

Ayodele Awojobi as a Scholar-Activist:

An Assessment of the Historical Mission of Intellectuals Towards an **African Revolution**

By Temitope Fagunwa | Opinion

Abstract

Intellectuals are the threads that hold societies together. They form the basis upon which the making and unmaking of the future of societies are built. In fact, it is almost impossible to assess the progression of earliest societies without considerations of the transformative roles of individuals with inimitable intellectual skills and essence. This article will attempt a preliminary study on the socio-cultural and political tasks of intellectuals in neo-colonial Africa. Since there is a nexus between colonial domination vis-à-vis the production and consumption of knowledge, the existence of neo-colonial Africa thus presents a society whose intellectuals are behind in the fulfilment of their historical task. The dominance of Western liberal epistemologies and methodologies across the purported African academy have precluded, to a reasonable extent, the existence of 'African' intellectuals whose mission ordinarily ought to be related to the actualisation of the African revolution. Nkrumah has argued that in birthing a revolutionised

postcolonial Africa—a society free from all forces of capitalism and neo-colonialism—the intellectuals are destined for an important role. Chomsky has echoed this position when he posited that there has to be a connection between scholarship and activism. By exploring the socio-political activities of the 'mighty giant' Professor Ayodele Oluwatuminu Awojobi, this article examines the mandate of 'African' intellectuals as both the 'producers of ideas' and 'workers for ideas'. Through the exploration of existing primary and secondary sources, this article argues that postcolonial African intellectuals have the duty of being inspired by the revolutionary life and works of the activist-scholar Ayodele Awojobi. The ultimate submission of this article is that scholarship cannot only be an arena for rhetoric, but must also be committed to the production of pragmatic thoughts, ideas, and actions that have the capacity of transforming the prevailing repellent social conditions and realities of the vast majority of the downtrodden African masses.

Introduction

'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it' (Marx, 1964: 647).

Although Karl Marx did not write extensively on the specific role of the intellectuals in a class society, himself and Engels in the renowned *The German Ideology* (1989) unambiguously attempted a theoretical explanation on the class character of knowledge production. Since the production of material objects is based on human social relations, the place of the nature and character of knowledge production in any society cannot be overemphasised. In whatever society, and at whatever point in time, the production of this knowledge has consistently been anchored by a group of individuals, now recognised as intellectuals. The progression of societies since the earliest times in fact cannot be accurately interrogated without the transformative roles of individuals with inimitable intellectual skills. This article explores the socio-cultural and political tasks of the intellectuals in the current neo-colonial state of the African continent.

By exploring the socio-political activities of the 'mighty giant' Professor Ayodele Oluwatuminu Awojobi, this work intends to examine the mandate of intellectuals as not just 'producers of ideas' but also as 'workers for ideas'. One of the most recent influential leftist thinkers in the Western world is Noam Chomsky. The scholar-activist in one of his essays argues that intellectuals have to embrace the concepts of responsibility, power and truth-seeking (Chomsky, 1967). The point was made that scholars have the ultimate duty of confronting and exposing the frequent effects of neoliberalism, inequalities, poverty, etc. Against this backdrop, the 'causes and motives, and often hidden intentions' of right-wing ideologies that have dominated the overall affairs of neo-colonial Africa have to be within the research sphere and pedagogical approach of scholars.

What the above presupposes, therefore, is that scholarship cannot simply be an arena for rhetoric, but rather for the production of pragmatic thoughts, ideas, and actions that can transform the prevailing repellent social conditions and realities of the vast majority of the masses. Scholars will have to be groomed to internalise their vanguard roles in the

process of mobilising, organising and sensitising the downtrodden in any society, against their oppression. In pursuit of the African revolution – a term Kwame Nkrumah has described to mean the ultimate unity of the African continent under socialist governments, intellectuals have been charged with a pivotal role (Tunteng, 1973). The erstwhile Ghanaian president affirms that the ultimate bulwark of the African revolution is the class of genuine African intellectuals whose aspirations will have to differ from that of members of the ruling class (Nkrumah, 1970: 40). Because the chase for repressive power, primitive accumulation of wealth and social privileges are contrary to the material base of a socialist economy, the African intellectuals in the struggle for a better society cannot share alliances with members of the ruling class.

