

Àrẹ Lekan Àrẹ: A Tribute to a Warrior for all Battles

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In the forest of songs
yours is a fertile lyric
weaved for every ear.
In the sky of words
your lines are rainbow,
brighter than the moon,
illuminating beyond the
stars. Àrẹ, now that the
flute of death blew beyond the seven hills
of Ìbàdàn, I offer an
elegy to the man whose
impacts shaped our lives,
a man whose anvil forged the future we
desired. Àjànàkú, the
elephant that rumbles
the forest. If death would
have loved to receive money, we would have
offered him money.
If death would have loved
to be offered a thousand
rams, we would have loved to slaughter them.
But death took you,
beyond the earth where
the feet of children learn
to walk without stumbling.
You—father, mentor.
You—Achiever. Catalyst.

Before the advent of the
 media, your words travelled beyond the
 four walls of our country.
 Before the arrival of death, you were the king
 and Èlẹ́sin Ọba. You made the earth look
 ordinary. Now that the
 song of farewell occupies the sky,
 Àrẹ, let my elegy adorn
 the world. Today there
 are no birds to sing
 because of your demise.
 Today the earth trembles
 because your death broke the camel's hump.
 Ọmọ Ìbàdàn, your lineage
 is that of a warrior. Your
 memory remains unbroken despite the
 tenacity of time.
 Farewell, the mountain that bends the arrow of lies.
 Farewell, the rain that veils deserted lands.
 Farewell to the son
 of the soil.
 Farewell to the scion
 of Ìbàdàn.

Let me now shift gears to the tedium of history. The late Dr. Lekan Àrẹ (1933-2020) was the founder and Chief Executive (CEO), Kakanfo Inn and Conference Centre, Ìbàdàn. He was also the chairman, University Press Plc., former General Manager, Ogun-Osun River Basin Authority, and the longest-serving director on the board of Punch Nigeria Limited. The late Àrẹ was a member of Ìbàdàn Elders Forum and a strong pillar of Government College, Ìbàdàn Old Boys Association (GCIOPA). The president, Government College Ìbàdàn Old Boys Association (GCIOPA), Chief Wale Babalakin, in a statement, said: "With gratitude to God for a life well spent we announce the exit of our dear patron and trustee, Lalekan Emmanuel Àrẹ (1948, Field House), President GCIOPA 1989-2006. Lekan Àrẹ is widely known for the passion with which he championed the GCI cause and everything GCIOPA, Lalekan Àrẹ was the epitome of a great Old Boy."

Chief Lekan Àrẹ will be remembered as an Afrophile, a custodian of the Yorùbá culture and a multiculturalist. In his lifetime, he portrays the knowledge of the continent which includes engrained familiarity with different myths, folktales and socio-cultural belief in Nigeria and Africa as well. Also,

in his engagement with Africa, Chief Àrẹ extends his representations of the continent to its people. He deconstructs earlier notions that majority of Africans flux into the West without a sense of purpose. He is a grand believer of Africans having a sense of purpose and rooted in culture where they come from.

His ideas and ways of living was that of the Afropolitan, one who believes that in spite of their culturally hybrid nature, one does not sever ties and relationship with one's African roots. Often times, he has illustrated this attitude with his narration of the story of one of his family members who married a Japanese. The family not only maintains contact with the Yorùbá culture, they transmit both Yorùbá and Japanese customs to their children too. A humanist and an accommodator of culturally different people, he always insists that there are people who seek to be understood beyond the rigid limits of their statehood. Hence, an affiliation to a country should hardly be the basis for understanding a human being in their totality. This worldview is well espoused in the story of how he travelled to Brazil and met Yorùbá indigenes with whom he bonded passionately. Even though he is a firm displayer of the Yorùbá culture, he also demonstrates a flair for cultural intermingling and interpenetration both within and outside the continent. As a major proponent of interracial mingling and inclusion, Chief Lekan Àrẹ gives primacy to interracial marriages and interethnic relationships. He is also reputed for encouraging Africans to always place cultural communality over the divisiveness of religious difference.

Àrẹ Lineage in Different Ages

Jàgíní! Jàgíní!

Ojú inú, I can see! I can see!

Images tell their lore

Like the moon contrasts the grey of the sky

Unveiling, revealing, unwrapping

Ancient text on woven formats

Once seen through a glass darkly

Unmask hidden forms

Ifá, Arínúróde!

