

Nigeria and the Dearth of Patriots and Statesmen: An Essay in Honour of Gani Fawehinmi

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Abstract

One tragic calamity that has befallen Nigeria as a country is the fact that it has been plagued by one of the most avaricious, unproductive and parasitic political classes on earth. Since the attainment of self-rule in 1960, the country has been terribly misruled by extremely unpatriotic and thoroughly corrupt elite. This underpins the mass poverty and gross underdevelopment which have bedeviled the country over the decades. But on 22nd April, 1938, Nigeria experienced some good fortune with the birth of an indisputably phenomenal man, who, for seventy-one eventful years, abandoned the privileges bestowed on him by his enormous skills, talents and knowledge, and took the side of the Nigerian hoi-polloi. This essay is in honour of Chief Abdulganiyu Oyesola Fawehinmi, Senior Advocate of the Masses (SAM); SAN, popularly and affectionately called Gani. This extraordinary man sacrificed everything in his struggles against bad governance in Nigeria and the numerous improprieties of the Nigerian elite. Gani was special; he was an icon and a hero; he was a fearless and vocal patriot; and he was a compassionate and kind-hearted statesman. This is the focus of this paper.

Keywords: Patriot; Patriotism; Statesman; Elite; and Nigerian State.

INTRODUCTION

He was a Senior Advocate of the Masses. He was a fiery fighter for the Oppressed. He was a Veteran of War Against Tyranny. He was an Icon of the battle for good governance and constitutional democracy. He was a detribalized Nigerian. He was Chief Ganiyu Oyesola Fawehinmi, LLD, SAN, SAM. He is greater in death than life. He lives on. Adieu Gani.

Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) (2009:16).

The afore-stated tribute from the editorial desk of the publication of Nigeria's Universities' Teachers' Union strikingly captures the very essence of the man: Chief Gani Fawehinmi. The major calamity that has befallen Nigeria since it attained self-rule in 1960 is its criminal and pestilential political class. The country has been economically dwarfed and "mismanaged by incredibly inept and embarrassingly incompetent, clueless, and egregiously kleptocratic regimes" (Obo, 2014:53). Without any single exception, all the regimes that Nigeria has had since 1960 - from the Tafawa Balewa - led administration to the current government of Bola Ahmed Tinubu - are culpable. However, Nigeria has also managed to produce some shining stars in all facets of human endeavour. One of these stars whose light shall never dim is Chief Gani Fawehinmi, SAN, SAM.

Every research, particularly in social sciences, aims at definite results (Okolo, 2001:328); the *raison d'être* of this essay is to pay a well - deserved tribute to Gani Fawehinmi, the widely venerated and an iconic hero of the struggle to liberate Nigeria from the impoverishing

grips of internal colonizers. Gani, as he was popularly called, was not just a human being; he was a phenomenon and an enigmatic institution. As Professor Abubakar Momoh (2009: 38) opined, Gani meant different things to different people, but none would deny that he was a genuine person, a patriot, who was keen about the plight of those who were marginalized and disempowered. In his words, Gani's interest, contrary to popular commentary was not to sympathize with them but to mobilize and galvanize them into political action, and unless we understand this, we cannot understand why he waged numerous struggles even at the risk of being killed. Gani was a distinguished and an accomplished lawyer who was comfortable by all standards and he belonged to the elite of Nigeria. However, he tested the position of the law on every single issue of public interest; he used the legal profession as an instrument to correct the arbitrariness of those who governed; and he felt that law, which was an instrument of oppression could be used as a remedial emancipative tool.

It is important to state *ab initio* that an essay such as this cannot adequately highlight even the smallest of fractions of Chief Gani Fawehinmi's incredibly monumental and ineffable accomplishments. As Edwin Madunagu (2009: 23) observed, Gani was "over-documented": you have abundance of reference materials generated by the man himself, the media, his friends and foes"; and in Madunagu's opinion, this attribute (over-documentation) is both an advantage (you have more than enough materials to work on) and a disadvantage (you may not actually be adding anything new-in fact and in analysis-to existing literature). Madunagu advised that if you are studying a subject like Gani, then you have to appropriate the advantages to the full while dealing with the advantages.

