

## Professor Ogo Ofuani and the Resonance of Memory Across Space and Time

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Comparative Cognitive Processes and Systems

“Exploring Every Corner of the Cosmos in Search of Knowledge”

I write this essay in commemoration of the fact that no week passes in which some salient point made by Professor Ogo Ofuani, my teacher and later, colleague, in the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, does not come to my mind.

I have not met Ofuani again in the eleven years since I left Nigeria, and have spoken briefly to him on the phone only twice, about four or five years apart, but his influence clearly is deep and reverberates in me as a voice of wisdom, unobtrusive, self-validating in relation to my current adventures, and yet operating in a space of freedom that leaves me free to accept or reject it, since the only penalty for rejection is the consequence following on experience, not any external arbiter or even inner judge.

I am amazed at Ofuani’s continued influence on me because years before I left the University of Benin and Nigeria, I understood myself to have liberated myself from whatever compulsions or loyalties my relationship with him implied. I saw him as part of the departmental establishment I was fleeing from to find my fortune in freer climes where my humanity would be better appreciated. In spite of the strategic role members of the department had played in advancing my career, I needed to grow beyond the space they allowed.

In fact, it was not until the tenth year of my time in England that Ofuani began to come to my mind repeatedly. In that year, fundamental changes were taking place in terms of my efforts to reposition myself in relation to my aspirations.

This repositioning involved much ambition, significant creative thinking, even cunning skirting the edges of breaking the law, pain, and recurrently, in the midst of the scraping against body and mind, Ofuani would come to mind.

Was it the image of him perpetually corporate in suit and tie in an environment where dress was left purely to one’s own initiative, insisting that one needs to look smart particularly when things are hard?

Is it his one line comment in relation to the consequences of my choosing to go my own way in relation to disagreement with the postgraduate board at my PhD seminar in the dept-“you are beginning to feel sorry for yourself”, pulling me back to my authentic self, the one beyond the need or desire to conform against the imperatives of the deepest self, as so beautifully described by Ayi Kwei Armah in the conversation between Densu and Damfo in *The Healers*?

Is it his description of his strategies of personal hygiene in relation to personal responsibility for oneself that reinforced the strategies I applied with such success in my leap to a level of corporate positioning that I could not have achieved otherwise?

Is it the vivid image of his showing me his notebook demonstrating his methods of crafting an academic article, making vivid an understanding of one kind of successful academic article as a product of a structured process, thereby potentially demystifying the concept of an academic article for a new academic as I was and still am ?

Is it the indelible impression of his veneration of scholarship and devotion to ultimate standards of excellence, and his resonating celebration of the concentration of academic culture he described the University of Ibadan as being during his own not untroubled PhD there?

Ofuani lives on in the flesh. May he live long to his satisfaction.

To me, however, he has already become an ancestor.

The concept of ancestor needs to be expanded to embrace the inspirational living ones.

In all respects, Ofuani's abiding influence, its recurrence in relation to various strategic situations in my life within a context of both freedom and compelling power, recalls Wole Soyinka's memorable evocation of the voice of the ancestors "Do you see those whose touches are often felt, whose wisdoms come suddenly to the mind when the wisest have shaken their heads and uttered 'it cannot be done' "?

We need to celebrate the terrestrial personage, embodied and yet radiating out his influence through guidance given in love imprinted in the depths of the mind, an imprint resonating across space and time.