

The Dialectics of University and Development in Nigeria:

An Essay in Honour of Kevin Ogon Etta

By

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P U B L I S H E D B Y

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PREFACE

Just two months between the time of invitation to be the Guest Speaker on the occasion of Professor Kevin Ogon Etta's eightieth birthday celebration and the day of delivery was obviously too short to do anything befitting the quality of the celebrant. But I did not want to merely talk. Professor Etta deserves something more concrete than mere talk. I had to sacrifice time and energy to come up with this Essay. All these notwithstanding, I take full responsibility for any inadequacies, as there are bound to be several.

The content of this essay does not refer directly either to Universities of Jos and Calabar or Cross River University of Technology, Calabar where I have had some personal relationships. They do not also draw from any University I have served as external examiner. They are views which are concerns of all Nigerians.

I am certain that the essay will generate sufficient controversy. This is welcome as long as such controversy will impact positively on the University system in Nigeria.

I thank members of the Organizing Committee of Professor Kevin Ogon Etta's eightieth birthday celebration for the opportunity to be part of their effort.

A. Owan Enoh
Calabar, May 18, 2018

1.0 Introduction

In accepting the honour to deliver this lecture on the place of University in development, within the precincts of a University community, I was not oblivious of both the simplicity and difficulty of the task. Simplistically, my audience is bound to be dominated by those who are already schooled in the belief of its obvious rightness, whether as teachers or students. It will therefore be extremely easy if I limit myself to a recasting of conventional theory; a justification of both our roles as University teachers or expectations as students; an elaboration of the taken for granted. To limit myself, however, to this obvious dimension against growing dissatisfaction consequent upon the stark realities of our situation will be a betrayal of trust. This calls for some critical examination of issues – a reassessment of our beliefs that Universities are the royal road to development. And that in itself provides the difficulty I am bound to face.

First, to say anything to the contrary amounts in a way to rendering a dirge in a wedding ceremony. But more importantly, I am a University man whom fortune has elevated to the position of Vice Chancellor and by implication a custodian of its commitments and ideals. Anything to the contrary can only be interpreted as baseless self-criticism which chance provided an opportunity for correction. If I cannot, why say it, some may point out. Of course, I will face the same criticisms if I fail to. Either choice provides the devil's alternative.

By accepting to be critical of the University system, I take the position different from Rousseau's who said that it is precisely because he is neither a prince nor a legislator that he wrote *The Social Contract*. If he was either, he went on to write, he should not waste his time in saying what ought to be done; he should do it or remain silent¹. It is therefore expected that many will be quick to criticism following the ordinary thinking Rousseau alluded to, that as serving Vice Chancellor I should use my position to right the wrongs this essay is set to lay bare or failing that remain silent.

Rather than prevent any form of criticism of the University, however, my current position greatly warrants that. In saying so, I am influenced by the thoughts of Plato who in his *Republic*, presented the allegory of the cave in which living in chains all their lives inhabitants of the cave mistake their shadows for reality. Those who free themselves from their chains escape to see the reality which exists outside the cave. These escapees, to Plato, are the philosophers who must therefore descend by turns and associate with the rest, "For when habituated, they will see better than them" and "recognise what image is, and what is its original", having "seen the realities of which beautiful and just and good things are copies"².

In rejecting Rousseau and accepting Plato, I take the position that not only does my position compel me to speak, it is even reinforced by the privilege of occupying that office to see beyond the ordinary and reveal the true reality of our Universities like the true philosopher that my position and training confers on me.

Plato's prescriptions demand that all true philosophers, having gone through the experience of distinguishing knowledge from opinion must be bold in bringing others into the same awareness. Our celebrant, Professor Kevin Ogon Etta, is not only a philosopher by birth, he is also a two time Vice Chancellor who will only be too happy to let others come to the understanding of the true nature of the institution his entire life was committed to advancing. It is my responsibility, prompted by his choice, to take on the difficult task.

That responsibility, I must say, can hardly be adequately accomplished by me, for I lack not only the courage of the man who demonstrates the heart of a lion, the voice of a megaphone, the grammar and fluency of Cicero and the depth of thought of Socrates. My consolation comes from the facts of history which show that most great men hardly bring forth children who achieve anything near their ceilings of accomplishments. I am an example of an undeserving son of a great father.

In terms of quality therefore I stand at the opposite extreme

of him in almost every conceivable way, prompting my near refusal to accept the challenge of presenting this lecture in his honour. My acceptance found strength in Machiavelli's wise counsel, which avers that men of opposite natures best discuss and understand each other. Notes him:

And I hope it may not be accounted presumption if a man of lowly and humble station ventures to discuss and direct the conduct of princes; for those who wish to delineate countries place themselves low in the plain to observe the form and character of mountains and high places, and for the purpose of studying the nature of the low country place themselves high upon an eminence, so one must be a prince to know well the character of the people, and to understand well the nature of a prince one must be of the people.³

I am presenting myself in this lecture therefore as an ordinary Nigerian placing the University system in judgment and not as one holding its highest office. I believe that it is only by so doing, taking myself to the low plains of ordinary life, can I see more clearly the underbelly of our ivory towers. In addition and more relevant to this lecture, I am in a permanently low state to Professor Kevin Ogon Etta. He is the Prince and I must remain of the people. I am therefore eminently qualified to discuss him because of our diametrically opposed natures.

Kevin Ogon Etta, the reason we are here gathered is a very distinguished scholar. With a First Class Degree from the prestigious University of Nigeria, a lecture in his honour can never escape a tinge of some deep thought, if it is to be deserving of presentation. And deep thought can never also escape strains of philosophy – the very reason behind my interest in examining not just the relationship between University and development but a dialectical one.

The dialectics, we must remind ourselves, is the ultimate

method in philosophy, which all greats, not only Socrates, Plato and Aristotle but also Hegel and Marx, employed to pursue truth or advance the frontiers of knowledge. Its essential ingredient is the reconciliation of opposing points of view, arguments and counter-arguments, thesis and anti-thesis or propositions and counter-propositions, leading to an improvement of earlier positions. Such improvements may involve either the total rejection of previous positions and the acceptance of new alternatives or a combination of positive elements from both (synthesis). For it to occur at all, a dialectic must have in place only opposites which are unified because they are interdependent and complementary as opposed to being mutually exclusive of each other. In such unified opposites the different entities through the similarities and difference they share continually interact by affecting each other and producing results which only their combined presence are capable of.

My application of the dialectic is not in the strict and more familiar Hegelian sense in which the contradiction of ideas acting as principal forces maintain a continuously evolutionary process of thesis (primary idea) which sets forth its negative or antithesis (secondary idea), leading to a compromise between them in the form of a synthesis. It is rather a dialectic which recognizes the continuous interaction of two or more systems or ideas in such a manner that, while retaining their separate identities are continuously reshaped by one another, either for better or worse. This interpretation therefore dispenses the luxury of a synthesis, a stage in which the ideas or systems take up a completely new character, comprising of elements of previous compositions.

The relationship or interaction between philosophy and science presents the clearest example of this form of the dialectic, because while they continuously shape one another none ever loses its identity. Rather, their interaction continuously refines each. It is within this frame that I urge our understanding of the relationship between Universities and development. None, especially the Universities, should be seen as the primary agent for

the improvement of the other. Both should be seen to be locked in an endless interaction to the extent that we can always creatively direct this for maximum benefit. The challenge is for us to draw at any given moment what is good from either to strengthen the other. It is the challenge that I have undertaken to accomplish in this essay.

My inclination is that although University and development can be construed as different entities, they also share certain common boundaries, the interaction between them producing results which are unique to their identities. This reveals the fact that I will not, and it does not make sense to, view University and development in very general terms. In other words, I will not be comfortable with the line of thought that there are certain specific functions which all Universities on earth should perform. I will rather, to paraphrase Frantz Fanon, take the position that every University must out of relative obscurity identify its mission, fulfil it or betray it, for Oxford or Cambridge will be as useless to Nigeria as CRUTECH or Unical will be to England. More crucially is the extent to which any University enters into a productive dialectic to yield results that continuously elevate it. It will be condemned by the extent that it negates this, either through isolation or sheer escape from the challenges and realities of its location.

My decision to dwell on the dialectics of University and development is therefore rooted in the following essential premises, which taken together will surmise for the conclusion of my presentation. Our Universities and their locations are unified opposites which must remain in constant interdependence in order to reshape or renew each other. Both entities have elements of the good and bad, strong and weak sides, which must continually be explored by drawing from the strengths of the other. Being involved in a dialectic implies that the possibilities for improvement in both elements is an ever present one. And most importantly, neither can advance in isolation of the other, being locked in perpetual unity.

This presentation is anchored on two principal hypotheses:

- a) We have allowed for too long a wide chasm to exist between our Universities and development
- b) In this widening gap, Universities have increasingly isolated themselves from development and failed as a result to take useful lessons from circumstances which have made such development possible at the level that it is.

This understanding occupies a certain urgency in my thinking and drives me not to take off this discussion from the preferred and obvious issues of the functions Universities may play and how they can be perfected by reference to external development factors. The major emphasis is to present certain weakness in our University system and to show how these can be mitigated by drawing useful lessons from what goes on outside their confines. There lies the dialectic of University and development; the bringing together of the two systems in a way in which each mutually strengthens or improves the other, except that for purposes of this presentation I will limit myself to improving the University system by introducing ideas external to it.

The lecture will be presented under certain key questions about which we can ask of our Universities. Are they:

- Theatres of Dreams or Thrones of Frustration?
- Centres of Excellence or Cocoons of Mediocrity?
- Citadels of Learning or Temples of Rites and Rituals?
- Bastions of Efficiency or Baskets of Waste?
- Instruments of Liberation or Implements of Dependency?
- Embodiments of Democracy or Empires of Despotism?
- Hosts of Order or Houses of Commotion?
- Seeds of Unity or Fruits of Disunity?

As already observed the methodology to be followed is the dialectic comprising three distinct stages. The first, of each section, corresponding to the thesis will consist of clarification of the concepts under examination. This will be followed with some

exposition of the positive relationship which Nigerian Universities at the formative stages of their establishment approximated these ideals. Universities will be presented as striving to approximate true theatres of dreams, centres of excellence, citadels of learning, bastions of efficiency, instruments of liberation, embodiments of democracy, hosts of order, and seeds of unity.

