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Chinua Achebe: A re-assessment

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This article argues that the genius of Chinua Achebe as a novelist was definitely assisted by the advantage of an early start so that other African writers had no choice but to look up to him. It was Chinua Achebe who established and defined the Nigerian tradition in the novel, a tradition that takes its roots from our folk culture and creatively makes use of our proverbs, legends, folktales, and local myths, thus giving expression to our national culture. And by making capital of what is *indigenous* in both Nigerian and African literature, Achebe established the total rehabilitation of the image and dignity of the African personality bruised and damaged by the colonial master. Achebe's achievements were indeed so fascinating that a "School of Achebe" arose. It is understood that both in his fictional and non-fictional works plus his interviews and other critical essays, Achebe is at heart a social critic. This is made clear in *The Trouble with Nigeria* in which he concentrated on the issue of poor leadership in Nigeria. He had equally dealt with the problem of poor leadership in his earlier fiction where he created leaders who failed their people. With the failure of both leaders of the old order and of the military regimes, Achebe places his hopes on the elite on whom the duty of salvaging Nigeria from her leadership problems rests. But will the elite rise up to the challenge? Achebe is a writer to whom we are grateful. **Key words:** Chinua Achebe, indigenous Nigerian traditions, political leadership, social criticism.

1

Chinua Achebe's incomparable genius was definitely boosted and assisted by what I term the advantage of an early start. So that other African writers had no choice but to look up to him. Achebe is definitely the father of the African novel.

Chinua Achebe has the singular honour and privilege of numbering among world-class writers who define their nations, whose country of origin evokes their names. I have in mind the kind of symbiotic relationship between England and Shakespeare, Russia and Tolstoy, the United States of America and Hawthorne or Melville, Kenya and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Achebe is as native to Nigeria as *garri* and *okro* soup, just as Hawthorne is to America as native as apple-pie, Tolstoy as native to Russia as vodka, and Shakespeare as native of England as the long bow and the institution of the monarchy.

It was Chinua Achebe who originated and finally defined what I shall call, the "Nigerian tradition" in the novel. By that tradition I mean in this study the literary conventions and habits of expression deployed by Achebe in the practice of his art. It

subsumes other narrative techniques employed by other Nigerian writers, especially Achebe to highlight the Nigerian worldview in literature. By the Nigerian tradition in literature, I further mean that tradition which takes its roots from our literature and folkways and is given ballast by vigorous and robust recourse to our folk culture.

Since, by "tradition" we normally imply a body of beliefs, customs, sayings, literary conventions, devices and habits of expression handed down to a writer and reader from the past, by the Nigerian tradition in literature I further mean that tradition which respects, copies from, makes use of, and owes allegiance to our folk literature and creatively makes use of our local proverbs, legends, folk tales, local myths, *et cetera* in giving expression to our national culture. I go even further to mean that tradition in which the voice of immemorial community, vestiges of primordial ritual and ceremony, and a judicious blending of our folk culture form the building block of our literary expression and narrative technique.

It was Chinua Achebe who made capital of what is *indigenous* in Nigerian literature and culture. And to him goes the credit as the inaugurator of the great tradition of Nigerian literature – that tradition which highlights the dignity of our manhood and our oral heritage. Achebe is first and foremost concerned with cultural assertion and is a pioneer in what has come to be known as *cultural nationalism* in Nigerian literature, in his stressing the innate dignity of the Nigerian man and woman, and in his concern with the rehabilitation of the image of the black man bruised and distorted by European writers. In sum, when all things are considered, we must all hark back to Achebe for what is great in the tradition of Nigerian literature – that tradition which promotes our awareness of what is really great and dignified in our culture, salted with the lilt of our local proverbs, the beauty in our traditions. In sum: the total rehabilitation of the image and dignity of the black man bruised and damaged by the colonial master.

No writer paints better than Achebe the Nigerian culture and political landscape. The rural society he depicts in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* earned for those novels, respectively, the sobriquet of *archetypal* and *situational* novels from Charles Larson (1978: 191). The image of rural Nigeria in Achebe's canon is drawn in bold relief. Anywhere in the world *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are read – that pristine and cohesive system of existence which the intrusion of the white man came to disrupt, is made manifest. There is no Nigerian who reads *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* without a sense of nostalgia, or feeling of loss. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* thus are the two works in which Nigeria is drawn in bold relief and re-defined as a society whose old ways of existence are lost and gone forever.

