

Open, Perceptive and Public-Spirited: A Tribute to Abdul Raufu Mustapha (1954-2017)

For the 37 years that I knew him, Abdul Raufu Mustapha, who departed this life on 8 August 2017, lived a life of courage, commitment and fulfilment. A versatile scholar and an internationalist, he had an incredibly open, perceptive and critical mind.

He prioritised the public interest, whether in terms of his persistent questioning of the failure of his country, Nigeria, to live up to its potential in most dimensions of development, or his engagement with scholars in other parts of the world in articulating an agenda of social change.

He was charming, kind and resolute – personality traits that were a product of his core values of fairness, inclusiveness, equality in all its dimensions, and contempt for corruption and authoritarian habits.

He always expressed his views clearly and boldly, and was not afraid to call out or challenge injustice, exclusion and oppression. He had a good sense of humour, especially when expressed in the popular Nigerian pidgin. His mother tongue was Yoruba, he spoke Hausa like a native speaker, and could hold a conversation in Igbo, having lived in Eastern Nigeria during part of his formative years.

Raufu, as he was known among friends and family, studied and taught political science at the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in Nigeria in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. He did his doctoral studies in the late 1980s at Oxford University in the United Kingdom, where he later taught for about 20 years, rising to the rank of Associate Professor.

His scholarship was inseparable from his personal values and critical

engagement with politics in Nigeria, other parts of Africa, and the world at large. Four big themes informed this scholarship: equality and social transformation; ethnicity and the national question; substantive democracy; and religion and social cohesion.

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Raufu thought deeply about the structures of domination that stifle the aspirations of ordinary people, leading to grossly unequal outcomes in the political economy. As a student and young lecturer at ABU, he was active in the struggles of the student movement, labour unions and the academic staff union of universities, which, in the 1980s, advocated an agenda of social transformation in addressing the problems of inequality, ethnic division and authoritarian rule.

Radical social thought and praxis, influenced by Marxist and dependency theories of development, was rife on Nigerian campuses, especially at ABU, and in sections of the wider society. In the 1979 elections, the People's Redemption Party, which spoke the language of the commoner, or *talakawa*, and was committed to radical social change, captured Northern Nigeria's two most important states, Kano and Kaduna.

A section of the radical-left at ABU joined the Kaduna State Governor's Office as advisers. However, it turned out to be a short-lived experience: unlike its Kano counterpart, the PRP in Kaduna did not control the State House of Assembly. The national ruling party, the National Party of Nige-

ria, which controlled the House, used its raw numbers power to impeach the governor, Balarabe Musa, after less than two years in office. The radical-left intellectuals were sent packing back to the ABU campus.

The PRP experience in Kaduna became a hotly debated subject among academics at ABU and elsewhere. Even though peasant farmers and other sections of the working poor voted for the party, they were not sufficiently organised or incorporated as active agents in the structures of the party.

One of the big questions at the time was why the impeachment of the popular governor on false charges was not resisted by the broad mass of the people. This led to another critical question: how effective can social transformation be carried out from Government House without mass mobilisation and building structural ties with the working poor?

Two years after the sacking of the governor, a major international conference was held, in 1983, at ABU on Marxist theory and African development, as part of many global initiatives to commemorate 100 years of Marx's death. Radical academics were by then divided between the returnees from Government House and their supporters, and those who remained on the campus and were critical of the Government House experiment.

Raufu, who belonged to the latter group, presented a thoughtful and incisive critique of the PRP experience entitled "Critical Notes on the National Question: Practical Politics and the People's Redemption Party". It was arguably the star paper at the conference, but it did not go down well with the

returnees, who dismissed Raufu's group as armchair theoreticians that did not want to dirty their hands in practical politics. The debate on the paper was passionate and vitriolic. Divisions within the radical scholarly community at ABU deepened irrevocably after that conference.