This exposition will be followed with a presentation of today's Universities as negations of their original attributes – the antithesis. In this regard they will be shown as tending towards thrones of frustration, cocoons of mediocrity, temples of rites and rituals, baskets of waste, implements of dependency, empires of despotism, houses of commotion, and fruits of disunity. In doing this, the circumstances or conditions which reversed their initial paths of development to the present degenerate states will be stressed.

Following this will be a caricature of some synthesis, consisting of either eliminating those deleterious conditions or circumstances on the one hand or drawing strength from factors which have made development possible outside Universities to improve on practices in the system. Finally, a development perspective will be highlighted.

To an examination of every perspective, we now turn.

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2.0 Theatres of Dreams or Thrones of Frustration?

Men are either catapulted by the dreams they have or are frustrated by them, for the concept of dream has both positive and negative sides. Positively, it refers to our imaginations, thoughts, ideas, visions, and aspirations: the goals we set and the hopes to realize them. Negatively, dreams allude to fantasy, day-dreaming, delusions and illusions: the never realisable hopes we set our minds on. One inspires; the other frustrates. One is achievable, the other elusive. It is hard indeed to tell where our Universities lie in

this divide, but safer to admit that this is dictated by time and circumstances as my shallow knowledge of educational history makes possible.

At the very beginning, our Universities were true theatres of dreams, with every opportunity offering an individual immediate celebration and the guarantee for a life of fulfilment and escape from the uncertainties and tedium of the vast majority. This was expected because their coming to be was to produce a crop of indigenous manpower to replace colonial authority whose positions which conferred them a life of luxury was wrongly interpreted to emanate from their higher educational attainment rather than their positions as colonialists. The University degree assumed the status of a passport to that privilege and the institution itself the only bridge to cross to a life of comfort.

It required no inducements to come to this realization as all was done to demonstrate its efficacy and potency. Six years of primary education offered one some marginal distance from those without to somewhere around level two salary grade level and an additional five years of secondary education just two additional levels. After secondary education, every year in a University guaranteed an additional level advancement which in working life takes between three to five years to achieve. This immediately placed Universities as the shortest route to upward mobility, irrespective of background.

To perform this preparatory function well, the ivory tower mentality was put in place at the very beginning, for while there were no marked differences in the architecture of primary and secondary schools from much of those in their communities, Universities were set apart for towers and ivory. It is only within the confines of such splendour that the necessary anticipatory socialization can be achieved for the offices products of the system were being prepared for. Dress codes too reflected the same slant; students dressed as managers in training and so quite apart from the rest of the population. Almost always too, Universities were located in big urban centres, the very location their training was preparing them for, with the highest prospects of having pipe

borne water, electricity, good roads and such other additions which give life its relative luxurious meaning but denied to the vast majority. Also, behind the perception of Universities as theatres of dreams lie the idea of equal educational opportunity. The claim is an understanding of it as the platform by which individuals without regard to parental background or geography, but with demonstrated ability can take advantage of its opportunity to fulfil life ambitions.

Conscious of its potentials as a theatre of dreams in the positive sense, demand was set on high from the beginning. From Ibadan University College in 1948, it took twelve additional years for the government in preparation for high level manpower, to set up the Ashby Universities at Nsukka, Ife, Lagos, Zaria and later on Benin, with the onset of political independence in 1960. Insatiable demand for the spread of opportunities to all sections, an issue which was to assume feverish heat by its threat to national peace and concord resulted in the later establishment of Jibril Aminu Universities in Jos, Calabar, Ilorin, Sokoto, Kano, Port Harcourt and Maiduguri.

Up to the late 1970's, Universities in Nigeria were very successful theatres of dreams, where those fortunate to gain access were treated with fanfare and huge expectations; where parents, extended family members and whole communities contributed resources and organized great send off parties; when matriculation gowns were signs of the great expectations and when graduations were accompanied with elaborate ceremonies. There were times when job opportunities were in excess of demand and when cars were the right of every newly-employed University graduate. These were times when those who could not have access to Universities accepted the indignity to work in banks and when the Civil Service, both State and Federal, embarked on massive recruitment tours in Universities to recruit those to serve them best. The University graduate had no compare, either with the footballer who on the average was either an illiterate or a school drop-out or a dramatist who was most likely a clown and deprived as a result of any dignity, or the possibility of a good income comparable to the University graduate.

This theatre of dreams had an effect on the composition of its membership. The students who gained admission set their eyes on competition to excel, while those appointed to teach were selected from the best of its graduates. It was easy to attract and retain them because of the right they enjoyed to indicate on appointment where in the world their salaries are to be paid. Truly, everyone in the University, whether student or teacher, lived their dreams.

Universities during the early years were not just preparatory grounds to a later life of comfort. Life in them was also a vast departure from what even average income earners could contemplate. With the assurance of three good meals at almost no cost to students, with the constant provision of very high five star hotel services in students hostels, the constant provision of light and water in the school generally, the clean and green lawns that sprawled the campuses, haven was not too different from them. Students purchased no handouts, had the latest book editions in libraries and in good quantities while lecture halls had the luxury of today's high profile conferences and lecturers exuded hope and inspiration. A newly admitted student was better taken care of than his employed classmate not so fortunate to be an undergraduate. The description 'undergrad' had a certain charm and assured everyone what lies ahead on graduation. There was practically nothing he could not get on request either from the University, his family, community and the public. He was the hope of tomorrow who must be nurtured and preserved for that purpose.

The efficacy of any platform or institution as a theatre of dream, deducible from the foregoing, is predicated on the purchase the external environment places on its products, an understanding of the positive connection between present action and future happenings, the preparedness of its participants to take maximum advantage of its opportunities by working hard to excel and having required capacity. These ingredients rather than the mere process of going through a University are what bring about the fulfilment of dreams. If these conditions made Nigerian

Universities in the first two decades after independence to assume the status of theatres of dreams, it is only appropriate to apply them to our present situation, approximately sixty years after, and see how they fit or differ.

2.1 Today's Nigerian Universities as Thrones of Frustration

Long after Nigerian Universities served as theatres of dreams their attraction has remained on the increase, warranting incredible expansion of access to the point in which almost anyone needy of its establishment gets a space. With 6 million admission seekers shut out of Universities in five years, the surest way out of the problem “is for government and private individuals or corporate bodies to establish more universities”¹. Their importance to communities is equated with the breath of air². With such expansion of opportunities came the problem of the 'educated unemployed,' 'qualification escalation' and 'educational inflation,' arising from the widespread belief that “the higher the educational qualification one gets the better one's chances of getting some job”³. Disillusion substituted lofty dreams as even those fortunate enough to secure employment find themselves in occupations which require competences far below their qualifications. Many engineers are unable to secure teaching appointments of whatever kind and join the ranks of the unemployed.

These after-school conditions have rebounding effects on the once unquestionable theatres of dreams in one significant respect: they affect learning and the ambition to succeed. With dwindling job prospects the drive to achieve and enjoy the immediate fruits of one's effort gets increasingly weakened. This situation is reinforced, consequent upon present over bloated class sizes, to render the teaching-learning environment a most discomfoting one. Added to the likelihood of having more underachieving students in class, arising from the wider access to candidates the new lecture halls directly tell their inhabitants hell is no different from here. The lecture halls which once inspired hope turn all but the very few into despondent lots. Their

realization that many of those the Universities shut their doors against achieve more visible material success further inflates the frustration the University has brought upon them.

On the whole, conditions which in the past made Universities theatres of dreams have in reverse turned them into thrones of frustration. First, the purchase value of their credentials has suffered tremendous devaluation. Second, University students no longer correlate positively what goes on in the University and what is obtainable outside. As a result of these conditions, the third is a matter of course: the drive to excel is diminished to the extreme. Even lecturers are not spared the wind of frustration currently sweeping across the Universities and the first casualties are those devoid of capacity and desire but who by default find themselves in the system. Unable to effectively teach or undertake meaningful research they become like fish on dry land, using every excuse to escape from their primary responsibility. Collectively, all accept how inadequate their wages are, making even the most suited for engagement to opt for better opportunities outside. In lecture halls, unprepared students for University work make teaching a horrendous experience and frustrate even the most endowed. The exciting days of meaningful intellectual engagements are almost behind us.

To the parents and larger society, the once bounteous hope of tremendous positive return on individual investment to University education has ebbed to the very bottom. The glamour of a University degree has lost its place and in realization of this students can trade anything for a grade. As a result, those with superior exchange commodities succeed in reversing the pattern of reward by receiving higher grades than their abilities ordinarily deserve. The more able with less or nothing to offer in exchange for grades are either punished or remain unaffected. Overall, the validity of our classes of degrees are called to question. Even the First Class has lost its veneration and awe.

Outside the Universities previous lowlands of frustration are increasingly being raised to theatres of dreams. The footballers, actors, entrepreneurs, artisans and so on are

demonstrating to us that our previous conception of Universities as the main avenues to the good life is misplaced. Those involved here meet the conditions earlier stated: they have succeeded in raising their purchase value by keying into the needs of the public; they find a strong connection between what they are engaged in and the responses from the people; they all work hard to succeed consequent upon interest in their engagements and the innate abilities they possess. Outside today's Universities, immediate return on effort and ability promotes growth and efficiency. Everyone is engaged in what makes meaning to him and sustains himself by his quality of output rather than claims of ability.

Our Universities can approximate the past image of theatres of dreams only when they throw open to individuals with a clear idea of what they expect of life and which corresponds with their aptitude and interest. Their theatre of dream can be status resumed when they cease to disconnect its activities from the realities of the world outside and become instruments to perfect individual capacities for maximum self-actualization. Our Universities must therefore assume a new character which contradicts what it was in its glorious days as theatres of dreams during which it certified individuals to a virgin society desperately in need of its products. That need has suffered tremendous reduction today. They must now be open to anyone thirsty for the knowledge which both widens his world view and strengthens his ability to improve on his life, while offering certificates of attendance rather than degrees. To be effective, society must begin to accord respect for demonstrable ability in place of claims of ability through the proxies of degree certificates.