In the ingredients of his story-telling technique, Achebe does not rely on foreign images and metaphors but on what is authentically indigenous. We see this in his use of the folk tradition. As I have argued elsewhere, Achebe's works are completely Nigerian and autochthonous in his use of folklore and myth, for myths have their roots in primitive folk beliefs of a people or the nation (see Nnolim 1992).

Nigeria claims Achebe completely as her own in his “sons” and “daughters” – Nigerian writers who were so fascinated with the subject matter and technique which Achebe so admirably perfected that they set out consciously or unconsciously to imitate him. We speak of the “School of Achebe” as we do of no other Nigerian writer. Munonye (1983: 77) admits in an interview that he was encouraged by Achebe’s success as a Nigerian writer and that he shares “with him the thrills and agonies of creations locally sourced” and “that we draw from the same environment and the characters we present to the world are children of the same soil.” He further admits, “it is a fact that Chinua, for me among others, has been a big source of inspiration” and “that there is considerable similarity in the themes of our earliest full-length novels and is not a matter for any regret. The subject of culture conflict was a compelling one at the time.”

We must therefore agree that John Munonye (especially in *The Only Son*), Elechi Amadi (especially in *The Concubine*), T. M. Aluko (especially in *One Man, One Wife*), Flora Nwapa (especially in *Efuru*), Onuora Nzekwu (especially in *Wand of Noble Wood*) are the most prominent among the “children” of Achebe who tried to capture Achebe’s technique, and were concerned with cultural assertion.

In his interviews and non-literary outputs also, Achebe has shown himself the writer as Nigerian; in his total concern for the quality of leadership in Nigeria’s body politic; and in his attempt (to the discomfiture of his admirers) to enter politics to help the ship of the Nigerian state keep afloat. Achebe as a social critic stems from his search for the right leadership for Nigeria and this informs his publication of *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983).

2

The Trouble with Nigeria is Achebe’s non-fictional work written out of extreme frustration. It is a sort of last warning issued by Achebe to an audience that seems hard of hearing. The theme of poor leadership which takes centre stage in *The Trouble with Nigeria* may come as a surprise to scholars and literary critics who have spent several decades poring over various themes and techniques in Achebe’s novels; but they need not be surprised for from *Things Fall Apart* to *Anthills of the Savannah* the one consistent concern he exhibited in each novel is the issue of leaders who, in time of crisis, fail their people. This study thus argues, that in *The Trouble with Nigeria* Achebe the novelist, finally drops his mask and comes out *in propria persona* to address readers who, over the years, while correctly appreciating the felicities embedded in his storytelling techniques have failed to grasp his message; readers who seem to have come to a packed theatre in which great drama is being enacted, and decided only to watch the audience.

I will also try to demonstrate that before the publication of *The Trouble with Nigeria* in 1983, Achebe had tried, sometimes obliquely, to draw attention to the central concern

of his novels – the issue of poor leadership – in his essays and public lectures, so that *The Trouble with Nigeria* was for him, a final summing up of an issue over which he thinks the last word could not be said. The leader that fails his people – what else is Okonkwo or Ezeulu or Obi Okonkwo or Chief Nanga or His Excellency, Sam, all about? All else, for Achebe, are in the periphery not in the dead centre.

To begin with, politics enters literature through what we normally term the pragmatic theory of art, through literature's affective powers, for the pragmatic theory looks at art as an end because, according to the adage: "Some men wish to change men's minds, / Others wish to change the world men live in."

As we shall see, in all his creative works and in most of his non-fictional works Achebe has demonstrated his political commitment in his works. Politics, as we know, enters literature also when the writer's concern with the public welfare is predominant, especially when the writer's concern extends beyond destinies of nations or the masses. Thus Achebe can be identified as a politically committed writer because of his concern with the fate or destiny of Igbos in particular and Nigerians and Africans in general in their collective encounter with Europe. His commitment is further evidenced in his continued concern with the future of his people after independence: through his continued expression of disenchantment with the aftermath of independence (our "mis-government of ourselves") resulting in bribery and corruption, election rigging, poor leadership, and inequities in our body politic. It will be seen that Achebe, in the end, is a writer of the political novel whose end is utopian, because the goal towards which all his novels tend is that golden era when the intellectual elite will wrest politics from the illiterate politicians and the military and create an egalitarian society free from poor leadership, bribery and corruption; for that time when politics will be played here, as in Europe and the West, according to the rules of the game; and for that time when African countries will be free from all neo-colonialist thrall dom cushioned, of course, by economic abundance and the absence of want. If this view of Achebe's work is sustained, a reappraisal of what has come to be known as his philosophic pessimism will be in order, once we have established that far from being a nihilist, he holds out hopes for the future.

