

TEJUMOLA “TEJU” OLANIYAN

In Memoriam (1959–2019)

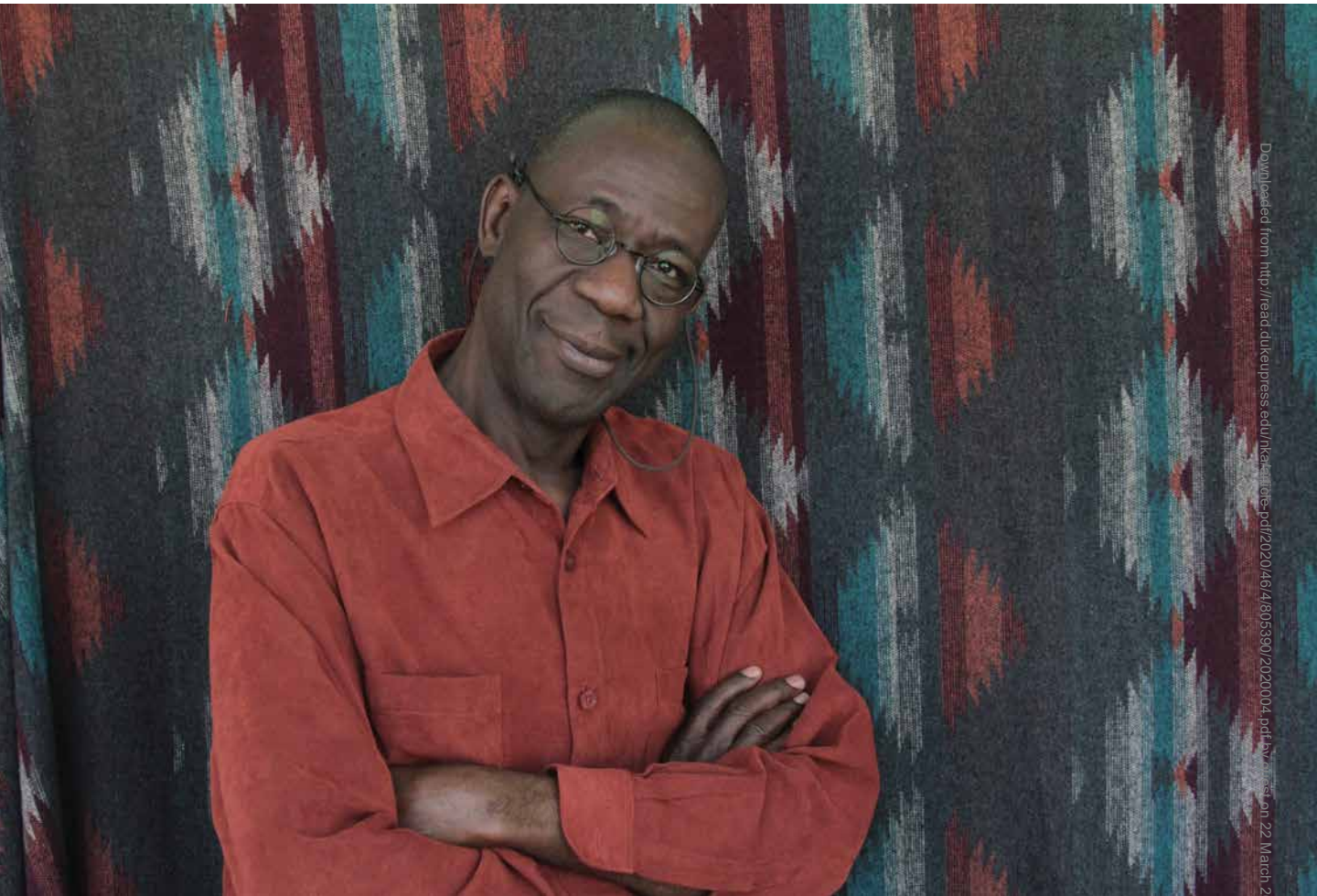


Photo: Olabimpe Olaniyan

It is with great sadness that we, the editors of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, mourn the death of our dear friend and colleague, Tejumola “Teju” Olaniyan, who passed away on Saturday, November 30, 2019. He was the Louise Durham Mead Professor of English and the Wole Soyinka Professor of the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Teju was born on April 3, 1959, in Omu-Aran, Nigeria, the son of

