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# **Pius Adesanmi: A Paradigm Shift in Pan African Humanity**

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The paper locates the professional worldview and personality of Pius Adebola Adesanmi, who died in the ill-fated Ethiopian Airlines crash in the early hours of Sunday March 10, 2019, within Pan African Humanity (PAH). Pan African Humanity refers to the embodiment of values, mores, norms and character of an African in relations to others. The paradigm shift that Adesanmi represented in Pan African Humanity is informed by his life-long commitment to work for the restoration of the above qualities through the development of a new cadre of African intellectuals who take pride in their own humanity, are socially and politically conscious, committed to excellence in both professional and public spaces with enough concern for building a better African society. While the distinctive features of Pan African Humanity are still cherished by Africans, many of these have been lost due to the degradation, distortion, pollution and disruption that Africans have had with other parts of the world, the resulting competition that have come to define their daily experiences and changes in the global value system.

This paper is based on experiential personal encounters that the writer had with Pius Adesanmi as well as his numerous updates on social media and literary texts. The paper will focus on his numerous engagements in mentoring African scholars at various sites, such as the Pan African Doctoral Academy in Accra, Ghana, the Abiola Irele Seminar on Theory and Criticism and the African Doctoral Lounge on Facebook, which he created. The paper seeks to answer the questions: What are the factors that motivated his commitment, even at personal costs, to these activities? How did these link to his reflection on building Pan African Humanity? How can these initiatives be maintained to sustain the legacy of Pius Adesanmi? This paper will involve an historical investigation and analysis of the above questions through personal experiences of collaborating with Pius Adesanmi on various projects, as well as his writings on his motivations for relentlessly pursuing these ideals.

## Introduction

This biographical paper chronicles aspects of the professional life and engagements of Pius Adebola Adesanmi, the late Professor of English and Literature and former Director of the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. Born on February 27, 1972, to the Adesanmi family in Isanlu, Kogi State, Nigeria, he died in the ill-fated Ethiopia Airlines crash shortly after takeoff in the early morning of March 10, 2019. This paper is based on experiential personal encounters that the writer had with Pius Adesanmi, testimonies from other professional colleagues, which came in the form of tributes after his passing, as well as his numerous updates on social media and literary texts. The paper will focus on his numerous engagements in mentoring African scholars at various sites, such as the Pan African Doctoral Academy in Accra, Ghana, the Abiola Irele Seminar on Theory and Criticism, Kwara State University, Nigeria, where he was a Co-Director, identification of talents and commitment to their development and maturity and the noble objective that informed the creation of the online platform, African Doctoral Lounge. What are the factors that motivated his commitment, even at personal costs, to these activities? How did these link to his reflection on building Pan African Humanity? How can these initiatives be maintained to sustain the legacy of Pius Adesanmi?

This paper will involve a historical investigation and analysis of the above questions through personal experiences of collaborating with Pius Adesanmi on some of these projects as well as his writings on his motivations for relentlessly pursuing these ideals. It commemorates the life of a man whose star burnt brightly across continents, spaces and generations, but disappeared too soon. While not exhaustive, it attempts to locate the life and time of Pius Adesanmi within a particular worldview where epistemological grounding in one's traditional values, norms, history and philosophy informed and inspired a life dedicated to the service of crafting a better human society.

After this introduction, the rest of this paper proceeds as follows. The next section provides a biographical sketch of Pius Adesanmi, in terms of his formative years, educational training, socio-cultural inclinations and how his background reinforced his social activism, public intellectualism and other modes of social interventions. Section three contains the existential struggles that continue to define daily experiences of Africanism, especially Nigeria, and how this constituted a burden of action for Pius Adesanmi. In section four, I lay out the concept of Pan-African Humanity as well as the contentions that have come to undermine it. In other words, although certain qualities, mores, and what Irele (1993) calls African Imagination have defined Africans for centuries, the changes in the organization of the society, largely exemplified by commoditization of life under capitalism, the reification of what Chomsky and Barsamia (2017) refers to as a culture of consumerism and exhibitionism in the age of technology, appear to have caused massive disruptions in interpersonal relations, aggravated micro-aggression, fostered territorial thinking, unhealthy rivalry and cut-throat competition. The next section locates Pius Adesanmi's efforts at reconstructing Pan-African Humanity not just by his satirical writings on the failure of the elites in Africa to judiciously use the resources of the continent to foster inclusive development, but by his numerous practical, if selfless, involvement in restoring lost values of mentoring, creating opportunities for scholars through information shar-