In thus tracing the contours of the landscape of Achebe's creative and non-fictional works, we shall be obliged to constantly look from life to art and vice versa, for the two are inseparable in Achebe's thematic concerns. "The trouble with Nigeria", he asserts "is simply and squarely a failure of leadership." He continues: "The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership" (*Trouble*, 1). But before we get carried away we should understand what Achebe means by the word "leader." I personally understand a leader to be that person in a group to whom others look up to for initiative in pursuit of group goals and one who must possess the following virtues in abundance: honesty, integrity, hard work, infectious

enthusiasm about others and their welfare, strong moral character, humility, self-discipline, and patriotism, for one cannot be the right leader in a society one does not truly love enough to be willing to die for her. In Achebe's own words:

Leaders are, in the language of psychologists, role models. People look up to them and copy their actions, behaviour and mannerisms. Therefore if a leader lacks discipline, the effect is apt to spread automatically down to his followers. The less discerning among these (i.e. the vast majority) will accept his action quite simply as "the done thing" while the more critical may worry about it for a while and then settle the matter by telling themselves that the normal rules of social behaviour need not apply to those in power. (*Trouble*, 31).

In examining the above, we must for the sake of argument look at Achebe's concept of the role of the leader under these broad headings: Achebe, the writer, as leader; leadership of his fictional characters in pre-colonial and colonial times; leadership of his fictional characters in post-independence setting; pronouncements on leadership in his essays and non-fictional works. Achebe does not merely stand aside and preach about leadership. He does something about it as a writer by personal example. In "The role of the writer in a new nation" he avers: "It is inconceivable to me that a serious writer could stand aside from this debate or is indifferent to this argument which calls his humanity in question – for me at any rate; there is a clear duty to make a statement" (Achebe 1964: 158). And in his essay, "The novelist as teacher", he further says:

Here then is an adequate resolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement [...] Here, I think, my aims and the deep set aspirations of my society meet [...] The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front. For he is after all [...] the sensitive point of his community. (Achebe 1975: 44–5).

In other words, Achebe tells us while at the same time admitting to himself that it is the duty of the writer to lead his people being "the sensitive point of his community." And in his statement below, he further tells us that no writer worth his salt will refuse to be his society's gadfly, its social critic who must have the courage of his conviction to expose and attack injustice, inequality, corruption in all its forms, and further be prepared to fight for all right and just causes. In "The African writer and the Biafran Cause," Achebe states: "It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant, like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames" and "If an artist is anything he is a human being with heightened sensitivities; he must be aware of the faintest nuances of injustice in

human relations. The African writer cannot therefore be unaware of, or indifferent to, the monumental injustice which his people suffer." (Achebe 1975: 78, 79).

It can, therefore, be stated without equivocation or fear of contradiction that by sheer force of personal example, Achebe as a writer has carved out a leadership role for himself as "the sensitive point of his community" determined to show his people "where the rain started beating them". It must further be stressed that as a writer, Achebe has given exemplary leadership not only to his people – the Igbos – but to Nigeria, and the entire African continent. No scandal has ever touched his person; no odd quirks of genius for which others are infamous. No profligate or outlandish lifestyle both in dress and mannerisms (he does not even wear a beard); extreme restraint in the use of language both in his creative output and in debating issues close to his heart. Achebe, it is argued, is a shining example of the writer as leader who practises what he preaches.

Achebe is a good family man, a great nationalist, a true patriot, a world famous intellectual, a writer in the world class – in Igbo parlance, an eagle perched on an Iroko. There is no higher heaven to conquer. And may his inkwell never dry!

3

From Achebe's ideas and example of the writer as leader, we proceed to examine the fictional leaders he created in his works reflecting the pre-colonial and colonial periods of our history. We have in mind Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, and Ezeulu of *Arrow of God*. These are what I prefer to call the leaders of lost causes, tragic and heroic figures who represent the collective consciousness of the communities they represent. These are community leaders in the traditional setting who fail, not because of indiscipline or inner depravity but because, caught in the vortex of inexorable historical changes, they read the signs wrongly or upside down, and held on a moment too long to the status quo, and got swept away in the unrelenting currents of history. These personages attain their leadership position in society not through the chicanery of the smart alec but "by the strength of their arm." Their dignity and self-esteem are neither in doubt nor even threatened. They are members of the Nze and Ozo elite society, untouched by the corrupt practices that bring Obi Okonkwo and Chief Nanga so ignominiously low. It is about these dignified personages that Achebe comments:

A man's position in society was usually determined by his wealth. All the four titles in my village were taken, not given, – and each had its own price. But in those days wealth meant the strength of your arm. No one became rich by swindling the community or stealing government money. In fact a man who was guilty of theft immediately lost all his titles. Today we have kept the materialism and thrown away the spirituality which kept it in check. (Achebe 1964: 159).

