

# 1 I Speak for Africa

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## My Quest for an internet

In this, the 24th installment of our weekly series at [emeagwali.com](http://emeagwali.com), we present Part 6/6 of Philip Emeagwali's lecture on his contribution to the body of knowledge that defines an internet.

## I Speak for Africa

The lecture [video](#) is posted at [emeagwali.com](http://emeagwali.com) and <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1219655872942772550#>

An interview by Nduka Otono, who is the former secretary of the Association of Nigerian Authors, following Philip Emeagwali's lecture at the University of Alberta (Canada) on September 23, 2006. It was published in *Share Our World*, a Celtec® magazine for mobile phone users.

Nduka Otono: In your Alberta lecture, you lamented the negative effects of

brain or intellectual capital flight on Africa's developmental efforts. Is it

Nigeria rewards the oil companies that consume the technology that I produced. The oil companies received 40 percent of Nigerian oil revenue, or about 200 billion dollars.

true that for more than 18 years you have not visited your homeland, Nigeria?



If it is true, what is Africa's hope (including Nigeria, of course) of benefiting from the expertise of gifted intellectual exiles like you?

**Philip Emeagwali:**

It's true that I left Nigeria 33 years ago, and my last visit to Africa was 20 years ago. My 16-year-old son and wife of 25 years have never visited Africa.

Despite my three-decade absence, I have been residing at the edge of knowledge and pushing the envelope of technology thus contributing to humanity, Africa included. I was the first scientist to prove that supercomputers with thousands of electronic brains called processors can be used to recover oil. For that achievement, *CNN* described me as a scientist who used his "mathematical and computer expertise to develop methods for extracting more petroleum from oil fields." This technology is used in Nigerian oil exploration. Globally, it is an eight billion dollar a year industry. Oil companies alone, purchase and use 10 percent of all supercomputers to discover and recover oil.

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*Philip Emeagwali*

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Nigeria rewards the oil companies that consume the technology that I produced. The oil companies received 40 percent of Nigerian oil revenue, or about 200 billion dollars. The Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) received billions. I received no compensation from oil companies or PTDF. I was not paid for 15 years of excruciatingly hard intellectual labor.

“How can I ever thank you?” gushed a woman to a lawyer who solved her legal troubles. “My dear,” he replied, “ever since the Phoenicians invented money, there has never been a better way to say thank you.”

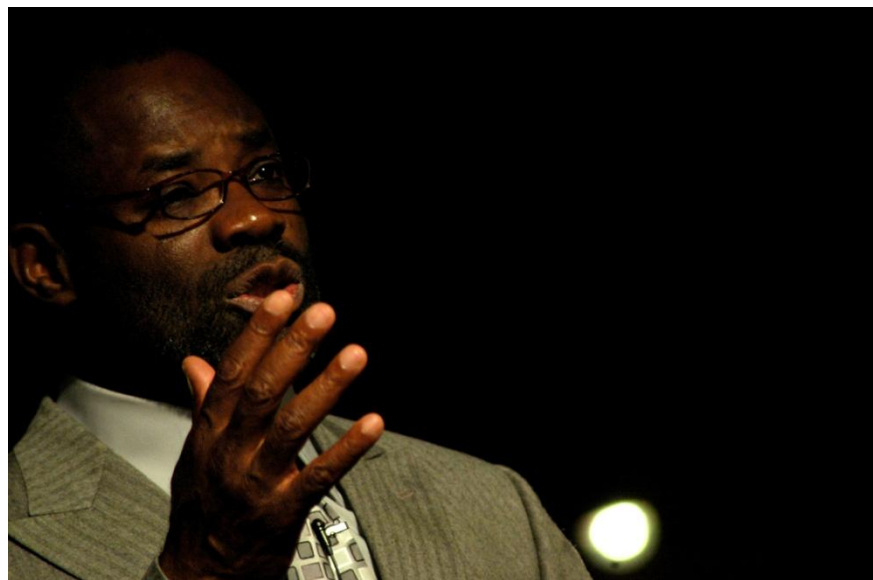
All I received were commendations such as the one from *Upstream* [a European oil and gas industry publication, January 27, 1997] that called me an “unorthodox innovator [who] has pushed back the boundaries of oilfield science.”

