



JOHN DAVID YEADON PEEL

# John David Yeadon Peel

## 1941–2015

... [T]he modest time-depth of an anthropologist's personal acquaintance with another society seems to sharpen his capacity to appreciate the balance of continuity and change in its history over the longer span. (Peel, 2016b, 549)<sup>1</sup>

DOES THE SENTIMENT APPLY as well to another person as to another society? John appears fully formed in the accounts of the personal acquaintances of his early career. His own writings tell a similar story of consistency. The demeanour, mannerisms, opinions, habits of speech, restless energy and relentless memory of the younger man are those of the established professor I met in the early 1980s. It would take a family memoir to get to the bottom of an ageless entirety that was not, in either constancy or character, wholly of his times. I remarked to Tom McCaskie at John's funeral that although John and I were separated by a decade in age, the difference always felt like a generation. Amused, because they were a mere five years apart, Tom confessed the same: John's personality, as he nailed it, was formed before the cultural watershed of the 1960s. A small pointer, but it's uncommon nowadays, when even prime ministers are (not necessarily warmly) referred to as Maggie, Dave and Tony, to be known affectionately by initials. JDY or JDYP seemed at home in a generation of men with initials—W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, G. M. Trevelyan—but a monographic acronym trumps even these and has something heraldic about it. The effect hinged around the prescience of that 'Y'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All John Peel's publications referred to in this memoir are listed in date order at the end.

<sup>2</sup> John also claimed to be the real John Peel in contradistinction to a well-known DJ, born John Ravenscroft, who adopted the name in 1967 as cover when working for a pirate radio station.

I have tried to follow John's life story chronologically, but its robust threads have wanted to disregard the timely order of things, so I have had to allow them some licence. John seems, whichever way you order it, fully present in every moment of his life.

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Born in Dumfries, West Lowland Scotland, on 13 November 1941, John David Yeadon Peel was mostly raised in the English Midlands as the oldest of the two sons and two daughters born to (Nora) Kathleen Peel (née Yeadon, died 1988) who had married their father in 1939. When John was a youngster, the family moved to suburban Sutton Coldfield once his father, E. A. (Edwin Arthur) Peel (1911–92), a talented artist in oils and later in watercolours, left the University of Durham in 1950 to become Professor of Education at the University of Birmingham, a post he held until 1978, serving as President of the British Psychological Society in 1961–2 (Anon, 1963). Education ran in the family: John's paternal grandfather and mother were both teachers. A painting by his father of John and his two sisters in their childhood backyard held pride of place over the mantelpiece of John's last home; I never asked him why he was parading a union flag across it. John was to take a University of London DLitt, or higher doctorate, by publication in 1985 on the grounds—so he told friends, though additional more complex motives seem likely—that his father's doctoral robes should not go to waste. The avoidance of waste is telling in the filial gesture: hard work and steadiness were likely to have been qualities formed in John by his father (which John later looked for and valued in others). Edwin Peel was Liverpool—or more exactly Everton—born (whence John's support for that football team) but educated in Yorkshire; his *Dictionary of National Biography* entry (Tomes, n.d.) describes him as a 'craggy-faced Yorkshire man', whose principles of education owed much to observing his four children grow through the lens of Jean Piaget's developmental theories of learning.<sup>3</sup>

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I suppose John's attention must have been drawn to this coincidence, since I cannot visualise his ear pressed to a transistor radio listening to alternative rock on Radio London in the 1960s.

<sup>3</sup>John's sister Susan confirms this, as does Peel Snr's work on the growth of thinking during adolescence, described by him as an empirical investigation building on the conception that Piaget expressed of a working through of some of the irreconcilabilities between the actual and the possible in young adults' experience of the world (E. A. Peel, 1971). This seems at odds with Caroline Ifeka's (2015) statement that Peel Snr rejected Piaget's theories (2015). For Peel Snr's papers at the University of Birmingham, see <<http://calmview.bham.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=XUS105>> (accessed 6 January 2017).

Reaching adolescence and adulthood in the 1950s, at thirteen the young research subject became a Foundation Scholarship boy at King Edward's School, Birmingham, which professes (on its website) to cater for clever and committed students willing to learn to love study and pursue excellence. No question of their success in either selection or outcome. Directly from school, John won entry as a Higgs Scholar to Balliol College, Oxford in 1959, graduating in 1963 with a first in 'Literae Humaniores', fluent reading-Latin that never left him and a commitment to the study of original texts, which included, as I learned only after his death, an enthusiasm for heraldry, sketching and colouring coats of arms collected in albums. The habit of thinking about families, including his own, dynastically preceded John's experience of Africa where it found a comfortable home. While he may have specialised in 'human learning', divine learning was just as close to the heart of a lifelong Anglican. Together, human and divine studies thoroughly prepared him to study Christianity comparatively.

From Oxford, John continued his studies immediately at the London School of Economics (LSE) where, remarkably, a PhD in Sociology was written in three years that included research in Nigeria (predominantly in Lagos and Ibadan in 1964–5). Quite why and how he found himself a sociologist studying religious change among the Yoruba in Nigeria I have not heard explained satisfactorily, and I regret that I never thought to ask him. Even Tom McCaskie's (2005, 30) accounts shed no definitive light on this, though he remarks that John's path may well have been blocked at Oxford, while sociology was considered an exciting and expanding field in the 1960s. John's father probably played some role in refining an initial interest that was likely to have been rooted in religious change and the history of Anglicanism rather than in intensive knowledge of the Yoruba. John's sister Susan recalls their father returning from trips to Africa as an external examiner bearing what seemed to them exotic gifts and recollections. The wide interests of his mentor, LSE Professor of Sociology Donald MacRae, must have been part of the attraction of moving there, and these may have been influential if the doctoral project was not formed fully. But it still seems a leap for a young scholar to make—and to be permitted to make—from 'Greats', or 'Classics', to the sociology of religion in West Africa; not one that would be countenanced by today's 'standards of excellence' for all that they are supposed to emphasise interdisciplinarity. Yet the happy outcome was that John discovered in the Yoruba a people of the scale, historical complexity and contemporary importance to engage the wide range of his curiosities for the remainder of his life, in

fact to do so increasingly, and Yorubas gained in him their finest modern social historian or historical ethnographer. And, as they grew in his affections, John identified the qualities that made the Yoruba exceptional in Africa south of the Sahara, and delineated these in ways, to which I shall return in more detail, that were to prove challenging to his comparative sociology. One of the three major ethnic groups of Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, Yoruba also live in the neighbouring countries of Benin and Togo, as well as providing the identity of choice of many North, South and Caribbean Americans. John was cautious about the last, American, category. 'I use "Yoruba" in the conventional sense', he wrote in his final book:

as used by the vast majority of self-described Yoruba, namely people who have the Yoruba language as their mother tongue or who, even if they have lost it or live outside the Yoruba homeland, still have close links with those who do, like the children of Yoruba parents who have moved abroad. But I do not count as Yoruba people of some other backgrounds who have assumed Yoruba names or who refer to themselves as Yoruba in the context of their practicing *oriṣa* religion. (2015a, 284, fn.1)

Population figures have to be estimates given these circumstances of wide distribution and fuzzy categorisation, but a Yoruba population of around forty million is a common claim and provides some sense of scale.