Fako Olaniyan and Bolajoko Aborisade Sajiku. He is survived by his wife, Mojisola Olaniyan, assistant dean and director of the Academic Enhancement Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison Law School, whom he married on August 22, 1988, in Ithaca, New York, as well his daughters Bolajoko and Olabimpe.

It is very difficult to speak of Teju in the past tense. He was simply larger than life as a towering

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intellectual and multitalented scholar, who traversed many disciplines and excelled not only in his own areas of specialization, but also as a critical theorist and a public intellectual. Teju was truly one of the most impressive scholars actively engaged in the fields of African and African diaspora studies, postcolonial studies, and cultural and literary studies. He remained up to the last minute active in his output as well his impeccable service to the profession. His immense contributions will continue to inspire and challenge the large community of scholars in his areas of specialization and beyond. Most important, Teju was a teacher and a generous mentor to a younger generation of scholars, who are now leading figures in their own right in the field of African and African diaspora studies.

Anyone glancing at Teju's publication record would not have missed the diversity of fields and objects of study that have captured his attention and the multivalent theoretical insights he has brought to these fields and objects of study. Nor would they miss the prolific nature of his publications: several influential books and edited volumes that continue to serve as textbooks for graduate and undergraduate teaching in the United States and across the world of African and African diaspora studies. He has also made significant contributions through more than a hundred articles that have appeared in a wide-range of scholarly books and journals as well as popular magazines. Tejumola's first book, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American and Caribbean Drama* (1995), is a groundbreaking work that brought to the fore African diaspora dramatic arts as a serious object of study beyond any narrow essentialist reading. His well-known book *Arrest the Music!: Fela and His Rebel Art and Politics* (2004) is a major contribution to the study of African music and popular culture and their intersection with politics, nationalism, and globalization in contemporary Africa. It is a careful and persuasive examination of the social context, organization, instrumentation, lyrics, and visual textures through which Fela Kuti produced his music. Again, it is a book that shows Tejumola's ability to traverse different disciplinary boundaries with ease and rare theoretical facility in foregrounding the exceptional

global impact of Fela's music. Tejumola continued to sustain his commitment to marshaling and producing useful texts for the wider scholarly community, including the coedited volumes *African Drama and Performance* (2004), *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (2007), *The African Diaspora and the Disciplines* (2010), and *Taking African Cartoons Seriously: Politics, Satire, and Culture* (2018). This record of publishing has been complemented by a remarkable number of chapters in books and articles in scholarly journals. His commitment to African studies and as a dedicated citizen has been evident in numerous ways. A few notable examples include serving as president of the African Literature Association from 2013 to 2014 and on the African Studies Association's board of directors from 2012 to 2015. At the time of his passing, he was editor in chief of the *Journal of the African Literature Association*.

Teju was a dear friend to many of us at Cornell. He was for a long time associated with Cornell's Department of English as a 1989 alumnus. His deep connection to Cornell's Africana Studies was evident by his lectures, visits, consistent participation in conferences, and his principled and deep commitment to this community of students and scholars.

We, at *Nka*, are deeply saddened but also honored to publish in this issue one of Teju's latest sharply written essays. We are grateful to his daughter Olabimpe for not only completing the task after her father's untimely passing, but also contributing insightful illustrations that bring visual texture to his astute meditations on the intersections of slavery, colonialism, and capitalism and what he dubs as "cosmopolitan interest rates." As a modest gesture of appreciation for Teju's remarkable intellect and personal grace, we dedicate this issue to him and to the brief but remarkable life he lived on this earth.

Salah M. Hassan

Chika Okeke-Agulu