ing, writing reference letters, inspiring people to look inward and develop their own talents and building bridges across generations and spaces. I will argue that contrary to the culture of professional insecurity that pervades the academia, especially in Africa, Pius Adesanmi was secured in his own space and unperturbed by the rise of other stars. In contradistinction to the destructive culture of *kenimanism* and *kenimatoism*<sup>1</sup> that have become so pervasive, in which some who claim to be senior scholars feel threatened by the profiles of junior scholars, Adesanmi acknowledged excellence and talents and inspired those who possess these qualities to do even more for Africa. Adesanmi's involvement in various initiatives such as the Pan African Doctoral Academy, Abiola Irele Seminar on Theory and Criticism, African Young Graduates and Scholars Conference and the creation of the African Doctoral Lounge attest to his commitment to the improvement of higher education in Africa. The next section details his efforts at building bridges between the academia in North America, especially through the Institute of African Studies at Carleton University and universities in Africa, mediating the spaces between the town and the gown through engagements with African Diplomats in Canada and seeking for ways to develop the Institute of African Studies to a formidable site for the production of knowledge on Africa. The last section concludes with reflections on how to sustain the legacies of Pius Adesanmi by consciously replicating his models of engagement through the mobilisation of people in his networks.

## The Essential Pius Adesanmi-upbringing, values, socio-cultural inclinations

Pius Adesanmi was born to the family of Mama Louis and Pa Joshua Adesanmi in Isanlu, Yagba West Local Government, Kogi State Nigeria. He was the third and only son of three children. His parents were of Catholic background and educationists with training in England. In Yoruba mythology, Pius was an *abiku*, who is a child who died after birth and returned again to the earth only to appear and re-appear. As Adesanmi himself wrote in 'Escape on my mind', after the first two girls, the mother gave birth to two children in quick successions both of whom died in infancy (Adesanmi, 2020). It was the third attempt that resulted in the birth of Pius. Despite the Christian faith of the parents, the consciousness of the circumstances of his birth and the important void he came to fill as the only male child of the family predisposed them to treat him in a special way. While his parents wanted him to be a Catholic priest, who is completely dedicated to God, and with full assurance of divine protection and possible hedge against another sudden disappearance, the paternal grandmother would have none of that as she ensured there was a continuous dose of application of African 'insurance' in the form of incisions and traditional medicines on Pius' body each time he visited home. Perhaps a consciousness of the possibility of his sudden disappearance also made him accept the application of the 'insurance'.

Pius grew up as a prodigious child under the tutelage of the Catholic priests

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1 These two concepts are formed from the Yoruba language. The first one denotes the prevalence of a cultural practice where those who have advanced in their careers or have accumulated much wealth will do everything possible to hinder any one outside their group from moving near the circle of success. *Kenimatoism* is a bit different from *Kenimanism* in that it represents resentment to other people who aspire to succeed or move near the level of success of others, even though the upcoming ones might have the same level of qualifications.

who, according to him, were of the puritan type from France and Quebec, Canada. He graduated with First Class in French from the University of Ilorin, Nigeria in 1992, obtained a Masters's Degree in French from the University of Ibadan in 1994 and proceeded to obtain a Ph.D. in French at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada at the age of 30. Before joining Carleton, he held a faculty position at Penn State University in the United States of America.

Pius Adesanmi's personality was formed by formal and informal education. Both forms of education reflected the excellence of his spirit, his humanity and humanness and advocacy for social justice. If formal education gave him the global platform with which he shone so brightly, the knowledge of his Yoruba culture, omooluwabi ethos, social mores and a sense of community underpinned his relentless pursuit of the restoration of the lost pride of Africans. Pius was rooted in Yoruba language and the mastery of the proverbs. His ability to make and maintain such wide professional networks, even with those he criticized in government, was borne out of his sense of community and associational life. His capacity to serve as a big umbrella under whom many young scholars could hide for mentorship is rooted in his cultural Yoruba upbringing in which the training of every child is the responsibility of every member of the community. In the African setting, the wisdom of elders provides invaluable lessons of life for any willing child. The unparalleled wisdom that Pius exhibited and the brilliance of thought that he displayed can be attributable to the repertoire of knowledge that he was exposed to as a child growing up among the elders in his native town of Isanlu and Kabba. The combination of the native knowledge and the world-class education that he received at such a tender age contributed to his global and local relevance. Falola (2019) alludes to this in his tribute thus:

Pius understood the core of the capitalist system, set against the context of the rural background of his parentage. He became audacious, seeking the ways to transform the rural into the modern, and means to tame capitalism into one with a soul. He resided in the heart of the capitalist system but his mind and spirit are in the rural. He successfully created a community of language to capture the minds of his commune.

