Building *Ibadan* on *Ake*: Childhood Influence and the Making of Adult Activist in the Autobiographies of Wole Soyinka

Senayon Olaoluwa, Ph.D.
Department of Languages and Linguistics,
Osun State University, Osun State, Nigeria.

Abstract

That Wole Soyinka's activism both nationally and internationally assumes an epic proportion can as well be taken for granted, what with his roles in the making of Nigeria's post-independence history, his poetic intervention in apartheid South Africa, and his unflinching fidelity to the cause of Pan-Africanism. But it is to his autobiographies one must turn in order to assess the great impact of his childhood influence on his activism, which sometimes almost inverts his status as first and foremost a writer and Nobel laureate. For, indeed beyond the derogation of autobiographies' vulnerability to flutters of exaggerated emotions and mawkish romanticism, there definitely remains a validation of the truism that they more often than not reflect with profound acuity how much of adult configuration and accomplishment are extracted from the influence of innocent, impressionable childhood. This paper therefore seeks to explore first the representations of some adult activist characters in his autobiography of childhood, Ake: The Years of Childhood (1981). Of deserved mention are his parents and their role in anti-colonial struggle. But perhaps more important are the duo of Reverend and Mrs. Kuti and their much more direct activism coupled with their revolutionary tendencies, especially by Reverend Kuti to initiate the little boy into the domain of global consciousness through analyses and debates of international news items and publications to the extent of alerting him to the subtle nuances of imperialism and racism on the global stage. On the other hand, the paper will consider the transmutation of the child in Ake into a remarkable adult political activist in Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years (1994), arguing that his adult activism owes so much to the adult activist characters of his childhood autobiography.

> It can be… assumed as a general principle, if one acknowledges the inevitable social forging and shaping of personal memories, that it is somewhat arbitrary to limit influences that affect memory to the lifetime retention-span of a single individual and not also consider memories that are communicated between individuals and social institutions that transcend more than one generation (Ross, *Remembering the Personal Past* 1991: ix)

To be sure, the art of autobiography remains one of the most controversial genres of writing. This is despite the fact that it is as old as literary culture itself. When subjected to the antecedent of orality, this genre of writing can as well be regarded to be as dated as the earliest known human society. Considered from this angle, it becomes clear why autobiography, right from its earliest recognition and practice by the likes of St. Augustine in the 3rd century, has tended to induce all manner of opinions where scholars and intellectuals are involved. Perhaps for this same reason it is reputed over time to assume unstable status in literary circles as the preference it enjoys in one age may not be sustained in another. Basically, what is implied in the foregoing is the peculiarity of the knotty nature of the perception and reception of this form of writing, which, for the fact of its generic nature, straddles all forms of imaginative and factual writing. But if autobiography's structural elements constitute a source of controversy, its annunciation as a genre that apparently privileges the self over the social is perhaps more discomforting, not so much for the polarity it espouses, as for the dichotomy it suggests. Worst still, from a poststructuralist perspective, autobiography is limned as an impossibility precisely because of the delusion of the autobiographical subject whose "I" dissolves once language takes the centre stage (Lang in Berger, 2010: 34).

By way of considering its modern pedigree from the end of 18th century alone, one realizes the statuses with which this form of writing is invested and the various arguments generated against them. According to Anderson (2001: 7), one of the greatest controversies the genre was confronted with at the beginning of the 19th century was "the public exposure of the private self." In other words, it was an

attempt at the initial stage of its modern evolution— from the conscious transmutation of its designation as "self-biography" to "autobiography" as coined by William Taylor (Anderson, 2001: 7) — to subject the very nature of the privacy of the self to an all-accessible public view and commentary.

If this instance of anxiety still remains extant in contemporary times because of the degree of perversion to which such self exposure is vulnerable, it is also for this same reason that the controversies it attracts ramify questions of objectivity and subjectivity. At another level, autobiography as a major form of what in contemporary times is known as life writing, has been no less subtended in modes of anxiety connected, this time, with its capacity to spread beyond limits and boundaries. For, indeed, "autobiography produces an unease that it could spread endlessly and get everywhere, undermining even the objective stance of the critic if it is not held at bay or constrained by classification" (Anderson, 2001: 6).

Thus, the credibility crisis in which autobiography is enmeshed notwithstanding, it is propelled by a force of reception whose velocity appears too expeditious to be left untamed. Among many other issues in which the genre is embroiled, perhaps the most prominent is the conception of the self as an actual figure locatable in time and space, inscribed, invented and crucially implicated in each given piece. In connection with this, one must turn first to the popular definition of Lejeune (1982: 193) for whom the genre is "a retrospective prose narrative by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his life, in particular on the development of his personality." Here, the understanding of this form of writing is that of the conscious self-image and massaging so much so that the autobiographical subject predominates the whole of his space and together with all the other forms of life that should ordinarily have been acknowledged in the process of becoming.

Similarly, and to consider a second definition, Olney (1980: 23), sheds light on what he considers "the explanation for the special appeal of autobiography [as being] a fascination with the self and its profound… endless mysteries." In this second definition as well, the image of the self looms larger than any other thing and places him at a pedestal so

rarefied altogether as to turn him into an enigma. Therefore, if critically scrutinized, the self assumes an individualism which removes it from the plane of the commonplace and enlists it, as it were, with the rarity of the aristocracy. This explains why in the reflection of Anderson (2001: 4 – 5) such representations of the selfmake autobiography get "drawn seamlessly into supporting the beliefs and values of an essentialist or Romantic notion of selfhood."

