

Professor Lai Oso: Tribute to a Departed Scholar and Icon of Nigerian Journalism

Pelumi Folajimi
Obafemi Awolowo University
Harvard University

Professor Lai Oso was a renowned and celebrated Nigerian Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication. He lived around October 15, 1956 and June 24, 2023. Before his unfortunate passing, he was the President of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria. He studied at the University of Lagos (BA), University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University (B.Sc), and University of Leicester (Ph.D, 1987). He and I lived in the same house, at Elite Area, Abeokuta, between 2000 and 2001. He lived in a three bedroom flat which was different from the flat I lived. I was a student of Abeokuta Grammar School while he was the Deputy Rector of Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta.

It was a fantastic experience being the neighbor of such an amazing scholar. His two children, Simisola Oso (female) and Moyosola Oso (male) were my friends. Simisola and Moyosola used to, fondly, call him “Daddy.” I, too, used to call him “Daddy.” Moyosola was, probably, his best friend. His relationship with Moyosola was full of fun. His wife, Mrs. Abimbola Oso, was motherly in her acceptance and treatment of me. The children and I used to call her “Mummy,” just as we would call Professor Oso “Daddy.” I was almost a member of the family because I was often in their flat and often in their family car. On certain occasions, I had found myself in his study where he had a forest of books. No doubt, he invested in books. His son, Moyosola, used to say that his father guided those books, jealously. One of the easiest ways to cross the path of Professor Oso was to treat his books carelessly. The family, soon, moved from the house I lived and they moved to their family home, built by the family; the new house was only about ten minutes walk from me and I was never hesitant to visit the family in the new home. I remained an intimate member of the family and they accepted me as theirs. I was Moyosola’s senior, though not in the same secondary school with him. I was in my final year, in Abeokuta Grammar School, when Professor Oso invited me to the new house to teach Moyosola certain aspects of Literature. I felt honoured and glad to receive such an invitation from him. I was glad to sit with Moyosola and spent my time to teach him Literature. What an amazing family!

I was never in the classroom or in school with Professor Oso but I had professional encounter with him via his professional work in Journalism and Mass Communication. His home and his car were often occupied by newspapers which he often bought and read. I read some of the newspapers with him. Living in the same building with him, I would see him drive out of the compound and, shortly afterwards, I would hear him talk on radio. He was the host of “Topical Issues,” a weekly radio program which focused on addressing and engaging the most topical issues in Nigerian socio-economic and political spaces. The weekly program used to hold on Ogun State Broadcasting Corporation, OGBC. As a communication and journalism expert, Professor Oso brought his professional know-how to inform, enlighten, and entertain his audiences. He used “Topical Issues” as a platform of reaching out to hundreds of thousands, or millions, of OGBC listeners. It was around 2000 when Nigeria just moved into a democratic dispensation, after getting rid of military dictatorship. “Topical Issues” was a platform through which Professor Oso enlightened his audiences about the dynamism of Nigerian democracy and the corruption of Nigerian politicians. Professor Oso was penetrating and unsparing in his criticism of political tyranny and official corruption in Nigerian politics. I often spent my time listening to him and listening to his audiences calling in on the live program in which they (the audiences) engaged him and interacted with him.

His professional sarcasm and enlightened satire were visible in his electronic journalism and his print media. I read a series of his writings on the pages of newspapers, many of which were available in hard copy and on online platforms. In the early 2000s, when President Olusegun Obasanjo granted amnesty to President Charles Taylor who had fled the war-torn Liberia and had relocated to Nigeria in exile, Professor Oso wrote to engage the activities of Mrs. Taylor who had attended a Sunday worship service at a big and famous church in Nigeria. Published in the national newspaper, Professor Oso criticized and ridiculed Mrs. Taylor as a woman dancing and rejoicing, in church, as if she were not aware of the damage that her family had caused to the innocent people of Liberia where, due to political ineptitude of President Charles Taylor, a huge number of innocent civilians have perished in the civil war.

As a lecturer, Professor Oso pursued his scholarly career at Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State, Caleb University, and University of Lagos. At Lagos State University, he served as the Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies. As a practicing journalist, he worked with Radio Nigeria and News Agency of Nigeria. His scholarly articles have appeared in *Africa Media Review*, *New Media and Mass Communication*, and *Media Watch*, apart from many other journals. We shall remember him for a long time, as we continue to celebrate his impacts and his contributions. His demise is a great loss to Nigerian journalism and the Nigerian university system. In him, we lost an intellectual icon whose unfortunate demise leaves us with a vacuum.