If the received knowledge from various universities that Pius attended contributed to his sophisticated mind and high level of articulation, the cultural upbringing from his cultural roots laid the foundation for his angst against misgovernance and irresponsibility of the political elites, as well as his persistent propping of the followership in Africa to rise above passivity.

## **The Challenge in Africa and Pius Adesanmi's Burden of Action**

That Africa has underperformed below her potential in all spheres has been a subject of much debate among scholars in the humanities and social sciences (see Arman, 1968, Ayittey, 1994, Bayart, 1993, Osaghae, 1998, Chabal and Daloz, 1999). These works show how the failure of governance exemplified through weak institutions, predatory elites and the pursuit of personal interest as against the advancement of the common good have kept Africa in chains of poverty and underdevelopment. Indeed, the combination of historical forces of colonialism, contradictions

of political independence and economic dependence, imposition of external political system in the form of state institutions, dependent capitalism, dictatorship, an emasculated civil society sector, weak and corrupt bureaucracy and near absence of a developmental political class to chart the course of transformation, have ossified the gains of independence in postcolonial Africa (Shivji, 1980, Taylor 2014, 2018). Although scholars like Mkandawire (2011, 2005) would disagree that post-independent African leaders have not put development on the agenda and that experiences of African countries are very diverse, this does not detract from the prevalence of poverty and inequality as well as limited access to social services such as quality education, public health, clean water and good infrastructure in Africa. Development indicators from international development agencies like the United Nations Human Development Report and African Development Bank, among others, show that despite recent improvements on key indicators in some parts of the continent, the majority of countries remain on the Low Human Development Group (UNDP, 2018, African Development Bank, 2017). Worsening human conditions on the continent have fuelled forced migration, insecurity.

The political economy of post-independent Africa, especially those of the petrol-states, such as Nigeria, have evinced what Karl (1997) calls the paradox of plenty. While the ruling elites and their cronies live in conspicuous consumption, the majority of the citizens are left to survive on meagre handouts. Several studies have revealed that elite parasitism and exploitation have fostered accumulation by dispossession in different parts of Africa (Joseph 2016, 1987, Adebani, 2012, Okonjo-Iweala, 2012). Struck by high levels of poverty and occupied by the need to survive and make ends meet, many citizens have become disillusioned and demoralized. Lacking in extra capacity to engage and force changes in the accumulative predisposition of the governing elites, many have become apolitical. Yet, the deliberate pauperization of the majority of the people by the elites has succeeded in making many citizens susceptible to exploitation, especially during elections. In what Ake (1984) calls democratization of disempowerment, elections have become mere rituals through which elite circulation takes place. In this context, godfatherism, a process through which old or retired politicians sponsor emergent political elites for elective posts, has become rampant (Obi, 2011, Onwuzuruigbo 2013). Many disempowered citizens are happy enough to get handouts in the form of vote-buying during elections, leading to what Mkandawire (2010) calls voting without choosing. More worryingly, rather than organizing themselves to make demands for change, the struggle for competition over the remaining resources have forced citizens to turn on themselves. In the process, insecurity becomes rife. The age-long practices of being one's brother's keeper under the African philosophy of Ubuntu have become endangered or totally undermined in the game similar to the Hobbesian state of nature of the war of everyone against everyone.

It was in the context of the failure of governance, failed expectations and disillusionment among citizens across many countries in Africa, low quality of social services, uncritical acceptance of anything foreign, the docility of many of the millennial generation on issues that affect their lives, that Pius Adesanmi located his numerous interventions through social media updates, newspaper articles, speeches at public events and direct engagement with universities to provide support in training and mentoring emerging scholars. The next section analyses the concept of Pan African Humanity as the motive force for the numerous public engagements that Pius Adesanmi was involved in towards achieving a better Africa.