It is perhaps for this apparently suspect nature of autobiography, which is as historical as it is contemporaneous, that Reed-Danahay (1997: 1), for instance, observes that some kind of lull about the genre was maintained in Anthropology— and one may add — as there must have been in literature and other similarly related fields, between the 1960s and about mid-1980s. Nevertheless, the lull has since been over and there is a revitalized fascination for the autobiographical in scholarship, more than there has ever been in history. For one thing, especially in the postcolonial context, the autobiographical enjoys a pride of place and sustains attention beyond the faddish suggestion of an obsession. Yet, at this junction, caution must be sounded that the currency of self representation in postcolonial writing does not justify in any way the sweeping comments attributable to Lang (1982: 6) whereby "autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find it", [simply because] "if the writer is always, in the broadest sense, implicated in the work, any writing may be judged to be autobiographical" (Anderson, 2001: 1).

The explanation for this is instantiated in the fact that much as it is possible to have the writer implicated always in a literary piece, the genre of life writing has come to assume a distinctive recognition. For this reason, it is logical to draw a line between the fictive imaginative piece of a writer where the invention of certain characters necessarily echoes him, as against the other conscious effort at creativity where he welds facts about his personality with the measure of fiction the genre allows, no matter how excessively liberal that allowance can be at times. But more importantly, for the postcolonial writer of autobiography, the arguments that emanate from the precedence of the self above the social, or the perversion that occurs with the obliteration of the objective and the subjective, hardly begs

discussion. In the explanation of Reed-Danahay (1997: 2), one must begin by calling to question the:

> binary conventions of a self/ society split, as well as the boundary between the objective and the subjective. [This is because] the postmodern / postcolonial conception of self and society is one of a multiplicity of identities, of cultural displacement, and of shifting axes of power.

Yet, it is apt to illustrate the wisdom and pragmatism of the dismantling of the binary between the self and the society. Necessarily, the discourse of autobiography is underpinned by the concept of memory. And by way of accounting for this, the tendency, according to Ricoeur (2004: 3), is to slide naturally to the historical but fundamentally flawed attitude of asking the question "Who?" Therefore, it will be in order to reverse this pattern so as to steer clear of the "negative effect of leading the analysis of mnemonic phenomena to an impasse, [especially as was the case in the past] when the notion of collective memory was to be taken into account". That is because in the art of self-representation, there is an undeniable implication of collective memory; therefore, the cleavage between the self and the society can be erased by asking in phenomenological terms "What?" The value of a question like this especially in autobiographical study is, in the illumination of Ricoeur, evident when one attunes oneself to the fact that it is with such question that one realizes that "the fact of remembering" begins with "What?" The teleology for this rhetoric is convincingly situated in the knowledge that in order "to avoid being stymied by a fruitless aporia, then one must hold in abeyance the question of attributing to someone─ hence, to any of the grammatical person─ the act of remembering" (p.3).

By deemphasizing the question "Who?" and placing an initial emphasis on "What?" the logic that emerges is that of how the social or the society first and foremost makes the individual. The making of the individual who subsequently becomes, one presumes, an actual figure around whom the narrative of a text revolves, is not a function of who the individual is as that of what the individual, as a product of socialization, acquires in the process of becoming. This leads to the

question of the location of an individual in the formation and structure of a social space and temporality. Granted that the individual has the right to be as free and independent as possible to the extent of attributing a sole responsibility to himself, it is however impossible for such individual to exist outside the social formations to which he is bound, as they necessarily account in the long run for the realization of his potentials and the coming of age (Gyekye, 1997: 35).

Within the context of African epistemology, for instance, there is the primacy of the objectification of what Gyekye further calls "communitarian features." It is a process by which the "I" of the individual dissolves into the collectivism of others. Therefore, whatever an individual achieves appropriately calls for a perpetual acknowledgement towards the society. The tripartite question at this point thus becomes: What does the autobiographical individual owe to the society? How does he/she become indebted? And with which agencies does the process of becoming begin?

To answer the question, one must turn to Ricoeur's (2004: 21 – 22) analogy of the primacy of "learning" and "seeking", but for the purpose of this essay, learning in particular. That Plato and Aristotle emphasized the primacy of learning, certainly in the formation of intellectual opinion and accomplishment, was a result of their indebtedness to Socrates. But if this analogy as put forward by Ricoeur suggests the defining index of the formal acquisition of skills and knowledge in the process of becoming, such analogy deserves to be balanced with "learning" from the angle that is not formal. This is when the values of informal education come to the foreground. As globally acknowledged, from perhaps prehistory, learning, in that natural and informal sense of the word, begins from the home. As the smallest unit of social institutions, the home becomes for the autobiographical self the first mustering point of intimate learning. It is certainly for this fact that Campbell asserts that:

> Indeed, one of the most basic kinds of social interaction, from a developmental point of view, is the sharing of memories between parent and child. This kind of social bonding seems to be part of what

> explains the evolutionary benefit, the selective value, of autobiographical memory (1994: 1).