2.2 Perspectives on Development

Both conceptions of a University as a theatre of dream or throne of frustration have implications on development, to the extent that individuals are either stimulated positively or negatively. When conceived as theatres of dreams admission and completion provide necessary energy and drive to achieve to the maximum and to face whatever vicissitudes of life there are with

more confidence and hope. Man is the prime mover in every economy, we have been told; the generators of all impulses of progress, the determinant of all economic and social change. To be all these he must himself be in a state of great optimism about his own ability to control situations around him or alter them to his advantage.

When the perception is that of a throne of frustration, a lowering of confidence in one's own ability and the cloud of gloom than overhangs him vitiates the necessary energy to confront life. Going through the University ceases to provide drive to alter the circumstances in one's life, for the better. Ultimately, the individual becomes subdued by them and life becomes drab and frustrating. Under this circumstance, man ceases to be a prime mover of desired change and becomes subject to the forces and circumstances around him.

It is important to stress the self-fulfilling prophesy inherent in both interpretations of theatre of dreams or thrones of frustration and the seeming powerlessness of the individual to alter his circumstance. In both interpretations lie the fact that if the University at any one moment renders the individual powerless to alter his situation, he must remain bound by the circumstances of the nature of the University at the time and either remain optimistic or condemned by it.

To accept this kind of determinism is to make none-sense of University education. No matter its conception, we must realize that when they were conceived as theatres of dreams this was so not because of any inherent character of the Universities themselves but due to the limitless opportunities available on graduation. The strength of the external world by its opportunities impacted on the prospects Universities were seen to have. It is not as if the universities provided any special training for its beneficiaries to impact positively on society. The change of fortunes in the world outside provides opportunity for Universities to alter the world and bring about the good life we call development. In other words, it is not whether Universities are theatres of dreams or thrones of frustration, for these are mere

perceptions. It is what we can actually make of them to serve as prime movers of development by bringing out certain kinds of individuals and not others.

One way by which this can be achieved is by exposing University students at all times to the philosophy of existentialism which emphasizes the principle that our lives and destinies are in our hands; that we can become whatever we aspire if only we work hard, make the right choices, live authentic lives and do not unnecessarily follow the crowd. Our University students need to be told that there is unemployment to only those who want to remain unemployed as there is always something to do to earn a living. They need to be told that in the midst of great difficulties many are still making it to the top through hard work and diligence. It is their choice to either remain idle or be engaged in some work; become rich or poor. In the philosophy of existentialism man is an open possibility.

Armed with this philosophy, every opportunity to be in a University will always become an opportunity to increase one's range of opportunities to choose and make the best out of life. If we follow this philosophy, Universities and the training they provide will always remain theatres of dreams to inspire all to contribute positively to development rather than remaining helpless.

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3.0 Embodiments of Democracy or Empires of Despotism

By their very nature, Universities ought to be true democratic institutions. The maturity of their total population, whether staff or students, more than anything else demands that they are so. There can be no valid grounds on account of this to exclude any, but particularly those to be affected by any policy or measure. The high literate composition of its membership also naturally invokes freedom of expression of opinion and association. This singular element calls into being such other

democratic principles as the demand for justice and accountability from those in positions of authority. Its very complexity also necessitates, if it is to function effectively, free flow of communication and the sharing of ideas.

It is in furtherance of its democratic necessity that Universities operate the committee system in their management. By pooling individuals from different backgrounds and experiences Universities benefit from its diversity and prevent control by one or the few. Consequently, while on the one hand different levels of the University system – Council, Senate, Management, Faculties and Departments – can be conceived as committees, they can be viewed on the other hand as semi-autonomous units which in the spirit of the Universities democratic tradition apply the committee system in their operations as well. Together, they provide checks and balances in the exercise of power. The composition of these committees at all levels and recognition of laid down rules of succession further enhances the democratic spirit, for no one head of a Committee at any given moment is far too superior to his members that excuses him from the open scrutiny of his views and actions.

In almost all Universities too, there is strict adherence to policies on matters of smooth transfer of power at all levels of management, not by imposition but by the consent of all those under the umbrella of a given authority. Within such an umbrella, reliance on objectivity and truth over any other basis of authority implies the supremacy of ideas and policies in the conduct of its affairs. By so doing, Universities by nature are institutions which place maximum regard on the principle of equality, interpreted narrowly as equal treatment of all. It is in the attempt to apply the principle of equality that Universities demand for autonomy from external agencies, including those who established them as any interference from outside undermines its effort at formulating and implementing policies in their required objective form.

Nowhere else is the democratic spirit in Universities more evident than in teachers demand for and exercise of academic freedom – the freedom to teach what one believes in without

interference by even those who employed them. And given the expected ages of its students, the democratic spirit gives them the equal freedom to demand for reasons from their teachers and management in a fertile exchange of ideas which makes it truly democratic. The opportunity for Student Union Governments in all Universities through which students freely manage their affairs completes their description as true democratic communities. Using this platform, students put pressure on University administrations to be more responsive to their demands. When this is considered alongside other University Unions, every member of a University must of necessity belong to a Union, thereby making accountability and the channelling of views easier and comprehensive.

3.1 Universities in the Past as Embodiments of Democracy

To a large extent, Nigerian Universities at the very beginning reflected these tendencies. First, because the processes of recruitment placed ability over other considerations staff never owed their allegiance to an individual or group, a situation which guaranteed freedom of mind to stand on the path of truth, whether as individuals or members of unions. Second, and following the same path of objectivity, all opportunities whether into Council, Senate or University committees followed the same tradition; each clearly understanding its true position and providing effective checks which stabilized the system. Third, appointment of Vice Chancellors, while involving the University to have a say through a rigorous screening process which all sections of the community played a part in determining, remained largely unbiased and screened away from limited interests. This neutrality also made possible the smooth transfer of authority from one Vice Chancellor to another.

In all of these, it is the quality of staff and students which facilitated effective democratic practice in Nigerian Universities at the beginning. From the perspective of staff, it guaranteed, as already pointed out, the freedom of mind arising from the tendency of any truly knowledgeable and informed individual to

resist falsehood, oppression and injustice. This spirit is displayed in the conduct of all committees. It also, by the same token, ensured that the teaching-learning atmosphere is pervaded with the spirit of objectivity, open-mindedness and tolerance to different or competing viewpoints. And with the maturity and quality of students, the teaching-learning atmosphere is often charged with genuine dialogue in which teachers and students engage one another in examining issues brought before them. Such genuine dialogue was also made possible with all Unions, whether staff or students, with little or no influence by anyone but with the only commitment to the improvement of the system. It is this commitment, backed by the quality of minds, which places objective truth over anything else, together with freedom of expression of opinion, which characterizes a true democratic institution. It enabled Nigerian Universities in the past to speak out on important national issues and even influence them. It is what made University Senates, points of vibrant intellectual engagements without let or hindrance.

3.2 Today's Universities as Empires of Despotism

If democracy is rule by many, despotism is rule by a single individual wielding all the power and authority in the State. The despot governs by his own whims and caprices and in the absence of the checks by others it becomes synonymous with tyrannical rule. In Africa, Jean-Bedel Bokassa of Central African Republic and Idi Amin Dada of Uganda remain classic examples. But while no University can approximate the gruesome experiences of any country under such rule, exercise of power and authority by a single individual deprives any institution the advantages which come from collective participation in governance.

At the head of the University sits the Vice Chancellor, who determines the style of leadership and by implication the character of the whole system. If he follows laid down rules, respects the different organs which define its structure and permits them to perform their legitimate functions, he can never degenerate to the status of an emperor. Unfortunately, maintaining that delicate

balance among all organs is always a slippery business and many fail by taking the easier course of dictatorship and therefore converting otherwise democratic communities into empires of autocratic rule.

Now, autocracy has been associated with “personality disorder” in which, according to Aristotle, the autocrat aims at humiliating his subjects, creating mistrust among them and overpowers them to such an extent that they become incapable of action. This corresponds with the position of Machiavelli who submitted as follows:

Some princes, with a view to secure tenure of their States, have disarmed their subjects; some have kept the countries subject to them divided into different parties; others have purposely encouraged enmities against themselves; whilst others again have endeavored to win the good will of those whom in the beginning of their reign they suspected of hostile feelings. Some have built fortresses, whilst others have demolished and razed those that existed¹.

Resort to this can be due to a severe sense of insecurity and inadequacy to subject oneself to competitive negotiation of ideas and policies with those over whom his position as leader demands. For this to be the case in a community of considerable enlightenment says much of the processes through which leadership emerges, of the powers bestowed on that office and the personality of those over whom such despotism is given opportunity to thrive.

Unlike in the past, it is more common than rare to find Vice Chancellors who have become despots to the extreme. Shielding themselves behind the curtains of security and personnel they become drawn away from those with whom effectiveness requires intimate interaction. And deprived of the privilege of pooled ideas from a community endowed with so much, they become limited by their own ideas which they make available at their convenience. In contrast to a democratic society which must “in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse

gifts and interests in its educational measures,”² a despotic Vice Chancellor encourages the opposite by surrounding himself with only those who are too willing to convert every no to a yes.

Under this atmosphere, opportunities become the rights of close associates and the responsibility for effective service the duty of others. Arbitrariness elevates many beyond their capacities while those perceived as incapable of such depravity are pushed to the margins of obscurity. In no time, those placed in positions over others with superior abilities or rank acquire the same 'personality disorders' to maintain their positions. They too become despots; the system has made them so as they remain guided by the Machiavellian principle that for a prince, it is better to be feared than loved.

The authoritarianism that pervades the administration of Universities today has also found its way into lecture halls, a situation which is prompted by the quality of student intake. Unable, in most cases, to effectively participate in what is presented by teachers the banking mode of instruction becomes dominant. In this type of teaching Paulo Freire has said among others “the teacher teaches and the students are taught”; the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing”, “the teacher thinks and the students are thought about”; “the teacher talks and the students listen –meekly”; “the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined”; “the teacher chooses and enforces his choice and the students comply”³.