Nduka Otono:

Many admirers see you as a public intellectual, perhaps part of the reason you were invited as keynote speaker for the Unveiling Africa project at Alberta. What would you consider the role of the public intellectual in an underdeveloped political economy like Nigeria's?

Philip Emeagwali:

Public intellectuals are the eyes and ears of Africa. I communicate my ideas to Africa, not just to scientists. I



might point out that Nigeria will soon

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*Philip Smeagwali*

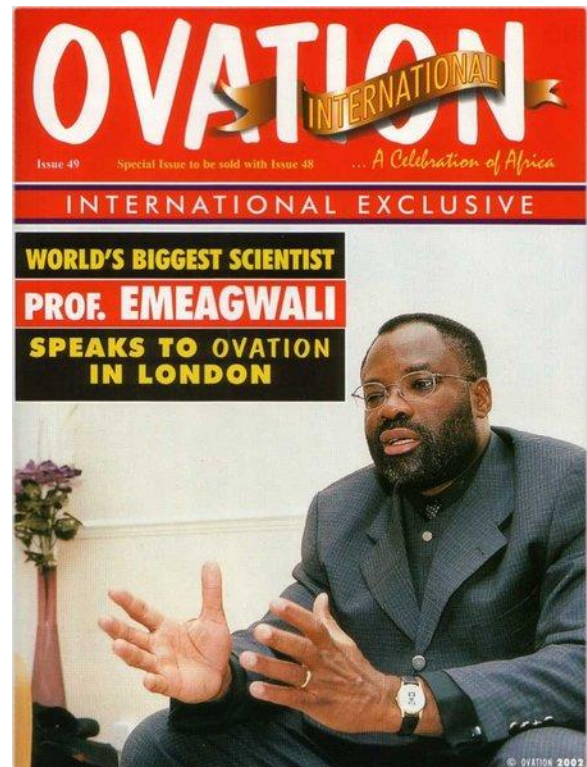
be celebrating its 50th independence anniversary while still paying a 40 percent tax to Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States through their oil companies.

I will explain that the 200 billion dollars paid to foreign oil companies is a hidden “ignorance” tax imposed upon a country that lacks intellectual capital.

I will ask Nigerians: Why did you pay 200 billion dollars for the privilege of removing your lifeblood? Is it not more profitable to spend 20 billion dollars to develop your intellectual capital and then save 200 billion dollars?

A public intellectual will question the allocation of a mere 110 million dollars to create jobs — jobs for 110 million poor Nigerians. He will point

out that’s only one dollar for every impoverished Nigerian, whose share of the national debt is three hundred dollars.



Nigeria's 391 Confab delegates debated oil revenue allocation among our 36 states, and submitted nearly 200 recommendations. But the Confab delegates avoided debate on oil revenue allocation between Nigeria and the Shell Oil Company; they failed to recommend any way to reduce the 200 billion dollar royalty

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fee, which is likely to be demanded again by foreign oil companies.

**Nduka Otiono:**

In your lecture, you spoke about the new realities that make it difficult for children of Africans abroad like you to reconnect with their ancestral home. Do you personally have any plans to physically partake in efforts at developing your homeland?

**Philip Emeagwali:**

I quietly work behind the scenes to develop Africa. I contribute my time and ideas. A few years ago, I conducted an extensive, unpaid investigation on the diminishing Nigerian petroleum reserve.

I emailed and warned elected officials that:

“Oil and gas are non-renewable and do not flow endlessly like the River Niger. Existing oil wells are yielding ever-declining production rates. This is a pregnant moment: Nigerian oil reserves diminish at 3 percent a year!