Though the above provides a guide into what ordinarily should be the mandate of contemporary African intellectuals, this path has largely been ignored. On a large scale, consequent to the infusion of neoliberalism into the entire polities of the African continent, particularly beginning with the 1980s, the consumption and reproduction of repugnant bourgeois scholarship has dominated the affairs of the intellectual circle. Unlike the era of decolonisation when African intellectuals fought, gallantly, against the racist colonial historiography, both in actions and writings, the atmosphere in more contemporary times seems to have changed greatly. Be that as it may, some scholars in their works and deeds have classified themselves as the continent's beacon of hope. In this category, radical intellectuals such as Walter Rodney, Bade Onimode, Claude Ake, Samir Amin, Bala Usman, Ngugi Wa T'iong, etc. resisted the overwhelming consequences of neoliberalism and Western bourgeois scholarship in their actions and works. Although this is a small category of scholars, their lives and works have had a significant influence across the continent and in fact beyond. Understandably, this influence has not successfully ignited the motion for the highly anticipated African revolution.

The 'bourgeoisification' of the African academy has concretely limited the space of scholar-activists in the larger society. This reality, amongst other factors, is symptomatic of the gradual isolation of the African ruling class from the mandate of adequate funding

of the educational sector. In spite of this obstacle, this paper is challenging members of the intellectual circle on the African continent to rise to the occasion of marching arm-in-arm with the hoi polloi in the journey towards the attainment of the purpose of the African revolution.

In the early 1980s, the cloud of neoliberalism had gathered across the African continent through the insidious roles of the Bretton Woods institutions. In neo-colonial Nigeria, the situation was not any different. Governments gradually began the process of underfunding the educational sector in the country. Accompanying this trend was the systemic infiltration of Western bourgeois and capitalist narratives into the African academy. Interestingly, it was during this period that Ayodele Oluwatuminu Awojobi began to develop an important profile of a consistent Nigerian scholar-activist. At a time when it was not fashionable for university intellectuals to stand with the suffering masses at the barricades of protests and demonstrations, Awojobi was a different breed. Beyond the barricades, the scholar-activist was frequently the voice of the people at important occasions and on the then-traditional media. Nigerian newspapers, radio and television stations were repeatedly interested in Awojobi's positions on numerous national issues during this period.

Though a Mechanical Engineer in the University of Lagos, Professor Awojobi was a renowned political activist during the 80s. Beyond national issues, he was convinced about the potency of the students' movement in the overall revolutionary struggles of the Nigerian masses. In his works and speeches, Awojobi had no qualms in demystifying the illusive sacredness of the Nigerian ruling class and their apparatuses. Heeding to the challenge of Nkrumah, the political activist was able to relate the relevance of theory and practice. Although Awojobi started out as a conventional 'academic' or 'intellectual', he gradually evolved into a full-grown revolutionary intellectual, consequent to his practical involvement in the daily struggles of the Nigerian masses. The value of his involvement in these struggles is a pointer to the nexus between scholarship and activism as required by the processes that are to birth the African revolution. It is against this background that this paper is convinced that the life and works of Awojobi have the wherewithal to inspire contemporary African

academics into undertaking the required vanguard role in pursuit of the African revolution.

Although he was not a self-acclaimed Marxist, Ayodele would pass diligently as a student of Marxism for he understood the dialectical relationship between thoughts and actions. There is no doubt that, had he lived beyond his untimely death, he would have transcended to the point of a full-fledged Marxist intellectual. This position can be proven against the background that as far back as the late 1970s, Ayodele was in the public space denouncing the then attempt by the Shagari-led government to privatise the power sector. This denouncement was premised on the basis that the sector cannot adequately live up to expectation because of the unapologetic interest of the private sector in crude profit maximisation. This position is concretely Marxian in context. And indeed, the relevance of this position is more so visible in the odious state of the recently privatised power sector in the country. In spite of the periodic huge funds the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) had previously stashed in the power distributing companies, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that Nigerian households spent N2 trillion on fuel and electricity in 2019 (The Punch Newspaper, 2020). In point of fact, Adoyele's fears have proven correct: since 2005, the sector has been fully privatised under the Electric Power Reform Act, and the activities of the private companies have shown that the ultimate focus is the accumulation of profit by all means.

The instinctive approach of Ayodele to the abovementioned crisis of the power sector is just an expression of his commitment to the struggles against social injustice and inequality in Nigeria. Another event that expressed this concrete reality was the decision of the scholar-activist, against all odds, to sue the government of Shehu Shagari to court over charges that ranged from corruption, to nepotism, to electoral violence and irregularities. It is also important to note that the political activities of Ayodele did not in any way isolate him from his responsibility as a Professor in Mechanical Engineering. Prior to his demise, the professor invented a car, now popularly known as Autonov 1, at the University of Lagos. Concretely, a lesson that can also be drawn from the life and works of Ayodele is that the academic field of any African scholar is indeed not an obstacle in the attempt to combine scholarship with practical activism.