## Pius Adesanmi and the reconstruction of Pan-African Humanity

Conceptually, Pan African Humanity refers to the embodiment of the values, mores, norms and character of an African in relation with themselves and others. While the distinctive features of Pan African Humanity are still cherished by Africans, many of these have been lost due to centuries of degradation, subjugation and exploitation that Africa has been subjected to through various forms of the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism. These experiences have led to distortion, pollution and disruption of African value systems in ways that have altered the underlying principles that informed the organization of society.

Unlike Asia, where postcolonial ruling elites ensured that the influence of external values was minimized after independence, coloniality, the continued form of colonialism, has continued unabated in Africa in being, power and knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, 2013b). To elaborate, post-independent Africa is mired in the contradictions of nationalism and the pursuit of Eurocentric modernity. The hegemony of market ideas and capitalism created social disruptions that reified unhealthy competition, possessive individualism, exhibitionism, conflicts and territorial thinking. The changes in the global value system that followed from the commoditization of the society have undermined the spirit of brotherliness, cooperation and a sense of communalism that previously defined African societies. The paradigm shift that Pius Adesanmi represented in Pan African Humanity is informed by his life-long commitment to work for the restoration of the above qualities through the development of a new cadre of African intellectuals who take pride in their own humanity, who are socially and politically conscious, committed to excellence in both professional and public spaces with enough concern for building a better African society. Pius Adesanmi believed in the power of the written word to bring about change in society. Dissatisfied with the overarching failure of political leadership in Africa, he used satire in many of his opinion articles to criticize and put the leaders on their toes. From Nigeria to South Africa, from Kenya to Algeria, he did not spare the political elites for their profligacy and irresponsibility. He pointed the follies in their policies, the contradictions between policy pronouncements and personal actions of the politicians, wastefulness of public resources, the low standards to which governance has sunk in comparison with other countries, as well as the lack of accountability. Adesanmi also called out the youth of Africa for their complicity in being passive or sometimes even cheering the same group of elites that are carelessly mortgaging their future. Unlike many Africans in the diaspora who care less for what is happening back on the continent, other than sending remittances, Pius Adesanmi used every available opportunity to point out the failings in contemporary Africa and adopted a comparative approach to suggesting solutions on how the continent can be better governed.

Pius Adesanmi's efforts in the reconstruction of Pan African Humanity transcends armchair criticisms. By the sheer force of personal example, he sacrificed time and resources and eventually his very life to the idea of seeing a better Africa. As earlier mentioned, he raised the consciousness of the citizens to their civic duties and sensitized them to the possibilities of a better Africa. While the past might not have been golden, he provided historical narratives that enabled Africans of all ages to

understand the role of civic agency in building a modern society. He made the youth understand the roles of the nationalist leaders in the struggle for political independence from the colonialists, as well as the role of the youth in reclaiming democracy from the military dictators across Africa.

From his location in Canada, he drew parallels between how public servants conduct themselves as servants of the people to the culture of bigmanism that defines leadership style in Africa. Adesanmi's role in the construction of Pan African Humanity went beyond public intellectualism. He ruptured the culture of hierarchization in the academia in which some senior scholars find it difficult to mentor junior scholars. Adesanmi filled the vacuum in mentoring by generously sharing his time, knowledge and other intellectual resources. He linked prospective students with prospective supervisors across spaces, contributed to finetuning proposals for graduate students, encouraged bright students to pursue higher degrees and intervened where such students face problems, as much as possible within policy. Although he knew that not everyone will agree with what he did, his belief in Ubuntu and the practice of the *omooluwabi* ethos<sup>2</sup>, provided him with a compelling reason to continue what he did to advance the cause of humanity. As Ochonu (2019) writes in his tribute, Adesanmi detested mediocrity and he fought hard to ensure that African institutions aspire to and accord other Africans the same respect that they accord people from other parts of the world. In this respect, Ochonu notes,

He lived what he preached, rejecting mediocrity, berating Africans who accepted it, and calling for a cultural turn that normalizes excellence rather than regards it as an unattainable Utopian quest. No domain was too mundane or trivial for him to live out this philosophy of excellence. When he travelled on his continental speaking and public engagements, he insisted that African bureaucrats and protocol personnel make the right arrangements. Flights had to be booked properly and at the right time. Hotel arrangements had to be made ahead of time, and the hotels had to have the right amenities. If honorariums were promised, they had to be paid promptly.