For Okonkwo and Ezeulu, the ethic of traditional loyalties dictated that the people had control over their leaders and rulers through variously recognized sanctions. The communal nature of the traditional society was guided by what Mazrui (1978: 68) calls "social collectivism." That complex of loyalties which tied the individual to his own specific society which commanded his affections for his kith and kin, which aroused his protectiveness for the soil of his ancestors, which enabled him to serve and, very occasionally, to love his people.

So, why did they fail themselves and their people? Okonkwo's failure as a leader stems from the fact that he is not a man of the golden mean. Governed rather too much by his exaggerated notion of the masculine ideal, he kowtows to neither man nor the gods. Killed rather by too much action that is not tempered by reasoned dialogue with himself or his peers; too much in a haste to inquire into the whys and consequences of things; too proud to show love and affection; too afraid of being thought weak, Okonkwo fails because he is not a leader of his people whose mores he breaks, whose wise counsel he does not seek, whose cautions he squanders. A hero who lacks humility may be patriotic but his was patriotism of the iconoclast, of the foolhardy. It is, in the final analysis, not the common good that Okonkwo dies for but in the pursuit of narrow selfish interests. Okonkwo finally fails in his inability to carry his people with him and in his too much stubborn adherence to the status quo in a new world order that calls for adaptive suppleness of vision and temperament. Achebe thus blames the tragedy of Umuofia – by extension the Igbo – on bad leaders. When a leader like Okonkwo who is too strong, too proud to seek advice and compromise puts his own welfare and interests above those of the clan, the result is tragedy everywhere.

Achebe must have thought of Okonkwo as an undisciplined leader, especially in his breaking the Week of Peace. He identified indiscipline as one of the causes of poor leadership. In *The Trouble with Nigeria* (27), he describes indiscipline as "A failure or refusal to submit one's desire and actions to the recognition of orderly social conduct in recognition of the rights and desires of others. The goal of indiscipline is self-interest, its action an abandonment of self-restraint in pursuit of the goal."

While Okonkwo's Achilles' heel is heedless action unsupported by philosophy or reasoned dialogue and compounded by indiscipline, Ezeulu's tragedy stems from too much philosophic rhetoric and reasoned dialogue ousted by the harassed course he steers between knowing what is right and doing the same. Here is a man who repeats *ad nauseam* that "a man must dance the dance prevalent in his lifetime" and that the "world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place" (Achebe 1964: 46). But when, under some sort of situation ethics ten elders demand that he eat two sacred yams at their collective peril for survival of the body politic, he bluntly refused to do the dance prevalent in his time and becomes the proverbial rat that could not run fast enough and had to make way for the tortoise.

Ezeulu fails as a leader because of stubbornness: the same stubborn resistance he exhibits in refusing the offer of paramount chieftaincy by the white man. The problem with Ezeulu is that he lacks tact; he has a poorly developed political instinct, and he lacks a proper sense of history as he strains after the gnat of personal power, swallowing in the process the camel of mass disaffection. He thus fails himself and fails Umuaro because he chooses to be blind to the limitations of his powers, forgetting that Ulu whose high priest he is, is not nature-god but god over Umuaro by convention and compromise and can only retain its power by adjusting to the demands of the times. Ezeulu also ignores to his peril Nwaka's warning that unless Ezeulu trod carefully, what happened at Aninta might happen at Umuaro. And we have all heard how the people of Aninta dealt with their deity when he failed them; did they not carry him to the boundary between them and their neighbours and set him on fire (*Arrow*, 31).

Thus Okonkwo and Ezeulu are two Igbo leaders of the old order who fail their people because, in times of crisis, they refuse to identify themselves with the plight of the people, preferring to pursue to the end their own narrow selfish interests: Okonkwo goes on to sign a "separate peace" through suicide; and Ezeulu abandons his people by discovering anew that he "was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god," thus losing grips on the issues of the moment and ending his days in demented dignity.