To return to my sequential narrative, John's first book, based on the LSE doctorate he had submitted during his twenty-fifth year in 1966 as 'A sociological study of two independent churches among the Yoruba of Nigeria', became a modest modern classic, charting the rise of 'Aladura', the churches of 'those who pray', notably the Christ Apostolic Church and the Cherubim and Seraphim, during the forty-odd years before his research, to which an emerging urban, lower middle class turned for help with 'this-worldly' problems of health and well-being and, in doing so, turned away from mission-introduced Anglicanism. The book radically rewrote theories of conversion by pointing first to the enduring importance for African religions of the means to deliver effects now, in the world of the living, rather than promising blessings deferred to the world to come, and second to the 'reasonableness' of these means that made them attractive to converts. Well before the later twentieth-century upsurge in popularity of Pentecostalism and of the gospel of prosperity, John noted that Christian poverty was already an unwelcome message. *Aladura: a Religious Movement among the Yoruba* (1968) provided ethnographic grist to the anthropologist Robin Horton's influential theory of the 'rationality' of African conversion launched in a 1971 article that was largely a

recapitulation and generalisation of John's book. The original print run of 2,000 copies sold out in ten years, respectable sales for a specialist monograph that was well reviewed. But John became dissatisfied with the overwhelmingly sociological character of his analysis and, as a thick file at the International African Institute (IAI) attests, was never able to rouse sufficient enthusiasm to write the substantial postscript needed for a planned reprint.

Notwithstanding his reservations about it, *Aladura* had the tone and breadth of reference that remained characteristic of John's later work. These qualities are already in the doctoral thesis which had been revised relatively lightly to become the book. Apart from dropping a couple of short sections concerned with definitional issues around sects and syncretism, and slightly toning down the Weberian references, the main changes occurred in the framing introductory and concluding sections, though even here not in their entirety, where a predominantly historical perspective on similarities gave way to one based in sociological comparison. The book concludes by noting that two transitions (one from primitive to world religions, and the other the religious response to the change from rural to industrial societies) which took place a millennium apart in Europe, occurred together in Africa. The first saw religious and cosmological thought differentiated; the second brought about a separation between religious and social allegiances (1968, 299). After citing examples that include Hellenised Jews at the birth of Pentecostalism, George Eliot's evocations of a dissenting congregation and miners in South Wales, and noting common tendencies in rationalisation between them, John's parting paragraph abruptly dissents from what has gone before: 'Although we aspire to relate systems of ideas to the social situations which gave them birth, the ideas live their own life. Of all elements of a social system, ideas are the most likely to find root in a novel situation.' Perhaps, he writes, it is the 'particularity of beliefs' that counts, which are summed up in the words of the Yoruba politician Chief Obafemi Awolowo: 'They believed in the potency [‘efficacy’ in the thesis] of prayer' (1968, 300).

Much of John's later work is foreshadowed here, not just his concern for the degree of effective independence of ideas, which remained in a creative tension with his concern for their social contexts, but in more specific ways his intuitions about a modern Yoruba elite being made in his time and the importance to them of Awolowo's example, the role of the forgotten pastors and village evangelists in spreading Christianity (1966, 101), the place of Christianity in the making of Yoruba identity and self-characterisation, and the largely accommodating relations between

Yoruba Christianity and Islam (1966, 232–3). John's later work would also pursue parallels for which a classical education had prepared him: between Yoruba and Greek city states, or between the impact of Christianity on Roman and Yoruba cults. A consequence of this way of formulating questions was that, as he came to know the anthropologists better, absorbing their theories and methods, John never suffered from their later concerns about exoticism. Yoruba were not exotic for John who accommodated them welcomingly within his capacious view of universal human history and sociological comparison, allied to an equal curiosity about parish-pump politics. *Aladura* was the first in the trilogy of works on Yoruba religion that will be the most enduring aspect of John's achievement. But for all it became apparent to him later, and inklings of it are evident with the wisdom of hindsight, nothing indicates this design was consciously present from the outset.

John did not return soon to West Africa. While still researching his PhD, he had accepted a lectureship in Sociology at the University of Nottingham.<sup>4</sup> There, at an Anglican chaplaincy tea party, he met his first wife, Jenny (Jennifer Christine Pare), like him from the Midlands, in her case Leicester, then a doctoral researcher in Psychology (PhD 1972). They married in 1969. Having quickly completed the revision of his thesis for submission as a monograph by November 1966, John was already at work on a biography and a volume of selected writings by Herbert Spencer (1971, 1972),<sup>5</sup> once the most influential of British Victorian social theorists; another man of the Midlands but by then fallen into understandable neglect. Mastering their nineteenth-century context in order to contribute to the wider 'sociology of knowledge', and reading the entirety of Spencer's prolix and repetitive writings, John showed that Spencer's evolutionary views attracted Victorians, and flattered their self-image, for the same reasons that they lost appeal in the twentieth century. Wondering how much of the correspondence of this curious and self-obsessed man was lost, John commented dismissively from his consultation of three small extant collections that 'Spencer does not appear to have been a particularly interesting or revealing correspondent' (1971, xii). Photographic evidence suggests that around the time he was labouring in Spencer's cause John cultivated sideburns of Victorian luxuriance: perhaps

<sup>4</sup>This is apparent from a letter sent to his sister Susan in October 1964 which finds him living in Kuti Hall, a student residence at the University of Ibadan, where he was teaching four hours a week and fully engaged both in research and socialising.