Ochonu continues,

Pius never entertained bureaucratic excuses for mediocre treatment or mediocre amenities...For Pius, the campaign for excellence was thus about racial equality and human dignity. The way he saw it, everyone, black or white, Nigerian or Canadian, had a right to be treated with dignity in Africa and everywhere, and the racial pathology of reserving excellence for and expecting excellence only from white people in Africa was a colonial racial hangover that needed to be exorcised (p 5-6).

Another aspect of Pius Adesanmi's demonstration of and reconstruction of Pan African Humanity was in his ability to collaborate with diverse sets of people across time and spaces. Perhaps on account of the psychological damage that poverty and many generations of suffering have inflicted on the minds of Africans, it is very difficult to have professionals or even scholars collaborating for long without stories of exploitation, abuse and in some instances, deliberate silencing and dehumanization. Contrary to this culture of the mindless pursuit of self-glory, underpinned by singing individual songs of achievement, Pius Adesanmi collaborated with scholars and professionals in different sites. Rather than taking the glory for the success of any initiative, he recognized the importance of team-work and attributed success to the efforts of others. Even though he was trained as a literary critic, his ability to build

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2 Omoluabi is a Yoruba word used to describe a person of honour, dignity and hardwork. He is person who is ever conscious of his or her identity, projects culture and ensure the advancement of his or her community.

networks across professional lines saw him contribute to policy issues at national, regional, continental and global levels. The example of selflessness and pre-occupation with the pursuit of public good for the greatest number of people that he pursued to the end, present distinct possibilities in the reconstruction of Pan African Humanity.

Beyond the general efforts to reconstruct Pan African Humanity are the specific initiatives that he either started or collaborated on with others, especially in the higher education sector, to which we now turn.

## **Pius Adesanmi and interventions in the Higher Education Sector in Africa: Personal Reflections and Collaborations**

Since I met Pius Adesanmi through our mutual mentor, Professor Toyin Falola of the University of Texas in 2014, we struck a bond that continued until the day he left Ottawa for Nairobi on the ill-fated journey. We struck the bond because of the common passion that we shared for a better Africa. In this section, I present some of Pius Adesanmi's engagements as well as my involvement with him.

### *Pan African Doctoral Academy (PADA)*

The Pan African Doctoral Academy was established in the University of Ghana, Legon with funding support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York in 2013. It was established to train doctoral students and early career scholars on how to manage the process of starting and completing their graduate studies on time and in good quality. The program holds twice in a year (January and June/July). Courses that are run include, but are not limited to, the following:

Academic Writing and Communicating Research Results, Career Development for the Emerging Scholar, Innovative Thinking in Research, Teaching and Learning, Managing the Ph.D. Process (including Managing Literature Review), Presentation Skills (including oral and poster conference presentations), Qualitative Research Methodology and Using NVivo for Analysis. Quantitative Research Techniques Using SPSS.

Professor Pius Adesanmi was involved in PADA since its inception in 2013. Apart from teaching the module on Managing the Ph.D. Process, including Managing Literature Review, he organized writing clinics for participants at the Doctoral Academy. He also provided support to the Director of PADA, Professor Yaa Ntiama-Badu. From various accounts, Adesanmi made positive impacts in the lives of the students and participants in PADA. Apart from bracing the inconvenience and the sacrifice of having to travel to Accra, Ghana, twice a year to facilitate his assigned module in PADA, he latched onto his networks of social media followers to inform eligible Doctoral students to apply. He also facilitated the involvement of other African scholars in the program. For instance, in January 2019, he put me on Skype from Pretoria, South Africa to join him to teach the PADA students on the benefits of interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary research. He introduced me to the participants as a colleague with whom he travelled all over Africa to mentor students and build the capacity of emerging scholars. Although the notice of my involvement with the

participants was short, I put everything aside to interact with them. Such was the belief that Pius Adesanmi had in the ability of other people to support the cause that he was championing.