I can see! I can see!

The Àrẹ lineage of Ìbàdàn has created a most impressive historical narrative over time. In the old era of the 19th century, they were great warriors, with one of them—Àrẹ Latosa—rising to become the ultimate political leader of the city and the overall Generalissimo of the Yorùbá. Àrẹ Latoosa was famous for the greater part of the nineteenth century, and was actually the most

powerful in the last quarter of that turbulent era. The Àrẹ managed a huge Ìbàdàn empire at a time of relentless and coordinated opposition from multiple corners and sources. Oba I. B. Akinyele, who wrote a book in 1951, *Ìwé Ìtàn Ìbàdàn*, on the history of Ìbàdàn documenting this era, paid scholarly attention to the *tẹ̀nbẹ̀lẹ̀kun* and *ọ̀tẹ̀*, the nasty twin of intrigues and conspiracies that defined this era. Thus, as the empire made the Àrẹ face *ogun* (war) abroad, there were *tẹ̀nbẹ̀lẹ̀kun* and *ọ̀tẹ̀* at home also, and there were just too many of them for one person to manage. Samuel Johnson who also recorded that moment painted a picture of actions, complicated decision making, rivalries, and difficult conflict management efforts. The Àrẹ was able to stand at the center of it all. The empire and its leader dominated the events. Samuel Johnson wrote under the shadow of the Ìbàdàn empire. His composition and portrait of the Àrẹ used the language of the empire—muscular, imperial, dominating.

As I fell on the past of the distinguished Àrẹ lineage, I composed a new song:

Ọmọkùnrin kànkà,
the hen who challenges the vulture
to a fight
The vulture circles the hen
Smiling, the hen teases the vulture:
Become a hawk if you want to eat me
Or wait for my death to eat the carcass
What can the vulture do to a hen?
What can enemies do to the Àrẹ Ọnà Kakanfò?

The war hawk of Ìbàdàn
A wildfire that stays on the roof
Daring the landlord to fetch fire
Water comes, *Ọkùnrinméta* turns into air
Air, the husband of fire
Ekiti take flight
Àrẹ jumps thrice to retool.

Ológun, yan, yan, yanbíakin
The war captain of Ìbàdàn
Summoning the ọmọ Odùduwà with a command;
Arm yourselves for battle in the morning
I, Yanbíolá, the war general
Who sleeps outside until the war is over.

Àrẹ, Àrẹ, Àrẹ
 Never tired of wars, he roams the world
 The restless spirit of Ìbàdànland
 Ògún ọmọ Ogun
 Àrẹ I am scared
 Spare me!
 Yan, yan, Yanbíqlá
 Wait for him if you dare!
 The offspring of a compound
 Full of arrows
 Àrẹ the offspring of a thousand quivers
 Yanbíqlá, never tired of wars.

Àrẹ was thirsty
 As his thirst rumbles
 The River Niger trembles
 Àrẹ, he that pours water away
 On hearing the rumbling of the rain
 When the rain rumbles and refuses to fall
 Yanbíqlá turns the Nile into a big pot
 To supply water to the city.
 If the rain so chooses
 Let it never fall again.

The late Chief Lalekan Àrẹ extended the glory of the lineage, carrying the genes of the older members of the lineage. He added positively to them in aspects of business, management, administration, institutional leadership, and community organizing. His mantra was hard work, analysis based on facts, the correlation of process with outcome, judicious use of resources, empathy and compassion. The foundation of his life and career was laid many decades ago. As a young man in the grammar school and university, he combined excellence in sports with distinction in scholarship.

Dr. Lalekan Àrẹ's style shared many things in common with the warriors of old. He was a straight shooter, although not of guns but of words. Quick to the point, forever dramatic in his actions and choice of words, and very witty, Dr. Àrẹ was effective in getting to the bottom of issues and taking decisions based on facts and good judgment. Like his ancestors, he was a fearless warrior. His weapons extended to the realm of ideas and ideologies. A warrior for all battles, he courageously took up for many issues with extensive social and political import.

Àlà mú, ọmọ Ní hí nílọla

Mo pè yín l'órúkọ

Oh, spirit of the hills!