Ayodele Awojobi and his activism

Professor Ayodele Olutuminu Awojobi was born on 12 March 1937 into the family of Chief Daniel Adekoya Awojobi and Madam Comfort Bamidele Awojobi in Oshodi, an infamous part of the modern Lagos State. His father had roots in the Ijomu area of Ikorodu, and the young Ayodele Awojobi spent his youthful days in Lagos. Ayodele went to the St. Peter's Primary School, Faji, Lagos, for his early education between the years 1942 to 1947 (Awojobi and Awojobi, 2008: 1). However, it was while he was attending the renowned CMS Grammar School, Lagos, that his academic prowess began to come into light. After passing his West African School Certificate Examinations in the year 1955 with an unprecedented record of eight distinctions, Ayodele Awojobi proceeded to sit for a General Certificate Examinations (GCE) in 1958, earning himself a federal government scholarship, owing to his exceptional performance, to study Mechanical Engineering at the defunct Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria, now known as Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (Awojobi and Awojobi, 2008: 2).

Indeed, it was another brilliant feat at Zaria that merited Ayodele another federal government scholarship in 1962 to study for a post-graduate programme in the field of Mechanical Engineering at the former Imperial College of the University of London, now known as Imperial College London. In the year 1966, he was awarded a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from the institution. In the same year, Ayodele joined the Faculty of Engineering, University of Lagos, as an academic staff member. Within a short period of time, Ayodele rose to prominence across the four walls of the university and also beyond as an outstanding academic, so much so that in 1974 he became the first ever African scholar to be awarded a post-doctorate degree of Doctor of Science by the University of London. And with this achievement, within a period of just a few weeks, he was appointed a professor by the Senate of the University of Lagos at age 37.

It is pertinent to mention that Ayodele's academic feats are symptomatic of his strong decision not to be an armchair scientist – rather an inventor. In the year 1972, the federal government had announced that the country was going to change from left-hand drive

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to right-hand drive. Dr. Ayodele Awojobi in the same year successfully converted a family car from right-hand drive to a left-hand drive with the assistance of a group of technicians and students alike. During the same period, Ayodele was said to have invented the legendary *Autonov 1*. The *Autonov 1* used to be a regular military jeep but its engine was reinvented by Ayodele giving the vehicle the ability to run in both the forward and backward directions, utilising all four pre-existing gears in whichever direction. In addition to this invention, the *Autonov 1* also has a second steering wheel and a central revolving chair (Asoya, 2008: 13).

The basic agenda of this paper is not to examine at length the numerous academic achievements of Ayodele Awojobi. However, it is relevant to mention that these feats were not inspired from any self-serving and opportunistic tendency. Contemporary intellectuals on the continent can be inspired by learning that in spite of several lucrative offers, Ayodele resisted the attempt aimed at the commercialisation of his *Autonov 1*. Indeed, he could have accumulated substantial wealth from these offers, but the inspiration that propelled the invention was altruistic. Consequent to the unmitigated project of the bourgeoisification of the African academy, the ultimate passion of an ever-increasing number of academics on the continent is not driven by groundbreaking creations for the systemic liberation of the teeming population.

Quite ahead of the general norms of the period he lived in, Ayodele was convinced that the African academy will

be moribund if acquired knowledge has no place in the overall transformation of the nefarious social realities and conditions of the oppressed people. Across all academic fields, scholars have consistently attempted to express how best societies can be transformed through their speeches and writings. A frequent lacuna that this paper has recognised in the antidotes of these scholars is the lack of understanding of the question of power – and not just any form of power but political power. Meanwhile, Ayodele was clear about the relevance of political power to scholarship. The nexus between political power and the state of societies cannot be undermined. It is in recognition of this fact that Ayodele once asserted that intellectuals must necessarily be political in their approach to scholarship. This is more so because only politics has the incomparable access to the ultimate resources that can bring about the lasting transformation any society deserves (Awojobi, 1980).

