

Stream of Consciousness

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

ON BIAFRA AND NIGERIA

Riveting Musing and Chronicled Stream of
Consciousness of an Innocent Mind in Nsukka,
Gripping Story of Biafra and Thoughts on
Contemporary Issues in Nigeria

Olu Aluko

Stream of Consciousness

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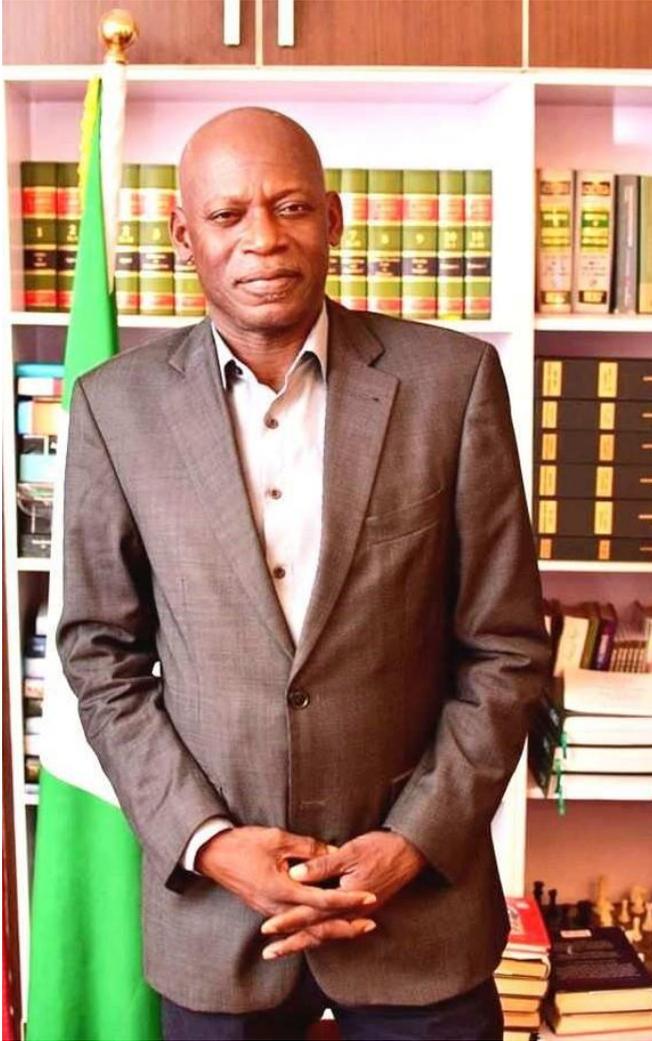
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Dedication

To the fond memories of all the people that lost their lives in the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. Also, to my parents through whom I lived on the campus of University of Nigeria, my childhood friends and all ranks of my friends in various social media and interactive forums that encouraged me to publish my maiden book.



Stephen Olufemi Aluko

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Preface

With the pedigree and distinct personal disposition of Olu Aluko over the years, he has created his own unique identity which makes the gregarious intellectual and politician not to need much introduction in various constituencies, his name alone says it all. His attribute of living by his conviction is admirable which makes his personality rather too compelling not to be ignored when he interrogates issues intellectually and passionately. His maiden published book is a testimony to the enigma, popularly called Afico. It was his fifth posting on his Facebook timeline under the caption of "This Biafra Thing" that I first saw and I had to search for the rest of the series because of the originality of the write-up. The saying in Warri which he quoted: "na big name dey kill small dog" arrested my attention and I had "belly laughs" reading his story about his pranks with fellow kids mimicking the civil war of Nigeria that happened between 1967 and 1970.

I couldn't resist the inspiration to package together the titillating stream of consciousness of his fertile mind, accompanied with some selected pictures of the dramatis personae in the remarkable recall of the prolific story teller and share it with a wider audience that may appreciate this kind of historical piece that is bound to become a must read for all.