<sup>5</sup>The conclusion to the book version of *Aladura* contains a citation of Spencer's autobiography not in the thesis version (1968, 299, fn.13).

an indication of his veering, if vicariously, towards the participatory methods of ethnography? In all likelihood trying his patience, Spencer nonetheless credentialised John as a sociologist. His theoretical inclinations would have drawn him more enthusiastically to the German tradition, notably Max Weber, the favoured thinker of his doctoral supervisor Donald MacRae, who was to write the Fontana Modern Masters volume on Weber (MacRae, 1974), but John considered his German language not up to an appreciation of that great thinker through his original texts. A near-native grasp of documents was essential. Each year until his retirement, John delivered a course on the history of social thought, predominantly from the mid-eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, insisting that students read primary texts (in translation for the continental European theorists) rather than mugging up pre-digested summaries from secondary sources. The texture of the real thing mattered. Introducing first-year students to this canon was a privilege, and not the chore he regretted that it seemed to some colleagues. Even if John tried to be even-handed, Max Weber emerged annually as the hero of his survey. I stood in on the occasions John was unavailable to lecture, and eventually I inherited his course along with its philosophy. Though here again, the connecting threads have moved me ahead of the story.

After four years in Nottingham, and with the publication of the Spencer volumes imminent, John returned to the LSE as a lecturer in Sociology. This tenure was brief (1970–3) because he was invited to Nigeria as a Visiting Reader in the newly formed Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Ife, which itself had been founded only in 1961–2, immediately after Independence (and was to be renamed the Obafemi Awolowo University in 1987, after ‘Awo’, the Yoruba Nigerian politician cited in concluding *Aladura*, who played a prominent role in its establishment). John’s two years spent at Ife (1973–5) with his wife and young family were crucial to his development as a Yoruba scholar, both for the enduring friendships with members of the post-Independence, intellectual elite formed then, and for the researches on which his second ethnographic monograph would be based.

Ijesha, and its capital Ilesha, the subject of the second Yoruba book, lie only 20 miles from Ife, allowing John to travel back and forth from the university for longer and shorter periods of research. The monograph on Ijesha would differ from *Aladura* with respect to both its subject and method. It is a history book, concerned specifically with how one kingdom became Nigerian in the course of becoming Yoruba. So it is also a book about identity and the importance of history both objectively and

subjectively to processes of identification. The foundation of the book is a mass of documentation: several surveys were undertaken by a team of interviewers in 1973–5 and again, during repeat fieldwork, in 1979. The testimonies of around a hundred interviewees were transcribed; some of them were interviewed repeatedly and at considerable length. Notwithstanding what John considered shortcomings in method (notably sampling), *Ijeshas and Nigerians: the Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom, 1890s–1970s* (1983) was the first of his books to clinch the African anthropology double of the Amaury Talbot Prize of the Royal Anthropological Institute in the UK and the Melville J. Herskovits Prize of the African Studies Association in the USA. One big question was settled for John when the book demonstrated the complementarity of anthropological and historical methods for the study of African societies (a question that had preoccupied anthropologists' disciplinary attention but is now justly forgotten). Two decades later, the book's career was to culminate in another honour, when the *SOAS Alumni Newsletter* (No. 26, Winter 2003) announced, presumably at John's prompting, that the Owa-Obokun, or King, had appointed him a chief of Ijeshaland, with the title *Bapitan* or 'father of historians'. A year earlier, as his friend from the early days of his doctoral research, Bolanle Awe, recalled in her obituary, republication of John's *Ijeshas* book had

occurred during the period of the birth of the Ijesa Cultural Foundation; this was a society founded by a few of us with the aim of sensitizing the Ijesa to the significance of their history and culture. Unfortunately, this book went out of print before many Ijesa could have access to it. We felt that its publication in Nigeria would provide a launching pad for this Foundation. John Peel readily gave us the copyright and agreed to donate the proceeds to the development of Ijesaland. We were able to publish a Nigerian edition in 2002; it was launched, with a great deal of fanfare with the Owa Obokun of Ijesa kingdom and a large host of Ijesa dignitaries from all over Nigeria in attendance. It became a highly prized book in their private libraries.

So John became part of the history he had set out to study.

Again, the momentum of the life has caused my account to run ahead of itself, so I must backtrack. On return from Nigeria in 1975, John had become Charles Booth Professor of Sociology at the University of Liverpool, a post he combined with sundry academic-cum-administrative tasks, including departmental headship (in 1975–81 and again in 1984–5, after a gap to take up a Visiting Professorship in Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Chicago in 1982–3) and Deanship of the Faculty of Social and Environmental Studies (1985–8). John saw these

responsibilities as part of an academic 'vocation', a calling in Max Weber's broadening of the religious sense, integral to a rounded career of teaching, research and writing, and to a duty of care for the future of his disciplines and towards his colleagues, particularly younger colleagues. He extended this sense of responsibility outside the university to various editorial positions, most enduringly for the IAI, as editor of its quarterly journal *Africa* between 1979 and 1986, founding general editor from 1985 until his death of its monograph series, the International African Library, of which the fiftieth volume has lately been published, and as its Chair of the Board of Trustees from 2003. John's mentorship of younger scholars was both generous and fastidious. Whether or not they were his own doctoral supervisees, he would rewrite clumsy English, sometimes from second language variants over which he sighed, rearrange paragraphs and refine arguments; all this by annotation in the margins of their drafts, his handwriting as small, precise and spiky as his comments were detailed and unsparing. He was determined, as he often put it, 'to get them through it', whatever 'it' was: a thesis submitted or revised, journal article published or book polished. Mention of 'being edited by John' raises a wry smile in most who underwent the process and emerged with their texts honed and their scholarly instincts sharpened. John's editorial interests extended to type fonts and book covers about which he had strong ideas. Although he did not get his way, he wrote to the novelist Barbara Pym, then also in charge of publications at IAI, when he submitted *Aladura*, suggesting that 'a design incorporating a motif of a bible and handbell would be striking as well as appropriate' (22 May 1968). What he got was a plain cover in a dark sienna yellow, but the International African Library gave him ample later opportunities to see his preferences into print.