Though a mechanical engineer by training, Ayodele Awojobi was a specialist on both national and international political matters. An account reveals that he was sometimes mistaken for a political scientist at public occasions (Adebayo, 2021). His audiences were often sceptical of his area of specialisation as an academic based on his well-articulated political and economic solutions to the problems of Nigeria. This paper is convinced that this attribute is most trendy amongst consistent scholar-activists. Ayodele in fact once confirmed his strong conviction in polemics when he affirmed that: 'I do not believe in running away from debate or analysis of different and controversial subjects, since a nation cannot progress if she turns her back to those areas that manifestly recur as problem and sensitive areas' (Awojobi, 1976: 37). For Ayodele, these polemics were a call to action. He once declared that: 'At the age of 65, I will have built the infrastructure. There would be very few illiterates in Nigeria when I mount the soapbox. Then I will go into proper politics' (Asoya, 2008: 14).

The point about the relevance of the life and works of Ayodele echoes in the submission of another important scholar-activist – Patricia Hill. Hill, in one of her works, once declared that since a school cannot be isolated from the society and also since 'thinking' cannot be separated from 'doing', it will hence be fallacious to dichotomise between scholarship and activism (Hill, 2012: 12). This position, however, has consistently been under attack by governments,

university managements, proponents of neoliberalism, and other bourgeois elements. With the exemptions of radical and transformative academic bodies, journals such as CODESRIA, ROAPE, etc. there are more bodies, institutions, agencies, etc. whose ultimate agenda has been to stifle radical scholarship vis-à-vis the existence of scholar-activists. Against this backdrop, contemporary African intellectuals have the historic duty of not just speaking truth to power but also hijacking power from the distractors and traitors of truth. Because the aim of the African revolution is not limited to raising consciousness alone, absolute conscious political actions for the complete transformation of society are required from members of the intellectual circle.

A further glimpse into the life of Ayodele expresses his relevance to contemporary African intellectuals. The Second Republic in Nigeria's history has traditionally been proven to be marred with issues ranging from political to economic instabilities. Maier Karl beautifully narrated the tragedy of the Second Republic in his classic work 'This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria'. In this work, Karl concluded that the errors of the republic by the political class spurred the social consciousness of the Nigerian masses against the class (Karl, 2000: 23). Whilst there was a mass opposition against the ineptitude and corrupt Shagari-led administration, Ayodele was one of the most outspoken public figures of this period. Fascinated with the solutions of Obafemi Awolowo to the problems of the Second Republic under the leadership of Shagari, Ayodele became a staunch follower of the former. As described by Sylvester, Ayodele was such a loyal apostle of Awolowo that the duo would passionately analyse the state of the nation at any given opportunity (Asoya, 2008: 13). Unsurprisingly, Awolowo wrote the foreword of a number of books and monographs authored by Awojobi.

The political instability of the Second Republic became more pronounced during the 1979 – 1983 general elections, which according to Joseph R. were marred with several irregularities and overt riggings in favour of the government of Shagari (Joseph, 1987: 36). Like thousands of Nigerians, Ayodele became a renowned critic of the government in the aftermath of the elections. He was consistently making the headlines in the newspapers for his strong views against the government of the day. And quoting Adebayo

Ninalowo on the roles of Ayodele Awojobi during this period, the former wrote:

To be a social crusader in favour of the amelioration of the human condition is normally a courageous selfless feat. To be iconoclastic in challenging the rulership of the day for not living up to popular yearnings, that takes exceptional courage. The late Prof. Awojobi was not only exceptionally selfless and courageous, he was both an epitome and personification of encyclopaedic intellectual ingenuity. He was, therefore, a quintessential role model (PAADC, 2018).

In what can be best described as an expression of courage and vision, Ayodele eventually sued the government of Shehu Shagari in 1983 for corruption and electoral fraud. Another test of the ideological clarity of Ayodele is visible in the relationship that was built with the rank and file of the students' movement. It is pertinent to state that the fame of the political stances of Ayodele was not just resounding within the Nigerian society, but also across universities. Consequently, he was a regular lead-off speaker during students' rallies or protests. As a scholar-activist, he was convinced that the process of liberating Nigerian society was also reliant on the direct involvement of students, and generally youth. Beyond the frequent firebrand speeches, Ayodele was galvanised by a large stratum of Nigerian students of this period because of his forthrightness and uncompromising stances on issues bordering on the democratic rights of students. In the University of Lagos, he became an iconic figure owing to his consistent interventions in several cases bordering on the attacks of the rights of students by the management.