We have quite a number of narratives in the public domain written by the military participants in the Nigerian civil war but we do not have many stories from the innocent children and other ranks of civilians who suffered the consequences of the war which were not limited to estrangement, forced separations, love stories and displacement of lives among others. His tales of childhood days in Nsukka before the civil war and the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife during the civil war days in

effect are the real stories of the war and not the propaganda or the stories told by other books about the war with a premeditated motive. It is straight from the heart.

Quite often, few people cause wars to happen while the whole society suffers the consequences. This is what makes the account of the Biafra war from the memories of a child, documented in the first two parts of this book to be exclusive and apt for posterity. Olu Aluko is a prominent active member of Ekitipanupo Forum, an indigenous intellectual roundtable, in which he has made terrific value adding contributions to debates over the years. This made it easier for the publisher to dig into the archive of the inimitable interactive platform of Ekiti intellectuals, and brought out the wide range of topical issues which he addressed and put them together under the appropriate chapters in part three of this book.

The last section of the book would enable readers to appreciate the author for the candid manner in which he engaged and engages dispassionately on national matters of general concern, as well as Ekiti politics and integrated contemporary issues.

In all, nineteen chapters were created and divided into three parts which the readers would find very engaging. This arrangement and structure of the content informed the title given to the book: Stream of Consciousness on Biafra and Nigeria. With over 100,000 followers across various social media platforms, his story on Biafra was deemed worthy of being published in a book. Left to him he was not particularly keen on publishing the book but was just responding to his inner voice to reel out the stories in a natural sequence as they come to his mind. Here is one of his responses to the call for a book to be published.

“...I have lack of interest as regards money per se. Eh eh eh, it is a bit in my DNA; my father really never gave two monkeys about money,

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he was strictly imparting knowledge and truth. But I guess I will struggle to take your advice. Meanwhile I can't stop my stream of consciousness. It is hitting me like a ton of bricks. I have written one though yet to be published in England, a fiction called Tribal Triangle. This is a stream of consciousness thing, a personal gift from my wall to those who care to read it and share the story. My main motivation is not pecuniary in nature. It is raw as I recollect from the depth of my soul and I transcribe directly online in real time. It is a child telling his story. Hopefully the power of recollection of "this child" would help enrich the reader in yet another perspective to what went down in those times."

I must state here that it was not an easy job to get this book published because it involved collation of the multifaceted writings of a brilliant roaming mind in different platforms at various times. It was indeed tasking collating the musings of someone who was writing without any intention of getting it published as a book. I practically went over his voluminous commentaries on the internet from ~~the year~~ 2010 to date, sieved and structured his deep-rooted messages to suit an appropriate book format for Mindscope Africa to publish.

To come up with this excellent piece involved a lot of weaving and knitting his integrated rich reflections and present it as one compact book which we have now as the maiden edition. If there are any shortcomings in the book, it was not deliberate, take it as what could be offered in this maiden edition. I enjoin all to read the book.

Seyi Adetumbi
Mindscope Africa
12/02/2020

**PART ONE – ONCE
UPON A TIME IN
NSUKKA**

Our lives
begin to end
the day we
become
silent about
things that
matter.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Jan. 15, 1929 - April 4, 1968

Chapter 1 - Childhood days at University of Nigeria, Nsukka

The human brain is a fascinating organ, and the power to recollect is awesome. For some reasons I have pressed my recollection button and this has taken me way back to my childhood days spent at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, the premier university in Igbo land.... I woke up to use the toilet late at night and as I passed my parents' room, I overheard a strange conversation. It was my Mum's voice. 'Daddy, why don't you take up the job in Ghana since Legon University has offered you the job'? Then my Dad replied: "Mummy, I will not leave Nigeria because of Akintola and his murderous gang. Their intention is to drive us out of the country or kill us, and what will people say? They will say Sam Aluko ran away to Ghana." "But we have to think of the family. These people are going about killing whole families. Look at where we are now. We are hiding out at Mokola at my brother's house. If not for the Ishan man that was among the killers sent to wipe us out that spoke my language, we would all have been killed," said my mother. There was silence, I stood still.