With this advice as our compass, this essay is only a tribute to honour the blessed memory of Chief Gani Fawehinmi, a man whose love for the Nigerian *hoi-polloi* was immeasurable and incomparable. He deserves this and more. While paraphrasing Robertson Davies, Wale Adebani (2008: 27) reminds us that Gani Fawehinmi was an extraordinary man who became even more extraordinary because of the extraordinarily terrible conditions that he confronted in using the law as an instrument of social justice. Indeed, even with a casual examination of the life and times of Gani, it is difficult to controvert Professor Festus Iyayi's (2009: 45) submission that:

*Until his death, Gani Fawehinmi was the greatest Nigerian alive- greatest not because he was the tallest; greatest not because he had been president of the Republic or won the noble prize; greatest not because he had invented some formula in mathematics or in the legal profession in which he was a titan but **greatest because of the amount of impact, positive impact, that he made on the Nigerian people and the country** (emphasis added).*

And neither is it easy to disagree with Dan Agbese's (1985) decades-old assertion that: *Fawehinmi is the greatest and the most erudite enemy of cant and hypocrisy this nation has ever had. There was none like him before him; there is none like him now, and I fear there may be none like him post him (cited in Adegboyega, 2009: 11)*

There is no doubt that great leaders have failed to emerge from the Nigerian political system because Nigerian public officials have lacked those rare qualities encompassing the power of identification and the sharpness of analytical focus and vision which combine to forge a revolutionary mission for correlating the social and geo-physical forces which impede human progress, as the sharpness of focus and vision enables a leader to coordinate theory and practice in an effective way (Nwankwo, 1989: 20-21). The struggle to change this situation was epitomized by Gani Fawehinmi.

The point has been made that the Norwegians are right; a hero, they insist, is one who knows how to hang on one minute longer; that Norwegian minute may be a month, a year or even longer; it may require courage and strength or meekness and perseverance; it may necessitate the capacity to suffer the gravest deprivations and humiliations; it may compel digging into the inner recesses of the mind to produce strategic vision and tactical re-positioning; or it may, in fact, oblige one to stand his ground even when the tide pushes everyone else in other directions; whatever it requires, that minute is long enough to define the man or woman and that definition separates the ordinary person from the one who is adored and celebrated (Adebanwi, 2008: 26). He is adored and celebrated, and this is what this essay attempts to reiterate. This paper is organized into five sections; following this introduction is section two where the concepts of “patriots” and “statesman” are clarified. A brief biography of Chief Gani Fawehinmi is presented in section three, and in section four, we examine Gani as a hero, patriot and statesman. Section five contains the conclusion.

A WORD ON PATRIOTS AND STATESMEN

In order not to be victims of “conceptual imperialism” (Ajakaiye and Roberts, 1995: 3), it is apposite to place the key terms employed in this essay in their appropriate conceptual perspectives. Moreover, as Ogban-Iyam (2007) (cited in Obo and Adejumo, 2014: 3) rightly stated, scholars must try to specify the sense (s) in which they use a term that may have more than one sense if they hope to be understood. Therefore, the concepts of “patriots” and “statesmen” shall be briefly examined in this section.

Patriots

To know who patriots are, it is important to know what “patriotism” means. It should be emphasized from the outset that patriotism is not what Nigeria’s current or former rulers and their supporters say it is because as a concept, it has been thoroughly misused, abused and misrepresented by the members of the ruling class in Nigeria (Obo, 2014: 54). Patriotism can be regarded as total and unconditional love for one’s country and one’s willingness to always identify- and possibly suggest solutions to- the problems of one’s country. In the words of Professor Chinua Achebe (cited in Obo, 2014: 54),

who is a patriot? He is a person who loves his country. He is not a person who says he loves his country. He is not even a person who shouts or swears or sings his love of his country. He is one who cares deeply about the happiness and well-being of his country and all its people. Patriotism is an emotion of love directed by a critical intelligence. A true patriot will always demand the highest standards of his country and accept nothing but the best for and from people. He will be outspoken in condemnation of their shortcomings without giving way to superiority, despair or cynicism...

