

For 'Broda Dapo' – Recollections of Measurable and Immeasurable Debts

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Long before I joined others of my generation who were his ardent admirers in calling him 'Uncle D', I knew Professor Dapo Adelugba as 'Broda Dapo'. This arose partly from the fact that I was a friend of his two younger brothers, Segun and Siji; since he was 'Broda Dapo' to them, 'Broda Dapo' he was to me as well. But there is also the fact that he was, like me, an 'omo Oke-Bola', a denizen of what is perhaps the most celebrated 'quarter' among the more 'modern' areas of the city of Ibadan. Thus, 'Broda Dapo' was a name which everybody of my age in our 'Seventh Day' section of Oke-Bola used in referring to Professor Adelugba in those years of the early to mid-Sixties. For this reason, this is the name I shall be using in this tribute.

Among our many 'egbons' at Oke-Bola, Broda Dapo was a leading light of academic brilliance, natural, unforced solicitousness towards us his neighbourly 'aburos', and masterly command of the English language, especially *spoken* Queen's English (more on this later in this tribute). Oke-Bola being one of the largest concentrations of educated elites among many of Ibadan's major 'quarters', it was no mean achievement for 'Broda Dapo' to stand out distinctly among our 'egbons' or elders. He had attended the prestigious Government College. And from there he had gone to UCI - as UI was then known.

And then he had starred as Suberu in a memorable adaptation by the School of Drama of Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. His performance in that production was so successful and indeed legendary that for a while 'Suberu' became his nickname. In all these, Broda Dapo so distinguished himself that for me and my peer group of age and school mates at Oke-Bola, he became what you could call a great role model. We were

immensely proud of him and we aspired to be like him, scaling heights which to us at that stage of our lives, often seemed extremely forbidding.

'Broda Dapo', on the occasion of your 70th birthday anniversary, I recall these memories of much happier times with great gratitude and affection. You not only made many things possible for us but you also helped in making them become realities where they had been mere dreams. We cannot thank you enough. For this reason, I will not end this tribute here but shall dwell a little more on that period when you were our own 'Broda Dapo' before others tried to 'steal' you and your fire from us by renaming you – 'Uncle D'.

For anyone over the age of 50, memory is like a vast echo chamber of hundreds of voices from the past. Some of these voices are distinct, others barely audible; some are melodious, others cacophonous; and some are immensely pleasing while others are harrowing in their disturbing effects. After the age of 50, the older one gets the more ambiguous and even more incommensurable to one's needs and control this echo chamber of voices from the past becomes. On account of this, it becomes more difficult to separate the pleasing, reassuring voices from those which confound and disturb in this echo chamber. Miraculously however, some voices remain somehow imperishably distinct. These are the voices I now recall in this tribute.

The three clearest voices that I recall here are those of Broda Dapo himself, then of Nelson Olawaiye and Mr. Modupe Oduyoye. It is difficult to be precise about the time, the date in one's teen years when one discovers in oneself a great thirst or yearning for experiencing life and the world through the knowledge that comes from books. Broda Dapo, Nelson Olawaiye and Mr. Oduyoye were the first set of authoritative elders to give me great encouragement in this passion and in doing so they gave it priceless validation.

Like Broda Dapo, Olawaiye was an Oke-Bola 'egbon'. I am not sure of this now, but I think that he went to Christ School, Ado-Ekiti. At any rate, he was a friend of Broda Dapo and both of them shared a passion for the arts, especially *belletristic* writing, foreign and local. Try as hard as I can, it remains difficult for me to recall the moment – and *how* – they discovered that I loved reading books and talking about them. All I can remember is that they were the only two 'Oke-Bola egbons' who talked a lot with me, about many things but primarily about books, thereby giving me invaluable encouragement at a period that was quite formative in my developing consciousness or sensibility.