These were times to be alert, and I made bold to say I was a very alert child. I saw the way things were going, our sudden flight from the Nigerian College, Ibadan dead at night. The day before, I had seen strange faces in our house. I had seen the agitation on my mum's face. As a troublesome young child, I knew when trouble was coming or had arrived. The men looked evil. For the first time I heard my mum

speaking the Ishan language to this evil looking man; apparently, he led the death squad! The squad departed and immediately my mum ordered us to begin to pack our bags. By midnight, we had fled. God was on the side of the Aluko family that day. We all would have been killed. The leader of the death squad could not just carry out the act for he was from Ekpoma, the town my mum was born. Indeed, God protects in mysterious ways. So, I stood still to hear the rest of the conversation. "Mummy, I have decided to take up the appointment at Nsukka. I will rather stay in Nigeria than go to Ghana" By the time I heard this response from my father, the urge to go to the toilet had disappeared. A sudden excitement overcame me. We were relocating yet again to a strange land; an opportunity to make new friends. So, I tried to wake up my older brother. He was fed up of my trouble, thinking it was another round of trouble he pushed my hand away. I laid on the bed in excitement; from London to Ibadan, now on the move again to Igbo land. I still could not relate what I experienced about the Igbos as a child and what I'm seeing and hearing today. War is a very terrible thing. Terrible, terrible, terrible!

We landed at house number 1 or 9 Azikiwe Drive on the campus of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). I personally thought we were back in London! I had the faintest recollection of England for I was so young when we left. But by the time my mum took me to the University Primary School on campus, I was confused as to where I was exactly.

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There were so many white teachers. My teacher was white; Headmistress I think was white too. My class was filled with children from all over the world. Thank God we came here; I immediately blended with the class going around making friends. "What's your name?" I asked. "John" he answered. "What's your name?" I asked another, "Emeka," he answered. They turned out later to be the Okigbos and the Nwosus, both families were among the finest professors in Igbo land and indeed Nigeria. That evening, we went visiting as a family. The first place we went was the house of Akin Etin Ojehomon Sr. His mum was a black American. The next place was the house of Professor Babs Fafunwa, his wife was pure Oyibo (white). Tell me, I had not landed in America!

The Continuing Education Center was an imposing building on the UNN campus that was destroyed by the federal troops during the capture of Nsukka during the war. A few years later as a young boy attending the Staff School at University of Ife, a primary school for staff of the university, seeing the pictures of destruction was one of the saddest days for me about the war. A sizeable number of academics at the university had come in from the diaspora to lecture on the UNN campus. They had built a world class center, state of the art then. So, not quite weeks when we had settled down at Nsukka my inquisitive mode kicked in. Despite being so young, I convinced my new friends to go on a mini expedition around the campus and surroundings. "Where is Olu?" I was told my mum screamed; "this boy won't kill us," I was told my dad added. It was getting to 7pm in the evening and I was not back at home as it gets dark by 6pm and staying out after dark was and is still considered higher risk in Nigeria. Parents had gathered in our house after hearing that I had led their children before we were picked up at school! You can imagine the embarrassments suffered by my parents. Earlier, I had led my friends

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up to one of the surrounding hills through Azikiwe's quarters, an estate owned by the mighty Zik of Africa. The climb up the hill took longer than expected.

