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In Remembrance of my Teacher: Dr. YUSUFU BALA USMAN 1945-2005

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Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman was five years old in his grave on the 24th September 2010, May his gentle soul Rest in Perfect Peace, Ameen.

To those who do not know him Dr. Usman was born into the royal family of Katsina. He schooled at Musawa Junior Primary School, Kankia Senior Primary School, Minna Senior Primary School and Government College Kaduna in the period 1951-1962. His University education was in Europe, first at University Tutorial College, Great Russell Street, London, England and University of Lancaster, Lancaster England. Thus by 1967 Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman returned back to his country Nigeria with a degree of Bachelor of Arts (Hon.) in History and Political Science.

Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman declined all the lucrative jobs his royalty could guaranteed him and chose to be a common classroom teacher, starting as a secondary school teacher at Barewa College, Zaria, and commenced his postgraduate studies in the Department of history,Ahmadu Bello Uniersity, Zaria under late Professor Abdullahi Smith, which he completed in 1974. With the completion of his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1974, Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman was the Head of Department of history until 1980 when he left the University to serve as Secretary to the State Government (SSG) of the former Kaduna state under the able leadership of the first civilian Governor of the state, Alhaji Balarabe Musa.

Titled as "The Transformation of Katsina c. 1796-1903: The Overthrow of the Sarauta System and the Establishment and Evolution of the Emirate", his Ph.D. research was a pioneering study from the perspective of an Africanist Historian. As the Head of Department he encouraged similar studies in the department, a number of which are now

published or about to be published. Indeed the editing of the volumes of these researches is what Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman was busy doing when death caught up with him on Saturday the 24th September 2005.

The contributions of Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman are not only in the number of papers he has written or the publications he has made, which are all there for posterity. More than that Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman spearheaded the establishment of a school of thinking quite unique from what the perception of history used to be in Nigeria before the 1970. In the period before his debut, history was understood and taught within the paradigm of colonial historiography. The effort by Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman and some of his colleague's in the department liberated the teaching of history when they masterminded the establishment and nurturing of the school of African historiography at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, and through it to other Universities and organizations in the rest of Nigeria, Africa and the World over. This brought the department of history, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria into prominence and indeed made a mark on all the students of the department wherever and whenever they make their presence known.

The basic teaching in the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) School of history is the emphasis that 'history is devoid of jargon and therefore factual, evident and involves rigorous evaluation and assessment of all types of sources for historical reconstruction.' This approach exposes the bankruptcy of the over reliance on written sources and encouraged the use of Oral, Archeological, Linguistics and other sources for historical reconstructions. When it started, the perspective appeared very refreshing, though difficult to conceptualize considering the colonial outlook of the teaching of history in the secondary and Advance level schools and syllabi. It was refreshing because it posed a serious challenge to colonial historiography bringing to notice how colonial historiography relegate the significance of other sources to ridicule and distortion with a view to downgrading African history before British Imperialism. Using written sources as a yardstick, colonial historiography argued that Africa has no history, because "African past was nothing but darkness." Africanist historiography on the other hand challenged and argued to the contrary. This effort, which witnessed a revolution in the courses taught

in the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, also saw a similar revolution in the caliber of teaching staff of the Department. These revolutions did not only stop at the Department of history; the then Faculty of Arts and Social science of the University, which was made up of the Departments of Political Science, Sociology, Economics, Mass Communications, Nigerian and African languages, French, English, Geography and the Archaeology Unit also followed suit. The impact of the revolution was so much that students of Ahmadu Bello University in general are to date noted for one thing; that is radicalism. It was therefore not surprising when in 1983 the Faculty of Arts of the University hosted the first ever-historical event of the centenary of the death of one of the greatest 19th century philosopher and social Critique, Karl Marx (1883-1983).

Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman did not only limit his liberation battle to the study of history, he also delve into politics. His writings were therefore geared towards the liberation of not only the human mind but also the common man. Thus throughout his lifetime Dr. Usman never relent in airing his views on national and international issues even if at the displeasure of the masters of the land. This he demonstrated during a public presentation when he openly challenged the former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to resign from his position as President of the country. His writings, no doubt cut across all aspects of life. When Nigerian masses were engulfed in a debate over the IMF loan in the 1980s, Dr. Usman set the phase clear for the Nigerian people in a book he published with the title "Nigeria against the IMF: The Home Market Strategy." Similar efforts were noted in Dr. Usman's contribution for democratic Nigeria and against the manipulation of religion in Nigerian Politics.

Before his death too, Dr. Usman posed a challenge to the Nigerian intellectual community that ethnic identities were never mechanically fixed somewhere, but rather were relating dialectically with one another and changing in response to time, space and social development, which demystify the issue of Settler/Indigene in the Nigerian body politics. Focusing more specifically on the Nigerian society, he stressed that "the process of the formation, transformation and reformation of nationalities had continued, unabated, across Nigeria and the rest of Africa." The emphasis is simply that no ethnic

group, from whatever part of the World, is exclusive. This understanding was in response to the claim by some ethnic groups within Nigeria for sovereign national conference to restructure Nigeria into federation of nationalities and ethnic groups. Rather than restructuring Nigeria on the grounds of ethnic divisions, which he considered retrogression, Dr. Usman made it clear that "the path to progress lay in building virile and democratic societies, which transcended ethnic chauvinism, through the establishment of national political parties by giving Trade Unions, Professional Associations and the Organization of Businessmen, Farmers, Fishermen, Herders, Tenants, Women and the Youth, leading roles in our political, economic and social life." The enormity of the confusion this claim for ethnic nationalities generated led to the publication of another thought provoking book by Dr. Usman titled "The Misrepresentation of Nigeria: The facts and the figures." Supported by factual evidence the effort in the book brought to light that "certain widely accepted views on Nigeria-such as the belief in the existence of a fundamental dichotomy between the north and the south; the belief in the inevitability of competition and conflicts between the monolithic and distinctive ethnic nationalities, and the assumption that antagonism was inherent in the relationship between the country's Christians and Muslims, etc were all false and without any foundations, whatsoever." It was with this same spirit that Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman, as far back as 1979 influenced the setting up of a panel on "Nigeria since Independence History Project", which produced eleven volumes of well-researched document on Nigeria History.

Taking the task more seriously Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman went beyond theoretical analysis and established, together with some like minds, two research centers:

(1) Abdullahi Smith Center for Historical Research in 1985 and
(2) Center for Democratic Development Research and Training (CEDDERT) in 1992.

Located some distance to the Ahmadu Bello University main Campus in Samaru, these centers housed a number of rare research materials, Books, Journals, Research Reports and Papers, theses and so on, on Northern Nigeria, Nigeria, Africa and the World. The centers were credited for their occasional publications on National and International

Issues. This was in addition to his full time teaching and research at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It is in record that he supervised the highest number of students compared to all his other colleagues.

In 1985 the authorities of Ahmadu Bello University, considering Dr. Yusufu Bala 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 has done enough to be a Professor'. Dr. Usman no doubt qualified for the promotion, his action was however an attempt to show his displeasure with the way promotions to the rank of professorship was politicized and abused. Dr. Usman died with the rank of a Reader.

Though Dr. Yusufu Bala is dead and buried, his intellectual and revolutionary works are everywhere for posterity. Adieu Dr Usman. May His Soul Rest in Peace

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