

Dr. George Adu: A valedictory remembrance

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Ras Adu is a man of many parts. On the football pitch he was called 'kofanko' – a great dribbler, skillful player, and a prolific goal scorer.

George Adu was a seasoned economist concerned with the critical questions that mankind is faced with in the 21st Century. He spent the best part of his academic life researching and teaching on the key questions that impacted the lives of ordinary people, ranging from the link between environment and growth; the sustainability of growth in the era of excessive public spending; the role of social planners in instigating and mitigating growth spurts; the interactive effects of informality, finance and growth to the shift to alternative, but more sustainable and cheaper sources of energy for a clean and healthy planet. George transitioned on 09 February 2019, aged 42, in Sweden while receiving treatment.

To those who are very close to him the news came as a big shock, and up to date, I have not personally recovered from the events of 09 February. On hearing the passing of his son early in the morning, his father, Opayin Adu, out of shock, also passed. Such is the extent of tragedy that has befallen both the biological and intellectual families of George Adu, to whom this issue of the *African Review of Economics and Finance* (AREF) is dedicated.

I met George in 1998 when we both enrolled as undergraduate students for the Bachelor's Degree in Economics and History at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). So, we had a solid 21 years of unbroken friendship and brotherhood until his passing. George was a fine scholar, a gifted individual and a committed citizen. Between 1998 and 2002, he obtained a joint BSc (honours) in Economics and History. In 2002, he was one of the few excellent candidates appointed as teaching assistants in the then Department of Economics and Industrial Management where he excelled at teaching Public Finance. From the very beginning, it was clear George had a deep and abiding interest and love for academia. Consequently, he enrolled for a master's degree in the same department. While pursuing his M.A. Economics degree at KNUST, he was invited to study MSc Economics at Umea University in Sweden. After graduating from Umea in 2005, he returned to KNUST to complete his M.A in economics in 2006. Both prepared him for a brief teaching appointment (2006-2008), which was followed by doctoral research at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala-Sweden, from where he obtained his PhD in Economics in 2012. From 2013 until his passing, he lectured economics at KNUST.

'Prof. Owuo was a symbol of straight talk, sharp intuition and unwavering insistence on the rules of right conduct'.

*Imhotep Paul
Alagidede*



George explaining a point about energy efficiency, natural resource rents with power and fire.

George Adu was, in one word, a revolutionary. He had abiding interest in the social sciences and he devoted a great deal of time seeking to understand the sources of economic growth. He was highly gifted in mathematics and this made



*Imhotep and George
at Nelson Mandela
house in Soweto.
They raise the fist
and chant 'Amandla',
which in Nguni
means power! They
invoke the power of
the ancestors and
transmit it to the
people.*

economics a relatively easy subject for him. Although reserved and shy in class, the keenness of his intellect and the sharpness of his mind were crystal clear. He would bring together students who were weak at mathematical economics and offer them free tutorials. It was, therefore, not surprising that he emerged as one of the top students in economics in the 2002 graduating class, earning him the most enviable position of a teaching assistant in the department. In contrast to economics, he loathed his history lessons. He preferred to trade off his history lectures for a good siesta, a practice which irritated his history lecturers. When he attended his history class he tended to show less and less interest in the topics of the lecture. Initially nobody could understand his behavior but upon careful reflection it is clear that the university history then, and now, were too Eurocentric and too idealist for George whose interests were more in contextual questions, features often missing in many history textbooks. This approach to history, together with its poor record of paving the way for employment, disenchanted the bright and pragmatic George.

Not only did he stick to his plan of pursuing a career in economics at the very highest level, he demonstrated great tact, intellect and keen acumen in all manner of academic pursuits. He distinguished himself in all the branches of economics, particularly in macroeconomics, monetary economics, financial economics, and environmental economics.

With relentless passion, he infected his peers, students and his teachers with his high levels of enthusiasm, hard work and integrity. Both in the classroom



Imhotep presenting the maiden edition of the Ghanaian Journal of Economics to George in his office in 2015.

and outside of it, George showed significant comprehension of the various dimensions of modern economics and he excelled in the application of the various tools for policy analysis.