In those days before we went to school, we were given money to buy sweets and cookies at the tuck shop in school. One of my new friends had told me that the cookies sold at a shop in the continuing education center was second to none. I had stored that information and could not wait for my parents to take me there. So, I saved up. Just getting to the 7pm at a time when darkness had set in to my horror, I saw among a group of parents my mum and dad walking in where we were seated chatting away with cookies in our mouths! Laughing loudly, I was doing the buying. A penny here, a penny there made the world go around. "There they are", a shout of relief rang out; we all turned simultaneously as we had been oblivious of the time. Each parent went directly to their respective child. Mine did not wait for me to get home. Right there and then the slaps started with me spitting precious cookies out of my mouth. The most painful thing, I was just about to follow the cookies in my mouth with a soft drink. As I was dragged towards the car amid knocks and slaps, I kept looking back at the drink. I almost asked; Mummy, can I take my drink? It was better I did not ask, probably I would have been a deformed boy from then on!

The swimming pool on the UNN campus had just been built I had a bit of swimming DNA, as my mum was a swimming expert. Although she was born in Ekpoma in current Edo State, she is an Ijaw who hailed from the riverine area. Again, off I went with my new friends without permission to the swimming pool. What a sight. I made friends with one much older Indian boy, his name was Gulu, and he was a fantastic swimmer. Then he told me every Thursday they showed the movie Tarzan at the university film house. Up until that time I had never been to a film house and was determined to watch my first film there.



The family of Prof & Mrs Aluko in the early 1960s. The author, Olu Aluko, standing first on the right.



Professor Samuel Aluko



Mrs. Joyce Aluko

Chapter 2 – Sapele

The stories we heard were incredible and yet legendary in those trying periods of the Nigeria nation in the 1960s. The allegories were boundless and could be very convincing to the young innocent mind. They said Sardauna was caught hiding among his household. Some said he was disguised as one of his wives and that it was only Nzeogwu that could kill him because he grew up in his “palace”. It was claimed that he went through the window somersaulting as soon as he landed and knew where the Sardauna’s power was laid. He had to reach that power before the powerful man got into that room. According to the legend, if the man got into that room he would disappear! Such were the mythical stories I overheard the elders saying then all over the country.

Two weeks before the coup I had followed my parents to see *Omimi Efor* at Sapele in present day Delta State. He had come to spend the Christmas holidays at Sapele which was his home town, I guess he had been tired of his assignment as minister of finance of the federation. Apparently, he was in constant communication with my father because he needed guidance and despite the fact that my dad was pro Awolowo he was willing to help when it came to what will benefit Nigeria and Nigerians. So, we had also come to spend the Christmas of 1965 at Benin City in present day Edo State, a little over an hour's journey from where the Chief was now residing for Christmas. They said the Chief had so much money, that he was corrupt. It was claimed that he told a story of when he was sitting in the veranda of his house in front of the lagoon and he had put a cheque meant for the whole of Nigeria under a glass of water, when he lifted his glass to drink the water the lagoon breeze blew

the cheque into the lagoon! The tail of his clothes was said to be a mile long, held by a young boy (The current story decades later long after the Chief was gone is that the young boy is now buying up most of the properties he left behind!). They said that with every step he threw money down amongst other legendary stories about the man.

"Mummy, let's go and visit my friend Chief Okotieboh in Sapele, " I overheard my dad tell my mum. In excitement, my mum agreed. This was during the Christmas of 1965. I was determined to go on the trip with them to see this man I've been hearing whispers about. But I was faced with a dilemma. The masquerades had come out 'with that beat,' "*St Johnson a wa St Johnson e wa Oh*" and how colorful the masquerades were. I had again planned to join a child masquerade crew even if an empty milk tin would be my instrument of choice. The local boys had taken up the drums and gongs. Again, how about the knockouts? Those loud bangers that heralded the festive period, they exploded like grenades I had seen thrown in war movies on the family black and white set. Little was I to know that the real things will be thrown by brothers at each other one and a half years later in 1967. I already had packets tucked away ready to be deployed at an unsuspecting passerby. Oh, I loved to see the fear and the quick escape when a knockout exploded at the feet of the unsuspecting. I enjoyed hearing the little girls scream in terror. Indeed, I was a troublesome little boy. Just being naughty and having a laugh.

