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Chukwuma Azuonye

University of Massachusetts Boston, chukwuma.azuonye@umb.edu

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Chukwuma Azuonye
Professor of African Literature
University of Massachusetts at Boston,
Fellow, W. E. B. Du Bois Institute
Harvard University



Ogbuu-Kay! The “After Laugh” LINGERS ON

One of the most remarkable achievers of his generation, Ogbu Kalu-Ogbuu-Kay to his close personal friends—was exceptionally assiduous and imbued with a high sense of mission. His approach to the academic endeavor was as passionate as it was inspiring. He delved into every research project like an explorer engaged in a voyage of discovery. And through his narratives of these explorations, he made church history into seem like the key to a better understanding of everything that every person should know. Despite his less than average size, he was indeed a giant! He could dominate every space, wherever he went, with his overwhelming stature and voice of thunder. Beyond church history, he seemed to know everything. Well-versed in current trends in literary criticism, he would ransack my home (whenever he visited) to make sure that I was always working on something new and that nothing he was told that I was doing was left undone. He was indeed a man possessed, as Igbo people would say, by the god of creative madness. Aflame with the fire of Agwu’s enthusiasm for the pursuit of excellence, he always sought a way to light the same fire in anyone that came under his shadow. I first met him, albeit distantly, in London in the mid-1970’s when he was plowing through the then newly accessible resources of the Methodist Missionary Archives at the School of Oriental and African Studies, my alma mater (I was later flattered to learn that from this research, he wrote two papers on the missionary work of my maternal grandfather, Pastor Albert Nwosu Igbo, who translated the Gospel According to St. Mark, the Book of Common Prayer and several Methodist hymns into Igede). Like a warrior, brown with the dust of combat, he seemed detached from small coffee break talk; but you could not miss the feeling that there was an inner ear that absorbed and preserved, in his memory archives, everything that was said for surprising later use. But, even in his uncharacteristic silence, you could not miss the congeniality and humor beneath his face. It was not until I returned to

Nigeria and joined the faculty of the University of Ibadan in 1979 that I forged a closer relationship with him. During a visit to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, I was stunned to hear that he had already claimed a full professorship. Some joked at the Senior Staff Club that he was a "child prodigy," because his promotion came in record time and during the "International Year of the Child" (1977), but he was among the first to enjoy the joke. There can be no one else like Ogbu Kalu. During his sabbatical leave at the Harvard Divinity School in the late nineties, he forged a special relationship of love and inspiration—for which my wife, Chioma, and I are ever grateful—with my sons (Nnamdi and Chisom) and daughter (Ijeoma). Nnamdi (of blessed memory) spoke admiringly of what he called his "after laugh." Laughing boisterously as he drank beer and played the game of draught with me or Nnamdi, or as he rolled on the floor with the kids, he drew open several magic casements of knowledge and inspiration before them through his unfailing humor. Beyond his matchless achievements in academia, he was indeed human and possessed of a unique ability to engender gladness through his infectious laughter. Ogbu biko nodu mma. Chukwu gozie gi. I mezuole eke gi n'owa. The "after laugh" lingers on, and will do so eternally.