Ayodele was an unapologetic critic of intolerant university authorities. On different occasions, he was clear that one of the ways in which the administrative structures of universities can be democratised is through the unconditional integration of student representative bodies. This position indeed was publicly expressed at a time when it was not fashionable for academics to raise such. As a point of fact, it was envisaged that a time would come when presidents of students' bodies would be actively involved in the administrative mandate of the governing council of universities. He even furthered this discussion in one of his publications

by demanding for a student representative in the National Universities Commission (NUC) (Awojobi, 1976: 44). And, quite interestingly, Ayodele would often urge the now defunct National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) to always be vocal on national issues. Leadership of the association was often urged to publish pro-student positions on national issues. This was the kind of ideological based relationship Ayodele built with the rank and file of the students' movement. There is no doubt that this tradition has not been sustained in the face of the persistent systemic repression of scholar-activists and students by management of universities. This outcome has propelled a widening gap between the labour movement and the students' movement.

In 1977, Ayodele presented his inaugural lecture at the University of Lagos. Though the lecture centred on the pragmatism of theories of engineering and mechanical vibrations, a coherent argument was stressed on the necessity of a localised theory and pragmatism for the ultimate benefit of the Nigerian masses (Awojobi, 1977). The scholar-activist further argued in his lecture that: 'There must be a conscious effort through a deliberate policy to ensure that the product of academic research is, first, of localized interest to Nigeria rather than the more popular approach of being seen as a contribution to the universal stock of knowledge' (Awojobi, 1977: 15). Needless to say, the mission of localising and Africanising the production and consumption of knowledge precluded Ayodele from jumping at numerous lucrative offers to lecture at foreign institutions. There is no doubt that this pan-Africanist aspiration has been under great attack in more recent times. Sequel to the surge of brain drain in the African academy, institutions and centres are gradually being deserted by specialists and experts. The verdict by Ayodele to lecture in a Nigerian university is understandably an unequalled sacrifice, then and now. Though a professor of mechanical engineering, Ayodele ended his inaugural lecture with a firm political statement: '...men in power succeed only when they govern firmly and fairly without double standards – this they do if, and only if, they learn to run the machinery of government – well beyond resonance (Awojobi, 1977: 23).

The social actions Ayodele Awojobi was involved in were unarguably beyond mere rhetoric. In the early 1980s, Ayodele rose to become the Chairman of the Lagos State School's Management Board. This

position not only afforded him the opportunity of revolutionising secondary school education in the state, but also brought him closer to the mass of the people. Interestingly, this position did not estrange Ayodele from the daily struggles of members of the oppressed class. From the get-go, the scholar-activist was convinced about the potent role the judiciary can play in the liberation of the downtrodden. Beyond the impeccable role the judiciary can play in the restoration of the political and socio-economic order in the country, Ayodele expressed that its formidable and functioning institutions can indeed prevent Nigeria from mismanagement. This stance is well encapsulated in one of his publications where he expressed that: 'I am of the very strong opinion that if Nigeria does not have a trusted judiciary that could be manifestly seen to stay impartial between the citizens and the government, we should all accept that Nigeria – our dear country – is still a very backward nation' (Awojobi, 1976: 36).

The conviction of Ayodele in the powerfulness of the judiciary explains why he literally became a private law student of the renowned Chief Barrister Rotimi Williams (Awobodu, 2009). The pertinence of facts and figures cannot be undermined in the judiciary. Ayodele progressively became aware of this, hence his consistent tendency of providing concrete evidence against the corrupt administration of Shagari, and

any corrupt government for that matter, on any media platform during the 1980s. Oral sources show that on any of these media platforms, Ayodele would make serious effort to ascertain his charges against any members of the ruling class (Adebayo, 2021). In a way, the professor was the mouthpiece of the masses on the trail of justice, transparency, and equity. He put on the toga of the people's advocate.

While soldiering on his mandate as the people's advocate, Ayodele encountered the event that took his life in the year 1984. In the early months of 1984, the scholar-activist had instituted a court case against Governor Akin Omoboriowo of Ondo State on the allegation of electoral fraud during the 1983 elections. In the course of one of the court appearances for the case in Ondo, reports have it that he was attacked with an amulet by a group of political thugs. Unfortunately, Ayodele did not recover from the illness caused by the attack as he died a few months later in his prime. He was 47 years old when he died on 23 September 1984. Oral sources confirm that the city of Ikorodu came to a halt during the interment of Ayodele (Adebayo, 2021). Several dignitaries also trooped into the city from far and wide to pay their respects to the renowned scholar-activist. Many eulogised him publicly for his overall great accomplishments as both a successful professor of mechanical engineering and an uncompromising activist.