Patriots are those who demonstrate eternal and deep-rooted love for their country, and if they find themselves in public positions of authority, they ensure that public resources in their custody are used *strictly* for the promotion of the public good. Nigeria is in the present embarrassingly deplorable state because there has been a huge deficit of patriots in public offices in the country. We do agree with the view that it is not enough for leaders to call for patriotism when their words and actions do not demonstrate such; nor is it important for leaders to call for discipline and sacrifice when their lives indicate the opposite (Elaiwu, 2011:290). Nigeria has not even had leaders since 1960; regrettably, what the country has been plagued with has been “prebendal and ruinous rulership” (Obo and Adejumo, 2014:147).

Statesmen

Igwe (2005:421), a statesman is a political actor that, unlike the politician, generally stands by principle possibly out of experience, considerations of the general good, or *raison*

d'etat, instead of expediency for “the end cannot always be justified by the means”. Kigbara (2015) regards statesmen as men and women who have distinguished themselves, worked and earned national and international reputation, and who are respected beyond measure in their immediate milieu. He also pointed out that embedded in the character of a statesman is a bedrock of principles which he is endeared to, and he builds his platform on a foundation of firm, unchanging fundamental truths strengthened by his moral compass which is rooted in his sense of absolute right and absolute wrong.

On its part, the *World Book Dictionary* (cited in Kigbara, 2015) defines a statesman simply as “a person who is skilled in the management of public and national affairs”. According to Professor Rufus Fears (cited in Mckay and Mckay, 2017), a politician and a statesman are not the same thing. A statesman, in his view, is not a tyrant; he is the free leader of a free people, he must possess four critical qualities. Fears lists these qualities to include: a bedrock of principles; a moral compass; a vision; and the ability to build a consensus to achieve that vision.

The point has made by Dannhauser (cited in Overeem and Bakker, 2016:2) that a statesman is not simply a politician, but an extraordinary politician who exercises wise leadership. Overeem and Bakker (2016:2) have listed some of the people who cannot be regarded as statesmen even if they possess good leadership qualities. As they put it

...concretely, a tyrant can have great leadership skills, but never be a statesman insofar as he does not aim at the common good (or, in modern terms, the general interest), but only at a partial one (aim). The director of a public agency, next, differs from a statesman insofar as he deals only with his organization and its direct environment and not with the broad interests of the political community at large (scope). And a military Commander, finally, cannot be a statesman insofar as his form of rule depends on physical force rather than on politics (means).

There is no doubt that Nigeria has been very unlucky: most of those who have occupied public offices in the country cannot be called “statesmen” or “patriots”.

GANI: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

In terms of the production and reproduction of public personalities/officials, Nigeria has been exceedingly unlucky. The country has been plagued by one of the most irresponsible, destructive and duplicitous ruling classes in the world. It is the dearth of patriots and statesmen in Nigeria’s public offices that defines the crises of underdevelopment and retrogression in the country. However, a rare moment of luck was experienced in the country on Friday, April 22, 1938 with the birth of Chief Gani Fawehinmi.

Named Abdulganiyu Oyesola Fawehinmi at birth, Chief Gani Fawehinmi’s parents were Chief Saheed Tugbobo Fawehinmi, the “Seriki Musulumi” of Ondo and a successful timber dealer, a philanthropist, civic activist and a Muslim leader; and Alhaja Muniratu Fawehinmi, also a devout muslim. Gani’s grandfather was Chief Lisa Alujanu Fawehinmi of Ondo who was well known for engaging in several successful battles for and on behalf of the Ondo people in the nineteenth century. Hence, he was nicknamed “Alujanu” which means “spirit”, an acknowledgement of his great exploits (Adegbamigbe, 2008:40; Ogunbayo, 2009:12-13; Ubochi, 2009; Adegboruwa, 2016)

Chief Gani Fawehinmi had his primary education at Ansar-Ud-Deen Primary School Iyemaja, Ondo from 1947 to 1953, and for his secondary school education, he attended Victory College, Ikare, Ondo from 1954 to 1958. It was at this school that his principal, Reverend Akinrele noticed his knowledge of current affairs and great ability to debate, and advised him to study law. In the words of Modupe Ogunbayo (2009:12), the principal’s recommendation to Gani’s father that the young lad should study law was informed by the latter’s immense knowledge and gift of cerebral arguments on national and political affairs as well as his talent for remembering facts and figures.

