

Other men came with complaints about neighbours, the non-payment of a debt or a wrongful dismissal. The Sultan dealt patiently, and sometimes, when necessary, sternly, with them all. He told me when he needed to hear the other side of the story he would say to the complainant, 'Take this letter to your district head and return here with his reply.' When I asked him if people were afraid to come to him direct, he said: 'Why on earth should they be afraid of me? They know they can come.'

As for women petitioners, he saw them every morning inside the gate of the inner palace where his wives lived and where I was staying. By seven o'clock he was seated and the women came one by one with their own grievances, to which he listened with the same attention that he gave to the men. But what surprised me most of all was to see the arrival through the main gate of a group of elderly village women accompanied by a number of young girls aged around ten. Their poverty was apparent – their robes were made of cheap material, their jewellery of white alloy – but it was their feet that caught my attention. They had obviously not only walked miles, but were used to walking miles, because their heels were cracked, their toes splayed and their nails thickened. I asked their leader, the Jaji, the purpose of their visit. 'To greet Sarkin Musulmi,' she said. 'He listens to our problems, cares about us and prays for us.'

The Sultan celebrated the 2006 'Id al-fitr at home in Sokoto; then he flew to Abuja to exchange greetings with the Head of State. On Sunday 29 October he boarded Flight 053 bound for Sokoto, which crashed after take-off, killing almost all on board. The Sultan's body, which was not burnt in the conflagration, was recognized quickly and flown to Sokoto for burial. The body was borne on a bier and very slowly carried through streets lined with tens of thousands of people crying '*Allahu akbar*'. He was buried in the Hubbare near the tomb of the Shehu, and that of his father. *Allah shi ji kansa, amin.*

#### IV

### YUSUFU BALA USMAN (1945–2005)

*M. M. Gwadabe*

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The intellectual community in Nigeria received with great shock the news of the death of Dr Yusufu Bala Usman on 24 September 2005. Indeed, the shock went beyond the intellectual community or the Nigerian nation because Dr Yusufu Bala Usman was not only a Nigerian intellectual but one recognized across Africa and abroad. He was not just an intellectual but also a democrat, a freedom fighter, and a lover of peace and justice. Thus his house, at Hanwa in Zaria (Kaduna

State), witnessed a large crowd of people who came from villages, states and countries within and outside Nigeria. Those trooping to offer condolences to the family included peasant farmers, spare-parts sellers, factory workers, mechanics, labourers, messengers, politicians, serving and retired military men, Heads of State, Governors, Ministers, Commissioners, businessmen, intellectuals, bankers, labour leaders, technocrats, students and market women. For over one month after his death the Department of History at Ahmadu Bello University, where he taught until his death, received letters of condolence from within Nigeria, Africa, Europe, North and South America, the Middle East and from as far away as Asia.

Born into the royal family of Katsina (one of the nineteenth-century emirates under the Sokoto Caliphate), Dr Yusufu Bala Usman attended the Musawa Junior Primary School, Kankia Senior Primary School, Minna Senior Primary School and Government College Kaduna in the period 1951–62. He received his university education in Europe, first at University Tutorial College (Great Russell Street, London) and then at the University of Lancaster. In 1967 he returned to Nigeria with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in History and Political Science. He declined the lucrative jobs his royalty guaranteed him and chose to be a common classroom teacher, starting as a secondary-school teacher at Barewa College, Zaria. It was here that Professor Abdullahi Smith, the then Head and founder of the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, discovered him. From 1970 to 1974, Bala Usman undertook MA and PhD degrees. He was the Head of the Department of History until 1980, when he left the university to serve as Secretary to the government of the former Kaduna State. His PhD research was on 'The Transformation of Katsina, 1796–1903: the overthrow of the Sarauta system and the establishment and evolution of the Emirate'; it was a pioneering study from the perspective of an Africanist historian. Similar studies followed, a number of which are now published or about to be published. Indeed, Bala Usman was in the midst of editing a number of volumes of research papers when death caught up with him on Saturday, 24 September 2005.

The contributions of Bala Usman lie not only in the number of papers he has written or the publications he has left for posterity. He spearheaded the establishment of a school of thinking quite distinct from the perception of history that used to be prevalent in Nigeria before the 1970s. Before him, history was generally understood and taught within the paradigm of colonial historiography. The efforts of Bala Usman and some of his colleagues in the department liberated history teaching as they masterminded the establishment and nurturing of the school of African historiography at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU). Its influence spread to other universities and organizations in the rest of Nigeria, Africa and beyond. This brought the ABU Department of History to prominence, and indeed left a mark on all students of the department, wherever and whenever they make their presence known.