The challenge is not in discovering oil but in recovering it. For every barrel of

“Public intellectuals are the eyes and ears of Africa,” says Emeagwali.

oil recovered two remain unrecoverable, because it is difficult to extract all the oil from an oil field, or rather oil sand — which is nothing but sand impregnated with oil....

The oil we export today was formed millions of years ago — when prehistoric, dog-sized humans, which were our common ancestor with

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*Philip Emeagwali*

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apes, walked around African grasslands on four legs. Ancient

“I was the first scientist to prove that supercomputers with thousands of electronic brains called processors can be used to recover oil,” says Emeagwali.

marine plants and animals that died were buried in clay before they could completely decay, and subsequent increases in temperature and pressure caused the formation of oil and gas....In practical terms, oil fields are not self-refueling. To be more precise, oil fields need a few million years to refuel.”

**Nduka Otono:**

**What are your plans to reconnect with Africa if any, and what is your time line?**

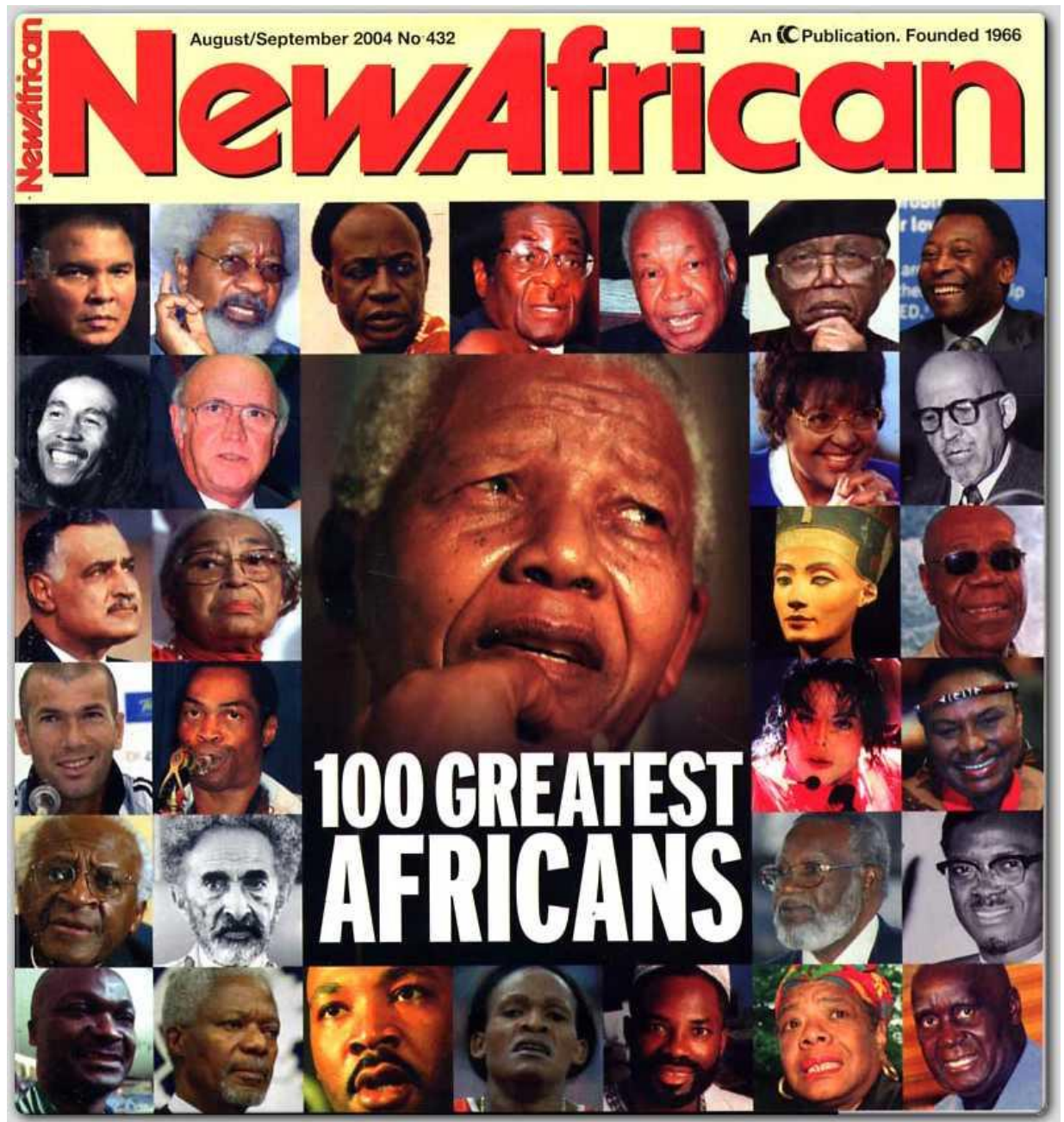
**Philip Emeagwali:**

I never got paid for the work that I did. Since time immemorial, people in the creative professions were patronized. Could Beethoven, Mozart and Bach have created music without patrons that paid their living expenses? Mark Anthony benefited from the patronage of Julius Caesar; and the great mathematician Leonhard Euler relocated to St. Petersburg to earn a stipend from Queen Catherine I of Russia. Intellectual exiles will relocate to Africa when they start receiving patronage.

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*Philip Emeagwali*

Emeagwali (third from bottom right) ranked 35th and greatest living African scientist (from pages [16](#), [18](#), [20](#), [22](#)).



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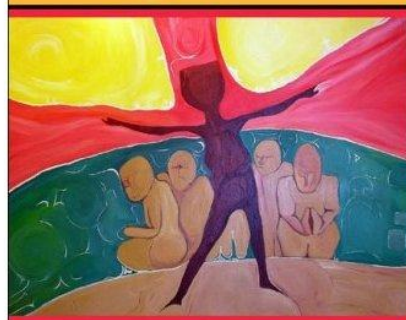
Philip Smeagwali