Gani arrived Lagos in January, 1959 and worked as a clerk at the High Court, Igbosere and later as a tally clerk at the Nigerian Ports Authority. In April, 1961, he travelled by sea to Britain where he enrolled at the Holborn College of Law of the University of London for the L.L.B. degree programme. In 1963, Gani was forced by the death of his father to drop out of the College as a full-time student and had to take up employment as Toilet Cleaner in Russell Square Hotel in Southampton Row, London and a sweeper in the old Gatwick Airport. Gani completed his programme in London under very difficult economic circumstances. As Adegbamigbe (2008:14) reported, when his father died, Gani

*...wrote 136 letters, begging many individuals for help. None replied. Then he made a beeline for the Nigerian High Commission in London, seeking enlistment in to the Army. The recruitment officer saw the book that Fawehinmi clutched, **The Free Officers' Revolt**, and wondered whether revolt was what the young man wanted to pursue in the force. He promptly rejected Fawehinmi's application*

Chief Fawehinmi returned to Nigeria in September, 1964 and enrolled at the Nigerian Law School, Lagos for the compulsory three-month course which he successfully completed. He was called to the Nigerian Bar in January, 1965. Gani practised briefly in his brother's chambers before establishing his law firm in April, 1965. During his years of law practice, Gani instituted thousands of suits in different courts in Nigeria.

Gani was a responsible and committed family man. He had two wives, Ganiyat and Abike with whom he had many children. Gani was at once an opponent and victim of the misgovernance of Nigeria by the political elite. Lamentably, when he took ill, Gani was tragically misdiagnosed by very poorly trained and disincentivized medical personnel in one of the public hospitals criminally neglected by the operators of the Nigerian state. This inexcusable dereliction proved fatal; when it was eventually discovered that Gani had lung cancer, it was too late. As Afusat, one of Chief Fawehinmi's daughters-who is a US-based medical doctor-said, "I wish he had got a proper diagnosis just a couple of months earlier. It would have made a difference" (cited in Ogunbayo, 2009:13).

Gani battled with the cancer for a few years, and in the early hours of September 5, 2009 one of Nigeria's most illustrious, selfless and incredibly patriotic citizens was snatched away by the cold and wicked hands of "death, our insatiable foe" (Osundare, 2017). He was buried on September 15, 2009. Gani was well aware that "the fundamental human dignity of the Nigerian citizens is the first casualty of the irredeemable hubris of the Nigerian state and her officials" (Adesanmi, 2017), and this explains his relentlessness and doggedness in his struggles to hold Nigerian elite to account for their actions.

In the struggle for democracy, human rights and freedom, Gani Fawehinmi was an exceptional being; he was in a class of his own; in political history, he could be called a revolutionary democrat; in the history of philosophy, he could be called a radical humanist; and as Fidel Castrol once remarked that if Che Guevara had been a Catholic, he would have been made a saint, one could say the same of Chief Gani Fawehinmi (Madunagu, 2009:10).

GANI: HERO, PATRIOT, STATESMAN

According to the Russian writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn (cited in Odion, 2017), one of the tell tales signs exhibited by a declining society is the scarcity of true statesmen. The Nigerian socio-formation is indeed a declining and an impoverished state whose rulers have neither been statesmen nor patriots. The Nigerian political elite love to call themselves statesmen and patriots but their actions and inactions clearly show that they are predators, charlatans, and internal colonizers. They have shown that they are callous, dangerous, unpatriotic and extremely avaricious, and they have demonstrated that they are not leaders but criminal predators who have robbed the country of its future as well as bruised and violated the collective humanity of the people (Obo, Omenka and Agishi, 2017:21). The point has been made that

throughout the history of civilization, man progresses by imposing order, symmetry, and aesthetic discipline over the primordial chaos of his environment. The Nigerian elite is the only group in modern history that has shown herself to be incapable of this fundamental element of civilization. Hence, escape is her only response to challenges which require industry, innovation, and genius (Adesanmi, 2018).