That parents are crucially involved in this process of learning of an individual is as natural as would be expected. Therefore, the individual graduates, as it were, from the level of what he learns, first and foremost from the home, through the agency of parenthood, to that other larger level the social order bequeaths to him. However, because the essay is primarily concerned with an African-based autobiographical writing, it is necessary to hint further that the concept of parenthood in Africa transcends the nucleated notion and drift by which it is identified in the West. For in considering the making of the activist in Soyinka's *Ibadan*: *The Penkelemes Years*, one must consider the impact of not only his parents' activism on his childhood years in *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, but that of two other adult characters, who in the broader sense of the word, belong to the extended family. But within the African family context, such formal delineation is considered too finical to be accepted. As Nelson Mandela puts it in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*:

> In African culture, the sons and daughters of one's aunts or uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins. We do not make the same distinctions among relations practised by whites. We have no half-brothers or half-sisters. My mother's sister is my mother; my uncle's son is my brother; my brother's child is my son, my daughter. (2004: 10)

Again, if "learning" is to achieve a panoptic effect on the child in the process of his becoming, then parents as located within this broader sense, must be ready to impact knowledge both in terms of language and action. Even at this point, the question "What?" comes up again for further illumination as parenthood becomes located within the context of the space of growth. This way, both the language and the action parents use and take as part of the process of socialization of the child are, to a large extent, a product of what goes on in their specific environment. Therefore, when the child comes of age and is identified as being able to hold his own as a man, it is just natural that the analysis of his personality is done by way of what Campbell

(1994: 1) designates as the "causal structure" of his personality. With respect to this, an assessment of his personality as a man must transcend the banality of a temporal configuration. This is why it is more compelling to determine this "causal structure" of the personality. With relation to this, Campbell sheds more light:

> There are two dimensions to this grasp of causal structure. There is grasp of the idea that one's later states causally depend, in part, on one's states: when one interacts with one's surroundings, what happens is the joint upshot of the character of the things around one and the way one is oneself. The other dimension in grasp of one's own casual structure is the idea that one can function as a common cause of various correlated events around one (1994:1 – 2).

At the level of language, the grasp of the social structure of an individual or the self and how it functions demands that one should go beyond the individual to consider the "sociohistorical and cultural forces" at play (Wertsch, 2001: 229). It is in this that parents as well as other agents of socialization are crucially involved. On the other hand, if "autobiographical memories" are crucial in the initiation of change, which is what Soyinka's activism is all about, and they account for one's "emotional proclivities" in later years (Person, 2006: 655), then the personality of Soyinka must be connected to his childhood and the making of a life-long commitment to the recognition and operation of justice as the first condition of man.[1] It is at this point one must turn to the making of the writer-activist through the agency of the adult personalities that surround his childhood space and temporality in *Ake* and how his activism in *Ibadan* looks back to the *Ake* years.

Going by the import of generic taxonomy, each of Soyinka's autobiographies generally belongs in the designation of "life story"

[1] From the first time Soyinka makes the statement about justice being the first condition of man in his prison memoir, *The Man Died*, there is a sense in which it has continually served as a reference point for why he remains committed to activism where he perceives instances of injustice.

precisely because, rather than cover the record of an entire life─ which is what is designated as "life history"─ it is "a narrative that highlights a few key events or focuses on a few important relationships" (Angrosino in Brettel, 1997: 224). To date, he has published three major autobiographies: *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years*, and *You must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006). Besides, he has to his credit other related memoirs like his prison note, *The Man Died*, and *Isara: A Voyage around Essay*, which imaginatively dwells on the biography and personality of his father. However, as stated in the abstract, the focus will be on *Ake* and *Ibadan*.

On account of his period of birth and years of growth, Soyinka gained consciousness in a historical milieu that was overwhelmingly colonial. While *Ake* is an account of this colonial childhood, it is also an indication of the consolidation of western incursion into Africa,[2] the decisive operation of which culminated in territorial colonialism after the aberration of racial slavery that began to phase out about the middle of the 19th century. Appropriately described as "both the place where his earliest memories of cognitive connection with the world began and to the temporal process of expanding beyond that beginning point" (Priebe, 2006: 43), Soyinka's Ake under parental tutelage was, however, not a passive receptacle for the imposition of the prevailing imperialist ideology of the time. For even when his father S. A. Soyinka ─ but better known in this work as *Essay* ─ trained in and taught for a colonial mission, he would not allow the dictatorship and regimen of the system deny his son an independent childhood of freethinking and logic. This in itself is remarkable because colonialism was most effective through its other coeval cultural constituents like Christianity and education (Aikant, 2000: 340).

By the construction of these cultural structures in the system, the much more broad-based project of the Enlightenment had gained root

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[2] The commencement of colonial influence in that direct sense of the word began with his grandfather's concession that made his father one of the earliest natives of Isara to acquire western education in the early part of the 20th century. He had crowned his education then with teaching qualification from a Seminary in Ilesa. See *Isara: A Voyage around Essay*.

in the colonies. Perhaps the most crucial telling trope of the colonial order was the exploitation of the invention of western linear writing that "seemed to conquer the whole planet earth beyond the West" (Flusser, 2007: 19).[3] As Anyidoho (2006: 158) reflects, the positioning of westerners as missionaries and administrators granted them uncanny privilege to misrepresent Africa in their writing. She argues further, that worse still, a number of Africans themselves would go ahead to validate such reports, as they were perceived to have been recounted from an enlightened point of view. If indeed some Africans were guilty of this validation of abnegation, *Essay*, even when he was a product and agent of the missionary system, was however far from being vulnerable. The critical consciousness he bred in his boy began with the privileging of logic over mere oracular pronouncements.