A great teacher, an energetic and astute researcher, and a committed mentor, he consulted for governments and international organisations. Typical among these are his ground breaking works on exchange rate dynamics and pass through effects on domestic prices; natural resource revenues and public investment in resource-rich economies; public private partnerships in mining; resource efficient and cleaner production financing. George's journey in academia is one that is exemplary and deserves celebration.

Rising from a position of disadvantage, he pushed aside all impediments and made it to the university under extreme conditions. He demonstrated that properly understood, every circumstance can be turned to advantage. He rose from teaching assistant to a senior lecturer by dint of hard work. In 2014, he was a visiting scholar to the Wits Business School where I worked with him on deriving the mathematical conditions for optimal environmental pollution consistent with sustainable economic growth, and the effects of environmental quality on different growth outcomes. This work subsequently culminated in a joint United Nations University World Institute for Development Economic Research (UNU-WIDER) and African Economic Research Consortium (AERC)

research project which further shed light on the climate-growth question. Between September 2015 and August 2016, he was a Senior Researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala-Sweden, where he gave his best attention to the questions of natural resource management, governance and proper utilization. It was at this same place that some of his best works on energy efficiency emerged. At the national level, he made his mark when he became a DRUSSA Policy Fellow at the Ministry of Trade and Industry where he helped to raise the profile of research and policy advocacy at the ministry. In 2014, he was promoted to Senior Lecturer, a post he held until his death in February 2019.

George Adu would have most certainly risen to the very pinnacle of his career. At the time of his death, he had supervised and mentored many PhD and master's students who now work with organisations of influence. His scholarly contribution is second to none among his contemporaries in the Department of Economics. At his relatively short spell in academia, he left a vast landmark in the numerous high profile authored articles that have received significant acclaim in citations and impact in the world. His main contributions to research is summarised as part of the celebration of his life by one of his students, Muazu Ibrahim, in this volume and readers should refer to page 15 for more information.

Working with George has been both a delight and a privilege. His enquiring mind and attention to detail would wake the most slumbering student and colleague up from the deepest slumber and stupor. His sense of humor and no-nonsense talk was admirable. His humility and gentleness remain qualities that will never fade from the minds of those whom he met and with whom he shared his life. In 2009, when I founded the *African Review of Economics and Finance* (AREF) journal, George became one of the pioneering editors. He held the post of Associate Editor and contributed an article to the maiden edition of AREF in 2009. He remained a staunch supporter, handling reviews, contributing articles and helping to establish the AREF network as the most vibrant forum for engaging critical minds on the future of the continent. He stayed true to this course, even to the very last days of his life. In the lead up to his passing, he and I had a prescient conversation in which he asked for all the articles under his submission to be reassigned for review because of his failing health. As if he foresaw his passing, he blessed AREF and handed over everything in his care before transitioning. The AREF family owes him a great debt of gratitude. He has left an indelible mark on the network and his legacy will find great reception in the current and future networks of members.

To the graduating class of 2002, George was affectionately known as ‘Prof. Owuo’. Others called him ‘Prof. Chume’. These aliases reflect his strict adherence to high standards of excellence, and discipline in matters of academic pursuit. Prof. Owuo was a symbol of straight talk, sharp intuition and unwavering insistence on the rules of right conduct. Prof. Owuo is truly a legend. He was a very competent long distance runner, and in football, his most passionate sport, he was a master dribbler and a serial goal scorer.

His rich gifts will always be here. He left a wife, three very bright daughters and a son. This edition of the *African Review of Economics and Finance* is dedicated to the celebration of the works of a great economist, policy maker, reformer, philosopher, father and warm-hearted soul. AREF celebrates 10 years this year, and without the contribution that this powerful being brought to this institution, the experiment would not have gone far. Life is but a dream. Death is awakening to real life. It is a beginning, and not an end. And without death, there can be no life. The great George Adu is very much a part of the journey that we are undertaking. We will miss him in flesh but we know he remains with us in spirit, to help bring about all the dreams that we dreamt together. May the ancestors receive him well.