

Tributes to Prof. Oyeleṣẹ Oyediran

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During my years at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), 1978-1982, many Nigerian members of the academic community visited as guest lecturers, visiting Profs on sabbatical, etc. With [Peter Badejo](#), Saidu Goje, [Segun Oyekunle](#) and others, we always took it upon ourselves to reach out to these compatriots, help them settle down and keep them company so that they will not be home sick. We dragged them to Friday night parties that included Africans from Africa like [Joseph Njimbidt Ngu](#), Tim Ngubeni and Tony Brobbey; Africans from America like Cobie "Kwasi" Harris; Africans from the Carribean like Carlene Edie and many brothers from Haiti whose frechified names I am not able to remember right now. We had formed a formidable group at UCLA on building a pan-African orientation. It was not all parties, we were a strong anti-apartheid pressure group within UCLA and we picketed the Bank of America every Saturday pushing for it to divest from apartheid South Africa.

One of these visiting lecturers was Dr. Onaolapo Soley. He related as if he was in our age cohort even though he could easily have given birth to me if he had started as early as I did. He was to later introduce me to former Head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo when he also visited Los Angeles. But before Obasanjo, in 1979, he introduced me to Prof. Oyeleṣẹ Oyediran who was to spend a year at the African Studies Centre offering courses in Political Science. Those were the days when people were passionate about academics.

Prof Oyediran was less the partying type. But he did not escape our pressures. I remember subjecting him to watching one or two documentaries on atrocities against black people in South Africa. I will not forget his pause to ask me how the situation in the documentary I had shown was different from the situation in Nigeria if we substitute the colour of rulers from white in South Africa to blacks in Nigeria. He set me thinking in a subtle way. That was his mentoring style that I would benefit from for several years as we built a very strong bond upon his being appointed a full Professor of Political Science at my alma mater - Unilag and he became the Chair of the Department that had sponsored my graduate work to be a PhD holder in exchange for 4 years of service at the University of Lagos on return with the doctorate. Unlike many who did not return, I over-paid back by teaching for 11 years before joining the United Nations.

As a young lecturer, Prof. Oyediran, mentored, guided and supported me in many respects. We co-authored a few articles and I contributed in some of the works he edited. He actively thought we could realise democratic change and a smooth federal arrangement for Nigeria through sharing knowledge. I never knew of him lobbying for any political office. He did accept to collaborate as a member of the Political Bureau that Babangida hoodwinked him and others into believing that he meant well for democratic change in Nigeria based on the views of Nigerians. Prof. Oyediran could be said to have been naively trusting that Babangida would leave. Arising from his naivety, he edited with others: "Transition Without End...." I copied and pasted below, the few of his publications that Wikipedia posted:

1. Nigerian legislative houses, which way?!. University of Ibadan Consultancy Unit, 1980.
2. Essays on Local Government and Administration in Nigeria, Surulere, Lagos, Nigeria, Project Publications, 1988.
3. Transition Without End : Nigerian Politics and Civil Society under Babangida, edited by Larry Diamond, Anthony Kirk-Greene and Oyeleye Oyediran, Lynne Rienner Publishers (1997) ISBN 1-55587-591-2
4. Nigeria : Politics of Transition and Governance, 1986-1996, edited by Oyeleye Oyediran and Adigun A.B. Agbaje. Dakar, Senegal, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (c1999) ISBN 2-86978-071-0

5. Nigerian Government and Politics Under Military Rule, 1966-1979. Macmillan, 1979. ISBN 0-333-26898-9.

6. Survey of Nigerian Affairs, 1973-1977 and 1978-1979. Nigerian Institute of International Affairs in co-operation with Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 1981. ISBN 978-2276-49-9.

He held his own internationally on the Political Science academic scene. He was appreciated beyond the shores of Nigeria as evidenced from his several visitations and posts he held in American and European academic institutions.

Besides academics, Prof. Oyediran took me on, literally as his first son. He looked out for me in the dog eat dog situation that Nigeria was transforming into. He over indulged me in many respects.

When General Obasanjo sought his collaboration on being Secretary of the Africa Leadership Forum in 1987, he readily agreed. I was his Assistant for almost a year as we organised Farm-House dialogues and the first International conference in collaboration with Hans d'Orville and co. Ayo Aderinwale later assumed my post and more as I was finding difficult to cope with our non-materially reimbursed support to General Obasanjo as speech writer, special assistant etc. My problem was not material but I could no longer cope as a full-time lecturer, part-time law student, part-time publisher and husband/father to 3 children and responsibilities in the extended family.

Prof. Oyediran was a principled Nigeria and one of those who reinforced in me that integrity is superior to material acquisition. His fall out with General Obasanjo was illustrative. When General Obasanjo became candidate Obasanjo for the presidency of Nigeria, he announced that he had formed a number of committees to look into several of his plan for office. He did not consult Prof. Oyediran but named him as chair of one of the committees. A furious Prof. Oyediran called me on the phone as i was in Nairobi working for the UN, and read to me a piece he had written to denounce the public announcement of his friend since Secondary School days when he was one- or two-years Obasanjo's senior. I put all my persuasion capacity into dissuading Prof. Oyediran from his intended public reaction. I failed. He insisted it was an issue of integrity for him. He published and denounced the President in waiting. He was not one of those to calculate on what he stood to gain if his friend occupied Aso Rock.

Born at Ogbomosho on January 13, 1934, my fatherly friend and mentor passed on to the unknown place beyond my comprehension on December 11, 2018. He is survived by Mrs. Grace Aduke and two biological children: Omoloye and Oyelola. Many like Oluyomi who literally sacrificed a lifetime to take care of him, second non-biological son Prof. [Adigun Agbaje](#) , Prof. Cyril Obi etc and many of his colleagues in the academia will surely miss him.

Oyeleṣẹ Oyediran lived a good and principled life that was dedicated to sharing knowledge without emphasis on pecuniary acquisitions. One of the great Nigerians who stoically lived against the torrent of grabbing national patrimony that Nigeria is today known for, is no more. As we believe in souls without proof, I join in seeking a peaceful repose for his soul if there are souls after life.