The fact that *Essay* is prepared to activate Wole's consciousness to the desirability of logical thinking is evident in how he engages the boy in sessions of argument through which his critical consciousness is developed. It really does not matter to *Essay* even when his wife, Eniola, better known in the narrative as Wild Christian, protests this because she feels "He (Wole) is too argumentative" (p.55). The earliest instance of the application of logic in matters of justice in the autobiography is during an allegation by a sexton that little Wole at a church service in St Peter's Church, Ake, was caught together with another child in the act of noise making. Of course, silence is required in a moment of collective piety, all the same, not when there is a necessary tincture of excitement during worship. The little boy's response to the sexton, as later reported by his mother to his father was "of all the crowd in the church who were singing and praying, how could the sexton prove that he was talking?" (p.56). To his mother, this was an act of rudeness which should be severely punished as soon as his father was informed. But to the mother's surprise, *Essay* responded by considering the strength of the little boy's argument: "We-e-ell … it would be rather a difficult thing to prove you know" (p.56).

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[3] Despite this, Flusser in his essay admits the historical and antecedent indebtedness of western alphanumeric culture to Africa, especially Egypt.

A similar instance of the privilege of logic and justice and the advocacy of allowing good defence especially for the helpless in the face of an all-powerful colonial authority is evident during one of the student trials at Abeokuta Grammar School. Ordinarily, when Rev. Kuti, subsequently referred to as Daodu, catches a group of students led by Iku roasting one of his wife's cockerels, having killed it, he does not pronounce them guilty immediately. As a matter of fact, he sets up a court of trial where Iku convincingly shows that the cockerel was only unfortunate to be a specimen for proof of the making of fire through the phlogiston theory that they have earlier learnt in their Chemistry class. That he discharges and acquits them of "Unlawfully stealing a chicken , property of Rev and Mrs Ransome- Kuti and knowingly roasting same with the intention of secretly consuming it" (p. 176), only goes to show how the reverend already directly or indirectly impacts the principles of justice and logic on the young Wole. The accused are eventually punished only for the less severe offence which is "Concealment, failing to report an incident" (p. 176), for which they have no good defence and logical response to contest.

However, it is significant to note that the instances of logic and justice that *Essay* and Daodu espouse and which their wives also advocate as shall be seen presently,[4] run counter to the operation of colonialism, which in any case, operated as a military regiment (First in Arnold, 2005: 114). It explains why these adult characters in *Ake* are subsequently caught in the collision course with the colonial system, rupturing its operation to the extent of causing a veritable instance of the "crisis of linearity." In speaking truth to colonial power, therefore, these adult characters have also initiated Wole into the struggle for a better society, the administration of which should be premised on justice. In other words, if Wole's growing up years were apparently colonial, they also witnessed the interrogation of the propriety of such aura by the adult characters responsible for his upbringing, especially as the system could not be said to be sympathetic to the cause of the colonized. This is why it will be congenial to explore the colonial aura further.

[4] Wild Christian, that is, Soyinka's mother, was actually a niece to Daodu.

Postcolonial criticism is unambiguous in stating quite perceptively, "colonial rule… was premised on notions of racial and cultural difference 'purity' and on preserving the 'difference' between the colonizers and the colonized" (Anderson, 2001: 114). The import of the reflection is that by reason of the project of 'purity' and 'difference', a multiplier effects-scenario of alterity was created whereby the colonized, especially the colonized black, was made to compare in poor relation to the colonizer. Therefore, where the colonizer was civilized, the colonized was barbaric; where the colonizer was logical, the colonized was dangerously emotional; where the colonizer was enlightened and progressive, the colonized was not only uninformed and unsophisticated, he was also retrogressive to boot. This pattern of affirmation of difference on the part of the colonizer was to the end of laying the foundation for justifying the depredation and the denial of privilege to which he was prepared to subject the colonized. But as Loomba (1998: 174) recounts, "in practice," this ordering of difference… did not necessarily work in that way". That the culture of perpetuating difference in the life of the colonized "did not necessarily work that way" was because some members of the colonized other wagered to moderate the domineering order of the system, not only to obliterate difference, but to also rescue human dignity from both racial essentialism and the aberrations of such power relations.

The process of reclamation of human dignity through the refraction of the institutional difference that colonialism authorized was in itself a process of social redress. Within the context of colonialism, for these nationalists, it was a great challenge about which they had to stake their lives and careers. Interestingly, Wole's parents were involved in those memorable moments in West Africa's history of nationalism. Perhaps more interestingly, the aura was liberally inclusive to the young boy, as he was privy, one way or the other, to the initiation and execution of the waves that revolutionized and interrogated the colonial system to the point of yielding to the continent-wide call for independence. Yet, the process of transformation did not take place like a flash of lightening; obeying the principles of gradualism, it offered Wole an opportunity to be witness to series of events that called to question the moral grounds of the colonial system. Whatever action the adult activists take begins first and foremost at the thought

level. Perhaps the motivating thought line is that which aims at disagreeing with the established *raison d'etre* of western power domination and the imposition of its thoughts. There is no doubt that this is a crucial index of nationalist intervention in the engagement with the arrogance of colonial power relations. It is indeed about the demonstration of the ability to disrupt the logic of oppression and difference in the best way possible beginning first with a sound thoughtful interrogation. Concerning this process, Chambers intimates thus:

> When thought is organized by the disruption of differences, rather than the levelling of logic of rationalism, we are drawn out of the shelter of its presumed resolutions to travel under the wider skies of a troubling complexity. It is a mode of thinking (2005: 40).