His involvement in PADA transcended classroom interactions. He maintained a strong relationship with graduates from the various cohorts of the program long after they had completed the program. These relationships allowed him to monitor their progress in the journey to academic excellence. As in many other initiatives, his commitment to PADA was done at the expense of his convenience and comfort. As Professor Yaa Ntiamoa-Baidu, the Director of the program noted in her tribute, she was shocked when Pius Adesanmi told her that he would be attending the January 2019 edition of PADA. Her shock was borne out of the fact that Pius had not fully recovered from the life-threatening accident that he had in Nigeria in July 2018. In her own words, ‘When we expressed surprise at having him join us in Accra so soon into his recovery, he replied, with his signature laugh, ‘My sister, you know nothing competes with PADA in my calendar!’ (<https://pada.u.edu.gh/announcement/tribute-professor-pius-adesanmi>). The response was another demonstration of the level of sacrifice that Pius was ready to pay to contribute to building research capacity in Africa.

*ABIOLA Irele Seminar in Theory and Criticism: Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria*

One of the other ways through which Pius Adesanmi contributed to building research capacity in Africa was the Abiola Irele Seminar in Theory and Criticism. Named after former Harvard Professor of Literary criticism, the late Professor Francis Abiola Irele, the Seminar Series was established at the instance of diaspora returnee, former Vice Chancellor of Kwara State University, Professor Abdul-Rasheed Na’Allah. It started in 2015 with Professor Adeleke Adeeko as the Director, while Professor Adesanmi served as the Deputy Director. Like PADA, the two-week intensive Doctoral Academy involved training on various modules such as managing the Doctoral process, managing relationships with supervisors, research methodology, publications, knowledge production, innovation in research as well as interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research.

As the Deputy Director of the Seminar Series, Pius Adesanmi was actively involved in designing annual themes and modules for each of the years that he served and participated. Additionally, he was responsible for identifying and persuading seasoned African scholars both within and outside Nigeria to serve as visiting Faculty members on the program. In 2017, he contacted me to act as one of the faculty members. Despite a gruelling and busy travelling schedule, I agreed to participate, if only for two days as I had to travel to Kigali, Rwanda for another program that I was organizing with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. In 2018, Pius Adesanmi ensured that I stayed throughout the two weeks to facilitate various sessions of the program. Apart from the facilitation that we provided during class sessions, the faculty members also had one-on-ones with the participants, who were mostly doctoral students and emerging scholars from different universities in the country. The direct engagement with the participants provided opportunities for mentoring, some of which continued after the program.

The poor state of critical infrastructures in Africa contributes to why many Africans in the diaspora have no incentive to travel back to the continent. However, Pius Adesanmi would not be deterred by this challenge. Indeed, the bad state of the

road from Ilorin to Ibadan was responsible for a life-threatening accident that almost consumed his life on July 18, 2018. After facilitating for one week at the Abiola Irele Seminar, he had left me and other colleagues at the venue to travel to Dakar, Senegal for yet another continental engagement with the United Nations. Barely two hours after he left Ilorin, I received a call from him that he was involved in a ghastly car accident. Although he survived the accident by the whiskers, the scars remained until his untimely death in the air crash of March 10, 2019.

In December 2018, Pius and I were together at the General Assembly of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). He was invited by Professor Godwin Murunga, the Executive Secretary of the organization to cover the General Assembly and write some reflections. Prior to that, we had not met physically since the accident happened. Shortly after we started our meeting on yet another project, he started feeling the pains on his leg. I was startled that he could travel back to Africa despite the pain. This was another testament to the fact that Adesanmi's commitment to Africa's higher education was unusual and unparalleled.

## **Continental Forum on the role of the diaspora in the revitalization of higher education in Africa**

At the instance of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Pius Adesanmi was invited in August 2018 to write a proposal in partnership with the Citizens and Diaspora Organisation unit of the African Union, for a "Study and Forum" on the role of the diaspora in the revitalization of higher education in Africa. This was in recognition of his position as a towering figure and active agent in bridging the gap between Africans in diaspora and those on the continent. Immediately, he approached me to draft the proposal. This was done within a week. The process of writing the proposal, receiving internal and external evaluations and eventual approval by the Board of Carnegie Corporation took approximately eight months. In anticipation of the approval, we had mobilized all relevant stakeholders on African higher education both in the diaspora and on the continent. Potential researchers and participants were identified. State and non-state partners with whom we could work with for the sustainability aspect of the project had equally been identified. The announcement for the approval of the grant was made on March 8, 2019. Pius' ecstasy knew no bounds as he communicated the approval to the Dean of his faculty as well as other relevant people in his network. Despite the tragic incident of March 10, 2019, other team members carried on with the program and held a successful forum on the subject matter in Addis Ababa from November 13-14, 2019. In her opening statement, the Principal Investigator of the Project, Professor Pauline Rankin, Dean, Faculty of Social Science, Carleton University, had this to say about Pius at the Forum:

