

My Kolanut Experience

Things Fall Apart
Brought to life.

By Maureen Haggerty



Dear Chief Josephat Nwosu and Chief Mbonu Onwumelu:

I wanted to thank both of you for performing the kola nut ceremony at the *Echoes Africa* fundraiser. It was an honor to be a part of the ceremony and have it conducted so close. It was especially humbling to have the kola nut ceremony conducted by both of you after hearing Ify's words, to me. It took everything I had to keep my composure. My eyes drank in every gesture and my ears were filled with your voice(s).

Maybe Ify Ezinwa told you, but I usually use the book, *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe, in my classes. One time, a student asked me, "Do you think this is the greatest book ever written?" I had to tell him, "Yes" because it can be used in so many courses: sociology, history, political science, philosophy, literature, English, to name a few. Also, the book has not just touched

lives but has *changed* so many lives. Twice, so far, I have had students come back to tell me that they use, "The



He who brings kola brings life

lizard that jumped from the high Iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did" as their personal mantra.

So, to actually hear you say, "He who brings kola brings life" was chilling (in the

best way, though), for me. I don't think you realized, at that moment, that you both brought that book to life, for

me, in a way that I, myself, cannot. You transported me to a different time and place. And, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I love the Nigerian people: one time I was on a mission to find kola. I stumbled

across a restaurant, Buka, in Brooklyn. I went in and asked a person, sheepishly, if she knew where I could find some. I had told her I had been looking for it everywhere and was not able to obtain some. (I had wanted to bring some into my class, for my students, so they, too, can literally partake in the book – in the culture – in the experience.) So, she said, "One moment; let me get the proprietor." She went to the back of the establishment and must have told the owner about my "mission," and he came out to greet me. In his hands he had a bag of kola. He handed it to me. I said, "Wow," and I filled him in, breathlessly, on details about my search for kola and for its purpose. I then asked, "How much do I owe you?" And, this is why I really believe the Nigerians know more about "hospitality" than most: The proprietor replied, "Nothing. It is for you. It is from my personal stash. It is from me to you." And, he would not take any-