

Dear Paula,

03/15/00

The court work was fine.

I would like to split this E-mail into, at least three issues, even if "pending matters" will be left behind.

1 - There is any way you may help me in reliable information about two moments from Benin History -- but, please consider that books are to me difficult to reach, and even when I buy those books they take a long time to reach me. Maybe one or two pages on it will be very much helpful. The issues are:

a) when Ovonramwen decides to attack the British mission, and it happens "on the way from Ughoton," the harbor city, neighbor to Sapele -- you say that the attack by Benin soldiers on the British attempting to come to Benin City did NOT result in the massacre of the entire British mission. Two people escaped and one of them -- Commander Boisragon . . . " Then, two escaped, but how many died. Even if the number will not be precisely, there is any idea about it: ten, one hundred, one thousand?

b) when the British under the command of Bacon impose a punitive mission to Benin, how was the extension in killings of such punitive mission, since the source I have speaks about a "blood bath".

2 - In my earliest E-mail I have informed you that I think in Portuguese and I'm writing in English. I have never lived in the U.S.A., in spite the fact that I have been in your Country, maybe twenty times, or more. I hear your music since the times of Roy Hamilton (have you heard about him?), and Summertime (sung by Ella Fitzgerald) and Manhattan (the version by Dinah Washington), are vivid parts of my memory, and once I was proud to have almost all Ray Charles' records. I have a very old record, I've bought it in New Orleans, with the signatures of Sweet Emma, and musicians I admired, playing at "The Preservation Hall." I started buying pocketbooks from U.S.A., with novels from James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and I loved the spiritual recorded in printing by James Weldon Johnson and his brother Rosamond (God's Trombones!!!). But all this is not enough to get the spirit. One must to live there, and sometimes even if you are born in a certain place, you'll never get the spirit, as is my understanding for the words bellow:

"The mass of "gospel" hymns which has swept through American churches and well-nigh ruined our sense of song consists largely of debased imitations of Negro melodies made *by ears that caught the jingle but not the music, the body but not the soul* (Italics are mine), of the Jubilee songs. It is thus clear that the study of Negro religion is not only a vital part of the history of the Negro in America, but no uninteresting part of American history."

From Du Bois', "*The Souls of Black Folk*."

All to say that, it seems was easy for you to understand the joke on Scheherezade, it stands in a kind of world understanding, because of Arabic too ancient history spread allover the world, but I'm still needing more words from you to understand the joke behind the *topical joke* "pending matters," in a different context than literally translated, as I did.

I have lived in Ghana -- not in the sense of staying there for more than one full month -- but back and forth Africa's West Coast, countless times. There was a time when I could laugh a lot with jokes from my good friends in Africa. They use to tell me long stories, easy too much not to be understood. And they loved me a lot, when I was translating Brazilian many "lines" jokes. But do you know something? It's hard for me to laugh with what Americans call, if I am not wrong, topical jokes, as spread by the old Bob Hope, and repeated nowadays by persons like David Latherman (is this his name, the talkshow man of NBC?), or even, often, Woody Halen. And it seems that all your Nation, loves them. It is a cultural question, I think so. Our jokes are not sophisticated-- they are a bit primitive: long stories, trying to make you laugh at the end, in a big climax!

Do you know why I said all that? Because you say that E-mail "fails miserably to convey humor". Maybe is because we are using two types of humor. We need to find a *lucumi* way for humor thoughts, so that even if is one line joke, or one hundred words joke, we may communicate one with the other, "*Not Without Laughter*." I have grabbed this phrase from an important African-American writer. And do you know something: I just don't know what really it means, but literally. I think I just guess, but I keep on guessing what there is behind the phrase.

" Is dangerous to believe a declaration of seriousness if the declarant has no sense of humor. In fact, if the pronouncer calls to mind the somber picture of the first glued to a forehead, and the stature of a body bent with the woes of the world, I try my best to exchange the grim environment for sunnier climes where really serious people laugh, chortle, giggle, and guffaw in their attempts to stick around and maybe make a difference in this mean old world." Maya Angelou, introducing Langston Hughes' "*Not Without Laughter*,"

### 3. South Africa with a smile.

It was in the hard times of *apartheid*, and I had to go several times to Mozambique. From Brazil the natural route was: Rio de Janeiro-Johannesburg, in a transatlantic flight. After six or seven hours of flight we landed in Johannesburg, after a technical stop in Cape Town.

My flight to Maputo use to leave, sometimes, two or three days after my arrival. So I have been in Johannesburg several times, but I have never reached the city. I have never left the airport. They have a good hotel at the international aisle of the airport, so there is no need for one to immigrate, it means, to stamp the passport. Since my clients where in independent countries of Africa, and they were hostile both South African regime, and the people who used to visit South Africa, a stamp from South Africa's airport could mean many of troubles in Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana.

I still keep thinking when I will decide to visit South Africa, and cross the Jan Smuts Airport door.

Maybe when Mandela invites me! (One line joke).

Best regards,

José Luiz