The lecturer who converts his lecture room into an empire in which he acts as the despotic emperor suffers similar fate among other lecturers of superior rank, for he is constantly reminded of his proper place and must learn to respect the difference. He is forced to assume the position of his 'banking student' as captured by Freire. Going up, the senior colleague remains under the iron rule of the despotic Vice Chancellor and so the entire University becomes a collection of concentric empires where every emperor guides his own but all remaining subject to the supreme lord of the manor. Fertile intellectual activity requires not an atmosphere of hostile restriction and fear but one of free exchange of ideas and

action, together with a sense of satisfaction and encouragement made possible on all equally.

In examining the concepts of democracy and despotism as applied to Nigeria's University system today, one cannot reasonably ignore the issue of loyalty of staff to the leadership of serving Vice Chancellors, arguably one of the most powerful institutional heads. Events leading to their appointments often divide University communities into supporting camps of all the contesting professors. The eventual appointment of one often leaves its deposit of losers and winners with some Vice Chancellors falling into the trap of identifying a group as being supportive or 'loyal' to their administration; men and women who will never find anything wrong with whatever policies and actions are taken in the course of administering their institutions. This provides the warrant to explore the concept of loyalty in some detail as its elucidation is key to understanding several problems bedevilling the system.

In ordinary or common sense meaning, loyalty is being faithful to a person or cause and providing support as required. It is, therefore, construed as a positive support in the practice of democracy which requires coming together to fulfil common ends. This is often contrasted with disloyalty or opposition which are thought to undermine it. The problem with this interpretation of loyalty however is the tendency to become blind by providing support just for the sake of it, even when what is being supported is baseless or harmful. More importantly, the interpretation does not provide respect for the individual offering loyalty as his will or judgement is not called to play. A situation in which one is expected to say yes to another without conviction, assessment and acceptance of the fundamental issues is slavery.

Technically, loyalty suggests the condition of a free agent having a will to choose his course of action. It demands free submission to some ideals or standards rather than others. To say that one is loyal to a cause is therefore to imply that the decision is entirely the individuals rather than it being forced or done to please another. Here, we can contrast loyalty with obedience. We can

obey uncritically or out of fear or compulsion because obedience does not give room for critical reflection. In most instances of obedience, the individual is not in a position to do otherwise or to choose for himself. A junior soldier obeys his superior officer, a child his father or an offender a policeman. Loyalty on the other hand brings to mind the element of freedom to choose between alternatives and to remain bound by one's choice. It is more commonly applied in situations of common agreement where individuals drawn by the same ideals come together as free individuals to uphold them. By coming together they are loyal not to one another or the head whom they choose but to upholding the common ideals which bind them⁴.

As a condition of loyalty also is the need for knowledge and understanding of the content of what one is being loyal to. It involves as Peters⁵ says "being on the inside of a form of thought and awareness" rather than just being merely informed. A man cannot be loyal to the ideals of liberty and equality except he fully understands their deeper meaning. To be only acquainted with them as mere words used carelessly in everyday discourse can never bring about strong attachment to what they stand for. It is this understanding of the content of the ethical principle one is being loyal to that guarantees commitment to their application in "some sustained and practical" way as Josiah Royce puts it⁶. This is the kind of allegiance or loyalty Harold Laski had in mind when he said, "we seek to know what will bind men's allegiance, not inertly, but with passion to its preservation and enlargement."⁷

From this understanding of the concept of loyalty, it is evident that a loyal husband is not he who obeys the commands of his wife. He is on the contrary the one who is committed to upholding the common values which marriage demands. The same is true of a loyal friend as not being he who does whatever you want but who remains committed to sustaining the values shared by both. Loyalty is remaining faithful to promises made as opposed to the slavish following of another's whims and caprices.

Applied to the University, all have their clearly stated objectives and values, long accepted as guide to fulfilling its

mandate and subject to revision as the need arises. Every Vice Chancellor too has his vision and plans for his administration, both of which are publicly known and open to questioning and modification. As University staff, loyalty to any University administration can only be viewed from the perspective of continuous commitment to the actualization of those publicly stated ideals. To do this is not to be loyal to the Vice Chancellor or his administration but to the larger institutional entity to which the Vice Chancellor is only an individual. Individuals who sing praises of their Vice Chancellors or indeed any leader for that matter when their policies and actions are greatly at cross purposes with achievement of collective goals of the entity are indeed those who are disloyal to the very ideals which are intended to benefit all. They are those who in the final analysis are denying the system the opportunity to achieve its developmental mandate.

True loyalty is demonstrated by identifying round pegs for round holes, entertaining all shades of opinions which further the cause that the University is pursuing and which subordinates private to public interests. With loyalty, the Vice Chancellor is himself committed to upholding the higher values which the University sets for itself and which endures longer than the tenure of any single administration.

3.3 Regaining Universities Lost Democratic Past

The degeneration of Universities into empires of despotism with Vice Chancellors as emperors can only be attributed to the ultimate source of power to appoint and retain them throughout their tenure. As long as this source remains both external and extremely limited in representation, so long will the degeneration continue. Thus, in spite of the much talked about democratization in Universities the foundation of that condition has remained faulty.

By convention University Councils appoint Vice Chancellors but recent happenings in many appointments where both winners and losers do the unusual undermines its validity, especially when this is seen against their limited numerical

composition relative to the total University population. Furthermore, University Council members are never members of a University community in a way in which staff and students are. Not only are they unaware of important dynamics of the Universities they govern, they are limited in knowledge of those most suitable for appointment and so have to either rely on other secondary sources or directives from above. This is no democracy. It explains why Vice Chancellors can become despotic and unengaging with the people they are placed to serve, yet seemingly satisfy those who appointed them.

The composition and complexity of Universities call for direct participation of all its members in determining who assumes its leadership. All are sufficiently mature, whether as students or staff, to make informed choices, for the demands of office, from effective performance of municipal functions, provision of academic leadership and general managerial ability are important parameters for consideration. Demonstration of these qualities which come with every opportunity to serve at different levels in the University, together with the required personality dispositions, are factors which place every true member of the University community ahead of Council members in deciding who assumes office from among its interested and qualified individuals.

University seniors, whether academic or non-teaching can only come to the point at which quality of ideas are given greater consideration over position or rank when these are earned on relevant grounds. To keep the young in silence even when they have superior ideas in a community that should respect them is a deviation from its core value. Those who find themselves in positions of authority upon satisfaction of objective criteria are more likely indeed to respect sound contributions from individuals, irrespective of rank or age. Others who acquire their status on irrelevant considerations become more protective and suspicious of ideas and prefer an atmosphere of non-interference. This trend is applicable in classrooms as well, for teachers of quality are more likely to be tolerant to opposing viewpoints than

their opposites. The implications of all this to recruitment and promotion policies are too obvious to require further elaboration.

3.4 Perspectives on Development

It is difficult indeed to conceive of development without democracy, properly practiced. For if development “is the way of achieving a society having certain qualities rather than merely offering a degree of affluence expected to produce such qualities”⁸ it is democracy that best guarantees the expression of such qualities. With democracy comes existence of the rule of law in which every individual without distinction of class conducts himself under conditions of equality and justice, where there is freedom of expression of opinion and association, accountability and existence of majority rule (will of the people).

The existence of these conditions in turn provide a climate of rights protection by all and so every individual acting within the confines of law is guaranteed equal opportunity to express his talents and advance as far as these can go. Where there is freedom to think and act, there is room for the development and expression of capacity and the assurance to harvest fruits of one's endeavour. By the freedoms it provides, the mass of the people in a democracy are made effective participants in shaping their lives by demanding accountable rule from those in leadership, who no longer conduct themselves as they like since they become responsive to their will.

By acting on the will of the people, public interest at all times takes precedence over private, individual or group interests, a situation which reduces those in leadership to true servants of the people whose place it is to execute commonly agreed goals. All these prevent social divisions either from the perspective of service or reward. Participation by all in pursuing goals which will benefit self and all is the best recipe for the increase which makes democratic life a worthwhile experience.

Despotic rule reverses all the prospects which democracy makes possible. Absence of the rule of law, a separation into a privileged and subject class, the limitation of rights for some and enlargement of privileges by others, restriction and expansion of

freedoms too along separate lines and lack of accountability make this rule deficient of all the brightness under which development flourishes. Under it, talent is wasted or underutilized and participation by all which fuels development is sacrificed for the services of a few who monopolise thinking and action.

In *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, the authors portrayed the striking relationship between economic and political institutions. Distinguishing between inclusive political and economic institutions from extractive ones, they revealed how nations of the former walk their way to prosperity and others become plagued with poverty. According to them nations with inclusive institutions achieve this because they allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic (and political) activities that make use of their talents and skills⁹. In contrast, extractive institutions exclude the vast majority from participation in the political and economic life of the nation, losing as a result of this the talents and skills of those excluded to achieve desired prosperity.

Despots by nature are more inclined towards turning institutions into extractive ones. By appointing lackeys into positions of responsibility which demand great ability and discipline beyond their capacities there is the tendency to limit what they can offer to the institutions. The reason for this is simple, loyalties are likely to be misdirected from serving the system to serving the individual despots.

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4.0 Centres of Excellence or Cocoons of Mediocrity?

It is difficult to appreciate the general usage of centre of excellence without attempting to unravel the concept of excellence. The presumption in what we are about to discuss is not that certain units of the University are designated as such. It is rather that the entire establishment ought to be, for whatever reasons, a centre of excellence. The first interpretation would have carried the simple understanding of units so designated to have a

concentration of attention in resource allocation to achieve certain high standards set for them. Such a dichotomy would not be necessary and in any case injurious to the system. The understanding of Universities as a whole being centres of excellence is, therefore, more promising and is the position adopted in this essay.

But first, what is it to be excellent and what does a centre of excellence represent? “It isn't just that people have different opinions about excellence”, Gardner has said. They see it from different vantage points”, he continued, concluding that “the elementary school teacher preoccupied with instilling respect for standards...will think about it in one way. The literary critic concerned with understanding and interpreting the highest reaches of creative expression will think of it in a wholly different way. The statesman, the composer, the intellectual historian each will raise his own questions and pose the issues which are important for him”¹. What unites these different thinking about the concept is the feeling of exceptional competence displayed or expected by an individual. However, competence is not the same thing as excellence and it is in this that much misunderstanding derives, necessitating our clarification of their distinction.