Indeed, there is enormous wisdom in Khalil Gibran's assertion (cited in Odion, 2017) that "pity the nation whose heroes or statesmen are either impostors or comen".

It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that the towering presence and humongous contributions of Chief Gani Fawehinmi toward the betterment of the Nigerian society and the upliftment of its people can be properly contextualized. Gani was not only an iconic hero of the masses but he was also an intrepid and an indefatigable champion and defender of the cause of the Nigerian people. It has been observed that Chief Fawehinmi was not everything to everybody; you either liked him passionately or hated him intensely, and this was because of his boundless and sometimes suicidal energy with which he tenaciously and uncompromisingly pursued and crusaded his beliefs, principles and ideals for the untrammelled rule of law, undiluted democracy, all-embracing and expansive social justice, the protection of fundamental human rights and respect for the hopes and aspirations of the masses who are victims of misgovernance (Adenekan, 2009).

Gani was an incredibly selfless and exceptionally kind and generous man. In the words of Chris Ngwodo (2016), in a cynical society overtaken by materialistic self-involvement where all values have been monetized and are negotiable, the civic virtue of defending the poor and the vulnerable can seem an exotic eccentricity. This, in his view, is all the more so when opportunities to use one's talents for self-enrichment abound; Gani could have deployed his gifts-his prodigious intellect, keen memory, attention to detail and dedicated toil to amassing great wealth and winning the esteem of the powerful. According to Ngwodo (2016), Gani did not; instead, he devoted these gifts to fighting for the weak and for a better society. Ngwodo also points out that Gani's motivation was chiefly ideological, as he was a socialist who was driven by "the need to put a human face to the practice of law". Gani had argued that "law does not exist on its own; it is a mechanism to make the lives of the people better, an instrument of social change". As Ngwodo puts it,

in Gani's worldview, justice has two dimensions: legal justice as purveyed by the courts and social justice which involves the social and economic rights of the people. He contended that legal justice can only be truly procured in an environment that recognizes social justice and that legal justice will fail in an environment of abject poverty.

In the view of Abubakar Momoh (2009:39), Gani did not believe that there could be justice in the face of poverty and ignorance; and in such societies he felt that the best that could be done was to use all instruments possible, including the law, to challenge and question the mighty and those in authority. Momoh also points out that Gani's humanism derived from canonical ethical standards which are towering and challenging, and this is because in the pursuit of the ideals that he believed in, he felt that he needed to abide by the noblest moral standards; hence Gani was highly principled and unbending on the rules and his personal morality and integrity. This, according to Momoh,

is because, without those ethical and moral parameters, one is likely to be compromised to those in power. There was no meeting point for Gani. He never took a contract, a bribe, a professional brief that did not accord with his personal principles and political preferences. Gani hardly ever attended a social event or a party. Never drank nor smoke nor womanised. He was so

spartanly clean. Gani felt that in maintaining the highest moral standards and principles, he was also standing out as an exemplar, role model and mentor to those around him.

Gani was uncompromisingly committed to his people-friendly ideals and principles, and he held on to them with an apostolic zeal and tenacity. For him, as Momoh (2009:39) reminds us, there was no room for “sabbatical leave” on the issue of principles; if you must be principled you have to be consistently principled, and if you want to be opportunistic do not pretend that you are principled. As rightly stated by a Nigerian author,

to be ruled by personal principles often raises a man above the mean beast from which we evolved and imbues man up the false polish of the homo-sapien. Contrariwise, the lack of such principles does not, in any way, make any less of man. But profession of a code of principles invests one with the responsibility to live up to them. Such a personal code becomes a touchstone with which to test the deeds of man since there can be no ultimate criterion with which all humanity can be adjudged (Betiang, 2016:127).