It was in the first half of the 1980s, as a contributor to *Africa* and at various conference and workshop meetings while I worked at the University of St Andrews, that I gradually came to know John. My serious publication history got under way when he accepted what was a rarity in *Africa*, a two-part article, and one submitted by a scarcely published author whom he did not know. John always backed his opinions, and he never grudged attention to other scholars who delayed his own projects. He also kept keen and consequential recollection of those who rejected his advice on less than convincing grounds. Rightly so, since his judgement was sound more often than not, and he had nothing to give that he valued more highly, or gave more generously, than his time. Even if occasionally he was not right in his advice, he was fundamentally correct about the etiquette: it was ungracious not to acknowledge a senior scholar giving his

attention so selflessly. Without prejudices about race, class, nation, ethnicity and so forth, John was deeply prejudiced in matters of character. Someone he felt to be basically worthy and of good will—a ‘trooper’ was a term of high, and ungendered, praise—would be supported in the face of what others might construe as exasperating failings; but it was as well not even to mention the name of anyone he considered idle, self-serving or dishonest, albeit none of these precluded his rueful acceptance of their being clever. With few exceptions, characters tended to stay in the categories into which John had decided to fix them.

Tom McCaskie, who became a close friend to John in the mid-1980s, has written about the critical impact during the following decade of his Ife sojourn on John’s career (McCaskie, 2005). I never knew the house on the Wirral Peninsula, across the Mersey from Liverpool, where John and Jenny raised their boys, and where he painted over the door a coat of arms hybridised from both their antecedents, but by report it was a comfortable base with a garden study conducive to John’s concentration.

The editorship of *Africa* allowed John to refine the attributes of a disciplinary anthropologist and add them to those of comparative sociologist and historian. It was through the IAI that he met his closest Nigerian friend, J. F. (Jacob) Ade Ajayi. That was in 1975 when Ajayi became Chairman of the Council of the IAI, the year after the Directorship had passed from Daryll Forde to David Dalby. By 1979 it was thought that the Institute had over-extended itself and was facing bankruptcy (Peel 2015b). Dalby was deposed, in his own words, by ‘an internal coup d’état’.<sup>6</sup> So far as John was concerned, only Jacob Ajayi’s clear-sighted resourcefulness had saved the Institute, a service he never forgot, nor allowed others to. John particularly admired ‘the stability of interlocking moral attachments’ based in family, community, historic wisdom, nation and religion that grounded Jacob (2015b, 746). Like John, Jacob was inclined to recognise continuities and respond to loyalties. Together they assembled the volume of essays to commemorate their mutual friend Michael Crowder (1992). Over forty years, John became a friend and ally not just of Jacob, but of the family: Jacob’s wife Christie (née Aduke Martins) and their children: Yetunde, the first of four daughters, Niyi their son, and Funlayo, Titilola and Bisola. When he was invited to deliver an eightieth birthday lecture for Jacob Ajayi at the University of Lagos in 2009, John chose the topic ‘Islam and Christianity through the prism of Yoruba history’ to pay tribute to the generally peaceful accommodation between

<sup>6</sup> <<https://sites.google.com/site/daviddalbyorg/biography>> (accessed 6 January 2017).

Yoruba Christians and Muslims. He stayed a last time with the Ajayi family in Ibadan on his final visit to Nigeria in April 2015 to offer his condolences on Jacob's death, and to lecture on the occasion of the ninetieth birthday of Sir Olaniwum Ajayi, a lawyer and close associate of the Yoruba leader Obafemi Awolowo. His subject matter was both broadened and harked back to the previous lecture when he took as his topic 'Religion and the future of Nigeria: lessons from the Yoruba case'. I shall return to the three lectures John delivered in Nigeria after his retirement. On John's death, Christie sent one of the earliest letters of condolence, recalling the last occasion on which she and the family had been welcomed in his home by John in May that year. Her son Niyi, a London-based surgeon, spoke eloquently on behalf of the family at John's memorial meeting the following June. The relationship between the two men and their legacies will continue when John's books are gifted to the Jadeas Educational Trust founded by Christie and Jacob.

Explaining this relationship and its importance, I have again been made to run ahead of the life story. To go back, I met John a few times in the 1980s. One of the earliest of these occasions was at the University of St Andrews workshop on 'Comparative method in social anthropology' convened in December 1983 by Ladislav Holy, to which John contributed 'History, culture and the comparative method: a West African puzzle' (1987), an essay reworked recently as the first chapter of his final book. We spoke there about ethnicity, the subject of my own paper in that volume. A few years later, I listened to John's brilliant paper on 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis' at the 1987 annual conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists devoted to 'History and Ethnicity' (1989). We also chatted at one or more of the congenial residential gatherings that Dick Werbner still organises annually in the Lake District as the 'Satterthwaite Colloquium on African Religion and Ritual', certainly at the 1985 meeting since I find among my papers one by John under the title 'Religion and the state in the West African forest' from that year, an outline of a comparative project he never pursued that would have involved Yoruba, Asante and perhaps also Benin and Dahomey. All academic careers, John consoled me later, have their share of uncompleted plans. I think those few occasions, and the editorial communications around my article in *Africa*, were about the sum of our dealings before we became colleagues. I had accepted a lectureship at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in October 1987 but did not move until the following year (the department at St Andrews being too small to leave once the academic year had started). In

1989 (as part of an education funding deal the details of which I cannot now recall) John was transferred to SOAS as Professor of Anthropology and Sociology with reference to Africa. Richard Rathbone has noted how this struck us all as an immense coup for the school, and a particular delight for Richard and me as West Africa specialists. After his first year, John became Dean of Undergraduate Students (1990–4), with Richard as his postgraduate student counterpart, throwing his energies into a complete overhaul of the teaching structure. They were a burly pair, and I privately thought of them as SOAS's version of the City's protective Gog and Magog; Richard recollects them being likened less flatteringly by one colleague to a pair of nightclub bouncers. It was a packed decade: John was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1991 and served later as Chair of S3 between 1997 and 2000, and as a British Academy Vice-President, 1999–2000. During the same period, he was also President of the African Studies Association of the UK, 1996–8, which made him its first posthumous recipient of a Distinguished Africanist Award in 2016.

John had moved from the bachelor flat he had initially rented on moving to London in a purpose-built block at The Angel, Islington, with metal stairs around an internal courtyard which struck me as a suitable set for a re-enactment of *West Side Story*, to an appropriately eccentric and homely property alongside the Archway Bridge. Archway—or more accurately the replacement for the original viaduct—crosses, and gives its name to, the concrete canyon through which traffic on the A1 heads in and out of London. It must be one of the capital's busiest roads, but the end-of-terrace property abutting and high above it was always quiet. John occupied the ground floor of this eyrie, reached up a winding and overgrown path, where a spacious living and dining area led onto a secluded and watery back garden where he could indulge his passion for plants. Reversing conventional domestic arrangements, the bedroom was on the basement floor, along with a large office. This setup provided ample room for hospitality, as guests were able to make themselves comfortable on sofas and armchairs while he shuttled between the kitchen and the dining table in the spacious living–eating room. Red wines and hearty stews were the staples. At John's memorial, his friend Sophie Baker read Elizabeth David's classic recipe for cassoulet in recollection of these times.