I am almost certain that Broda Dapo is probably going to be very surprised when he reads this particular section of this tribute. That's because he probably does not remember that long before I formally

became his pupil as an undergraduate at UI, I had been in an informal but vital tutelage to him and his friend Olawaiye when, with the assurance that I would have their sympathetic and supportive ears, they were the only two Oke-Bola 'egbons' I could regale with accounts of materials I had gleaned from books I had checked out of the old Western Region library and the long defunct British Council and USIS libraries. But this is precisely the point I am trying to make here: I myself did not know at the time that I was in that relationship of informal tutelage with them at the time. With Mr. Oduyoye, I was always aware that I had much to learn from that bibliophile who took me under his wings and gave me maximum encouragement, within and outside the classroom. But with Broda Dapo and Olawaiye, full consciousness of the role they had played in my life would come much later. And here I can only say thankfully that this realisation came not too late for me to recognise and protect my own embrace of that kind informal but vital mentorship role in the lives of much younger wards and acquaintances. This leads to my closing observations and reflections in this short tribute on debts owed to Broda Dapo as *mentor extraordinaire* that I consider profoundly immeasurable.

To make a long story short here, let me allude to something known as 'fail in English, fail in all' during the period around which I am reflecting in this tribute. Simply, this meant, quite unequivocally, that failure in English in the West African School Certificate examinations meant failure in all the other subjects, no matter how brilliantly one had performed in those other subjects. In other words, until you eventually passed in English, you couldn't move forward in your studies. That's how fetishistic the status of English was in the educational system in those days. Indeed, beyond the educational system itself, this went to the heart of the claims of colonialism to be in essence not a mode of foreign domination but a civilising mission. This is a topic I have explored as *Igilango Geesi*, interestingly in the context of another tribute – to Wole Soyinka.

It was as a wonderfully enthralling and liberating embodiment of *Igilango Geesi* that Broda Dapo first entered my consciousness as a mentor. I recall this happenstance now distinctly. In his *elocution* in diverse forms and registers of speech acts – as actor or director; as conversationalist or interlocutor; as teacher and mentor - spoken Queen's English took on the most simultaneously impressive and unpretentious *sounding* one had ever heard of it. Let me try to make this clearer. I personally had no problems with 'fail in English, fail in all'. Better put, I did have a problem with it – but as a sort of vague but powerful misgivings about the disproportionate influence it exercised on our lives, this English that could be so dazzling and at the same time so alienated and alienating. I never watched or *heard* Broda Dapo in stage plays at Government College when

he was a student there, but all I know is that when he began to produce and direct plays at the Ibadan Grammar School when he taught there, they did not sound anything like GCI productions. These were generally Anglophilic to the point of apishness, though often dazzlingly so. I have no better designation for this than – the effective *domestication* of the Queen’s English, without apologies but also without cultural self-surrender to the ever lurking claims of the civilising mission of colonialism.

Of course, in the period about which I write here, I did not have full or critical awareness of these issues; more importantly I did not and *could not have* given these matters the designations I attach to them today. But this should not lead us into a false nominalism – the belief that unless you have a name for a phenomenon or until you have named and defined it, it doesn’t exist. Years later, ‘Uncle D’ replaced ‘Broda Dapo’ as I joined others who were not ‘omo Oke-Bola’ in more or less permanently inscribing the new name for this mentor. But there was no rupture in the qualities I had perceived in the earlier incarnation, ‘Broda Dapo’. In stage performances and television dramas, I was directed by ‘Uncle D’ but in these productions, I never encountered the charmed, sublime alienation of the GCI brand of theatrical, performative *Igilango Geesi*. Much later still, Professor Adelugba would identify and theorise about a cultural and linguistic phenomenon that he designated *Yorubanglish*, thereby considerably broadening the frame of reference around the issues under discussion here.

Incidentally, two big names in Nigerian English-language theatre, Soyinka and Osofisan, were also products of GCI. In their mature work, they also powerfully transformed vestiges of the imperial traditions they had imbibed at their famous alma mater and as a consequence, our modern drama and theatre were forever set on new paths of evolution and reinvention. But significantly, long before my encounters with Soyinka as another major mentor and with Osofisan as friend and intellectual soul-mate, it was in the context of my formal and informal tutelage to Broda Dapo that I personally first encountered and absorbed the liberating currents of this process.

There is a simple and unambiguous way of putting across the claim I am making here and I shall make an attempt at it in concluding this tribute. As ‘Uncle D’, the circle of those who found Professor Adelugba’s work and presence in the arts greatly liberating widened immeasurably; much earlier and at a sensitive period in my life, I had encountered in Broda Dapo this same bounty as a bequest he was barely conscious of. I was conscious of it then, but just barely. The years have deepened that

consciousness and it is immensely gratifying for me to be able at last to give voice to this gratitude in this tribute.

Life, health and vitality to you, Broda Dapo!