While it is thrilling to contemplate the intellectual power assembled in this room that will address these questions over the next two days, it is also bittersweet as we must acknowledge the absence of our beloved late colleague, Dr. Pius Adesanmi, whose energy and vision is responsible for convening us here today and whose voice will be missed in every conversation. Pius Adesanmi's life work embodied the goals of this Forum. A bril-

liant scholar, he worked with boundless energy to build academic bridges between African scholars, between anglophone and francophone colleagues, and between African and non-African professors and students. As a citizen of two continents, he passionately sought to engage diasporic populations in support of higher education and challenged us all to imagine previously unimagined ways to develop and strengthen African higher education. The last email I received from Pius just before his passing was, in fact, about this project. He wrote enthusiastically that with the generous support of the Carnegie Corporation and in partnership with the African Union, we were going to be able to “do something big.” And, indeed, that is where we stand this morning – at the cusp of accomplishing “something big” for African higher education.

The array of scholars and policymakers that attended the Forum, the quality of discussions and the actionable points agreed upon towards the improvement in the quality of higher education in Africa underscored the global recognition that Adesanmi’s work and legacy earned and commanded in this important sector. Despite his physical absence, echoes of his memories and contributions reverberated throughout the two-day Forum. Participants also echoed the need to continue where Pius stopped in ensuring that African academics in the diaspora continue to engage with their counterparts on the continent. The need to establish an alliance of institutions and scholars geared towards the sustainability of diaspora engagements in the higher education sector in Africa was also highlighted.

## **Adesanmi as the transcontinental bridge builder: Forging a partnership with African universities**

Pius Adesanmi recognized the importance of building bridges between academia in Africa and North America. This recognition is premised on the universality of knowledge, the enduring politics of knowledge production and the increasing flow of African students to North American universities (see Oloruntoba 2015, 2014). There is also the issue of the differences in research capacity among universities in the two continents. In Africa, research capacity became negatively affected from the 1980s, when neoliberal policies forced the state to cut back on spending on higher education (Zezeza, 2015). In what Mamdani (2006) calls scholars in the market place, in a book of the same title, the structural adjustment programs imposed by the international financial institutions on African countries, following the economic crisis of the 1980s effectively undermined the capacity of universities. Faced with low salaries and inadequate or near absence of research funding, faculty members were forced to fend for themselves through massive engagement in consultancy and other side jobs. The university system suffered a colossal loss as experienced and well-educated faculty members migrated in droves to the United States of America, Europe and to a certain extent, Asia.

The gap in research capacity this mass exodus created in African universities also motivated Pius to seek to build institutional partnerships that can contribute to boosting research capacity on the continent of Africa. His focus in this regard was creating opportunities for early-career scholars, who have faculty positions in African universities to have the opportunity to spend between three months to one year in a Canadian university. The time away from the burden of teaching, supervision of students and other distractions could help them to learn from more established

scholars, get abreast of new methodologies and concepts as well as have the opportunity to concentrate on research. He also explored the prospects of a joint Ph.D. Degree between Carleton University and some universities in Africa. Thus, as the Director of the Institute of African Studies, he made conscious efforts to forge partnerships with some of the best universities in Africa, especially in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa. These series of partnerships created room for exchanges of ideas through research visits and other forms of collaborations. Pius Adesanmi was also involved in organizing the Study Abroad Program for students of the African Studies program, who wished to travel to a particular African country during the summer. In 2018, he led students to the American International University in Kenya. He was also preparing for the 2019 edition of the Study Abroad Program before the tragedy struck.

Beyond the aforementioned institutional interventions of Pius Adesanmi in higher education in Africa were his numerous speaking engagements at academic conferences and policy roundtables. For instance, he was a regular speaker at the annual African Unity and Renaissance conference organized by the African Institute of South Africa, Human Science Research Council of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute, University of South Africa and the Tshwane University of Technology from 2014. His name was included as one of the keynote speakers for the May 2019 edition of the Conference. He was also one of the speakers at the African Young Graduates and Scholars Programme organized by the African Institute of South Africa.