Alongside responsibilities within SOAS and beyond, throughout the 1990s John was regularly visiting Birmingham to research what would be his greatest book and the centrepiece of the trilogy on Yoruba religion, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (2000). It was the perfect match: the missionisation of the Yoruba, largely by the Yoruba,

during the nineteenth century and under the Anglican auspices of the Church Missionary Society. Everything had prepared him for this. The Church Mission Society Archive was housed in the library of the University of Birmingham, the city of John's upbringing and the university of his father's professorship. It contained, among other treasures, the journal extracts that missionaries were asked to send at regular intervals, which read across the decades with an immediacy John found similar to ethnographers' fieldnotes. He could stay in Birmingham with his close friends from the Centre for West African Studies, the Ghana specialists Lynne Brydon and Tom McCaskie, and Paulo Moraes de Farias and Karin Barber, she the doyenne of Yoruba literary studies in the UK. Fieldwork in Nigeria was called for and undertaken in 1994, during which John became vividly aware of the scale of the Pentecostal movement amongst Yoruba. The Birmingham–London axis was mobilised to gain an Arts and Humanities Research Board project award to study 'The role of the media in the constitution of new religious publics in Yorubaland' between 1996 and 1999, as an undertaking jointly between SOAS, where it was led by John and Louis Brenner, and the University of Birmingham, in the persons of Paulo and Karin. This project supplied some of the wider context to John's last two books.

*Religious Encounter* continued to document, among other matters, the vital role that Yoruba intellectuals, initially predominantly Christians, had played in the creation of a collective Yoruba ethnic identity from the myriad sometimes violently competing states and statelets of the nineteenth century. More broadly, Nigerians, John argued, played a crucial part in making and transforming the collective identities that were critical to post-colonial politics. In this respect, John's history of the nineteenth century connected with his experience of living alongside the Yoruba elite during the twentieth century. Because he did not give it explicit book-length treatment, the significance of John's ethnographically anchored history of the making of a Yoruba elite is easy to overlook, but it is a recurrent concern, particularly evident in the wonderfully engaged reading of Wole Soyinka's memoir of his father, *Isara*, that John composed for the Festschrift for Adrian Hastings (2002). Like *Ijeshas and Nigerians* before it, *Religious Encounter* did the 'double' with the award of the Talbot and the Herskovits Prizes on the two sides of the Atlantic: a double double achievement so far unique to John.

As he entered the new century, John was already at work on the third book of the Yoruba religion trilogy. It was to appear posthumously in 2016 as *Christianity, Islam and Oriṣa Religion: Three Traditions in*

*Comparison and Interaction*; all but the proofs and index were completed before his death. By now the shape of the trilogy was before him clearly. The final book would make good his relative neglect of Yoruba Islam which, outside Lagos, predominated in the northern areas of Yorubaland that were less familiar to him. In common with other observers, notably themselves, he was struck by the relatively scant importance in comparison to bonds of family and place that Yoruba had historically attributed to differing confessional identities. But relations between Christians and Muslims were polarising both inside and outside Nigeria. The book begins with the evidence of Michael Adebolajo, London born of Yoruba Christian antecedents, hacking to death a soldier on the streets of the capital in the name of Islam. This could not, John writes, or perhaps not yet, have happened in Nigeria. Adebolajo was radicalised in London. Within Nigeria, conflict between Yoruba Christians and Muslims remained rare and is actively downplayed. Yoruba do not kill one another over religion, as John had put it in his Olaniwun Ajayi lecture.

Perspectives on 'orisha religion', as John decided to call it, are also distinct and different inside and outside Nigeria: for self-identified Yoruba in the Americas, Yorubaland is the source of African gods, essential attributes of Yoruba culture and identity; but these gods are for the most part disregarded or disparaged by ordinary Yoruba in Nigeria who consider themselves Christians and Muslims, members of world religions and, for all that some aesthetic and imaginative space may be found for their historical or 'traditional' beliefs, definitely not pagans. John's last book has ambitions wider than Yorubaland, since it draws upon his increasing certainty about the differing historical trajectories of the world religions that were set in motion in their early years and which the comparative sociology of religion would demonstrate. Seen in these terms, Christianity and Islam differed by virtue of their contrary relations to political power at the time of their inception.

The shape of a trilogy also becomes apparent retrospectively in the identities of the dedicatees of John's Yoruba religion books: the first volume, *Aladura*, for his parents; *Religious Encounter* for his three sons; and *Three Traditions*, the final volume, dedicated to his second wife Anne and to the six grandchildren born in his lifetime and any more who would not meet him. A seventh grandchild, a grandson, was born in February 2017. It may only seem significant with hindsight that the books on Spencer and on the kingdom of Ijesha did not have dedicatees. An over-interpretation? Perhaps, but John's life was patterned consistently by the

enduring character of his dispositions. The trilogy, as I suggested earlier, seems already present in the doctoral thesis.

For all that it is engrossing, John's last book is not an achievement of the same magnitude as *Religious Encounter*, which in turn he considered a much better book than *Aladura*. John knew that he did not have the time to complete his final book as he would ideally have liked to, hence the number of chapters recycled from previously published papers, some of them old. The meat of the book is in the substantively new chapters of Part II, which deal with Yoruba Islam but, as he freely admitted, in scholarly terms John did not have the command of sources he enjoyed for Christian history, and by inclination he was less attracted to Yoruba Islam than to Christianity. Frankly its study was a struggle. For all his intense interest, it always felt an obligation, a dutiful, even noble, putting the balance to rights.

