

Obituary

PROFESSOR IAN TAYLOR, 1969–2021: AN APPRECIATION

On 26 January 2021, I received what I had no way of knowing at the time would be my final correspondence from Ian. In the email copied to my colleague Dr Caroline Valois, Ian said that he had “been extremely unwell lately and not sure how things are going to progress, either in terms of the disease or the treatment”, but expressed “hope to be back in action at some point”. I responded that he should stay strong, and that he should rest assured that both Caroline and I were rooting for him and hoping to see him back on his feet. Sadly, Ian did not make it, as he took his final bow a few weeks later on 22 February.

Ian was a young 52 at the time of his passing, a fact belied by the sheer scale of his scholarly accomplishments. He was quite easily one of the most prodigious Africanists of the past quarter of a century, essentially turning the fields of International Relations, African politics and the nascent field of Sino-African studies into a one-man palatinate. Ian wrote copiously and compellingly, securing a permanent advantage over the rest of the field because of his inimitable passion for the phenomena he studied so diligently and scrupulously. Shortly before his passing, the University of St Andrews, where he taught and mentored with such rare distinction, conferred on him a Doctor of Letters (D. Litt.) degree in recognition of his outstanding corpus.

Africa – its travails and the conundrum of its underdevelopment – was Ian’s first and never jilted love, and the easiest way to elicit a glint in his eyes was to bring up something about the continent. Ian was no armchair academic. Blessed with an unflagging energy, he travelled widely across the continent (around the world as a matter of fact), collecting data, attending conferences, visiting institutions, and building personal and professional relationships. He was the quintessential peripatetic scholar, teaching at various times at the University of Botswana, Ben-Gurion University (Israel), University of Edinburgh, University of Addis Ababa (to which he donated his famously extensive library), University of Hong Kong, Mbarara University (Uganda), Renmin University (China), and Zhejiang Normal University (China), among others.

Although I was more than familiar with his work, I never had the honour of meeting Ian until 2017 when we both accepted the invitation to co-edit the journal. I expected to meet someone stuffy and distant; such was his standing in the field. To my surprise, I found Ian approachable, self-deprecating, and

witty, and we quickly struck up a friendship that only deepened with the passage of time. I teased him to no end, especially about his passion for Brentford Football Club; he repaid the favour at every opportunity. It is difficult to imagine anyone who could be more pleased now that Brentford has made it to the highest echelon of English football. The outpouring of tributes from various parts of the world following his passing testified to the reach of Ian's reputation and the staggering number of lives he touched.

The quality of Ian's mind was such that he could distill a wealth of information into a singular, commanding insight. He was equally at home discussing the latest developments in Marxist theory; the South African Development Community (SADC); Chinese foreign policy; the political economy of Africa; Gramscian theory; and conflict diamonds.

But it is, above all, as a family man, generous friend, and well-rounded human being that Ian will be missed. As soon as he knew of my devotion to coffee, he made a point of dispatching to me, often without advance warning, the finest coffee beans from some of the world's most exotic locations. Asked how much I owed him he would deflect the answer by saying that I would buy the first drink next time we met. Now that time will never come. Instead, I will spill an espresso in Ian's memory, to the many African leaders and intellectuals whose agency he took so seriously, and whose personal and political complexities he embraced and celebrated in his work.

Rest in peace, my friend
Ebenezer Obadare, August 2021.