her hand. Enter two stretcher-bearers with a body. SERGEANT walks beside it. They put down the stretcher.

SERGEANT: We want this man's name for our records. He bought food from you a while ago, maybe he told you his name. Do you recognise him? (*Removes the sheet*. (MOTHER COURAGE shakes her head in denial) At all? (MOTHER COURAGE shakes her head again) Okay-oh. Take the body and dump it in the mass grave. He is an Unknown Soldier.

9

Two years later. Half the population of West Africa has died. Epidemic kills what is left by the slaughter. In the former flourishing country there is famine. We meet MOTHER COURAGE in the mountains with the Union Army. The harmattan is bitter. Business is very bad. COOK gets a letter from Monrovia and departs.

MOTHER COURAGE: I must talk to Ngozi first. You've only just told me. I don't just make decisions like that. Ngozi! (NGOZI comes out of the wagon) Cook and I want to settle in Monrovia. He has inherited a beer parlour there. We get on well and he has a nose for business. The peacekeepers have kept the place stable. You'll have a great opportunity to catch a husband. Looks don't count for everything and God knows what with all the amputees around, a little scar won't be a blemish. It's time for us to live life. Look at your body cove

NGOZI tight) I didn't reject him because of you, so don't get any ideas. It was because of the wagon. Offload Cook's stuff for him and let's go in the opposite direction. (Climbs up onto the wagon and throw out the rest of COOK'S belongings) That's that. From now on, it's just the two of us, mother and daughter. Come on it looks like it's going to rain. Harmattan is ended.

They hitch themselves onto the wagon and go. COOK comes back and looks uncomprehendingly at his things.

15 Pear NOTHER COURAGE 5 NGOZI pili their vagorias - C

The wagon, in dire shape, stands near a farmhouse with a huge thatched roof, which is leaning against a mud wall. It is night. Out of the woods appear a sergeant and three soldiers heavily armed.

SERGEANT: Maintain silence. Anyone opens their mouth, shoot to kill.

SOLDIER 1: (Shouts) Yes Sir!

SERGEANT: (Hisses) Are you deaf?

SOLDIER 1: (Whispers) Sorry sir.

SERGEANT: Sorry for yourself.

SOLDIER 2: But Sergeant, we need a guide. We'll make noise when we knock on the

FARMER: This is our son. This girl is deaf. Her mother is in town buying supplies. People are fleeing the town and are selling their property cheap. They are travelling traders.

SERGEANT: All right. Now, do your mouths like this. (*Covers his mouth with his hand. They copy him*) That's right. Not a sound, otherwise I shoot you. I need one of you to show us a way into town. (*Points at* YOUNG FARMER) You.

YOUNG FARMER: I don't know a way.

SOLDIER 2: (Grinning) Oh, yeah?

YOUNG FARMER: I don't help Union troops.

SERGEANT: Is that so? (To SOLDIER 2) Land him one. Only one, oh!

SOLDIER 2 lands YOUNG FARMER a blow in the stomach with the butt of his rifle.

YOUNG FARMER: (*Cries and falls to the ground in pain*) Ah! Even if you kill me, I will never betray my people!

SOLDIER 1: Sergeant, I know how to open his eyes. (*He goes to the cowshed*) Two cows and an ox. Either you show us the way or they eat lead.

YOUNG FARMER: Ah, please, don't kill our cattle!

FARMER'S WIFE: (Weeps) Sergeant, I beg, don't kill them. We will starve.

SERGEANT: Well, then.

SOLDIER 1: Mister Ox, you first.

YOUNG FARMER: (To FARMER) Daddy, should I help them? (FARMER nods) I will help you.

FARMER'S WIFE: Thank you, Sergeant. God will reward you. You will not miss road. All your enemies will be vanquished/

FARMER: Enough!

SOLDIER 1: I told you. Cut off their oxygen, and they become cowards.

Led by YOUNG FARMER, *the soldiers depart*.

FARMER: They want to bombard the town again. When civilians are fleeing.

FARMER'S WIFE: It never stopped them before. Maybe these ones are just scouts.

What are you doing?

FARMER: (Puts a ladder on the roof and climbs up it) They might be part of a

battalion. I have to find out. Ehen, what did I say? An armoured division! Tanks,

cannons, rocket launchers all up the hill and beyond. They want to exterminate the

town. God help the people.

FARMER'S WIFE: Is there any light in the town?

FARMER: (Climbs down) No. They are still asleep. Once they get into position, they

will massacre everyone.

FARMER'S WIFE: The guards will see them and warn everyone in time.

FARMER: Which film are you watching? They must have been killed by now or else

they would have sounded the alarm.

FARMER'S WIFE: If only we had more people...

FARMER: It's just ourselves and a mute.