By the morning, I had made up my mind that I was going on the journey to Sapele to see the minister of finance of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The mansion was impressive. We had all been holed up in my uncle's house on Akenzua Street, Benin. We had a tradition in our house when Christmas was approaching to discuss our holiday plans which was either spent in Ode-Ekiti or Benin. The decision was always to put the choice to a family vote. But the problem was then we were a family of four children and mum and dad. Gbenga, my younger brother was too young to vote as he was a baby. Morenike, my younger sister is older than Gbenga and could manage to raise a finger after observing whether my mum had raised a finger or not. The core decision or the swing votes lay between my older brother, Bolaji and I. My choice always came noisily in an attempt to influence the voting pattern. The results were always the same as it was only my dad that voted Ode-Ekiti for us to spend Christmas.

The continuous loss of these family elections got so worrying for my father when he found out that at the rate at which he was being defeated every Christmas, we his children may never know his village! How would we want to, when my mum would ask questions on the dining table towards Christmas like, "*Eh en* daddy, did we remember to send money to Baba to repair the leaking roof that we slept in, and to repair the window of the room?" Then she will quickly follow it with, "I just got a letter from Baba-agba, he has extended his house and painted it." Immediately I will exchange glances with my elder brother. Indeed, INEC had spoken! However, my dad, mum and I proceeded to Sapele to visit Chief Okotieboh.



Festus Samuel Okotieboh (1912-1966)

From the chief's mansion, he took us to his factory where he manufactured shoes and sandals. What a site, what a factory! I still do not know today where Nigeria went wrong for not only should we be one of the most advanced societies, we ought to be a super power. As the visit came to an end, he gave us a sack full of shoes. He felt so happy that we had come. He showed us round the whole of Sapele and introduced my parents to his people. He was shocked that my dad knew virtually everybody there because he had taught as a young secondary school teacher in the Warri/Sapele axis! We left Sapele, went back to Benin singing "one man went to mow; one man and his dog went to mow a meadow. Little did I know our days of spending Christmas in Benin will be punctuated by war! I could not wait to get out of the car fast enough when we got to Benin; I headed for where my stash of knockout was. It was time to once again start deploying it!

There was no end to the various hard to believe stories of 1966 crisis when the first republic government was overthrown. Unlike Chief Samuel Oladoke Akintola (SLA), it was said that the Sapele Chief was tortured; they tied him to a land rover and dragged him while he was still alive! In the west, they said one lieutenant led the strike on Akintola and that say they first captured his deputy, Chief Remi Fani-Kayode. They drove Fani-Kayode to Chief S. L. Akintola's house after tying him up and tossed him at the back of the land rover. They made Fani to shout out Akintola's name; "Samuu, Samuu several times.

Akintola went for his gun, it was said that he turned to different animals in the ensuing battle but the lieutenant kept turning into the same species of animal too. They said Akintola also had his magic room but the lieutenant cut his path to the room. The lieutenant took a bullet in the arm but his reply was deadlier. Akintola fell and was no more!



I asked my friend, Baba Tafawa Balewa years later, what happened to your papa the prime minister? It's usually a story of betrayals. But in the end the man stepped to his death as if he was going to the office. Majestically he followed his murderers as if they were all going for a meeting. He played the role of a gentleman till death! Apart from Okotieboh, most of the leaders then had modest income. The motivation to occupy office was to serve and not primarily for pecuniary reasons. When the core coup plotters got to the house of General Hassan Usman Katsina, he was beside himself. It was so much that they felt he had already neutralized himself so there was no point killing him. He woke up days later to ask, what was going on? Then the crocodile man, Aguiyi Ironsi came in. All his powers, it was said to be in the crocodile, so he held a little carving of the crocodile that was magical, it was said. Lieutenant Danjuma went for the crocodile upon sighting the man. Unfortunately, Aguiyi Ironsi's crocodile was not on him; the story would have been different as far as those who told the story are concerned! This was the counter coup staged months later after the January coup of 1966.