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From the foregoing analyses, it is clear that Ayodele's activism revolved around the struggle for the complete liberation of the oppressed masses of Nigerian society. He was most committed to the struggle against all forms of injustice, corruption, mismanagement, nepotism, and other qualities of bad governance. The disregard for the rule of law by members of the Nigerian ruling class was considered as a great anomaly. Ayodele was clear on the notion that members of this class are frequent adversaries of the constitution they formulated in the first instance. Overall, this has been a major clog in the socio-economic and political development of the country. Ayodele stressed this position when he asserted that ‘a constitution becomes a worthless document if it can be violated by the men in power without a reliable judiciary to ensure obedience to the constitution and put the men in power under the law’ (Awojobi, 1976: 43).

The persistent disdain for the rule of law by members of the ruling class in a way has a strong connection with electoral irregularities. It is against this backdrop that Ayodele had no qualms in relating the surge of electoral fraud in the 1980s to the internal contradictions of the judiciary. Beyond this, the scholar-activist was clear that members of the political class who rely on electoral fraud and violence are indeed saboteurs of democracy. According to Kayode, Ayodele once declared that the process of building a strong democratic base in Nigeria will continue to be a farce since the country is bereft of true democrats (Komolafe, 2005). The conviction of the activist in constitutional powers, particularly as a potent weapon in the defence of the rights of the masses, can also be predicated on the roles he played in the establishment of a renowned political movement known as the National Association for the Survival of the 1979 Constitution (Hussein, 2018). This attempt distinguishes Ayodele as not just an articulator of freedom, but also as a working or active revolutionary intellectual.

On the imperativeness of a just Nigerian society, the systems and institutions that have permitted the ownership of the vast resources of the land by a tiny minority will have to be dismantled. This intervention is germane because the majority of Nigerian people are indeed already disenchanted with the state. The outpour of youth on the streets during the 2020 #EndSARS Protests, across major cities in the country, is a strong indication of this reality. In a way, Ayodele is in accord with this position when he admitted that 'the fundamental property of a stable society is support from masses of people arising purely from their satisfaction with the policies of the government of the day' (Awojobi, 1976: 4). Based on current trends, Nigeria is unarguably an unstable society. Governments across the board have lost the support of the people. By reflecting on the limitations of the Gowon and Obasanjo regimes on the one hand, and the Shagari administration on the other hand, Ayodele would contend that the country ultimately has what it takes to develop, had it not been for the greed and insincerity of the ruling class. These erstwhile governments were further accused for inciting ethnic politics in the country as a means of distracting the oppressed from the reality of their obnoxious and inhumane state. The governments of Balewa and Ironsi, in this case, were held liable by Ayodele.

Overall, Ayodele – the fiery critic of the Nigerian state – was a believer in social justice and equity. This path he walked until his demise in 1984. In line with the injustices that characterised the state of the Second Republic, Ayodele was a frequent mobiliser of the masses. He was convinced that the masses have the duty of organising against their oppression. More often than not, the Nigerian state and her apparatuses were exposed by Ayodele, for clamping down on the natural and human rights of the people to resist the effects of bad governance. Ayodele expressed in one of his publications that: 'A nation that pretends the problem should never be discussed or does not exist is like an ostrich burying its head in the sand' (Awojobi, 1976: 37). The above presents the impactful life and works of a genuine African intellectual who was interested in the practical struggles for the complete emancipation of the oppressed people of Nigeria from the claws of their oppressive state.

Ayodele Awojobi: A Resonator for African Intellectuals

Frantz Fanon, the Algerian revolutionary thinker, posited that: 'Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it' (Fanon, 1961). The continuous degeneration of neo-colonial Africa has created a massive disorder, to the extent that the intellectual class has been polarised on the question of its historical mission. On the one hand, numerous intellectuals are largely indifferent to the sufferings and disenchantment of the downtrodden. And on the other hand, an insignificant number of intellectuals have consistently displayed their interests in alleviating the social realities and conditions of the hoi polloi. In spite of this interest, the monopolisation of the public space by the African bourgeoisie has had an overwhelming effect. Neoliberalism, nepotism, corruption, etc. are just some obstacles that have precluded the chances of the rise of a determined class of African intellectuals.