Beginning with the interrogation of unequalled power relations in the colonial era was necessary perhaps because colonialism, as an action in itself, began first with a mode of thinking. Its operations as a matter of fact were known to snowball from thought modes to action modes. This is why it is logical that the disruption of the perpetuation of difference on the part of Daodu begins with the lone dissenting voice, which he makes to bear on the colonial suggestion in England about the proposal of only one university for the whole of West African region. Having been privileged to be part of the African team invited to rubber-stamp the British colonial government suggestion about one university for the colonies, ordinarily one would expect him to join his voice to those of others in acquiesce; but no:

> His exploits in England had become known largely through word of mouth ─ how he had forcefully ranged himself against the British plans to establish only one university for all of their West African Colonies, he insisting instead on one university for each country. His stubborn, nearly isolated opposition was highly acclaimed; only our Daodu could have done it. (p. 168)

That such "exploits" become part of city legend already instructs the entire Ake land; but if it doubtless does, then, doubly so for Wole whose admiration of such triumph of logic of the oppressed as embodied by Daodu, cannot be missed in the quote above. The logic of the activism, when examined further, becomes justified given the fact that even one university distribution ratio for each of the colonies could not in that distant past still have equated what Britain enjoyed in terms of university education provision for her citizens. If Daodu challenges colonial imposition in England, he is by no means cowed by its agencies at home as seen in the testimony on him regarding his relation with the Alake, the traditional chief who has allowed himself to be reduced to a crony of the system. (p. 168)

Further, it is interesting to note that while Daodu is away in England, his wife, Funmilayo Kuti, better known in the narrative as Beere, and Wole's own mother, together with two other women have begun what in the reckoning of Wole would "set in motion in Igbein, the Great Upheaval that ended in Ake" (p. 181). Initially it has begun as a kind of elite wives' group concerned with immediate problems affecting them and to some extent, other problems affecting women in the community in a colonial era. But as Daodu presciently advises, such a group has to be all–inclusive. To achieve this, he advises the women to bring to their fold not only "*onikaba"*— "gown wearers"; more crucially, they have to bring in their numerous numbers "*aroso*"— "wrapper wearers," for they are "the people who really need your help" (p. 179). As the women both from within and largely from the outlying villages begin to attend meeting with the women leaders, they are sensitized to their plights and the oppressive system in existence and how its agents, both black and white, exploit them for their own aggrandizement. Again, Daodu steps in as adviser extraordinaire one day to counsel in favour of the empowerment of the women against exploitation:

> Do you know the real trouble with the *aroso?* They are illiterate. They don't know how to read and write, that is why they get exploited. If you set aside half an hour at these meetings, you could end up making all the women in Egbaland literate by the end of a year!

> He chuckled at his own wild optimism, strolled on…
> The idea was taken (p. 180).[5]

Among other things, undue exploitation along the line of arbitrary imposition of tax on women and other forms of infringement upon their rights becomes part of the issues that the women engage. Just as Daodu contributes his ideas and resources towards the success of the movement, *Essay* also remains as supportive to Wild Christian, especially in the period Beere "left for England… [because] there appeared to be conferences to attend" (p. 185). If Egba Women's Union eventually becomes something to reckon with especially with respect to the social change it is able to effect, it is also significant to remark that Wole, in his own infantile right, is instrumental in all its activities─ from assisting in teaching the women how to read and write, to running errands and providing useful intelligence even to *Essay* on developments. Simply put, he has in the process of things, even at age ten, built a "record as Oddjob man with Women's Movement" (p. 187).

The Women's Movement is ultimately able to reverse the order of things not only in their favour but also in favour of men as well. Matters have come to a head with the first appearance of an old woman whose testimony of tax exploitation triggers off the protest as spurred by Kemberi, another major figure in the women leadership. The reaction is spontaneous; it is also the needed prod from Kemberi. Not only does she lead their protest--, which lasts for many days-- to the palace of the Alake, the protest also yields the expected result of the abolition of the "Special Assessment" proposed against all women (p. 221).

Furthermore, the women protest also results in the transfer of the uncooperative District Officer under whose regime the protest has

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[5] Although Gibbs (243) has faulted the representation of the overwhelming influence of Rev Kuti in the prosecution and success of the Great Upheaval, as he contends that based on Mrs Kuti's profile as an outstanding nationalist and women leader, the credit of the movement should go more to her than to the clergy, the concern of this paper, however, does not include the gender questions such criticism raises.

begun. Throughout the negotiation that ensues and which even excludes the Alake, it is clear that colonialism can no longer hold out for long. Beere's heroism, which is embodied in her riposte to the recalcitrant District Officer, is instructive for two reasons: while it shows the necessity to stand up to oppression, it also assures Wole in a significant way about the necessity to be prepared to speak truth to power without fear or favour. Wole witnesses a similar incident when Beere calls the Lagos office of the District Officer to protest the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima. The boldness with which she questions the morality of bombing Japan when the originating culprit-country is Germany emboldens Wole the more. For not only does Beere attack the West for bombing a non-white country, thus betraying the racial import of the bombing, she also asks the Officer in Lagos to pass her protest "to the so-called Allies" (p. 224).