In general, competence refers to achievement in a particular task whose standards are known. The level of achievement may be the outcome of training another or the repetitive performance of a task by oneself. To talk therefore of competence is to connect an individual with his performance in relation to standards previously set. We talk of a competent teacher, engineer, driver or nurse when we have in mind their levels of achievement as approximating or meeting high standards we expect. All these introduce the element of measurability in the concept of competence. We can objectively set levels of competences, the award of grades in schools representing the clearest example.

The concept of excellence on the other hand is more general than specific. It picks out no specific activity to which reference can be made. If competence approximates the limits of

our expectations in the achievement of a given task, excellence surpasses it in a range of activities. It is the universal idea, the ideal, to which competence is the concrete form. And just as Marcuse has said “a concrete quality...represents a negation as well as a realization of the universal...a girl may be beautiful but not beauty”², an individual can be competent but not excellent, excellence only residing in Plato's world of Ideas or Forms, as depicted in his theory of the divided line and requiring our continuous striving to achieve.

A primary condition for excellence is above all else the evidence of performance which supersedes every other of the same kind. In this sense, the concept is always expressed in comparison to another's performance. It would be contradictory to refer to excellent achievement when one or several others exhibit performances which outstrip the one we made reference to. What attracts our identification of excellence with an individual is his ability for sustained performance, for chance performance is insufficient for the attribution of excellence. In other words, to ascribe excellence to an individual is to imply that it has capacity for repeated performance at the highest levels relative to others. To be a centre of excellence is therefore to have a tradition for performance of outstanding quality.

The twin factors of superior performance and sustainability lead to the third condition of excellence namely, progressive improvement. This draws from our understanding of excellence as an ideal towards which we always strive. To rephrase Herbert Marcuse, we can display excellent performance but we are not excellence. Finally, excellence requires at all times effective functioning of component parts making up the whole. A car will not function 'excellently' if any of its parts is not performing at maximum level just as an individual can never be at his best if any part of him has a defect and as a result of that performing below normal.

These conditions can be collapsed into three in a linear order as maximum input, efficient activities and maximum output. In this way, excellence is made possible by the quality of

input, the efficiency of its performance and the quality of repeated output which, as we have seen, outstrips all others of the same kind. Each of these, seen in isolation, will never result in excellence, just as even all of them may not, for excellence requires, above all else, a certain attitude to put these conditions in their proper place and function. Hence, the concept of excellence is like that of education which has been so perfectly portrayed of an educated man as follows:

To be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view. What is required is not feverish preparation for something that lies ahead, but to work with precision, passion and taste at worthwhile things that lie to hand....³

So much the same with being a man of excellence.

4.1 Universities in the Past as Centres of Excellence

Compared to Universities of twenty first century Nigeria, the so-called first and second generation ones, from their different dates of establishment up to the 1990's, were centres of excellence. Application of the different criteria of excellence easily comes to this conclusion as we attempt to show.

The superior performance of Universities in the past evaluated from their products can be viewed from two perspectives. In the first, no other source of training could match what was provided in them. They were the distant first with nothing to compare as products of Universities and even their students had easy marks of identification through different criteria of appraisal. Secondly, their quality was so high that even rejects of the system, who could not find places for admission were readily offered places in the best universities overseas⁴. Many today lament that at earlier times no one with less than a Division Two Certificate thought of finding a place in a University, today, anyone with five O' levels can and even those who have failed are still sure of a place⁵.

With quality students, supported by quality teachers, effective teaching made effective learning possible and progressive

performance was always expected as an atmosphere of competition to outperform each other prevailed. It was common to hear the public compare the quality of graduates from different Universities, making all of them to continually strive for excellence. With the annual publication of performance at Federal Civil Service interviews, every University worked assiduously to outshine the other, turning them thereby into centres of excellence as all these meant the development of the attitude for excellence.

Universities at the beginning could achieve the status of excellence because of the high degree of functioning. Funding, although never sufficient in any way, the world over, more than met the basic needs in teaching and welfare demands. Laboratories, libraries, halls of residence and staff entitlements satisfied even the most expectant. These did not only guarantee adequate readiness by teachers and learners to give their best and minimized to the very minimum incidences of industrial unrest which guaranteed planned academic calendars. It also provided every learner equal educational opportunity to earn grades which matched their abilities.

As a mark of excellence, Nigeria's first and second generation Universities attracted staff and students from all over the world. It was common to find Western scholars of the highest calibre teaching in these Universities, either on full time basis or during rainy season programmes and degrees from these Universities equally gained international respect. Their products proceeded overseas for graduate work, many ending up as lecturers upon outstanding performance on completion. While accreditation of programmes were non-existent at the time by an external body, every University maintained effective internal quality controls which ensured sustenance of the highest quality possible.

Wide application of the merit principle also ensured that only those deserving of promotion following the quality of their teaching and research publications earned it. The University Professor being the highest member of the community of excellence was himself the best expression of that description. He

was known more by the quality of his output and mind, his ability to provide academic leadership and his love for doing so. Gaining respect because of all these, others drew inspiration from his presence and worked hard to achieve excellence as well.

4.2 Today's Universities as Cocoons of Mediocrity

Judged from the two perspectives, if Nigerian Universities passed the test of excellence in the past it is doubtful if the same can be said today. They no longer hold the monopoly of uncomparable performance other training institutions currently exhibit. One can hardly make any appreciable difference between products of Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education. This failure affects the other aspect of evaluation: the institutions and their products have slipped in international rating, warranting the demand for other measures of assessment to secure placement for further training.

These reversals of fortunes have been attributed in part to the politicization of student admission as a result of the conflicting interpretation of equal educational opportunity. On both sides of the conflict are the equally persuasive policies of competitive performance and equalitarianism. To advocates of competitive performance our Universities have lost their glory by admitting low achieving students. Equalitarianism advocates think differently, claiming that intelligence is randomly distributed among all groups.

A liberal interpretation of excellence finds nothing wrong in admitting both high performing and average performing students into the same class. For true excellence, in the liberal sense that it ought to be seen, demands that an individual is taken from where he is at the point of entry to the limits of his ability. The truth of the matter is not therefore that the students admitted are either of high or average quality. It is rather that the Universities are failing to stretch students to such limits. It is in what Universities presently do that makes them cocoons of mediocrity than anything else.

While it is possible for an excellent teacher to transform an

average student to a high performing one, it is impossible for an incompetent teacher to sustain the quality of a good student. By not engaging the best from their Departments or those with outstanding performance from other Universities, today's Universities endorse mediocrity. And even if the class of degree no longer reflects an individual's true assessment, the opportunity for competitive interviews to engage those that meet acceptable standards is compromised today through a system of nepotistic patronage.

Following our liberal interpretation of excellence, it becomes a matter of distance covered or achievement gained from a given level to another rather than a flat rate of equality in which two individuals from different starting points are judged on their final achievement levels. This fact is lost sight of as our Universities and their lecturers with an eye on international scale subject students whose deficiencies at lower levels deprives them the opportunity of benefits from activities of the lecture room. In the end, neither the teacher's activities nor the learners effort is rewarded with success.

If these issues do not convince us of the level of mediocrity our Universities have degenerated, those of promotion, tenure and student assessment surely do. Universities require that for an academic staff to be promoted, he should show evidence of extensive and 'quality' publications. Nothing is said about his quality of teaching and how this can be assessed. As a result, one can rise to the status of a professor who, having no understanding of his discipline and failing to even appear in class to teach his students, publishes extensively in chemistry without visiting a laboratory. By allowing this to happen, we undermine the strong link which exists between effective teaching and genuine research. Mediocrity is the inevitable outcome under this circumstance.

With non-teaching staff, lacking clearly defined standards of appraisal, the issue of promotion is even more complicated as members demand for favourable outcome every promotional year, even when in a good number obvious lack of basic competences clearly exist. These demands are often backed by Union pressure

which yield expected results. Many get promoted to grade levels which contrast sharply with their productive capacity. With such loose promotion requirements, a good number of University staff, both academic and non-teaching, rise to the top and lord over all others through irrelevant grounds. A situation where one gets to the top largely by age or years of service can only breed mediocrity.

More contributory to this degeneration is our attitude towards students assessment in all its forms. Many of us have been unabashed in our conduct and reverse the pattern of award of grades which discourages hardwork. There is no better way to nourish the seed of mediocrity than our elevation of the less performing on the one hand and degrading those aspiring for excellence on the other. Unfortunately, the continuous method of assessment intended to strengthen the system has been converted to an effective instrument of that perversion.

The tigers of research methodology have constituted cartels to assist students produce 'perfect' research works and deliberately punish those who attempt to resist their assistance by continuously pointing out faults in their research efforts. Without the opportunity to try and gain perfection, most ostensibly good theses turn out to be the product of research experts. Mediocrity is not only encouraged; it is recycled as the system absorbs into its faculty a younger generation of lecturers lacking in ability to undertake even the most basic research. The interaction of poor teaching and research skills conspire to produce "lazy professors and underserving Ph.D. Holders"⁶. According to a former Vice Chancellor,

Research in Universities the world over revolves around professors...But the way professors are made in some of our universities these days is nothing short of pure magic. Traditional rulers and men of influence in the society are known to have led delegations to Vice chancellors in order to plead for their son or daughter to be made a professor⁷.

Inspite of my continuous placement of teaching above

research in thinking about the functions of a University and by implication the ultimate criterion in determining its standard of excellence, research has a fundamental place which cannot be undermined. This is so for at least two reasons. Firstly, excellence as a quality of rare achievement has a huge cost requirement to attain. Secondly, it is today more relied upon for promotion of academic staff than teaching. Matters of research are therefore central to any discussion of academic excellence in Universities. It is necessary we examine this in some further detail.

In general, two kinds of research are undertaken in Universities: basic and applied. The aim of the first type is “obtaining empirical data that can be used to formulate, expand and evaluate theory...Its essential aim is to expand the frontiers of knowledge without regard to application⁸. Applied research, on the other hand, is “research performed in relation to actual problems and under the conditions in which they are found in practice⁹. Due to its simple nature, basic research is also the most widely used in teaching learners to acquire necessary skills. It is also very unfortunately the most widely employed by teachers themselves to use for publications and promotion. The danger with the widespread use of basic research is that it is open to abuse through easy duplication and outright plagiarism with some cosmetic alterations here and there to cover up.