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John's personal life had been in flux. After a prolonged period of growing apart, or perhaps discovering how unsuited they had been all along, to his regret his first marriage to Jenny was finally dissolved after more than thirty years in 2000. He literally and metaphorically dug himself in at the Archway and created the hospitable place his temperament needed for entertaining and work. He was intensely proud of his three sons—David, who became a consultant oncologist, Tim working in finance in Australia and Francis (Franko) in a development initiative at Imperial College London. He was effusively delighted by his three daughters-in-law and his six grandchildren, most recently a fourth granddaughter born in 2015. Outwardly, and although he knew it was incurable, John treated his diagnosis with a melanoma in 2010 as a nuisance more than a crisis. In the preceding couple of years, he had found happiness after again meeting Anne Ogbigbo, who had been a mature student of ours at SOAS in the late 1990s. As an aid and development professional, Anne was posted to be a Human Rights Officer with UNMIL, the United Nations Mission to Liberia. After five years together, she and John married in 2014, honeymooning in Rome (from where John sent postcards expressing his greater enthusiasm for baroque churches, and Anne's reactions to them, than for classical ruins). His need for treatment prevented John from spending as much time as he wished with Anne in Liberia. On a second visit in December 2010 he had begun the habit of sending monthly 'Letters from Liberia' as email attachments to his personal communications to his friends. Seven more letters were to follow, the last in June 2014. After his

death, we assembled them into a short illustrated volume as a souvenir of the day held at SOAS to celebrate his life (2016a). The letters were written with warmth for the people he encountered, enthusiasm for the country, happiness at his life with Anne, but without mention of his illness.

Treatment continued in the forms of surgery and chemotherapy for more than five years; a drug trial in 2012 proved promising and kept recurrence at bay for some time. The operations to excise the cancer were painful but more particularly resented for interfering with the long walks John had always taken. Weekend treks were planned to allow him to set out from a starting point with time to walk all morning to a sustaining pub lunch, then continue for the afternoon, preferably with a stop for tea, before reaching the station from which he would take the train back home. Anywhere between 15 to 20 miles a day was routine. Longer trails were tackled in successive weekends, each resuming the next leg of an itinerary. During annual vacations, extended walks could be undertaken; some of the most satisfying were in France. Continental trips began from the married home of his sister Susan in Paris. John had embarked with passion on a project of visiting the great churches and cathedrals of France with a view to describing them, and the circumstances of his encounters with them, for English-speaking visitors. There was nothing nicer, he beamed, than pottering along secondary roads to imposing feats of architecture from which to retire to a modest nearby café for an invariably excellent lunch. The incomplete project survives as a box of notes, photographs and other church memorabilia.

The end, when it came, was sudden, shockingly so given how long we had all become habituated to it. Its rapidity caught out everyone, even John. But he was prepared spiritually, and died as his classical and enlightenment icons would have wanted to: calmly, thankful for his family, loves, friends and career, and with individual attention to each of many visitors coming to say their farewells and wish him a comfortable passage to ancestorhood. Others will have their own recollections. I had dined in late September with John and Anne at a fish restaurant he liked on Archway. Conversation flowed to all intents normally, though John explained a new difficulty in calling nouns to mind that prevented his completing crossword puzzles. On the positive side, he added, his mathematical faculty seemed unimpaired so he had substituted numbers for words and did Sudoku puzzles instead. The symptom, he knew, resulted from a secondary brain tumour. Our meal was timed by my leaving for Australia where my mother had died. We parted and walked our separate ways home from the restaurant. Anne felt able to return to Liberia. When, back in London, I

saw John a month later, Anne had rushed from Liberia that day and he was bedridden. We held hands, he smiled and spoke a few sentences, unaware that I could make no sense of his parting words.

I have been rooting back through old emails to remember John's laughter, sometimes oddly close to a giggle for a man of outward gravitas and solid stature. It meant something had been, was or soon would be afoot. For instance, the sheer glee of writing a letter strongly protesting at the reorganisation of our university which began (I have changed the name of its addressee), 'Dear Director (or Gordon if we must be chummy) ...'. John did not feel 'chummy' towards what he construed as foolishness, and he had to struggle to understand disagreement when his own viewpoint was self-evidently correct. This is not to suggest that John always thought he was right: on some occasions (I initially wrote 'many' but given the deceased's respect for facts I ought to stick to them) he sought others' opinions and listened to them intently. He was the most constant supporter of his friends for whom he always wanted and savoured the very best their own best efforts deserved (the idle kept company with the smug and self-satisfied in his estimation). Of one email I sent as his administrative successor at SOAS, and conveying views we shared, he responded instantly and briefly, '*Fortis est veritas et praevalabit!*'—'Truth is strong and shall prevail!' In being first part university town motto from the arms of Oxford, second part Vulgate bible quotation, completely forthright and uncompromisingly supportive, this was quintessential JDYP. You knew he had sent it after rubbing his hands and grinning as he always did when righteous mischief was abroad. In this event, he was wrong and truth did not prevail, but if John agreed then other opinions seemed to matter less. I am not sure whether it is appropriate to recollect it in a British Academy Memoir, but notes on the inadequacies of the Faculty Office support sent to our then Dean were entitled 'Fac. Off.' followed by their number in the series of complaints. John appreciated serviceability in things, people and ideas.

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To return to the intellectual achievements of the life, given the monumental books, it is easy to overlook the carefully crafted lectures and articles. John was a brilliant essayist, poised, assured, measured and always lucid. Rereading his work, I wonder whether the essay form was not his ideal medium. Many of the finest started out as occasional lectures. John took unashamed delight in scholarly recognition; the numerous invitations to

deliver named lectures meant a lot to him, and most of the domestic honours he might have anticipated duly came his way (along with a few I had never heard of). An honorary DLitt from the University of Birmingham was most valued for what that place and institution had meant to him since childhood. The reader of just a few of the essays will come away with the governing ideas of the career. In 1976, with Robin Horton, a strong defence against a critic of what was called the 'intellectualist' approach to the rationality of conversion in Africa. Two years later (in 1978), an argument for the need to devote attention to translation in development studies, delivered through a close examination of the Yoruba notion of development and enlightenment, *olaju*, that referred alike to these qualities and to their emissaries, and in Nigeria particularly apt, as Yoruba saw it, to describe themselves. Tellingly, this was placed in a journal of development studies. In the 1980s, the decade in which he thought most about historical method, there were essays demonstrating the necessity to understand history as an element of reflexivity in the making of the present, and particularly in the making of identities, including ethnic identities, and of course Yoruba identity (1984, 1989). From the 1990s, a concentration on the parts played by Yoruba intellectuals, typically Christians or from Christian families, in creating contemporary Yoruba culture and identity, including, as noted already, a compelling essay of exposition of Wole Soyinka's *Isara* and a related genealogy of the Yoruba intelligentsia dedicated to his friend Jacob Ajayi (1993, 2002). In John's closeness to the contemporary Yoruba intellectual elite, as much as their nineteenth-century forebears, we encounter a quality of relationship rare among Africanist anthropologists with which I want to conclude the intellectual portrait.

