

Tributes

A Personal Tribute to Professor Wamba dia Wamba

I first met Professor Wamba in 1996 when I was an undergraduate at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. His wife was the advisor for our program. I had heard of Professor Wamba, and his reputation as a serious philosopher was known to me. But as I was an immature undergrad, he had no desire to have a conversation with me. I was therefore always and never able to find words that I felt were intellectual enough to have a conversation with the renowned scholar.

After returning to the States, and continuing my academic career, I became more grounded in African Studies and would come into contact again with Professor Wamba. Initially, this was through the works of his son, Philippe Wamba, especially his seminal 1999 book *Kinship: A Family's Journey in Africa and America*. Philippe's book spoke to my own experiences, as someone who was also born in Tanzania, to an African American mother and a Tanzanian father (in my case). Philippe Wamba's book would have a profound impact on my navigation of own my bicultural identity and being able to confidently stand in my Tanzanian identity, even with my American accent. The book would also help determine my research agenda for the next decade. Later, Professor

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Wamba would step in to inadvertently guide me as I sought to assert that Tanzanian identity within CODESRIA.

When I briefly moved to Tanzania in 2013 as a Fulbright Scholar, I would finally meet with Professor Wamba again. I learned a lot from him. We spoke in person and via email about the history of Africa, and the history of resistance among Black peoples. Professor Wamba spoke to me about African resistance to slavery dating back to the fourteenth century with the Mande manifesto, the movements that led to the Haiti Revolution, and about Nganga Nzumbi and Quilombo dos Palmares in Brazil. I often felt like I did as an undergrad, in need of an encyclopedia to keep up, and somewhat embarrassed that I was not familiar with each reference. But as I had come to understand, an encyclopedia would not have helped me, because I was often witnessing knowledge being created.

My work had somehow gotten on Professor Wamba's radar and his willingness to reach out to me, and

to take the time to meet with me was wonderful. Within the discussion of the history of African liberation, Professor Wamba's message was, "the liberation movement has to go on. The various resistances on the African continent as well as elsewhere will probably come to the realization of the need for unity and for a politics from the point of people at a distance from the state."

We spoke a lot about my work around hip hop as protest music, and while hip hop was not necessarily his favorite genre of music, he understood the importance of liberation music. His encouragement, "I am impressed that you are able to include protest music in your lectures", was a validation that I truly valued.

The last time I saw Professor Wamba was at the 2015 CODESRIA General Assembly in Dakar, Senegal. I was excited to see him again and update him on my research on hip hop in Africa. He seemed very amused, but still very supportive. CODESRIA is a space that can also be intimidating, and at that meeting there were other East African giants, namely Mahmood Mamdani and Issa Shivji. Knowing many of the people at the meeting, Professor Wamba took the time to introduce me to several people, as very few people at the meeting knew who I was. On

the day the meeting broke out into regional sessions, less confident in my Tanzanian identity, I was a bit nervous about going to the East Africa sub-meeting. Some of the other attendees also seemed to question my presence. But, being there with Professor Wamba and having him basically co-sign my presence as not only a scholar, but

as a Tanzanian scholar worthy of being in that space meant so much. It cannot be understated how much that meant to me.

The Wamba family remains very special to me. Professor Wamba started off as a larger than life figure in the mind of a wide-eyed undergrad, and then became a mentor

and a friend. My interactions with Professor Wamba always made me think and reflect. I am grateful for the conversations that we had, and I am forever grateful for the influence that he and his family have had on both my personal and professional life.

Prof Ernest Wamba dia Wamba 1942-2020

Wamba-dia-Wamba is no longer with us!
Wamba-dia-Wamba n'est plus !

