

MAURICE TADADJEU ICON OF SELF-SACRIFICE AND SERVICE TO HUMANITY

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Maurice Tadadjeu, linguist, educationist, academician, researcher and humanist of exceptional prowess, commitment and dedication to service quite unexpectedly, took on early the fight to eternity on the thirtieth of December 2012, practically refusing to see another new year on the planet earth.

Maurice Tadadjeu was a man of many distinguished parts and excelled in all of them or almost. *He was an ideologist* of African unity and a *front-line activist* (in the finest sense of the word) who laboured relentlessly up front and behind the scenes with the likes of his '*ami personnel*', President Alfa Konare in the struggle of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to become the African Union (AU). Even then, the present AU concept of autonomous states loosely related is a far cry for Maurice Tadadjeu's deep-seated vision of a United States of Africa, an emergent USA, a veritable 'Confederation of African States' united in its destiny for a historic grandeur and economic prosperity.

Maurice was vice-President of the OAU/AU's prestigious civil society institution 'Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSSOC) and during his tenure, he worked hard with the team in terms of dynamic service to give the institution meaning, functional relevance and prestige.

The AU Constitution project which he and other colleagues wrote from the vantage point of this vision of Confederation of African States is alive and making the rounds in political circles across the continent and gathering adherents to the cause. Maurice Tadadjeu's role and influence in the creation and implantation of the OAU/African Union Clubs in schools, in colleges and Universities on the continent is fundamental and determinant as a forum for ideological orientation of the rising generation to ideals of continental grandeur and the emergence of African nations.

Maurice Tadadjeu, was an astute educationist whose vision of education transcended current elitist models that favor the creation of a class of governing elites for the government positions. He had aversion for this education via a policy of limited and exclusive use of exoglossic or foreign languages expropriated from Europe and appropriated in Africa as the nation's only *official languages*, with the consequent marginalization and indeed exclusion from the development process, of the majority African populations who speak mainly or only an indigenous African language. The situation, Maurice Tadadjeu could not stand. It hurt him from the mind, through the body to the bones and the marrow.

Eked by this unfortunate reality, Maurice Tadadjeu devoted thirty-seven years of his university teaching career to the fight to redress the situation. He enrolled in the continental army in the fight for what has become known as the '*mother tongue based multilingual education*', the advocacy for the policy of mainstreaming the mother tongue as language of

education with the official languages English, French, Portuguese and Spanish as ‘partner language’. He fought on all fronts for the implementation of this policy, at the national, the regional and continental levels. He rose from ranks to impose himself as the *generalissimo*, a foremost theoretician and practitioner in the mother tongue-based education industry. Among the litany of successes registered, Maurice will be remembered for the immense contributions to the advocacy that led to the revision of the 1961 and 1972 Cameroon Constitutions from a provision to the effect that ‘English and French are the official languages of Cameroon’ (*un point, un trait*) to the more progressive constitution which in addition, recognized the value of Cameroonian languages and consecrated their development and use in the school system. Although there is a gaping gap between the policy and its effective implementation, it has nevertheless given rise to the 1998 law on education and a number of decrees in favor of the effective use of Cameroon languages in education as a medium of instruction.

Maurice conceived and developed the “Projet de Recherche opérationnelle pour l’Enseignement des Langues au Cameroun’ (PROPELCA) after the IFE (Nigeria) model. The PROPELCA project which demonstrated beyond reasonable doubts that children who studied primary school subjects first in their mother tongue and later in English or French performed significantly better than those who studied these subjects uniquely in English or French has become a major reference in the advocacy of the *Mother tongue-based multilingual education* by the UNESCO experts. The results of PROPELCA were verified and ascertained by external assessors led by Prof. Cairns of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the International community as a reference in the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education.

The work by Maurice Tadadjeu, his students and colleagues produced from this project have had a lasting impact on issues of language planning and applied linguistics at the global level as attested by the various citation indexes and the award of the international linguapax for 2005 to Maurice Tadadjeu.