A close reading of *The Trouble with Nigeria* reveals that each chapter caption reveals an aspect of the cause for the failure of leadership in Nigeria. They are: tribalism, patriotism (or lack of it), the cult of mediocrity, indiscipline and corruption. After examining each aspect listed above, Achebe lays at the door of the elite the duty of salvaging Nigeria from its leadership problems. First, he opined that part of the problem is the lack of intellectual rigour in the governance of Nigeria. In spite of conventional opinions Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership. A basic element of this misfortune is the seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of our founding fathers – a tendency to pious materialistic woolliness and self-centred pedestrianism (*Trouble*, 11). Secondly, he calls on the elite to come out of their shells to shoulder the duty of intellectual leadership of the country or we all perish:

What I am saying is that Nigeria is not beyond change. I am saying that Nigeria can change today if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision [...] But it is the duty of the enlightened citizens to lead the way in their discovery and to create an atmosphere conducive to their emergence. If this conscious effort is not made, good leaders, like good money will be driven out by bad. (*Trouble*, 1-2).

With the above in mind, one can only imagine Acbebe's disgust with a character like Obi Okonkwo of *No Longer at Ease*, a member of the intellectual elite to whom the Umuofia Improvement Union looks up for leadership but who woefully fails them.

Here is an educated young man clean ostensibly in limb and mind who is guilty of cowardice (why not challenge an effete custom like the Osu system and marry Clara?); who is downright immoral (helping procure a dangerous abortion on his intended); whose high idealism crumbles like a cookie on the slightest test; who is guilty of bribery and corruption against which his public utterances are clear (and when he descends to the swamps of bribe-taking, he incurs the disgust and contempt of his kith and kin, that when he decided to eat a toad he did not have the high sense of eating a fat one!).

Furthermore, he does Africa disservice by confirming Mr. Green's insulting utterance that "the African is corrupt through and through." Obi Okonkwo is thus Achebe's example of the modern intellectual elite who betrays his trust; because he cannot cope with the demands of leadership which call for high discipline, for Obi Okonkwo is at heart morally bankrupt. "Here is the Nigerian intellectual for you," Achebe seems to be saying with utter disgust.

Chief Nanga (in *A Man of the People*) joins Obi Okonkwo as bastard sons of the new cities and the urban ethos created by the white man, both victims of the discontinuities of religious and ethical allegiance to the tribe, disorientated from the rural ethos, enmeshed in bribery and corruption, worshippers at the shrine of materialism with money as their god and material wealth as their new religion. After the shenanigans of the likes of leaders like Chief Nanga and Chief Koko, Achebe said in an interview with Robert Serumaga (1967: 11): "But I think the next generation of politicians when we do have them, will have learned one or two lessons, I hope, from what happened to the first Republic. This is the only hope I have and if it turns out to be in vain, it would be terrible."

Chief Nanga and his ilk brought out into the open a landslide of abuses of the privilege of leadership: election malpractices – use of thugs, stuffing the ballot box, rigging of elections; politics of self-aggrandizement through blatant acts of bribery and corruption, contract inflation; ostentatious life style; megalomania and abuse of power.

The despair of *A Man of the People* is that Odili, the intellectual on whom we hoped for delivery, spoils his case by engaging in acts of personal vendetta and deviating from the rescue mission, which prompted his involvement in party politics. As some perceptive critics have pointed out, the two main protagonists of the novel are like the proverbial two knives in the house of a widow: the one that is sharp has no handle and the one that has a handle is not sharp. Odili with his worthwhile political ideas has no following, and Chief Nanga with a great political following is illiterate and is completely devoid of worthwhile political ideas.

The despair in *A Man of the People* stems from the fact that both the popular politician who is corrupt and the intellectual who cannot drum up enough following (with dark hints that both Odili and Max have descended to copy Chief Nanga's tactics)

have all failed us. The only salvation, a cautious hope then by Achebe was hope in the military to be our only solution, hence the suggested *deus ex machina* at the end of the novel through military intervention. Nevertheless, Achebe still pins his hope for the right leadership on the intellectuals.