In the opinion of Pius Adesanmi (2017), the Nigerian state has repeatedly had to serve as a foster parent of high stakes crimes for much of our post-colonial history, providing cover, providing rationalization, providing a coherent narrative for such crimes, and, for where necessary, providing prosecutable fall guys who face heavily mediatized trials. Chief Gani Fawehinmi was well aware of, and deeply disheartened by, this fact, and that was why he waged sustained and relentless resistance-on the streets and in the law courts-against the numerous crimes and malfeasances of the maladministrators of the Nigerian state. Gani believed that for a society to make progress, its leaders must be visionary, selfless, patriotic and exemplary. As Albert Schweitzer (cited in Oluwasanmi, 2018) opined, “example is not the main thing influencing others; it is the only thing”.

Just as the great “Madiba”, Nelson Mandela expressed his readiness to sacrifice his life for the liberation of his country, Gani was prepared to die in the struggle to free Nigerians from the crippling grip of the country’s rogue elite. He was convinced that freedom, as Frantz Fanon (cited in Okpeh, 2002:8) stated, is not a commodity which is given to the enslaved upon demand; it is a shining trophy of struggle and sacrifice. In fact, on one of the many occasions when he was unjustly imprisoned by Ibrahim Babangida who is one of the key leaders of the league of ruiners of Nigeria, Chief Fawehinmi declared:

I am taken away today, Friday, May 29, 1992 by the Government of General Babangida. Even if they kill me, my spirit will continue to fight for the oppressed people of this Country-Nigeria. No leader has a right to turn his people into paupers. Surely, there is an alternative to poverty and above all, there is an alternative to oppression which Babangida has subjected this Country to. I crusade for that alternative. If I have to die, it is a noble death. I have no regrets (emphasis added) (cited in Adeniran, 2009).

The Nigerian state has been criminally misgoverned by the country’s kleptocratic elite who have thoroughly oppressed and extremely dehumanized the Nigerian people. But in the history of Nigeria, no citizen has been hounded, brutally and cruelly treated, and incarcerated-by the Nigerian state-like Chief Gani Fawehinmi. Moreover, there is no Nigerian, living or dead, that has challenged governments and their policies in court on matters that are not personal than Gani (Ubochi, 2009). In course of his pro-masses struggles, Chief Fawehinmi’s international passport was seized at least ten times and he was jailed about thirty-nine times. Some of the prisons, police and security cells where he was detained include: Panti police station; Police Headquarters, Lagos; Ikoyi police station; Force CID, Ikoyi; SSS cell, Shangisha; Kuje prison;

Inter-Center cell, Lagos; SSS cell, Ikoyi; FIIB Alagbon; Kaduna prison; Gashua prison; Gombe prison; Bauchi prison; Ikoyi prison; Police Headquarters, Abuja; SSS cell, Maiduguri; Ilorin, Ikeja, Wuse, and Jos police stations (Obasi,2009:18). During the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida, for example, Gani was arrested and detained at least seventeen times!

Gani was an astonishingly generous and compassionate man; his altruism and humanitarian spirit propelled him to provide timely and immeasurable assistance to thousands of Nigerians. But, according to Momoh (2009:39), Gani was not a philanthropist, for philanthropists are beneficiaries of an exploitative social and economic order which they do not wish to abolish. On the contrary, Momoh opines, Gani saw his assistance to the needy, his scholarship to many brilliants but indigent youth, as a stop gap, remedial measure in the face of the state's negligence and insensitivity.

Chief Gani Fawehinmi's willingness to always make his prodigious legal skills and talents available freely to the poor and needy was astounding and unparalleled. Between 1969 and 2002, Gani handled about 5,700 briefs, more than 1,500 of which were *pro bono* cases in which he represented the poor, the oppressed, the cheated, and student activities (Ngwodo, 2016). As an unrepentant opponent of injustice and oppression, Gani in 1969, few years into his legal practice, took up the case of a poor worker in the civil service of Benue-Plateau state (in North Central Nigeria) whose wife had been snatched by a senior public official in that state. Gani won the case in court and the irresponsible and covetous senior government official was disgraced. For this selfless and humanitarian act, Gani was detained for many months by the hugely corrupt Yakubu Gowon dictatorship. Gani was not deterred. In 1975, Edwin Madunagu, a renowned Nigerian scholar and activist became a beneficiary of Gani's selflessness. As he puts it,

...it is sufficient for me to say that Gani Fawehinmi...brought his knowledge to bear on the brilliant and fearless motion he brought before the court. Gani had never met me before then. Not only did he charge no fees, he radically and absolutely supported my fiancée (now my wife), friends and comrades, in cash and in kind....(Madunagu, 2006:354-355).