Applied researches being inherently problem based are more intellectually demanding, expensive and time consuming. Even when adapted they still require patience to achieve results. Because the publication prospects are almost the same with basic research, they are more rarely undertaken. The prevalence of basic research in our Universities today has resulted in the engagement in researches with no aim in mind. Both lecturers and learners are known to replicate one another to such a ridiculous extent that a particular lecturer, department or faculty can be associated with a given research focus or title requiring changing perhaps the area of study, time and time again. In the end, neither new insights are gained nor effort invested. It leads to the widespread situation of lecturers publishing copious research works without the remotest

contact with what is claimed to have been done or impact on society.

Basic research can never transform society; it can never solve the problems which restrain us from developments. Only applied research directed at solving specific problems can, and unless Universities are equipped and supported to do this the necessary transformation we eagerly sought will remain unrealizable.

4.3 Restoring Universities Lost Academic Excellence

The degeneration of our nation's Universities cannot be reversed and their past glory restored without giving effective teaching and research their proper place, and these too cannot be contemplated without regard to methods of engagement. A system which hopes for excellence cannot continuously ignore its best fruits for less competent ones just as it cannot regain purity while retaining impurities within it, for it is always easier for such impurities to contaminate the whole than otherwise. Restoring our Universities lost academic glory must begin with the bold decision of identifying and eliminating from it staff who have no business with the kind of competences required for optimum performance.

All over the world, Universities which have maintained a tradition of excellence reject a civil service policy of staff engagement which guarantees a lifetime of service to the point of retirement, barring any severe disciplinary breach. They have done this by placing demands on staff to meet acceptable standards of performance in teaching, evaluated every school year by those they teach, together with the quality and profundity of their researches. Our Universities cannot revert to their claims of excellence when they retain within their ranks indolent and incompetent staff who offer nothing in return for their entitlement, yet allow those with promise to occupy the streets or remain in sectors where their capacities suffer extreme underutilization. They must put in place flexible methods of engagement to allow many competent individuals render useful

service in whatever form.

Outside the Universities infraction in all its forms having been identified as a root cause of underdevelopment is being addressed with the setting up of agencies to check abuse. With the “abuses that result in counterfeit Ph.Ds which are more of an existential threat to the country than Boko Haram in the long run”¹⁰ we cannot, under any respect for University autonomy, continue to allow them inflict this severe harm on the entire nation. Similar agencies are urgently in need to assist Universities and indeed other educational concerns to free them from the weight of unwholesome practices which contribute in a major way to their poor reputation. We cannot also ignore the funding of Universities, both from the perspective of adequacy and equity among all, irrespective of ownership. If we must reverse current levels of disparity that is gravely affecting some more than others, we must also check unbridled expansion of access, especially under circumstances of poor quality primary and secondary education, for only the adequately prepared can take advantage of whatever opportunities Universities provide to achieve their highest possible levels of excellence.

Of all the sins bedeviling the Nigerian University system, none is as strong as its glorification of a certain theory of knowledge which turns out to be antithetical to the spirit of excellence. This issues from the authoritarian place of the teacher, his role in the teaching-learning process and by extension his distance to knowledge vis-à-vis the mature learner he finds in his class. In theory, the student is made to understand that knowledge can issue from revelation, intuition, reasoning, the senses and authority, but in practice he is made to believe that only the teacher is capable of all these. This cold-storage view of knowledge gives the teacher a commanding view, the only source through whom all knowledge issues – the authority. It conceives knowledge as at best pre-defined, context free and permanent and places even the mature learner in deficit¹¹ with the only responsibility to receive without questioning the immutable truths constantly handed over by his all knowing teacher. If he must learn, he must accept

knowledge the way it is presented by his teacher.

This deficit concept of knowledge finds a correspondence in our dominant approach to assessment and our classification of those deserving of either distinction or failure. Obviously, it is the disciplined student who most absorbs the submissions of his teacher that is judged excellent and those who differ, that stand condemnation. It is important to determine the reliability of this view to an understanding of excellence in its proper meaning – the potential of a student to excel outside the tight frame of the teacher.

A University student who memorizes his notes to score an A and ends up with a First Class is a pride of every parent or University, and there are too many these days. He is no better than another who copies from a textbook and earns the same score in the examination. Both are guilty of presenting materials which are not theirs in the sense that they have never been part of their individual stock. In awarding A scores to both, the teacher assesses their submissions against his predefined standards and makes a statement on their levels of achievement. Such measurements fail to consider the potential of individuals to create and interpret knowledge – the ultimate grounds for excellence having to do with potential rather than achievement¹².

Our system of assessment places too much emphasis on recall than originality and creativity. It explains why many 'good students' upon graduation from Universities never rise to the occasion and those we classify as average or even less spring surprises by their display of excellence. An A student whose performance results from his obedience to a teacher by handing over what was given to him in class can never become a good teacher, researcher or inventor, for these are qualities which demand originality, confidence and the ability to go outside the prevalent range of thinking. Excellence is a product of potential and can only be determined by sparks of originality which flourish with opportunity even after school.

If our Universities must become centres of excellence they must meet the requirements of cost and they can only do this by

receiving required funding for their researches from private, local and multinational companies in the country. A situation such as we have at the moment in which University researches are done in isolation from the needs of industry is most unfortunate and ultimately undermining of development. Through funding, directed at providing specific answers to specific problems, University professors and their Departments can become more engaged in conducting relevant applied researches whose findings will positively impact on industrial performance and by so doing achieve greater contribution to national wealth. The best Universities in the world enjoy this kind of partnership which makes them effective partners of development as well as supplying the means for their sustenance and independence. It will not be inappropriate to demand from companies, both local and multinational, contributions to University research at individual levels.

4.4 Perspectives on Development

It is difficult to conceive of development without at the same time expecting or demanding that what is leading to it is not done excellently. In the first place, both concepts have positive elements associated with their usage. To say that one is performing excellently is to imply that he is engaged in something worthwhile. The same applies to the concept of development as we cannot be talking of developing when what we are referring to is not seen positively. But this is not what conceptually connects them. What does is their meanings which relate to achievement.

If development has to do with the continuous achievement of desired states, better than what is obtainable now, only the highest levels of performance can best guarantee its actualization. Average or mediocre performance, if allowed, may make some marginal gains which if not substantial enough will not lead to the sufficiency to satisfy demand. What best guarantees that sufficiency is the possibility for everyone to perform at his highest level so that the whole derives the sufficiency necessary for it.

In the same way in which excellence is not a matter of a

part of a system but involves every unit to perform excellently so that the combined excellence of the whole sums up to the totality of its achievement, so is development not a matter of a section. We will not refer to progress in a section as development. We will rather refer to it as growth of that section. And so we arrive at a conception in which development must require of us to ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to develop himself as well as allow maximum opportunity to exercise his competence for the good of all.

When we ascribe development to an entity, we are at the same suggesting that its pace meets our expectations or simply satisfies need. However, this level of achievement is inconceivable when we do not aim at getting everyone to perform at the highest levels possible. To settle for less is to compromise achievement of the highest possible levels. It is to stall development.

Our Universities will become true agents of development when they strive to achieve excellence in students by stretching them to their limits of achievement and by extracting from every member of the community the maximum utilization of their competences, irrespective of who they are. They must identify and develop competences to the point of excellence and maintain within their employ only those with potential for such quality. They must also reward excellence wherever they find it so as to extract from every member maximum service for the benefit of all.

Universities can never become true centres of excellence when they remain hived off from the rest of the society, for excellence is like a tool whose definition is a measure of what it brings. Its teachers must take more than a passing interest in what goes on around them, both in terms of what they do and how they do it. This does not only limit them to adding this to University curriculum. It requires as well that University teachers take reasonable time to work with them at the level of their knowledge and infrastructure and to gain first hand understanding of it all, for there is always something to learn and criticise. There is every likelihood that on return to the University they will deepen their understanding of what is out there and improve their knowledge,

just as they are likely to impact on what is done outside in the course of their engagement.

How can a civil engineering Professor begin and end his career without practical experience in a road construction site or another in primary education do the same without experiencing teaching at that level? Excellence is nourished through multiple range of experiences which at the moment is given little consideration. Unless this dynamic relationship between Universities and other reaches of society is maintained, development will be slow. But through it both benefit from the other, thus leading to improvement of all. Such a situation is inconceivable in the isolation that currently goes on. A compulsory year of service in an area outside the University but suitable to an academic discipline is necessary just as it is for others to serve the Universities as well. This intercourse is vital to development and is urgently in need.

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5.0 Citadels of Learning or Temples of Rites and Rituals?

Compared to other levels of the education system, Universities make their description as citadels of learning most fitting for at least one reason. Their learning population has the advantage of maturity and the element of choice associated with such maturity to enroll and acquire knowledge, “since learning is essentially an activity possible only to an intelligence capable of choice and self-decision in relation to one's own impulses and to the world around him”¹. While other levels before it are expected to combine learning with some form of socialization, necessary to imbibe social norms and values, Universities carry the image of institutions perfectly designed for promoting the intellectual way of life by being preoccupied with learning. However, another reason follows from this.

Universities too are expected to be an assembly of society's most intellectually endowed minds whose love for scholarship and

its dissemination combines with the maturity of learners and their thirst for knowledge to stimulate the highest level of intellectual engagement anywhere within its defined limits. To be associated therefore with a University anywhere in the world, but particularly in the developing world, is to be seen to be preoccupied with learning and with having so much of it. This image is the product of its origin but especially in the Middle Ages when a young man simply sought out the Master under whom he wished to study, signed his name on that Master's roll, and paid him his fees². Both were therefore inexorably locked in that commitment to the pursuit of learning and the rest of society saw them as centres concerned first and last with learning.

Freeman Butts reports that once admitted and lodged, a student acquired the clerical gown as a sign of his studentship³, a probable indication of the origin of the matriculation ritual. From this primordial beginnings, down to the present, Universities introduced rites and rituals to make up for their unique culture. Teaching, research activities, demonstrations, carrying out of assignments, conduct of examinations, a graduation ceremony, tutorial sessions, seminars, excursions and a host of student activities came to characterize University life and setting them apart from other levels of education. But as all rites and rituals they are only embellishments, the outward component of its essence, which at all times remains the pursuit of learning. In other words, no matter how elaborate and extensive any rite or ritual is, it does not add to the content of its substance. This is to the extent that while the actualization of substance without ritual can be sufficient, a rite or ritual without substance must always remain vacuous, an activity for activity sake, incapable of realizing the primary goal of an endeavour.