In *The Trouble with Nigeria* (53) Achebe makes this clarion call to the intellectuals: But arduous as the task is, Nigeria's educated elite must understand that they have no choice but to address themselves to it (the leadership issue) or receive history's merciless indictment. All those enlightened and thoughtful Nigerians who wring their hands in daily anguish on account of our wretched performance as a nation must bestir themselves to the patriotic action of proselytizing for decent and civilized political values. We have stood too long on the sideline and too many of us have adopted the cynical attitude that since you cannot beat them you must join them. Our inaction or cynical actions are a serious betrayal of our education, of our historic mission and of succeeding generations who will have no future unless we save it now for them. To be educated is, after all, to develop the questioning habit, to be skeptical of easy promises and to use past experience creatively.

Those who are familiar with the events of *A Man of the People* will easily confirm that the above cry from the heart is a fleshing out of the hints given in that novel. When Chief Nanga urges Odili to "take your money and take your scholarship to go and learn more book...." he adds intimidatingly and cynically, "and leave the dirty game of politics to us who know how to play it." Max had added as a postscript to so many things going awry in the body politics: "what else can you expect when intelligent people leave politics to illiterates like Chief Nanga?" (*Man*, 73).

I stated earlier that Achebe wrote *The Trouble with Nigeria* to spell out correctly what he had all along obliquely touched upon in his fiction. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, he demonstrates to us that he has lost hope in the ability of the military to solve our political and economic problems. *Anthills of the Savannah* is a re-engineering in fictional form of the hopes he had placed in the ability of the military to save us at the end of *A Man of the People*. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe comes close to being cynical about the administrative and political ability of the military which are more interested in the props of power than in solving the nation's problems. And, in the end, Achebe expresses disgust at the ritual and cynical method through which one military regime succeeds another. Achebe's solution: he re-pitches his tent with the intellectuals (whom the military has marginalized, intimidated and cowed) as the last hope for salvation. His hero: Ikem Osodi the fearless editor who is killed by agents of the military. His hope for the future: the intellectuals made up of the likes of Chris Orikoi, the student leader, Emmanuel, and intelligent and educated women like Beatrice Okoh who takes charge of things on the death of Ikem Osodi. The era and mystique of the military, as far as Achebe is concerned, is gone forever.

In sum, throughout this study, we have looked from literature to life and vice versa in the works of Achebe in this issue of leadership and we have found no just man in a position of power. But he does profess a hope, not in the life of any of his fictional characters but in that of a leader from Kano whom he admired, Mallam Aminu Kano. Achebe tells us in the concluding page of *The Trouble with Nigeria* (63):

I can see no rational answer to the chaotic jumble of tragic-comical problems we have unleashed on ourselves in the past twenty-five years, but the example of Aminu Kano – a selfless commitment to the common people of our land whom we daily deprive and dispossess and whose plight we treat so callously and frivolously [...] When the late Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa made the crack that if Aminu Kano were to become Prime Minister of Nigeria he would one day carry a placard and join a protest march against himself, he was paying a most profound and befitting tribute to a saint and revolutionary [...] For it was indeed true that if for any reason Aminu Kano should discover that he had joined the ranks of the oppressor he would promptly and openly renounce his position and wage war on himself.

It is now evident that in all of Achebe's fictional and non-fictional output, he has all along been on a search for the right leader to lead us in our search for utopia – a utopia of reconstruction, of reinstitution, of healing the many wounds inflicted on us by the long years of colonialism and neo-colonialism, of the havoc wreaked on us and on the body-politic by our corrupt politicians and rapacious and power-drunk military leaders.

He finally pitches his hope for salvation on the intellectuals but only those intellectuals of the stamp of the late Aminu Kano – self-less, unassuming, not power drunk, a true man of the people who in spite of the trappings of power will always consider himself one with the masses.

Finally, we must not forget that Achebe as a writer founded the Association of Nigerian Authors. Who else but Achebe founded the publication *Okike* an international journal which, thanks to the editor, Ossie Enekwe (d. 2010), has endured and where many a nascent Nigerian artist, poet, or short story writer has cut his creative teeth. Who is involved in PEN's Nigerian chapter more than Chinua Achebe? And have we forgotten that through him as editor of Heinemann African Writers Series many a Nigerian, nay African writer, found a footing? Achebe has, in his quiet unobtrusive manner, made himself Nigeria's public institution number one, Nigeria's national icon.

Things Fall Apart was numbered, not too long ago, among the world's best hundred books. Fifty years after, we all as Nigerians, nay Africans, stand on tip toes, cheering our eagle – Achebe – as he soars beyond the Iroko into the nimbus of divinity, among world-class writers of all time, clutching along with countless literary awards, the "Man Booker Prize for lifelong achievement". Achebe is a writer for whom we are grateful.

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