Rise up, oh warrior, rise up

Tough and stubborn, *Bàbá kan ọsọ*

The fearless, never bothered by threats

Baba hears, Run! Run! Run!—he refuses to run

Baba hears, Give way! Give way!—he refuses to
relent.

Tactful warrior, offspring of the Great Warrior

Ọkọọ Ọlábí sí who challenges death.

Death carries a club,

Baba *Fúnkẹ* carries a club.

Elephants and lions take flight.

He who witnesses Baba *Ayọ* and Death in

a duel does not live to tell the story.

Àlà mú, expose the treacherous— treachery
hides.

Baba *Dàmọlá*, show the face of the wicked:

wickedness hides.

The hyena who roams the jungle, taunting

the dogs to emulate him.

Gently! Gently! Baba *àgbà*.

Please! Conqueror of death.

we think no evil, speak no evil

Hear no evil of Baba *wa*

I will first sacrifice to *Bàbá Àrẹ*

Conqueror of Death

Before I sacrifice to *Òkẹ' bàdàn*

Lord of the Hills

Òkẹ' bàdàn can wait, *Bàbá* cannot

Accept my kola

Bless my kola to multiply

May I never see the wrath of Baba

Only his praises.

Rats see the cat and run.

Baba Revenge! Revenge!

not once, but twice

For they who scheme evil

against you yesterday morning

Àrẹ dead by day break.

Baba, Lord of the land and sea
 Five men in one, never to be subdued,
 Tiger of the plain,
 Baba, chew silently
 to say your incantations
 Grind on the thick stone
 to make your charms
 Open your mouth
 to sing
 Clear your legs
 to dance.
 Èkùn,
 Praise us, when you mean it
 abuse us when we deserve it.
 We bend and bow
 to avoid the fiery eyes
 We prostrate
 to avoid eyes of blood
 We are quiet
 to avoid the tongue that lashes
 We appease Ìyálóde
 to calm your temper.

I am a beneficiary of his large mind and grandiose generosity. Although I have not been able to take him up on the offer, he mandated his staff to let me stay at Kakanfo Inn for free any time I am around. He funded the publication of my long book on Ìbàdàn. May the Àrẹ of the future be great men and women of heroic characters like the Àrẹ of the past. May the Àrẹ of the future be great entrepreneurs and investors as the Àrẹ of the present. As we celebrate the departed soul, do please join me in dancing to a new song:

 He watches our war steps
 We, who never run away from death
 We wage wars at four corners of the house
 We told him the four:
 The bow carrier in front
 The quiver carrier in the middle
 The arrow carrier stays to the left
 The gun carrier at the back.
 Lekan, master of our moves.
 Àrẹ turns into an *Egbínrín*

Egbínrín, creator of colors
 Offspring of the slim *Ìrókòò* tree
 Master of clothes
 If there were no cloth
 We would have misbehaved
 Laughing tirelessly,
Egbínrín would have offered the feathers
 For us to fool the world.
Àrẹ is reborn
 Reborn into wealth
 If you are pursued by death
 It will not catch up with you,
 Eat Kola, the nut of life
 The bitter kola that elongates life
 May you live long
 Eat sugarcane,
 The sweetness of life
 You will live a sweet life
 Drink water
 No one chooses water as an enemy
 May you become water
 Water that has no enemies.
Baba mi, the good
 Who is grateful for favors
 On the bad, a thousand favors
 are wasted.
 A fit man with
 Ears for wise sayings
 Head for counseling
 Brain for ideas
 Chief *Láḷẹkán Àrẹ*, serve no fools
 Who weep in the wilderness
 Who plant lotus on dry land
Baba mi àgbàlagbà oyè,
 The water with no enemies.

And after the dance, let us close with a final meditation:
 Somewhere young turned old gents
 Will handle a photo album with fragile fingers
 And its dust will turn breathable air,
 Old dreams, wise words will grace wrinkled faces

As silence breaks into sweet single tears
While they sniff the nostalgic smell
Of your youthful posture
In black and white
Àjànàkú ńlá, we will see life the way
It is meant to be
An assemblage of your youthful bravery actions,
Wise words and old age pictures
Which will be imagined through the eyes
Of living old men
Who were once lads sitting at your
Feet that walked this earth...
I remember when waters were clear
death was not a word
nor sorrow ever heard
we bathed in milky lakes
doves skimming an infinite blue
something lived on...
Chief, your actions are living on.