In spite of these challenges, there must be a reawakening of the traditional mandate of African intellectuals. Oral sources have indicated that the socio-economic growth and development of a chunk of proto-feudal African societies chiefly rested on the gigantic roles of distinct intellectuals of that era. A case in point is how transformative the innovations of Imothep were in the emergence of the renowned Egyptian civilization. Proto-feudal African intellectuals

acted in different capacities such as artists, griots, historians, artisans, philosophers, etc. Colonialism truncated the conventional process of knowledge production and consumption in colonial Africa through the introduction of Western education. Postcolonial intellectuals have the duty of rising above this challenge. In the process of concretising the political and economic subjugation of the colonies, the European colonisers had to dominate knowledge. Through the colonial educated Africans, the racist notion of Western supremacy was not only institutionalised but successfully emerged as a model for postcolonial Africa.

The complicit roles of the colonial educated Africans in the process of European imperial control over the African continent has gained extensive scholarly attention. In the submission of Ayandele, the Western educated Africans were at best 'deluded hubris' (1974: 12) because of their over-glorification of bourgeois Western social norms and customs at the detriment of Africans. Rodney echoed this point when he posited that 'the main purpose of the colonial school system was to train Africans to help man the local administration at the lowest ranks and to staff the private capitalist firms owned by Europeans' (1976: 60). The scholar-activist in his critique against the colonial school institution also expressed that 'the colonial school system educated far too many fools and clowns, fascinated by the ideas and way of life of the European capitalist class. Some reached a point of total estrangement from African conditions and the African way of life' (Rodney, 1976: 69).

Understandably, the domination and exploitation of the African colonies was somewhat meant to be supervised by the colonial African intellectuals. While it is true that a section of members of this class were in the long run instrumental to the anti-colonial struggles, owing to the internal contradictions of the overall structures of colonialism, they really did not relinquish the Western bourgeois *modus vivendi* that the era had created. Extensively, the intellectuals postcolonial Africa inherited had no interest in waging any main struggle against the forces of neo-colonialism consequent to this trajectory. The intellectual class, except for in rare occasions, is not conventionally modelled for this responsibility since members were historically and mandatorily meant to alienate themselves from the social realities and

conditions of their immediate societies, including the state of members of the downtrodden class.

The foregoing analysis therefore exposes why the academy within the context of the African continent is a somewhat citadel of Western neoliberal philosophies and epistemologies to a significant extent. The dominance of capitalist and bourgeois individualistic lifestyles that colonialism institutionalised are indeed apparent in the circles of intellectuals even today. It is thus relevant to state that the sense of solidarity and social responsibility that was dominant in proto-feudal African societies have to be revived today. African intellectuals in postcolonial Africa have to be encouraged and inspired by the life and works of scholar-activists such as Ayodele Awojobi, Walter Rodney, Claude Ake, etc. for the sake of fulfilling their historic mission. Postcolonial African intellectuals will have to pay attention to the submission of Wilfred and Martin on the task of educators. The scholars contended that educators have the mandate of shaping their acquired knowledge to their immediate environment and to 'make it move to the rhythms of the people and their land' (Cartey and Kilson, 1970: 121).

At this moment, the call by Chinweizu that stressed the necessity of a decolonised African educational system is especially pertinent and must be a dominant objective in the African academy. Chinweizu called for a 'Black Africa that is liberated from imperialism, neo-colonialism, powerlessness, and from the world's contempt – a Black Africa that has a technologically robust culture; is autonomous in its economy, culture and politics; and is prosperous and Afrocentric' (Chinweizu, 1987: 21).

The class of contemporary African intellectuals ultimately must rise to the occasion of being the 'articulators of freedom'. The renowned Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa T'hiongo, also made this point when he contended that 'it is necessary for an intellectual who really wants to contribute to the liberation of the African people – that is, the liberation of their productive forces and their genius – to put his intellectual resources at the service of the people; to make sure that whatever he articulates in writing, in lectures, in essays, everywhere is in harmony with the needs of the struggling classes in Africa' (Wa Thiong'o, 1985: 20).

It is true that a number of scholars in the African academy, both in the past and now, had identified with the revolutionary methodological approach and practices of Marxism. Mayer (2016), in his classic work, has revealed the depth of the existence of Marxist intellectuals in the Nigerian academy during the post-1980s era. By providing an overview of the works of Nigerian Marxist scholars such as Edwin Madunagu, Bala Usman, Eskor Toyo, etc. the author painted the noble attempts of the circle of radical African intellectuals in birthing a better society. The point however must be made that the mandate of a Marxist scholar cannot entirely be exhausted in the literature and indeed in the four walls of the universities.

