

Unveiling Bob Fullilove, My Game Changer! (Posted on Facebook on April 23, 2023)

Anyone who has read the acknowledgment of my books will come across a constant name—Bob Fullilove—my development copy editor. He has copy-edited all my publications—books, journal articles, book chapters—since I earned my Ph.D. 13 years ago. Except for my family, Bob is the only other person who gets the longest acknowledgment in all my books. Bob has watched me grow—from a junior scholar who struggled to write a book proposal and publish in top-tier journals 13 years ago, to an award-winning full professor who is now teaching others how to get their well-researched works published.

To fully understand the nature of Bob's involvement in my career, one would need a context—how I conceive academic writing. First, I wanted to enjoy research and writing. And thankfully, I have always worked on projects that fascinate me. Second, I conceive research and writing as attempts to purge myself of my ignorance about people, things, events, ideas, cultures, and communities—not an effort to claim expertise or absolute knowledge about anything.

I wanted the “art” in history to reflect in how I write and conduct research. I realized that it's not enough to report the past—there should be a stylistic and a thoughtful way to arrange narratives to give life to dormant stories and keep people interested in reading my work—till the end. Quality writing is the lifeblood of historical research. And knowing when to narrate, argue, describe, conceptualize, and theorize or hypothesize does not come, naturally. Rather, they emerge out of a self-conscious attempt to balance every component of a text knowledge creation. I think that the art of academic or non-fiction writing is teachable—it shouldn't be treated as a talent that only a few exclusive people are lucky to have.

This realization requires more than the basic rudiments of research and writing. Like any conscientious academic writer who sees writing as art, I need to own myself. And put a premium on every sentence I compose as a piece of myself. This strategy then puts a lot of strain on composition because it's not just about producing something that colleagues would consider a good piece of academic work, but writing a fraction of my interiority that animates through the interpretation of archival materials, oral sources, newspapers, among other evidence of the past. Heavily influenced by orthodox Fuji's sequential compositional technique, I trained for a style that doesn't complicate sophistication. In other words, something doesn't have to be vague to be sophisticated.

This is where Bob comes in. As my development copy editor, he's not reading for me, but against me. He doesn't read to agree, but to disagree with me. He doesn't read along with

me, but away from me. His job, which he enjoys, like life itself, is to closely follow my composition—the way abula follows amala down a wet hungry throat. Logic, created out of evidence, is a difficult thing to consistently achieve, especially when you write a book that must have a central idea/s. Because I write on different topics, learning new vocabularies for each book project requires new repository of language that doesn't come with ease and that requires the eagle eyes of a genius like Bob to monitor.

Scholars generally think that peer-review is the control mechanism for quality publishing. I think that the real quality control is a very good development copyediting. Except for a few exception, peer-review is mostly a gate-keeping process; development copyediting is a gate-opener that allows the author to see much of the problems that peer-reviewers would never see. The best of the best development copy editors, like Bob, would track the progressing of argument/s from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and chapter to chapter, ensuring that the cohesion required for a book, journal article, and book chapter to form a comprehensive whole, is maintained. Because I have Bob, I'm not afraid to experiment with proses because he could tell me if they make sense or not before the entire world see them. I could focus on the big picture and advanced meaning-making—not on minor errors that can easily be fixed by the publisher's copyeditor.

Development copy editing is expensive. Between 2010 and 2023, Bob's charges have tripled. Yet, my relationship with him is not merely transactional, partly because, in clear terms, we don't do development copy editing simply to increase the chances of acceptance of a manuscript for publication, but as an integral part of quality control in knowledge creation that improves on the present and future works.

I have used the skills acquired by working with Bob to help my students, mentees, and junior scholars to: turn their thoughtless graduate school application materials into something the most unwilling graduate admission committee member would read; transform a mediocre journal manuscript into a publishable piece; make a disjointed book manuscript into a coherent finished book that contributes tangibly to knowledge; write a compelling letter of recommendation; make a grant proposal competitive, etc. Since writing is the art and is at the heart of what I do, the skill I have acquired from working with Bob has now been adapted into writings for a myriad of purposes—including making a strong case for the best amala buka in Ibadan!

By the way, some people—who didn't buy me amala; who didn't worry if I'm eating enough kolanut for caffeine; who didn't volunteer to be my packer and load carrier for the Fuji documentary film shooting; who didn't ask, codedly, if Jagunlabi nsun le'bi or not; who didn't buy me ticket to see my favorite Fujician—are asking to gbe'nu si owo Dan David. No

be juju be that? Yet, Bob Fullilove, who truly deserves a bite from the Dan David money, is not asking for anything.

Yours Sincerely in History,  
Ìşq̣lá Alákq̣là