If simple reasoning and historical circumstances provide some bases for our description of Universities as citadels of learning, the responsibility they have acquired along the way as purveyors of knowledge rather than just consumers, as other levels of the education system are, introduces another dimension in our understanding of them as such. We cannot elaborate on this

further without an adequate understanding of the concepts of learning, for central to this concept is the related concept of knowledge.

Now, to learn is always to have come up to some standard, to know what previously one did not know, or to have mastered a given skill or acquire a new piece of information⁴. One cannot conceivably learn, therefore, without knowing at the same time but knowing (knowledge) is different from opinion or belief. Its conditions must include assurance that a certain proposition is true, ability to justify such assurance by providing adequate evidence and the fact that the proposition is in fact true. Plato sums all these as follows: “Opinion deals with the changing, intelligence with the real and as the real is to the changing, so is intelligence to opinion, and as intelligence is to opinion so is science to belief and understanding to conjecture”⁵. Universities are concerned with intelligence rather than opinion, with truth rather than belief, and with understanding rather than conjecture. It is these that make them citadels of learning.

Again, we are pushed further to address what truth is and what amounts to an adequate evidence for its justification. Of course never ending controversies will arise because there are many layers of it. Every present truth always faces its denial by those who think differently and so as Conant has said, “controversy is essential to a healthy condition in the citadel of learning”⁶. The continued search for unwarranted beliefs among the different disciplines sustains this controversy. Consequently,

To test beliefs by various methods, to find standards by which interpretations of tragedy and joy may be evaluated, to find standards for assessing common sense judgments of good and evil, for accepting new ideas as part of the cultural heritage or rejecting them as passing illusions of a distorted brain: such are the tasks of the dwellers in the citadel of learning⁷.

Bryant concludes that all disciplines have been the product of both conflict and cooperation, a struggle among beliefs and a sharing of

beliefs and that the vitality and safety of the citadel of learning can only be ensured by maintaining this tradition⁸.

5.1 Universities in the Past as Citadels of Learning

Universities in the past were noted for their preoccupation with teaching and learning, recognizing these as the primary reason for their status, either as teachers or learners. This called for constant preparation by its teachers, entailing the generous use of libraries and other facilities essential for enhancing their quality and resourcefulness. Students too knowing why they are in school constantly availed themselves of all learning opportunities the environment provides. Thus, just as in Plato's Academy over whose doors was written "Those ignorant of geometry need not enter here," because geometry "draws the soul towards truth, and gives the finishing stroke to the philosophic spirit"⁹, so did Universities in the past have the unwritten inscription. "Those not prepared for the search and pursuit of knowledge have no business here."

Achievement of this was also made possible by the quality of teachers and learners which not only enhanced effective communication at the highest level of intellectual penetration, but also of how both positively reinforced the other. For while on the one hand good teachers, constantly enriching themselves, will naturally task their students, it also requires good students, such as were available at the time, to not only appreciate and be willing to keep pace with such high demands but more importantly to also task teachers to keep pace with their desire for more. The outcome is the elevation of lecture halls into high grounds of fertile intellectual exchanges between teachers and learners.

Outside lecture halls, teachers engaged one another either in seminars, conferences or even boardroom discussions and informal settings on latest advances within their disciplines. And with the rich diversity of their composition the possibility for continuous intellectual growth was guaranteed. When all these are seen against the state of such facilities as libraries and laboratories, Universities satisfied major conditions necessary for

their concentration on the tasks of teaching and learning.

Writing on University teachers in the thirteenth century Freeman Butts said “As the principal molders of the intellectual life of the times, the status of the teaching profession in the Universities was very high, surrounded with privileges, exemptions, and immunities. University professors did not acquire the wealth of noblemen or high churchmen, but they enjoyed much better than average living and held an enviable place in public respect and social esteem”¹⁰. Similar conditions were evident in the early Universities in Nigeria and these greatly assisted them to focus on their primary functions of teaching and research, while perceiving other means of livelihood as not only undignifying but totally unrelated to their chosen vocation as University teachers, with an avowed commitment to the dedicated pursuit of knowledge.

Then, as now, Universities in carrying out these functions conducted the same activities as we have today. They matriculated students, registered their courses, conducted examinations and seminars, organized committee meetings and so on. But they recognized the distinction between process and substance and accorded what is more important its due. For in the platonic sense, Form or Substance is inherently superior to matter and can exist without it, while matter cannot be conceived without form. Universities in recognizing this placed more emphasis in bringing about learning and it was evident from the quality of their students.

Universities in the past also commanded the respect of citadels of learning because within their boundaries were to be found men and women with the most cultivated intellect whose passion for its advancement continuously extended their distance from the rest of society. It was easy, as a result, to depend on them for leadership on all matters having to do with knowledge, whether with regard to its source or application to complex social issues.

In this commitment to learning, the student was given ample opportunity for the free expression of his ideas, to differ with his teacher without fear of intimidation and to earn his

grades even when he holds contrary views to him. On their part, teachers commanded considerable authority which comes with their excellent display of scholarship, the open exercise of power to enlist learners respect being an exception rather than the norm. In this joint pursuit of learning, the ultimate authority for both teachers and learners becomes truth and the foundation upon which it is based.

5.2 Today's Universities as Temples of Rites and Rituals

Not long ago, we were reminded that “not all schooling is education. Much of it is mere qualification – earning. And more and more of it becomes so...And more qualification-earning is *mere* qualification-earning – ritualistic, tedious, suffused with anxiety and boredom, destructive of curiosity and imagination, in short anti-educational¹¹. Nowhere is this ritual in the education system more evident than in today's Universities where students have so perfectly summed it up with the words: “we read to know but we sort to pass”. All what seems to count in today's Universities is the piece of paper received at the end with the beautiful description of a degree certificate.

In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell remarked that “...what we directly see and feel is merely 'appearance', which we believe to be a sign of some 'reality' behind”¹². In other words, continuously acting on this appearance without reflecting on the reality that lies behind is at the centre of our view that today's Universities focus more on certain activities which do not connect with the real purpose they are set to achieve. They ritualize these practices which have come to substitute the primary purpose of teaching and learning.

When lecture halls no longer offer teaching for whatever reasons and learners learn nothing from attending, the purpose for attendance by both teachers and learners is lost. Further attendance becomes a ritual, the requirement to attend for attendance sake without the expectation to achieve something in return. The same applies to students learning activities, whether

practical sessions or project work they undertake. Students perceive these as mere formalities with little hope of gaining any knowledge in return.

No form of human activity abhors formality like learning, yet in our Universities today, a combination of factors have made formal methods most attractive and cheap to employ. Without the slightest consideration and respect for their ages, teaching often proceeds in the ordered sequence of a syllabus which hardly meets the specific interests of learners at most given moments. Bored from the onset of almost every course or lesson, learners become disconnected and lose interest in all classroom activities.

Formal classroom teaching easily therefore becomes mere rituals because like all under that description, ritual practice maintains a constant form which must be rigidly followed and where the relationship between initiator and initiate is one of strict obedience. But as it has been so perfectly observed, "That children are individuals whose freedom should be respected while the more mature person should have no freedom as an individual is an idea too absurd to require refutation"¹³. Given this unfruitful inversion to which educators only preach child-centered education with its demand for the freedom to learn according to their interests, we are inclined to accept that even in Universities "there is no one logical sequence in which the truths of a subject must be communicated, even those subjects which seem most strictly sequential"¹⁴. Our Universities will become better citadels of learning and reverse the tendency towards ritualism when they liberate teaching from excessive formality and routine.

Nowhere is this ritualization in our Universities more evident than in the various forms of assessment of learners for informed opinion on their levels of achievement. From continuous assessment to terminal examinations and oral defence of research works, essence has given way to mere formality and routine. Typically, every assessment apart from determining levels of achievement, also serves a learning function in jolting learners to prepare in advance in order to improve performance, or after every experience to identify areas of weakness and focus attention

in subsequent studies. Some benefits of continuous assessment have, for instance, been found to include making students study conscientiously and continuously, improve performance as teaching/learning would be taking place all the time and identifies special/gifted students who require greater challenges and greater assistance in weak points¹⁵. When assessment scores fail to reflect students actual achievement levels, these benefits cannot be derived. Again, in situations such as are prevalent in our Universities today, where those who are not assessed earn higher marks than those who were assessed and where there is rampant inverse transfiguration or mutation of scores, the entire exercise is reduced to a mere ritual and students know it.

With students defence of research works, at all levels, from undergraduate to doctorate, the complete idea of a ritual is most graphically expressed. Every occasion is reduced to a ceremony in which like the coronation of a king where the final rite is only a show, having long agreed of his kingship, our Universities have reduced students research defence to unimaginable decadence. The ceremonial date is set, the Faculty and Department are in a frenzy, a friendly external examiner is invited and the student instead of refreshing his mind with his work prepares refreshment for the defence team. During the actual defence, the student's supervisor becomes the examinee, defending every aspect of the research in place of the student whose duty it is to defend. The entire occasion is reduced to triviality; of editing grammar and spellings and of laughter and dinning in anticipation of the bigger picture that is to follow. In nine of ten cases jubilation ends the day even when in many cases students cannot correctly state the titles of their researches. Simply stated, our Continuous Assessment exercises, final examinations and students project defences have all assumed the character of what Erving Goffman called 'interaction ritual'¹⁶. The entire project defence in particular, couched in a veil of seriousness to the outsider who is made to overestimate its importance, conceals distortions taking place inside. In the end, the student emerges with a smile of success without learning a thing which such an opportunity should

ordinarily provide.

The difference between learning and ritual lies in this: learning implies achievement and therefore effort. Ritual suggests formality, an exercise carried out for its own sake. The extent to which ritual has surpassed learning in our Universities is that a vast majority are credited with degrees for which little or no learning has taken place, especially that which can be credit to the deliberate activities of teachers. Our Universities have long been infested with the 'diploma disease'¹⁷.