On the part of Daodu, the ramifications of the Women's protest also mean the revision of one of his school's anthem, which previously has celebrated the Alake. Now it is turned into a satirical piece, mocking the hitherto revered monarch for betraying his own people to satisfy the colonial system. But more importantly, what *Essay* begins by alerting the young Wole to the currency and seriousness of news items is consolidated by Daodu who not only engages Wole on them, but also seeks his views on issues both national and international:

> You must take an interest! Don't just stick your nose in that dead book you are reading. Don't you see, if Mussolini could undermine the independence of Abyssinia, what chance has the new National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons got with their demand for some measure of self-government? These people who have managed to defeat Mussolini, is it likely that they will ever surrender what they already have? What do you think of Winston Churchill? (p. 228).

On the closing pages of *Ake*, part of which is the quote above, both Daodu and Beere sensitize Wole to the politics of racism beginning with the Atlantic Slave Trade and the implications for the present in a colonial era. It is in a sense, a convincing way of justifying their activism against colonial power and its injustice. More than that, as

Wole from this point is on his way to Government College, Ibadan, it is clear that he too has received enough tutelage from his parents, in the far-fetched sense of the word, to cope with the challenges not only of racism, but also those of the injustice of certain power relations. Indeed his own activism, as will be seen in *Ibadan,* transcends his college years, as part of the narrative also reflects significantly on his days in Ibadan as a university researcher and dramatist. There is, moreover, a strong sense in which the movement from Ake to Ibadan underscores Pfister's explication about the visceral link between autobiography and travel writing (Naito, 2008: 476).

Appropriately, *Ake* could be limned as a recollection of moments of childhood with relation to the significance of socialization of Wole. For the most part, he, even at his most active, is represented with respect to the formation of attitude through parental upbringing. However, in *Ibadan* Wole's role as a receptacle of social wisdom and tutee of social and radical activism has snowballed into independent involvement in issues of concern and urgency happening around him. But his indebtedness to the past is unmistakable. The likes of Daodu and Beere as well as other adult activist-characters in *Ake*, by virtue of their activism, have also laid bare a kind of self-representation. This in itself becomes a source of inspiration. One basic fact about documentation of lives is that it can serve as a source of resistance or repression (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 9).

The ideals, for which Daoudu and others stand in Ake, when placed in perspective in connection with the existing power relations of the time, indicate a representation of agents of nationalist resistance to the repressive forces of colonialism. But the documentation of life of any kind does not start with the calligraphic or celluloid effort that an author makes. Instead, it begins first on the plane of memory and recollection. Needless to say, that for a person who chooses to recollect the past for the engagement of the contingencies of the present, the place of learning is undeniable. This explains why representation means more than speaking for the patently intended as it stands simultaneously for other things not announced (Chambers, 2005: 22). It is more accurately so in the case of African autobiography which, although intended to objectify the

representation of a particular self, does so only through the objectification of the entire social order, the product of which is Wole.

By moving from Ake to Ibadan, a traversing of two cityscapes, first for the continuation of his high school education, Wole can be said to have engaged in a kind of migration. And where migration is involved, Chambers (2005: 115) intimates that the first challenge is the inevitable collision "against the limits of our inheritance". In the case of Wole, perhaps the most prominent of inheritance is the socialization and tutelage of activism he has acquired and which, depending on his choice, will account greatly for how he intervenes in the events of the new location. When such happens, Chambers reflects further on the intricacies of the circumstances of relocation:

> We may choose to withdraw from this impact and only select a confirmation of our initial views… We could, however, opt to slacken control, to let ourselves go, and respond to the challenge of a world that is more extensive than the one we have been accustomed to inhabiting. (2005: 115)

For Wole, however, the commitment to the ideals of resistance to the undue suppression of both colonial and postcolonial establishment is paramount. In looking back to *Ake* days, he draws inspiration enough to face the challenge of his new location. From this point on, the challenge of confronting the powers that be in demand of fairness also requires that the self-representation of Wole, the author's actual first name, be changed to Maren, a fictive name which nonetheless, emanates from a mischievous collusion of syncretism between Maren and his grandfather.[6] Rather than see this change of name as a confirmation of the "troubling" reputation of autobiographical

[6]The appropriation of Maren follows from the incantations and incisions his grandfather secretly administers on him as a little boy during one of the family's visits to Isara. It is basically to fortify Wole against the challenges of the future. The Symbol of the protection is what is inscribed graphically on the pillow case gift that his grandfather sends to him on his admission to Government College. For his father and his mother this is a bit tricky because of the undertones of the gift, which is not known to them, but known only to Wole and his grandfather.

"hoaxes" (Smith and Watson, 2005: 359), the events narrated here are as real as they are concretely historical.