FARMER'S WIFE: We

need. Preserve this city and the lives of those who dwell therein. Except for Mama Sheni who owes me two thousand naira. Her house is Number 45 Kelly Street, opposite Ibukun Cinema, next to the barbershop close to... (FARMER gives her a withering look) But of course no need to give you directions Lord. Wake up every man, woman and child, oh Lord, I say wake up every living thing in that town and give them wings to fly away. Oh Protector of the Weak, watch over our families and their children who are sleeping. Including my nephew, baby Paulina, who is going to become either a lesbian or a criminal. She fondled my breast in an adult way. (Throughout the prayer, NGOZI is disturbed) We would be your messengers Lord, but it has been written that we will not be your instruments in this case. Thy will be done, oh Lord. (FARMER'S WIFE and FARMER possessed by the Holy Spirit flail about and speak in tongues)

NGOZI sneaks unnoticed into the wagon and takes something out of it and hides it under her wrapper. She climbs up onto the roof of the cowshed. FARMER and FARMER'S WIFE continue to be in rapture. NGOZI sits on the roof and beats the FARMER'S WIFE: She's going to get us killed.

FARMER: Stop it! Come down right now! Come down I say!

FARMER'S WIFE: The Union troops are going to slit our throats.

FARMER: (Searching for stones) I will stone you, oh!

FARMER'S WIFE: You have no heart at all, this girl. The Union troops will kill us.

NGOZI stares in the distance and continues drumming.

FARMER'S WIFE: (*To* FARMER) What did I tell you? I said we should not allow these riffraff onto our farm. They don't care if we lose our cattle.

SERGEANT: (Enters running) You people are finished!

FARMER'S WIFE: It is the girl. She sneaked up there while we were praying for you.

SERGEANT: Where's the ladder?

FARMER: (Points) She took it.

SERGEANT (*To* NGOZI) I command you to throw down your drum right now! (NGOZI *keeps on drumming*.) You will all suffer for this.

SOLDIER 1: (*To* SERGEANT) Permission to suggest something, sir. (*Whispers in* SERGEANT'S *ear. He consents*)

SOLDIER 1: Young woman, let's make a deal. Come with us to the town and get your mother. (NGOZI continues drumming)

SERGEANT: (*Pushes* SOLDIER 1 *aside*) She doesn't trust you. With a face like yours, I don't blame her. (*Shouts at* NGOZI) MY sister, I give you my word as an officer and a gentleman.

SOLDIER 2: Sarge, you got promoted and didn't tell us. Congratulations/

EnterText 4.2

SERGEANT: Shut up! Sister, what do you say? (NGOZI *drums harder*) Na wa for this girl, oh.

YOUNG FARMER: Sir, it's not for her mother.

SOLDIER 1: We're running out of time. They'll soon suspect something's wrong in the town.

SERGEANT: We have to cover the noise with another noise. Something louder.

SOLDIER 1: Sir, you said we should not make noise.

SERGEANT: Not a war noise, fool.

FARMER: I could get my own drum and blend it into her own beat.

SOLDIER 1 and SOLDIER 2 become mesmerised and start dancing. A glare from SERGEANT brings them to their senses.

SERGEANT: (Holds FARMER) Get the drums. (YOUNG FARMER runs to get drums for himself and for FARMER) Very good, now start playing as if your lives depend on it. They do.

NGOZI has been listening and drumming less. Worried, she continues, harder.

SERGEANT: You call this drumming? We can still hear her.

FARMER: (*To* YOUNG FARMER) You hear that? She is disgracing us. Follow her beat and play! (*They follow* NGOZI'S *beat and soon the drumming becomes* synchronised into a rhythm. NGOZI understands what they're trying to do and changes the rhythm to that of a war tune)

SERGEANT: Stop, you fools! You're alerting the town! Stop!

EnterText 4.2

SOLDIER 1: It's the Major. He's going mad. We're in line for a court martial.

SERGEANT: Political Correctness has done me in! All right, you dumb mother-

fucker! This is really the last chance!

NGOZI, in tears, keeps drumming. SERGEANT shoots her. NGOZI beats the drum a few more times then falls.

SERGEANT: Thank you for the music—bitch.

At the same time as NGOZI'S last beats, cannons from the town fire.

SOLDIER 1: (Respectfully) She did it.

12

Before dawn. The sound of drums and whistles of marching troops.

In front of the wagon. MOTHER COURAGE is crouched over NGOZI. The farm people are standing beside her.

FARMER: (Hostile) You must go! There's only one regiment left. You can't make it

alone.

MOTHER COURAGE: Hush, she's sleeping. (Sings)

Little darling, sleeping still?

It's time to for us to go

We can't stop moving, not until

Our hearts and minds say no.

You must be dreaming,

No more hunger, permanent peace at last

I've made this bed I'll lie on it

And leave the past to stoke the past

Though I believe you're better off

Sleeping as you are

I'm the last one standing out of four

Thanks to this bloody war.

You should not have mentioned the children.

FARMER: And you, too busy profiting from the war, you didn't think of your child.

MOTHER COURAGE: Not too loud, she's sleeping.

FARMER'S WIFE: With the ancestors.

As long as man is politics

The poor will scoop to eat his sick

So let us shout, "Bring on the war!"

And may it reign forever more!