Das Raju (2013) espoused that 'a Marxist is someone who is committed to dialectical and materialist analysis of society and nature with the purpose of contributing to the creation of a better world, a world which is ecologically sustainable and which is without class exploitation and social oppression'. The scholar, by implication, argues that the defence of the basic ideals of Marxism is dialectically related to actual practices. In other words, the absolute appreciation and commitment to the tenets of Marxism requires the combination of thought and practice. Against this backdrop, African intellectuals who appear to be propagating the ideals of Marxism in the colleges, universities, etc. have the duty of playing vanguard roles in the overall struggles of the oppressed. It is germane to emphasise that contemporary African intellectuals will not be embarking on a strange journey by merging their scholarship with activism. This paper erstwhile painted the overall relevance of the intellectuals in the making of proto-feudal African societies. In fact, the renowned Nigerian academic, Ukpabi Asika, in discussing the African context, once said that intellectuals can be understood as the threads that hold society together (Chuku, 2013).

The retrogressive roles of bourgeois intellectuals in postcolonial African society therefore have to be consumed for a renaissance. The relevance of this renaissance is obvious in the submission of Soyinka when he argued that: 'The artist (intellectual) has always functioned in African society as the record of mores and experience of his (or her) society and as the voice of vision in his (or her) own time' (Cartey and Kilson, 1970: 122). It is thus an undebatable fact that, should this responsibility be ignored,

such an intellectual will not just be distorting his or her traditional role but also expressing a great disservice to the postcolonial African society. Since the ultimate relevance of intellectuals can be most felt in their immediate distinct societies, the former – in the context of the social realities and conditions of postcolonial Africa – have the revolutionary duty of confronting the cruelty of neo-colonialism. The intellectual class, flowing from its historic task, as argued by Nkrumah, have to provide the necessary impetus and leadership for the African revolution in the struggle against neo-colonialism (Nkrumah, 1970: 39). In quest of the African revolution, the foregoing has painted the consequential role of the intellectuals. Since the revolution, as articulated by Nkrumah (1970: 30), can only be possible when the organic structure and conditions within the society have aroused mass disenchantment and desire for positive action to transform the society, the intellectuals will be critical in the process of not only articulating these structures and conditions, but also providing the masses with a concrete alternative. The radical life and works of Ayodele Awojobi, as discussed hitherto, is a pointer to the immense contributions that intellectuals can play in the process of birthing a better society. The conviction of the activist-scholar in the power and relevance of the nexus between scholarship and activism is exceptional and should be emulated today by intellectuals. Though a trained mechanical engineer, the works of Ayodele on socio-economic and political matters in Nigeria are outstanding. Works such as 'Nigeria: In Search of a Social Order', 'Nigeria: In Search of a Political Order', 'Where Our Oil Money Has Gone?', etc. are logical expression of the class Ayodele was loyal to – the oppressed class. Intellectuals will have to transcend the myopic pedestal for success in academic promotions, positions, etc. Concretely, the basis for any academic excellence should be reflective in the social change and transformation of the society itself. The overall quagmire that has continued to engulf the Nigerian state is indeed an indication of the exceptionality of Ayodele's intellectualism. As stressed by Kayode, the well selected titles and arguments in most works of Ayodele might confuse one into thinking he was writing about the present state of Nigeria (Komolafe, 2005). This calls for a reawakened commitment by contemporary African intellectuals in the struggle for a better society. Simply put – there is much liberation mission that is yet to be embarked upon. If Ayodele fought the Shagari-led government

in the 1970s because of a missing N 2.8 billion, one cannot begin to imagine how many ministries, government agencies, institutions, and organs he would have to confront today.

Conclusion

The ultimate objective of this paper should not be misconstrued to mean a denial of the roles of the oppressed masses in their collective struggle towards liberation. The intellectuals, however, are the strong blocks that have the capacity of sustaining and enriching the people's struggle with the necessary ideology and purpose. But, as warned by Nkrumah (1970: 40): 'if they (intellectuals) are to play a part in the African revolution, they must become conscious of the class struggle in Africa, and align themselves with the oppressed masses. This involves the difficult, but not impossible task of cutting themselves free from bourgeois attitudes and ideologies imbibed as a result of colonialist education and propaganda'. What this paper has done is to expose how Ayodele Awojobi can inspire the emergence of another generation of activist-scholars. This is timely, given the current absolute repression and exploitation of the masses by members of the African ruling class. The overwhelming dominance of the forces of neo-colonialism on the African continent also bears witness to this urgency. Concretely, the continent is at a crossroads and only the intellectual class, in alliance with other strata of the oppressed, can change the tide.

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