Maren's activism in Ibadan, which begins at Government College, looks back expectedly to Ake in every way. As said earlier, Maren as a product of an African society owes his personality and character formation and maturation to the social order that brings him up. Like the representation of the adult activists that make up *Ake*, Maren's activism begins first at the level of language, which has of course been preceded by thought and the invocation of memory. By following the pattern of his upbringing, he appears to confirm the third possibility for language conception, which is basically grounded in the social: "I can mean what I say, but only *indirectly*, as a second remove, in words I take and give back to the community according to the protocols it establishes. My voice can mean, but only with others: at times in chorus, but at best of times in a dialogue" (Holquist, 2001: 391). This is why the events in *Ibadan,* as events of "memorized text," and some of which will be presently considered,[7] have to be conceived as illustrating part of the Kantian cosmological antinomy. This in the illumination of Ricoeur (2004: 23) shows events as either resulting "from something prior in accord with necessary causation or else it proceeds from freedom, in accord with spontaneous causation." But more than the spontaneous, events in Ibadan draw strength from the prior causation of Ake years of childhood.

The first instance of events, which come up for illustration in this paper, is at Government College. In front of one of his white English teachers' house, there are scattered effects. Mr Kaye is apparently disposing of them. But of particular interest to Maren and two other friends of his are some "discarded journals and books". In rummaging through the discarded lump, the young students are able to curry booties for themselves. But Maren especially has in his kitty, amomg other things, William Blake's *Poems.* The sight of his booty has attracted Mr Kaye as he thinks the collection will also contain Blake's

[7] Although the events in *Ibadan* span nineteen years (1946-1965), and take one from space to space both in Africa and Europe, this paper is selective in the sense that it is content to dwell only on some of those that have to physically do with Ibadan.

"Jerusalem" which is his own favourite. Disappointed that the book does not include it, Mr Kaye goes into a long informal introduction of the poem to the students especially because of its nationalistic sentiments: "As it happens, Blake's *Jerusalem* has also been set to music, which I shall now proceed to play. It is, as I said, rather patriotic piece, one might even say chauvinistic… but it also offers an interesting comment on the social history of England in Victorian times." (p. 154). For a discerning and sensitive reader, the Victorian era marked the crowning peak of British imperial power as Britain decisively stamped her hold on the colonies with the series of declarations of protectorates especially in Africa. The chauvinism of the poem will therefore bear evidence beyond the borders of River Thames.

As promised, Mr Kaye does not waste time to produce a copy of the poem, which has been set to music by Paul Robeson. In no time, the 78-rmp disc begins to play on the turntable. Beginning with collaborative latitude Christianity allowed in the imperial period, the poem plays out in the following lyrics:

> And did those feet in ancient time
> Walk upon England's mountains green?
> And was the holy Lamb of God
> On England's pleasant pastures seen…? (p. 154)

But it is with the commencement of the second stanza that Maren begins to chide the essentialism of Blake, preferring instead a kind of universalism that will not leave out any part of the world and in which Ake rituals will be prominent. It will suffice to take a look at the second stanza:

> Bring me my Bow of burning gold!
> Bring me my Arrows of desire!
> Bring me my Spear! O clouds, unfold!
> Bring me my Chariot of fire.
> I will not cease from Mental Fight,
> Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand… (p. 154)

Certainly the "chauvinism" of the poem is manifest in the above stanza, and it inspires in Maren a personal poetic piece which he has

crafted “in tribute to William Blake” (155). But as one reads the poem, it becomes clear that even at a subliminal level, the constant interrogation of colonial power imposition on Africa and the essentialism that defines western racial relations with Black Africa coupled with evils of slavery ─ convictions that Daodu and Beere have made clearly known to Wole in *Ake* ─ have become the basis for his response to his white teacher’s celebration of British nationalism. The fact that Kaye does not expect such critical response makes Maren’s composition take him unawares: “Back from leave, English master Kaye held the piece of paper at arm’s length, his face a map of anguish; even his ragged moustache appeared to have drooped in despair as he shook his head slowly from side to side, groaning, ‘What have I done, Maren, what have I done?’” (p. 155). Maren’s poem nevertheless is worth quoting at length:

> Is Africa a land so base
> Are we born into servitude
> Have we to bear that yoke always
> Of slavery in such magnitude?
> Perhaps our acts are not so smart
> To those who come our land to spoil
> Have they not taken the better part
> Of our ancestral, arable soil (p. 155).

If this was meant to be a “tribute”, by now one should know better that Maren has gone a step further than Daodu and Beeere in interrogating colonial hegemony, by not only talking back, but by also “writing back”. Therefore, as western colonial system was sustained then by textual attitude (Bhoemer, 1995: 13), it was also expected that postcolonial criticism should get back through the same attitude. Moreover, if Edmond Jabes (cited in Chambers, 2005: 22) is right in feeling that there are “Winners with their arrogance, their eloquence,” he however underestimates “losers” when he permanently endows them “without words or without signs.” Right from *Ake*, losers have not lacked words as seen in Wole’s parents, and in *Ibadan*, Maren builds on this when he takes the winner to task in a manner that beats his imagination.