Author, Olu Aluko 1st right in 1962 with Aluko family members



Author, Olu Aluko

Chapter 3 - Festivals

Igbo Masquerades

I never knew what informed me about my love for masquerades at that time of my early childhood. It was not until my father told me his father, my grandfather, was chief of the masquerades in my town Ode-Ekiti and that he started out being a baby masquerade. In fact, he told me that his ambition when he was young was to be the top most masquerade in the whole of Ekiti. And he usually was the last to dance after all the main masquerades that had danced during the *Egungun* festival until Rev Ajayi, the grandfather of my very good friend, Prof Adesuyi Leslie Ajayi forcibly took him to start formal school.

The reverend had worked with missionaries and the policy of the missionaries was to go around Ekiti land to force children of that age to attend schools. Reluctantly my grandfather agreed and off my father went and the rest is now history. So, the distant drum beats of approaching masquerades caught my attention. Up till that time, I had never seen a masquerade because when we were in Ibadan, the dreaded Oloolu masquerade was to be heard but not seen. Oh!! The Igbos have one of the most feared and colorful masquerades. And back in the day permission was given by the Vice-Chancellor to allow masquerades to display on campus.



The preparation of the masquerades happened at the crest of the surrounding hills. So, the sound of the drumbeats got louder as the masquerades approached the campus. The beats were warlike; the songs were fierce warning songs. This day there was about to be a showdown between two very fierce and dangerous masquerades as they were about to test their powers on each other. I rushed out of the house; it was a Saturday. Boy!! What a sight to behold. It is "*ojoornu*", people came running in my direction terrified bearing a carved crocodile on its head. What!! I ran back inside and opened the window. Simultaneously there was another drumbeat approaching from a different direction, people began to scream; "it is *agaba*, it is *agaba*". They must not meet they must not meet!!! *Today na today*, lives will be lost! As I overheard the conversation on the outside, I momentarily shut the curtains. But a few minutes later I opened the curtains again; "curiosity kills the cat but satisfaction brought it back".

Agaba had a huge chain round its waist holding a cutlass, a huge man held it. That chain must not cut, that chain must not cut, came the scream! Then the drum beat changed from both directions, by this time I had bolted to my friend's house, a couple of doors away. There, we decided to call other children. The beat has changed to imminent attack beat, and then *agaba* was striking its machete on the tarred road of the campus. A group of concerned lecturers/parents had gathered: "No, no, no; these two masquerades cannot meet on this campus" some of them whispered in horror because of the grotesque look of the masquerades .

Then a group of house-helpers rushed towards them *ojoornu* has begun its somersault, they screamed. It rarely did this unless it was going into attack mode. To our horror we saw *ojoornu* somersaulting at a distance as some in his party brought out flutes made of bones of animals. "Oga, *ojoornu* has started its somersault o, *oga people fit die* o. Then the whispers of some grew louder I heard one said. It was time to go to the Vice-Chancellor's house o and inform him about what was about to happen on the campus. To our further horror the big drums accompanying *agaba* that had not yet been beating began to sound as the two masquerades began to close in.

History had it that the last time they met "moons" ago, it was a blood bath! No victor no vanquished; just bodies, dead ones littering the ground! Oh Nsukka, the capital of the 'wa wa' people. Could it be that they were about to witness a spectacle not seen for long? As a child my heart beat was increasing by the minute.

Now there is a "native" contraption, supposedly spiritual in nature that masquerades then were supposed to possess, it was called a 'pin'. As described by our driver, Stephen who was a native of Nsukka, the pin was molded with iron, small with two sharp points that could be inserted into the ground. Between the two points, at the top was where the charms were placed. Most masquerades carried the pin, according to Stephen carried this contraption when they went out. Now what happens when two opposing masquerades meet was that they bring out their 'pins' and violently insert it into the ground. The pin was meant to immobilize the opposing masquerade, whereby the immobilized masquerade remained on one spot. It was mind blowing for me then. The *agaba* masquerade as Stephen told me, hailed from the modern-day Cross River State areas, while *ojoornu* was supposed to hail from the Onitsha area.