Raufu's decision to advance his understanding of peasant life and politics in his academic work may have been partly shaped by this early experience of the failed PRP experiment in Kaduna state. His DPhil thesis at Oxford focused on rural differentiation and politics, with field work conducted at Rogo, a rural settlement about 90 kilometres from Kano. I accompanied Raufu to this village a few times during his research and was impressed by the warm rapport he established with the rural folk. He felt very much at home in his surroundings.

With his knowledge on peasant differentiation, rural livelihoods, and research skills, Raufu was invited to contribute to a research project I coordinated in the early 1990s at the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) on economic crisis, structural adjustment, and social change. He provided valuable insights on the project's core theme on multiple coping strategies, or the tendency of households to diversify sources of incomes as single activities prove insufficient to sustain livelihoods.

His research paper on the coping strategies of cocoa farmers at Alade in South West Nigeria showed that even though price liberalisation raised incomes and revived accumulation among all categories of farmers in the cocoa economy, prospects for sustainability could have been undermined by the continued fall in international prices and demand, escalating input costs, ageing trees and ecological problems.

Raufu's other big research interest was ethnicity and the national question. Given the multiple levels of polarisation in the country, ethnicity, federalism, and revenue sharing schemes constituted the bedrock of Nigerian political science. However, radical political economists tended to ignore or underplay their significance, focusing instead on the dynamics of wealth creation and impoverishment, the state's role in the economy, working class struggles, and popular or subaltern and middle class pressures for social change.

Raufu was among the few young scholars who broke ranks with this tendency, devoting much of his time in understanding ethnic cleavages and politics in their own right without sacrificing the class dimension of radical scholarship. He published in 1986 "The National Question and Radical Politics in Nigeria", as a contribution to a special issue on Nigeria in the *Review of African Political Economy*.

A number of important publications on ethnicity followed at the turn of the century, including his contributions to the UNRISD project on Ethnic Inequalities and Public Sector Governance, and the large programme on horizontal inequalities and conflict at the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE) at Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford. In these publications, he demonstrated that Nigeria's power sharing institutions are bedevilled by sharp ethno-regional and vertical inequalities, which tend to affect the country's stability and development.

The 1990s was a period of widespread democratisation in Africa and other parts of the world. Nigeria itself has not always neatly followed the two key political trends on the continent: the first trend can be described as early democratisation in the run-up to independence, followed by long periods of military or one party rule from

the mid-1960s to the end of the 1980s, and redemocratisation in the 1990s; and the second represented continuous single party dominant, or competitive, democratic politics, as exemplified by Botswana, Mauritius and, to some extent, Senegal. Nigeria's immediate post-independence democracy, like the first African trend, collapsed in the mid-1960s, but was resurrected in 1979, only for it to collapse again in 1983; the country then experienced the longest transition in Africa. It was a latecomer in the new African wave of democratic politics, even though it sent troops to Sierra Leone to restore a collapsed democracy in 1997; it finally transitioned to democracy in 1999, after an exceptionally brutal military dictatorship and manipulation of transition rules and schedules.

This history of democratic politics and oppressive military rule initially affected how sections of the radical-left related to the democracy project—prioritising popular struggles and people power and maintaining a sceptical stance on liberal democracy, which, it was believed, would not deliver real power to the working people or change living conditions substantially. Raufu and others embraced both the freedoms promised under liberal democracy and the need to demand substantive change that would improve the lives of the poor. He was fully involved in the broad civil and human rights campaigns to end General Abacha's dictatorial and brutal regime and restore the rights of expression, organisation and assembly, as well as the fundamental principle of free, fair and credible elections.

One of the low points of Abacha's dictatorship was the execution of the Ogoni nationalist and poet, Ken Saro Wiwa. Raufu's draft contribution to the obituary jointly prepared with a group of prominent Nigerians on Saro Wiwa, published in the *Review of African Political Economy* in 1995, was revealing and speaks to

Raufu's abiding faith in the unity of Nigeria. Raufu recounted that in a conference on human rights in Lagos in 1993, he asked Saro Wiwa in a one-on-one meeting to respond to the widely held belief that his Ogoni struggle was separatist and detached from minority and civil rights struggles in the country. Saro Wiwa assured him that the Ogoni demand on self determination was a negotiating position, and insisted that the main problem was the refusal of the military junta to negotiate.