On Maren's return from Leeds where he has bagged an Honours degree in English, he takes up a research fellowship with the University College in Ibadan. It is also about the time the university is transforming from being an annex of the University of London to a full-blown Nigerian premier university. A certificate scandal has earlier involved a Nigerian academic in person of Dr Sylvester Anieke. Although a qualified medical doctor, he has been found not to possess the D.Sc. he claims to have acquired from Toronto University. Worse still, after his sack from the university, to everybody's shock, the Governor-General of the country and Visitor to the university in person of Nnamdi Azikwe has found Anieke the only worthy person to be appointed his personal physician. But the peak of the derision of merit on the part of Azikwe is the appointment of the same Anieke sometime later as the chairman of the University Governing Council. Although not a full-fledged staff of the university, the role of Maren in drumming protest and mass resignation of staff against this uncomplimentary gesture from the Governor-General is significant.

To show further, how strongly he feels about the incident, he breaks the protocol of prior appointment to seek the audience of the Principal Dr Dike in order to assure him that to save the autonomy of the university; he should not bow to the pressures from the government to institute mediocrity in the system. The principal's resolve to stand against the resumption of the controversial chairman is assuring to Maren and before he leaves his office, Maren congratulates him on such stand for integrity and credibility. However, when Maren returns from his fieldwork only to confirm that the Principal as well as the university staff has bowed to pressure by allowing the Chairman of Council to resume, he does not hesitate to return to the Principal to express his disappointment. Apart from turning down the university's offer of permanent appointment, he also turns down the offer by the university for the publication of his "shorter plays" on which printing process has commenced. In the letter written to the Publication Committee of the university, the reason for this withdrawal of consent is unambiguous: "Since work began on this volume of plays, the status of the University has altered immeasurably… The University has been deliberately dishonoured and the occasion has passed without some comment… I have no wish to further, in any way, however indirect, this conspiracy of shameless acquiescence." (pp. 195 – 6)

About the time of taking the decision, University of Ife has just taken off on a temporary site in Ibadan. Although Ife was not as established as the University of Ibadan, Maren is well pleased to be on the staff of the newly founded University of Ife. However, the socio-political turmoil that has begun to rock the nation has shifted its conflict site to this young university. This time, the Premier of the Western region is directly involved and set to destabilize the leadership. Maren's advocacy for justice and logic, attributes bequeathed to him in his Ake days, has propelled him into seeking personal audience with the Premier S. L. Akintola. His opportunity of meeting the Premier's daughter serves to confirm the boldness of an activist whose comportment and verbiage are reminiscent of Beere's conversation with the Lagos District Officer in the wake of the bombing of Hiroshima. Capitalizing upon the revelation that the daughter is very close to his father, the following conversation ensues between Maren and the young lady. When it is over, no one is in doubt as to Maren's preparedness to speak truth to power in a postcolonial era:

> Her eyes were flashing as she leapt up. 'Daddy loves me. We're very close. I am closer to him than my mother is'
> … He prepared to leave. 'That's about as far as I can go with you.' Then he stopped thoughtfully and asked, 'You say you have no secrets from him?'
> 'None. I tell him everything'…
> 'Repeat everything I've said to you. And one thing more ─ tell him to keep his hands off the Ife University. You've spent years studying abroad. You know what universities are. Tell him I said Ife is not his private property. We all work for our salary and do not owe anyone personal loyalty. Our loyalty is to the University…' (p. 205)

Maren's activism on the universities' campuses can be said to prefigure his full-blown involvement in a national activism. For through his involvement in the *Credo*, an activist group comprising mainly of intellectuals who have been involved in open opposition to the refraction of the universities' autonomy by the state, a greater form of consciousness begins to build up in this group and in no time finds

kindred spirit in the farmers' revolt against the state. It also recruits common people from the street to swell its ranks and create an awareness of the need to resist the despotism and election rigging of Western Region government embodied by its Premier Akintola and supported by the Federal Government. This kind of attempt to take the whole of the suffering masses along, again, is reminiscent of the transformation of an elitist women group in *Ake* into a mass women group through the leadership of Beere and other women in its leadership including Wild Christian.

In a manner that shows his absolute commitment to the reversal of injustice imposed on the people by the NNDP-led government of Western Region, Maren is determined to ensure a change in the status quo, staking all his life to take on an unwelcome political order: "What had become clear to him was… that his pattern of living had changed for ever ─ at least for as long as the repressive order remained." (p. 356). Together with his group he considers various options of demonstrating the opposition of the people to the affairs of the government in power. The one he finally succeeds with is the hijack, at gunpoint, of the Premier's recorded speech broadcast to the people over radio *in media res* at Western Nigerian Broadcast Service in Ibadan, and its replacement with his own which partly reads: "This is the voice of the people, the true people of this nation. And they are telling you, Akintola, get out! Get out, and take with you your renegades who have lost all sense of shame…(p. 356)" Shortly thereafter Maren is declared wanted, and many days after, arrested, detained and tried, but one is thing is clear: by this time, the errand boy of the Women's Group in Ake has come of age, and can hold his own as a necessary intervention in the interrogation of the oppressive relations of power.

Therefore, by drawing inspiration from the childhood past of a colonial era, his intervention in a postcolonial dispensation cannot but show the sincerity of a young man's search for justice for all in a postcolonial state. It then stands to reason that, even when the autobiography is limned as "an exercise in personal agency" (Everett, 2009: 46), the extent to which the evolution of this agency obtains from the orientation of childhood cannot be over-emphasized. The

case of Soyinka is a validation of this assumption as has been illustrated in *Ake* and *Ibadan.*

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