All of a sudden, the drums on both sides fell silent as if angels were passing by. It was the gongs that took over simultaneously on both sides of the divide. 'Oga oga another house help came running and said: *They wan remove pin, they wan remove pin*; and then *agaba* appeared close to where we had gathered! He had the most hideous mask on that I have ever seen till date and may ever see. The teeth coming outside the mask were like fangs, as ugly as they come. Huge and fearful; we took to our

heels! Meanwhile *ojoornu* had copped a war like stance. If indeed he was a masquerade with a history connected with Onitsha, to me, they have an element of pride. The Onitsha man is the peacock among the Igbos. Onitsha people and its environs are supposedly proud people.

All of a sudden, the streets were empty, but the car of the chief security officer was sighted. I believe his name was Mr Okorafo (I stand to be corrected), but what cannot be corrected was that his personality then on campus was legendary. Those were the days when everybody held their side very well and they had absolute powers in their departments. He alighted from his vehicle and walked towards *agaba*. By now we were all indoors; I was holed up in the house of my friend's parents. Olu had again disappeared from his own home. *Agaba* turned his back and began dancing towards his drummers. Simultaneously *ojoornu* also turned and started heading for the hills where they had emerged. Pheeeew! The "*shakara*" was over as both masquerades and drummers began to fade into the distance.

Emeka Nwosu, my friend and I had our own taste of the masquerading experience. We decided one day to carry our own masquerade and go round dancing and collecting money to spend latter on goodies. In most houses in the nineteen sixties particularly academicians there were masks used to decorate the homes hanging on the wall which was a link to local culture. I can't now quite remember which mask we decided to use. So Emeka put on the mask and I got two empty tins and a bottle. Using it as drums we headed out to town.

Incidentally there were child masquerades too out there moving about. As soon as they spotted two young clowns playing masquerade, they pointed at our direction. I did not even wait for my masquerade friend I took off! They were in hot pursuit whips drawn. We made it home but we had lost our mask. What a funny incidence!

University Games

The Sir Frances Ibiam Stadium was an impressive sports ground back in those days. The only other stadium I had seen before then was Liberty Stadium Ibadan. I had fond memories of watching football at the stadium in Ibadan when Brazilian teams played friendly matches there. We usually waited at the Akindeko's house, a stone-throw away from Liberty Stadium for few hours before a match. Now there was this new stadium and it was the all Nigerian university games, universities from all over the country came.

In those days there was no proliferation of universities as they have now in the country. What a spectacle, we supported our university, young and old, natives from town with passion. I remembered a particular student, Lawal who was in my father's department of economics. My father was not yet a professor but was addressed then as Dr Aluko and had become head of department. Before the games, the athletes were usually pampered. It may not also be unconnected to the fact that Lawal was Yoruba. So, naturally there was some sort of bond because Lawal was often in our house for lunch. "Lawal you must come first in all your races", my father told him. "Your threat will come from University of Ibadan but Lawal you must beat them; you are my student". My father kept on psyching Lawal up before the games.

The stadium was filled to the brim for the games; UNN swept most of the medals. One race I can never forget was the hundred yards' dash

which had always been the king of all athletic races. The tension was palpable; everybody in the stadium was standing up. The favorite was from University of Ibadan (UI). Lawal a multi-talented athlete was on the starting blocks. “*Aya ma*” ...On your marks, get-set then the gun sounded. The favorite was out of the blocks like a rocket. But Lawal was determined, 50 yards and the University of Ibadan student was leading, by 75 yards, Lawal had caught up with him and by the time they breasted the tape, Lawal dipped to win the race. The whole stadium ran onto the field, lecturers and students alike carried Lawal shoulder high out of the stadium. UNN won the games with more medals than any other university.