By a happy mixture of accident, attraction and accommodation, over time John was able to envisage the Yoruba, at their best, in something like his own best image. For their part, the Yoruba elite returned his regard and welcomed him into their circles, as was apparent both in numerous tributes and obituaries, and in three invitations to deliver named lectures in Nigeria after his retirement in 2007 that mattered greatly to him. Read to predominantly Yoruba audiences in honour of Yoruba famous men, it is unsurprising that these lectures shared and developed a theme of Yoruba exceptionalism. An anthropologist lecturing his research subjects about their own history is worth our attention.

The first of these lectures was delivered in April 2008 in the Chapel of the Resurrection at the University of Ibadan (Unibadan) as the third Memorial Lecture for Bishop Ebenezer Adeolu Adegbola (1918–2004). A

year later, in April 2009 at the University of Lagos, the occasion of the second was an eightieth birthday lecture for John's friend Professor Jacob Ade Ajayi (1929–2014). Finally, in April 2015 at Muson (the Musical Society of Nigeria), Onikan Centre, Lagos, a third lecture was delivered on the occasion of the ninetieth birthday of Sir Olaniwun Ajayi (1925–). Respectively, these three Yoruba had played crucial roles in the twentieth-century making of Nigeria as a scholar of religion and Methodist minister (founding Principal of the Methodist Lay Training Institute, Sagamu in Ogun State, and the Director of the Institute of Church and Society, Ibadan); a scholar-administrator (sometime Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos and historian of Yoruba); and a prominent lawyer (head of a major law firm and political ally of 'Awo'). They were born more or less within a single decade (1918–29) between the two world wars, and together are evidence in themselves of Yoruba exceptionalism.

These commemorative occasions allowed John to put before audiences in the great cities of Ibadan and Lagos, which had been crucial to his research, what he saw as the contemporary relevance to Nigeria of his books, notably of *The Missionary Encounter*, in 2008–9, and of *Three Traditions*, in 2015. His particular challenge was to do this from the perspective of the Yoruba, and with reference to the exceptional co-existence among them of the triple religious heritage of historic African religion (for Yoruba he chose the more specific term '*oriṣa* religion'), Christianity and Islam. The attractions and repulsions between these three compelled his attention.

The first lecture addresses Bishop Adegbola as a figure on the cusp of the transition between the Nigerian nationalist era, with its high valuation of the African past that ended in 1977 with FESTAC (the second Festival of African Arts and Cultures held in Nigeria), and the debate from 1978 to the present surrounding the role of *sharia* or Islamic law in the Nigerian constitution. As John remarks, he is lecturing in sight of the Great Cross of the Chapel of Resurrection at Unibadan, which became the focus of conflict in 1985 when, during a flashpoint in religious tensions, Muslims demanded it be taken down. Adegbola was a scholar of the Africanisation of the church, that is to say of the attraction of Christianity towards the pole of historic African religion and its concerns. Events had since moved on, but Adegbola contributed to seeing Yoruba religious practice as a 'whole' in its three main varieties, which were like three legs of a stool. But would that balanced agreement to co-existence remain after one of the legs, the most distinctively Yoruba of them, that of *oriṣa* religion, was removed?

The second lecture of the following year presents Jacob Ajayi as the direct descendant, and major historian, of the nineteenth-century Christian intellectual elite of the Yoruba. Picking up the Nigerian national story after the new (but short-lived) constitutional arrangements of 1978–9, John highlighted the ways that ‘new and more strenuous forms of devotion on both sides’, aided by globalisation, put strain on the historic ‘settlement’ that was Yoruba co-existence between Christianity and Islam. The strains were exacerbated by some Yoruba politicians who gave salience to religious difference as they tried to mobilise confessional identities electorally. John credits Olusegun Obasanjo, the Yoruba who was Nigerian leader both as a general and as an elected civilian president, with defusing this potential; but he detects a periodisation of Yoruba co-existence, with the implication that this settlement might not have an indefinite term. The new strains of Christianity and Islam shared compelling resemblances, notably in their rejection of historic religion, but also significant differences between the individual aspirations of Christians to health, wealth and children, which closely matched long-standing Yoruba priorities, by contrast with the collective desires of Muslims to purify the *sunna*.

The third lecture, half a dozen years later, has a less optimistic tone, although it opened with the bold claim, cited earlier, that ‘No one has ever been killed for their faith in Yorubaland.’ The peacefulness of the Yoruba had been assured by the ties cross-cutting religious affiliations within families and localities and by the absence in Yorubaland of the jihadic tradition of the North. The mutual influence between the strands of Yoruba religion was long-standing. The defining figure of Yoruba aspirations during the twentieth century had been the federalist ‘Awo’, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, whose imprisonment had created the icon of the martyred Yoruba leader. Ironically, this stereotype was now reproduced in the undeserving person of Mashood Abiola, a Yoruba whose martyrdom occurred as a result of imprisonment by the military when he was denied the presidency. John’s point is that Abiola, who as a Muslim had endorsed the demolition of the Great Cross in Ibadan, ended his life as a Yoruba rather than either Muslim or Nigerian figure. In terms endorsed by John’s doctoral student Wale Adebani, Abiola became a ‘structural Christian’ in the way he was appropriated by the Yoruba elite (Adebani, 2014, 136). John remarks that his visit to Nigeria in 1994 was like stepping back thirty years to the imprisonment of Awolowo, then the most prominent Yoruba politician. Perhaps the case of Abiola suggested that Yoruba culture still retained its genius for neutralising the religious tensions engulfing Nigeria?

In this context, John noted also the exceptional success of modernising Yoruba Muslim politicians who had made Lagos the best governed of Nigerian states, embracing the Yoruba concept of enlightenment and development, or *olaju*. But here John's examples encountered a problem. His topic was supposed to be the general lessons of Yoruba experience for Nigeria, but his conclusion tended to draw attention to capacities that, on his analysis, Nigerians other than Yoruba lacked. Islamic reformism, as his final contribution to the journal *Africa* argued (2016d), removed the pursuit of well-being from the public sphere and replaced it with a political theology of purification. On this analysis, the country really was held together by little more than its shared dependence on the distribution of oil revenues without which South and North would have little in common.

John's optimism about Yoruba was based in a cultural exceptionalism that made it difficult for him not to be pessimistic about Nigeria, specifically about the capacity for co-existence between its largely Christian South and that part of the North that identified closely with the historic Sokoto Caliphate and had introduced *sharia*. The culminating volume of John's Yoruba religion trilogy explicitly addresses the triple heritage of the Yoruba, which he saw as a privileged case for the comparative sociological study of the historical trajectories of Islam and Christianity. He called his expertise in human and divine studies, history and anthropology, the past and the present into a final synthesis, but the very success of his demonstration of Yoruba uniqueness, which echoed their own sense of collective selfhood, made this a difficult exemplar for the comparative sociology of African religions.