As observed elsewhere, "when a society is bifurcated into two: the rich and the hungry, it is difficult for one to be neutral". Chief Gani Fawehinmi was not neutral; he was "on the sides of the Nigerian people who, over the years, have been made to live in sub-human conditions in spite of the enormous resources which nature has generously bestowed on the country" (Obo and Adie, 2014:2). For his immense love for the Nigerian people, Gani received a number of awards. For example, he was honored by the students of the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) with the award of Senior Advocate of the Masses (SAM). In 1993, Gani was bestowed with the award of the Bruno Kreisky Prize, an honour given to international figures who advance human rights causes. In 1998, the International Bar Association conferred on him the Bernard Simmons Award in appreciation of his human rights and pro-democracy work. And in 2001, Gani was belatedly elevated to the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), the highest title for members of the bar in Nigeria. In 2008, the Nigerian government bestowed on Gani the award of the Order of the Federal Republic (OFR). This award was promptly rejected by Gani as a protest against the many years of bad governance in the country.

Chief Gani Fawehinmi was like a lone star and in a world of his own; he inspired and motivated very many people. We agree with the view that "the fact that a star is all alone in the early morning does not mean that it is not giving off light; this light... will increase with increasing stars" (Betiang, 2016:169). Regrettably, as an illuminating star, only one Gani has been produced by Nigeria. In the words of Dan Agbese (2009:5),

...God manages to be rather stingy with the gift of such people to any one country in a generation. I would imagine that God's well-reasoned argument is that one Gani was enough to be the conscience of the nation and its successive rulers. He thought that one Gani railing against the cant and hypocrisy of the ruling class would bring out the fighting spirit in all Nigerians and help to move

*the country not just forward but forward towards a focused and determined end-
that end being a just and egalitarian country...*

CONCLUSION

This essay attempts to reiterate the fact that in spite of the despicable shenanigans of the irresponsible and unpatriotic operators of the Nigerian state, Chief Gani Fawehinmi was (and still is) a man after the hearts of millions of Nigerians. We join the multitude to celebrate this great and venerable man and all what he stood for. Gani deserves to be celebrated because he was a man who turned his own greatness into everybody's common salt; always, by fighting for the defense of other people's integrity, he proved his own integrity; he was a lawyer who became a measure of what a people-oriented lawyering should be like; he displayed the cutting edge of his radical sense of propriety by picking a beggar off the street to open the house in which he lived; it was a mark of his humility and spiritual decency and he was not just playing to the gallery; he was an advocate of the poor who sought to lift, through education, those who could not lift themselves; and in a country where the circumstances of one's birth could criminalize the innocent, Gani stood always to educate people to the contrary (Ofeimun, 2009:43).

Chief Gani Fawehinmi was an inimitable patriot and statesman who not only loved his country very dearly and deeply but he also sacrificed his all for it. There is no doubt that, as Chidi Odinkalu (2009:34) has reasoned, if death were to be here, Gani would find some delectable way to tell it that the battles that we have ahead require audacious generals among the living, and with his formidable forensic skills, Chief would injunct death against further depleting our troops. In Odinkalu's words, "because you were here, Chief, we will learn to face both death and bad government, confronting both perils with dignity, determination and fortitude".

It is clear that Gani has done his own as an individual; he has completed his mission; he has satisfied his conscience and has gone home to rest; and his legacy is there for everybody, who believes that his ideals were noble enough to borrow from (Ojudu, 2009:32). To him, we say: Chief, the Senior Advocate of The Nigerian Masses, Adieu!

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