The ABU School of History was based on the principle that history involves rigorous evaluation and assessment of all types of sources for historical reconstruction. This approach exposes the bankruptcy of over-reliance on written sources, and encourages the use of oral, archaeological, linguistic and other sources for historical reconstruction. When it started, the perspective appeared very refreshing, though difficult to conceptualize within the colonial outlook of history teaching in the secondary and advanced-level schools and their syllabuses. It was refreshing because it posed a serious challenge to colonial historiography, emphasizing how this had tended to distort the significance of other sources and to downgrade African history *vis-à-vis* British imperialism. Using written sources as a yardstick, some colonial historians had argued that Africa had no history, because 'the African past was nothing but darkness'. Africanist historiography challenged this position. This led to a revolution in the courses taught in ABU's Department of History, and in the calibre of teaching staff of the department. Nor did these revolutions stop at the Department of History; the rest of what was then the Faculty of Arts and Social Science—Political Science, Sociology, Economics, Mass Communications, Nigerian and African languages, French, English and the Archaeology Unit—followed suit. The impact of the revolution was so great that students of Ahmadu Bello University in general are still noted today for one thing: their radicalism. It was not surprising that in 1983 the Faculty of Arts of the University hosted the first-ever event to mark the centenary of the death of Karl Marx.

Yusufu Bala Usman was an inspiring teacher, as I can personally testify. I had known of him since 1978 through reading his commentaries in the newspapers and electronic media; I first met him personally in 1981, during the commemorations for Dr Bala Muhammed, the political activist and member of the People's Redemption Party assassinated in 1980. It was my readings of Dr Usman's works and my close relations with Dr Bala Muhammed that influenced my decision to read history in the University and to take up teaching as a career. Dr Usman taught me for most of my undergraduate years. He gave me the courage to face the public and air my views. I thank him greatly for that, for, being an introvert, I could have ended up as an administrator somewhere in my village if he had not encouraged my transfer to the university system.

In 1985 the authorities of Ahmadu Bello University, considering Dr Usman's contribution to knowledge, promoted him to the rank of a Professor. Humble as he was, Dr Usman turned down the promotion on the ground that 'he was not convinced that he had done enough to be a Professor'. While he was without doubt qualified for the promotion, his action was an attempt to show his displeasure with the way promotions to the rank of professorship were politicized and abused. So Dr Usman died with the rank of a Reader.

*Editor's note:* tributes to Yusufu Bala Usman, in the form of personal memoirs, newspaper editorials and condolence letters, have been

published as *A Life of Commitment to Knowledge, Freedom and Justice: tributes to Yusufu Bala Usman, 1945–2005*, edited by Alkasum Abba (Hanwa, Zaria: Centre for Democratic Development Research and Training, 2006). Volume 1 of his papers, *Beyond Fairy Tales: selected historical writings of Dr Yusufu Bala Usman* was published by The Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research (PMB 1023, Zaria), also in 2006; more volumes are in preparation.

## V

## KAY RUTH M. WILLIAMSON (1935–2005)

## HER LIFE AND WORK

*Ozo-mekuri Ndimele*

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Kay Ruth M. Williamson was born in Hereford, Britain, on 26 January 1935. She obtained a BA and an MA in English Language and Literature from St Hilda's College, Oxford, in 1956 and 1960 respectively. She completed her PhD in Linguistics at Yale University in 1964. Her area of specialization was Ijo linguistics.

She started her career as a teacher of linguistics in the Department of English, University College, Ibadan, in 1957. She was appointed Professor of Linguistics in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ibadan, in 1972. She moved to the University of Port Harcourt in 1977, first as Director of Studies (Language), and later as Head of Department of Linguistics and African Languages, 1982–4, 1987–9, 1993–5. In 1984–5, she was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Leiden. She was appointed Dean, Graduate School, University of Port Harcourt during 1990–1, and was Visiting Scholar at Wolfson College, Oxford, in 1991. After retiring from active service, she was employed on contract as Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt, in 2000–2. In 2002, she was appointed UNESCO Professor of Cultural Heritage, University of Port Harcourt, a position she held until she died.

She was an active and dependable member of the following academic associations: International Phonetic Association (Life Member), Linguistic Society of America, International African Institute, Linguistic Circle of New York, African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, West African Linguistic Society, Linguistic Association of Nigeria.

Her initial area of research interest was syntax. In fact, her PhD thesis was on the grammar of the Kolokuma dialect of Ijo. But later on she totally abandoned syntax in favour of phonology and historical linguistics. In an interview she granted Professor E. N. Emenanjo and