In the ideological war between adepts of developing a few mega-languages from the development of Africa and the developing languages, Maurice Tadadjeu pitched camp with the later and developed cogent psychological and sociolinguistic arguments in favor of a project leading to the introduction of what he calls *Basic Standardization of all African Languages (BASAL)*. The fact that the UNESCO 2003 Expert committee on the endangerment of world languages has taken position for advocacy for the revitalization of all endangered languages as well as the development, maintenance and use of all languages in education, is a vindication of the position of which Maurice Tadadjeu had fought for decades before UNESCO initiative.

At the continental level, Maurice was very respected for his intellectual ideas, knowledge, experience, commitment and dedication sacrificially put at the service of the continental language policy lobby. In this regard, Maurice worked diligently and fervently with others in the several committees of the African Union that revised and produced the compendium of new texts that were adopted by the heads of States at the Khartoum summit in January 2006. (*The Language Plan of Action for Africa 2006, the Charter for African*

Cultural Renaissance 2006, the Statutes of the African Academy of languages (ACALAN) 2006: The year of African Languages).

Together these texts for which Maurice made a significant input, constitute the language policy of the African Union; a policy which enjoins African countries to develop and use the African languages for Africa's development with the official languages of the colonial heritage as *partner languages* in the development enterprise. The AU considers the partnership between the languages of the African heritage and the languages of colonial legacy as an indispensable condition for the mobilization of the masses of the rural population for effective development in the perspective of emergence.

The African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) is the African Union's power house for giving impulsion to and coordinating language policy and implementation action on the continent.

Maurice Tadadjeu was, in 2007 elected and approved by the African Union Commission to serve as member of the first governing board of ACALAN in the distinguished company of Professor Ayo Bamgbose of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and Dr. Neville Alexander of the University of Cape Town, South Africa. This was evidence of the continental recognition at the highest professional level, given that Maurice who was considerably much younger was to occupy the same space in the orbit with continental giants of the likes of Ayo Bamgbose and Neville Alexander. But he unquestionably deserved the honor bestowed to him.

The African language policy for which Maurice worked so enthusiastically and so fervently is being implemented at various levels and at different rates of progression by the member States of the African Union since the commitment made at the Khartoum summit. In Cameroon, the Ministries of Basic, Secondary and Higher Education are actively involved in implementing this policy, especially as it is congruent with the provisions of the 1996 constitution and the 1998 law on education, It is gratifying that Maurice was actively sought and involved in working with all the three Ministries before his untimely exit.

In times like these, some of us who, as Maurice Tadadjeu's elder brothers in the profession have worked with him over the years, from ideological planning in the Diaspora (in the USA) to effective action on the continent and country of our birth, cannot help but feel a special sense of personal loss. The departure of Maurice at this time is certainly a loss felt by the family to whom I address my personal condolences. It is also a loss to the international community of scholars with whom Maurice has worked over the years in the realization of the continental project.

Maurice, you have jumped over the queue! You always preferred the fast track! Yesterday, it was friend Neville Alexander, who after years in Robin Island with Mandela served the new South Africa and the continent diligently and took off to eternity for glorious splendor. Today, You, the prince inheritor of our dreams, you have taken the earlier flight to eternity, making me look like an over aged, out of space, out of time dinosaur! Well, it is God's will and there is therefore no appeal!

You have taken the flight to eternity an early and undeserved exit; so unexpected that you could not wait for your students to organize a proper academic honors for you in the form of a well-deserved *festschrift*. We are left with memories of your pugnacity, your

dynamic engagement with adversity; memories of ambitious plans and of your determination to conquer the unconquerable and win all battles in the struggle for our noble cause. These memories we cherish; these memories we will treasure.

As I said on the occasion of Neville's funeral, I will say this again. I know it is not your wish that we should lay down our tolls and gloat for long over your departure. So, like the African freedom fighters of yester-years, we resolutely pledge to continue with the work/ 'a lutt'a continua'.

As you go through the pearly gates of splendor into heavenly glory, fair the well. ***Ghene ku zeshi'ne, Anwi fogho a gho.*** Arriver merci. To God be the Glory for everything we have done.