Raufu crowned his activism in democratic politics by publishing in 2010 a co-edited volume entitled *Turning Points in African Democracy*. This was a thoughtful, carefully structured and well written 11-country comparative historical study, with a brilliant introduction and conclusion, and a level of scholarship that demonstrated profound mastery of the literature on democratisation. It probed the changes that have occurred in democratisation by focusing on the effects of a key turning point on the trajectory of political development in each of the 11 countries. It has been well received by academics working on the challenges of democracy in Africa.

In the last few years of his life, Raufu shifted his research attention and energy to the problems posed by radical Islamist sects in Northern Nigeria as Boko Haram wreaked havoc on that region's society and economy. He became highly productive during this period, creating a transnational Nigeria Research Network of scholars to study Muslim identities, Islamic movements and Muslim-Christian relations, with funding, after competitive bidding, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands. This culminated in two important edited volumes: *Sects and Social Disorder: Muslim Identities & Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, published in 2014; and *Creed and Grievance: Muslim-Christian Relations & Conflict Resolution in*

Northern Nigeria, to be published in January 2018. *Sects and Social Disorder* throws light on intra-Muslim divisions, conflicts over interpretations of Islamic texts, and violence in pursuit of the «right Islamic path»; and concludes that the violence between Muslims and Christians cannot be resolved without tackling the divisions within the Islamic sects. One prominent US academic with profound knowledge of Northern Nigeria described it as "the unrivalled original source, easily the canonical collection".

Raufu was a versatile and consummate scholar, with diverse professional interests. In this tribute, I have tried to read him through the lens of four key themes. But the totality of his work transcended these themes. He co-published in 2008, *Gulliver's Troubles: Nigeria's Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, and edited *Conflicts and Security in West Africa* in 2013. He served on the Boards of journals, newspapers, and research centres, including the *Review of African Political Economy* in Sheffield, *Premium Times* in Abuja, and the Development Research and Projects Centre in Kano. He was a consultant to international policy think tanks; and participated actively in the work of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa in Dakar, serving as Director of the 2002 Governance Institute and as a member of the Scientific Committee between 2009 and 2011.

I will end this tribute by sharing some personal experiences I had with him in Nigeria. Raufu was the first person I bonded with when I first arrived at ABU as a young lecturer in 1980. He booked me into Kongo Conference Hotel at the Kongo area of Zaria, and we had a late lunch at Shagalinku restaurant, which specialised in jolof rice and lamb pepper soup, and became my favourite restaurant in Zaria. His favourite eatery was Mama Kudi,

which we often visited at Sabon gari, to eat pounded yam, *eba* and *amala* with *egusi* soup and *okra* or *draw soup* (I quickly learned that draw soup in Yoruba is *obe-yoh*, which Raufu always ordered). Another favourite eating place where we often went in the evenings was an Igbo-owned bar along the Samaru road to eat *isi ewu* (goat head pepper soup).

Raufu invited me to spend a few days with him in Ilorin, in 1985, where I had the opportunity to meet his mother (deceased), father (now in his nineties) and members of his extended family. He taught me how to use the overcrowded *molue* buses in Lagos and to navigate my way around the city during a three-week visit we both made in 1985 to collect documents and conduct interviews with officials in various government agencies and industrial firms for a project on the politics of economic crisis and structural adjustment. During the Nigerian Political Science Association's annual conference at the University of Benin in 1984, he nominated me for the post of Vice President—a position which improved my interactions with colleagues in Nigeria's numerous campuses. It was at this conference that I presented the paper "Overcoming Some Basic Misconceptions of the Nigerian Economic Crisis", which later generated the Usman-Bangura debate on the Nigerian economic crisis.

Raufu was a very devoted family man. He is survived by his lovely wife, Kate Meagher, also with a DPhil from Oxford (where they both met) and an Associate Professor of development studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science; and two children, Asma'u and Seyi – graduates of University College London and Oxford respectively.

A great friend has passed on. May he rest in peace!