**Nduka Otiono** is an award-winning writer; an associate lecturer, English Department, University of Ibadan; a journalist and a freelance publisher; and an active member of the National Committee on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural heritage. The following opinion piece by Nduka Otiono was reproduced from *THE GUARDIAN* - March 2005: Voices of Lagos -

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/pictures/image/0,8543,-10605140635,00.html>.

Lagos is made up of people stranded in the city. They work here but cannot go home. Most people live in squalor and cannot imagine any other life. They get so used to the bustle . You would think that people so exposed to such chaos would want a less urban environment, but Lagosians can't stand other places. Nightlife is a shadow of what it used to be. When it is nightfall now people hurry back home. It has led to many more neighbourhood bars, especially when there are power failures. We have what appears to be an upsurge of activities. Every weekend there are festivals but there is an absence of publishing infrastructure. I come from the generation that witnessed the complete waste of our resources like oil. Our life was marked by military dictatorship. One would have thought with the dawn of democracy there would be a revival in the arts. There is, but there is an overtone of hopelessness. There are a great number of cultural activities going on, but below the surface there is a grim feeling of where we are going. A great disappointment in the ruling class. Against this background of cultural renaissance is despair. The writing today is about survival, about lots of people not having jobs, no safety nets, about the huge investments being made in children. The most positive news from Nigeria comes from the arts, which are being recognised across the world. The most negative images come from the business and political class. The painful thing is that the political class does not read. It has a very narrow world view. Sadly, the intellectual class has simply fled. For a country that needs all of its brains, it is tragedy. The west absorbs our most distinguished intellectuals. Civil liberty groups are growing in confidence and stature. So what keeps me? I am a writer and secretary of the Association of Nigerian authors.

Love  
in a Time of  
Nightmares



Nduka Otiono