In his home country Nigeria, he was involved in several initiatives geared towards the revitalization of higher education. I worked with him on several such initiatives such as the Education Summit for the six states in Southwest Nigeria, which was planned under the aegis of the Development Agenda for Western Nigeria in 2017. The program was still-born because after several weeks of planning, the Director-General of the organization, Mr. Dipo Famakinwa suddenly died. There were also plans to engage with Kaduna State University to host workshops for doctoral students and early career scholars. The sudden and tragic death of Pius Adesanmi left many projects uncompleted, many words unsaid and many well-intended interventions unactualized. However, the conditions that motivated Pius Adesanmi to pay the ultimate price in the service of human remains as gargantuan as when he was here. The need to sustain his legacy and suggestions on how this can be done constitutes the concluding section of this paper.

## **Conclusion: Sustaining the Legacy of Pius Adesanmi**

This paper has examined the various dimensions of Pius Adesanmi's commitment to Africa. Whereas his burden for a transformed Africa led him to intervene on various issues through his satirical writings, the focus of this paper was his direct engagement with the transformation of the higher education sector. With the benefit of direct involvement in some of his activities, I have shown that Pius Adesanmi's multiple engagements with the higher education sector in Africa were borne out of the need to meet a need. In doing this, he embodied Pan African Humanism by seeking for the recreation of lost values of community service, selfless devotion to

the advancement of the public good. In the context of Pan African Humanity, he was a secured person, who transcended ethnic jingoism, narrow nationalism and rabid class consciousness. He, Pius, also went beyond the idea of self to build a wide network of likeminded people across Africa, North America and Europe, with whom he laboured tirelessly to give back to a continent that gave birth to him.

Preserving the legacy of Pius Adesanmi will require that more people subscribe to the idea of Pan African Humanity - a principle that undergirds his motivations. This requires thinking beyond the self and living with a sense of mission to contribute to the pressing and challenging tasks of seeking for the revitalization of higher education in Africa. As one of the outcomes of the Forum in November 2019 indicated, there is space for more Africans in the diaspora to be engaged in higher education on the continent. While there could be opportunities to join existing programs such as PADA, new initiatives can be introduced to meet old and emerging needs of building research capacity on the continent.

At the institutional level, it is inspiring that the leadership of the Institute of African Studies at Carleton University has indicated and has shown by practical examples the desire and determination to continue the legacy of Pius Adesanmi. The support that the leadership of the Institute and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences provided for me to manage the Carnegie funded project on the role of Africans in the diaspora in the revitalization of higher education was an incontrovertible evidence of the positive disposition of the leadership to sustaining the legacy of Pius Adesanmi. The proposed dual Doctoral Degree with African universities, short term visits by emerging African scholars and Study Abroad programs for students of the African Studies program should be vigorously pursued.

One of the ways through which the legacy of Pius Adesanmi could be sustained for the foreseeable future is to commence a bi-annual conference in his honour. The themes of the series of conferences will be centred around his engagements in Africa, both on governance, education and citizenship action, among others.

Pius Adesanmi lived his life in the consciousness of the famous quote by Stephen Grellent: (.n.d) I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again'. Pius Adesanmi's goodness transcended doing good to individuals. By his advocacy for an inclusive and de-racialized global society that values community life, by lifting up the young and emerging scholars and creating opportunities for as many people as came his way, he filled a void in the fragmented modern society.

Despite the brevity of his life, Adesanmi exhibited the quote credited to George Bernard Shaw as follows,

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no 'brief candle' to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to the future generations (Forbesquotes, n.d)

The challenge is on those who share his ideals of a better Africa and indeed, a better global society to go beyond the platitudes of lamentation, armchair criticism and sheer passivity to look for ways to engage in various capacities to contribute to

the revitalization of higher education in Africa.

The need to raise political consciousness of the teeming African youth and mobilize them for better and informed participation in the project of accountable governance is an unfinished task that requires volunteers in the mould of Pius Adesanmi. Beyond citizens' action is a functional and responsible state. To achieve the much-needed transformation in all sectors, the state in Africa, must be made more accountable. As Green (2008) concludes in his book *From Poverty to Power: How Active States and Effective Citizens can change the World* achieving inclusive development requires active citizens and effective states.

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