I mentioned earlier how John had consoled me—when I once lamented the various projects I had been unable to pursue for one reason or another—with the observation that all reasonably productive academic careers must have their share of projects not completed. His own abandoned or uncompleted projects seem to have been the comparative ones both within Nigeria and more widely in Africa which some of his essays begin. Rereading so much of his work—and sadly writing an account like this forces one to find the time to reread only when a friend is no longer alive—is, among other emotions, immensely frustrating. I have questions to ask him. Was it John's keen sense of Yoruba exceptionalism that made his comparative projects impossibly challenging? By coincidence, much of my own research has also concerned a predominantly Nigerian people, far less numerous than the Yoruba, who share with them the self-image of being split almost equally between Christians and Muslims, and who have also managed to sink these religious differences by appeal to shared

ethnicity. We never finished a conversation about whether the conditions of this identity outcome remaining viable were similar in these two cases. How could he leave in mid-discussion? As our colleague Kit Davies remarked, knowing John none of us imagined death would have the nerve.

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John's funeral (he died on 2 November 2015) took place at St Michael's in Highgate Village, North London, on 20 November, London's highest church where he had been a parishioner and usually attended Evensong, in his view the most quintessentially Anglican of church services. Quiet and without bombast: the hymn 'How great thou art' opened the service, 'Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son' closed it. The speakers and readers included two of his sons (Francis and Tim), his oldest granddaughter (Josie), his closest confidant (Tom McCaskie) and the vicar (Dr Jonathan Trigg). A eulogy and prayer was delivered by Mabel Kemjika who recounted how she had come to Britain from Nigeria after she had looked after the Peel family, forty years earlier, during their two years in Nigeria. She had married and brought up her family here. She did not mention that she had also provided care for John during his last weeks.

John's ashes were interred the following June, while Anne was home from Liberia, close to what locals call 'Marx and Spencer's corner' in Highgate Cemetery, the resting place of the two great Victorian social theorists. The following Saturday (25 June 2016) we held a commemoration at SOAS – 'J. D. Y. Peel: a celebration of life to the full'—designed to share memories of him as theorist, cook, lover of Corelli's Concerti Grossi, walker, Africanist, honorary Yoruba elder and friend. The speakers included former students and colleagues, opening with Robin Horton, the presiding elder, who set the tone by recounting John's apology for being unable to write his obituary as promised. Anne Peel Ogbigbo brought video of the memorial held in Liberia both inside St John's, where John had worshipped, and outside where the masks came to dance for him. Karin Barber read the *Oriki*, verses of praise, she had composed for him in Yoruba and in translation.

**ORÍKÌ FÚN JÓỌNÙ**

Erin ti wó, kò le dide.

Àjànàkú sùn bí òkè;

Gbogbo àgbáyé ní ọ̀fọ̀ olùkọ̀ òdodo tó ti lẹ;

Baba àwọn onímọ̀ ijínlẹ̀ gbogbo

Olórí àwọn òpitàn lanti-lanti

Olọgbón tí í mú ẹ̀kọ̀ wuni.

Ó mọ̀ ilẹ̀ Yorùbá bí ẹ̀ni í mowó

Ìwádíí tó ẹ̀, ijínlẹ̀ ni

Ó bèèrè lẹ́wọ̀ ọ̀ba, bèè ló bèèrè lẹ́wọ̀ mẹ̀kúnnù

Gbogbo ẹ̀niyàn ló ẹ̀ ẹ̀dọ̀ba-ẹ̀dọ̀ba

Kò sẹ̀ni tí kò mọ̀ ọ̀

Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni kò sẹ̀ni tí í ọ̀lálá-yìn ọ̀láyé

Ìwé tí o kọ̀ kò lópin

Oore tí o ti ẹ̀ kò lónkà.

Bàbá wa, sùn re.

**PRAISE POETRY FOR JOHN**

The elephant has fallen, and cannot stand up.

The mighty animal sleeps like a mountain;

All the world laments the passing of the true teacher who has gone;

Father of (=Foremost among) all the deeply versed scholars

Leader of all the great historians

Brilliant one who makes others want to study.

He knew Yorubaland as one knows money

The research he did was profound

He enquired of obas, but he also enquired of ordinary people

He treated everyone alike.

There is no-one who does not know you

Likewise no-one who could fail to praise you in this world.

The books you have written are endless

The good turns you have done are uncountable.

Our elder, rest in peace.

Karin (Àjíkẹ̀) Barber

To see us out, Paul Richards introduced the andante from Samuel Sebastian Wesley's great anthem 'Ascribe unto the Lord', as a musician himself explaining why andante was the most difficult of tempos to master; neither too fast nor too slow, it needed to move along at a measured walking pace, unhurriedly but purposefully, just as John did through life. The anthem reaches the conclusion that John expressed of himself, 'Ye are the blessed of the Lord, you and your children.'

RICHARD FARDON

*Fellow of the Academy*

*Note.* So many tributes to John have been published that it is difficult to add much factually. As well as drawing upon published obituaries (cited below) and some letters of condolence, and guided by Richard Bartholomew's (2016) excellent bibliography (IAI, 2017), I have also used recollections from John's funeral and from the memorial event held at SOAS on 25 June 2016 as 'J. D. Y. Peel: a celebration of life to the full', which include with her kind permission Karin Barber's praise poem. I am grateful to Stephanie Kitchen for the loan of the IAI publication file on John's *Aladura*, as I am to Toyin Falola for a pre-publication copy of John's 2016 Sir Olaniwum Ajayi lecture, and to Olufunke Adeboye and Yetunde Aina for final copy of John's other two Nigerian lectures. I discussed these lectures at the roundtable devoted to John's work at the 2016 Biennial Conference of the African Studies Association UK where I also benefited from hearing other contributors. The Archivists at LSE were as helpful as they always are. Susan Peel Robert, John's sister, has shared family recollections with me and a letter from the time of John's doctoral research. Members of John's immediate family helped me write an earlier, short obituary in ways that are more fully reflected here. I thank Catherine Davies for her careful reading of my final text.

Given the inconsistency in sources, I have retained Yoruba subscripts but omitted tonal superscripts except in Karin's praise poem and where they occur in the original titles in the bibliography.

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