Lecturers are not spared the disease of ritualization in any way. A vast majority take their classroom encounters as occasions for repetitive handing over of course materials to students and fail to convert these into learning opportunities for themselves, possible only when both teacher and student engage in meaningful exchanges. Even attendance at conferences and publications are hardly perceived from the perspective of interacting with a community of scholars out of which they can achieve intellectual nourishment. They are merely done to satisfy necessary conditions for promotion rather than advancing a position with commitment and providing necessary supportive evidence for them.

Any meaningful discussion of the University as a citadel of learning must bring into attention our unconscious attempt to fuse a Polytechnic and Research Institute into its functions. In the past, that distinction was clear and Universities were not expected to be what they are not. A Polytechnic by the simple understanding of it is a collection of many (poly) technical institutions (technic). Its focus is training in skill acquisition in specialised fields and so subordinates theoretical knowledge to it. To opt for Polytechnic education is to accept to acquire some skill to a high level of efficiency.

In skill acquisition one is limited by the tricks of the particular skill which are already known and transmitted. Repeated action or practice may yield perfection but hardly breaks the bounds of the already known. And so is it with Polytechnic education. Continuous activity is all what learning entails, to follow in near ordered sequence what the master skillman

presents. This form of education is therefore often mechanical and routine with no serious requirements to think or question what one is doing. The ultimate aim is gaining perfection in a skill.

Research institutes are different from Polytechnics too. Unlike Polytechnics, they do not have students but are constituted of mature individuals with common research interests and sufficient knowledge of the terrain. With teaching having no place, except when gathered to share experiences and progress out of which more learning occurs, they are more preoccupied with extending the boundaries of the already known. Results of their efforts are then “fed back into the University where the new material would be integrated into the existing bodies of knowledge”¹⁸. It is then the proper function of a University to organize, unify and teach; functions which neither Polytechnics nor Research Institutes can perform¹⁹.

In the confusion of roles that has become evident, Universities are being saddled today with the responsibilities of all three, causing grave abandonment of the function which is truly theirs. Universities are essentially concerned with effective transmission of knowledge which reflects the accumulated advances of humanity with a bearing on their environments. Of course, some form of skill training will be offered because individuals must be exposed to its rudiments to gain familiarity with them. Some research is also necessary in order to get learners acquainted with the basics rather than the need to discover with every attempt. And so skill acquisition and research must remain ancillary to the primary function of organizing, unifying and teaching all what is discovered. In this concern for knowledge transmission, the emphasis is on getting the facts, evaluating the foundation of claims and questioning conclusions reached. The orientation is more intellectual than practical and more transmissive than breaking new grounds, especially from the point of view of learners who need to be initiated into the different forms of knowledge before they can become interested in research and extend the limits of current knowledge.

Skill learning and research for learners in the University can only be viewed as opportunities to learn the rudiments of the

respective demands rather than gaining perfection. “Our major responsibility as University teachers is to help our students to learn how to learn”, it has been said²⁰. It is not how to acquire skill or gain perfection in research. Emphasis is placed on the quality of mind that they develop.

5.3 Returning Learning to Our Universities

We have been reminded that “the teacher is the pivot of the educational process...what he knows and does can make a great difference and what he does not know, cannot do, or fail to do can be an irreparable loss to the child...”²¹. It follows from this that to return learning to our Universities we must ensure teaching as well and its effectiveness. Students will always learn too little, especially from the standpoint of a structured curriculum such as we have without close contact with teachers. For many University teachers opportunity for this always falls short. The situation is further worsened by the total absence of mentorship of younger teachers who in most cases are forced to learn swimming in the middle of the ocean. Without sufficient time to be initiated into their new responsibility they are confronted with the knowledge that their career progression is solely dependent on publication and plunge into it with considerable gusto. Deprived of mentorship and preoccupied with the difficult challenge of publishing academic papers, the younger generation of University teachers remain less than adequate in initiating learners into what the curriculum specifies.

If Universities genuinely desire to return teaching to the classrooms and make them true citadels of learning, teachers must exercise their freedom to redefine their curriculum by bringing it to the point at which such effort is possible to adequately connect with learners. Without this there will always be little communication between both partners in this joint enterprise.

We have remained prisoners to the doctrines of educational essentialism with its emphasis on exposing learners to the accumulation of endless mass of information. We have ignored the doctrine of educational progressivism, its exact

opposite, which sees learning and education as the 'constant reconstruction of experience'²² and so not how much learners are exposed to by teachers but how adequately they can continuously reconstruct fully grasped experiences to meet future obstacles.

A wrong interpretation and application of academic freedom which gives everyone the liberty to teach without interference and to base his questions from what he has taught makes the University teacher to combine in himself duties of the police, judge and warder²³. He alone knows what the curriculum is which corresponds to content of the law. He alone is given authority to decide the fate of his students as he marks examination scripts and so acts as a judge. He alone can detain a student in his course as long as he likes and so serves as warder to those he decides to keep behind. With such enormous powers a University teacher can decide to teach only a topic in a course outline of ten topics, limit his questions to this topic and award scores on the basis of performance. He can even remain as shallow as his atrophied brain, caused by long years of under-nourishment, permits and get away with it.

To check these excesses, which have resulted in little teaching and learning in our Universities, effort must be made to have some comparison among students of different Universities, even if for the mere fact of it. If University teachers know that a higher authority will pass by someday and subject students of a given year and course of study to the same assessment with those of other Universities, teachers will wake up to their responsibilities. The reason secondary school students may still be exposed to more intense teaching and studying more conscientiously to pass their examination can only be attributed to their having to sit for external examinations at the end. While complete external degree examinations may not be feasible in Universities, some form for comparative testing is necessary.

A citadel of learning cannot be conceived of a University without ascribing it to a citadel of teaching too, following the relationship which exists between the concepts. Stated differently, there cannot be good learning without good teaching and so we

are pushed to consider some issues that hinder good teaching in our Universities as they limit the extent to which learning is facilitated.

First, if we agree with Aristotle, and there is so much to do so, that “all teaching starts from facts previously known...since it proceeds either by way of induction or else by way of deduction”, the gap between what University students take from secondary schools by way of acquired knowledge must become an important factor in defining both the content of what we teach in Universities and the methods we adopt. If this gap is too wide, we render secondary school knowledge too distant or weak to made effective connection with what is encountered in a University classroom. When it becomes repetitive too of what has already been known we give room for boredom as nothing is learnt since we do not learn what is already known. What is required is having a realistic gap which imagination and reasonable hard-work can help achieve the connection for learning to take place.

Today's Universities cannot be citadels of learning when their curricula is so rigidly followed without consideration of learner's entry behaviour. Most first encounters leave learners bemused and confused as little or no meaning is derived from what is offered. Continuation of this trend very easily leads to frustration and with it aversion for classroom experiences. The level of underachievement in Universities today is traceable to this occurrence. Resort to unwholesome student activities, so prevalent in our Universities today are traceable to students failure to have meaningful engagement in classroom interaction which develops to a point of aversion and resentment. Succour is found in new forms of learning encounters by informal groups which appeal to their immediate fancy.

If our Universities are no longer the citadels of learning that they once were, an important solution must lie with the place of teaching in its scheme. We must desist from looking at teaching as a simple process of handing down preplanned materials to minds whose readiness to assimilate are not taken into consideration. For the rate of assimilation is affected more by a

poor start which builds on no foundation than it is by the point at which we start. With a poor start, in other words, there is no foundation to build upon. But when on the other hand a good connection is made from the beginning between previous knowledge and the new, progress can be achieved even at a rate that time compensates from the low point at which it was started. This certainly requires skill and training. It explains in a large measure the necessity for some form of professional training in education by all University teachers.

For our Universities to return to their earlier status as citadels of learning there is need to re-examine the task which society seems to be placing on them to produce 'employable' graduates. This task has reduced our previous concentration on rigorous learning to one which accommodates any kind of activity as equipping students to either secure employment or become self-reliant on graduation. The truth is that although unemployment as it is at the moment is a social problem of great importance and vast dimensions, it is hardly an educational problem and even less so a University one²⁵.

5.4 Perspectives on Development

Development is about substance which adds value to human life. It cannot be separated from it or given more consideration to something else. While that substance may, at times, not be discernable, being immaterial in nature, it can never be substituted by any outward expression. In the distinction between learning on the one side and rites and rituals on the other, we can correlate substance with learning and rites and rituals with outward expressions. And just as outward expressions are hollow without substance so rites and rituals are without meaning, when not connected to something substantive.

It is always easy and cheap to focus on rites and rituals and many individuals will base their judgment of progress on these outward manifestations. They are easily attracted by the fancy and awe which such rituals convey, believing that these are real outgrowths of what lies underneath. They mistake colourful

dishes for quality food and large ones for quantities that are inside without thinking that it is what is actually inside, both in quantity and quality, that counts. Appearance can never substitute reality.

Colour, ceremonies and noise can never transform conditions of human life. No matter how frequent and loud they are, they can never become ingredients of change. But when they are carried out in proportion to what has taken place before them they serve as moments of satisfaction to the actual activities which bring about transformation. In this way, development can be likened to the relation between work and leisure. When the two go together human life finds balance and achieves satisfaction which comes from the abundance that work brings about and the leisure to enjoy it. But when we focus on leisure to the exclusion of work we deny ourselves the means for its sustenance and both work and leisure suffer.

Just as Marx stated that although philosophers have interpreted the word in different ways, the important thing is to change it, so is it that rites and rituals can take different shapes and colours, the important thing is what changes do they effect? Our Universities must begin to see that learning is the primary reason for their existence. They either insist on effective teaching and learning or cease to be, for no matter the colour and noise Universities add to their activities colour and trappings can never substitute for what their primary purpose is.

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6.0 Bastions of Efficiency or Baskets of Waste?

Given the enormous responsibilities placed on Universities and the distinguished character of their composition, nothing less can be expected of them than to be most efficient in the conduct of their affairs. For by these we expect other human organizations, but especially educational ones, to emulate in the discharge of their duties as well. With the quality of their membership, highly

trained in their respective disciplines, society expects maximum utilization of its total input for maximum output and minimum waste. For an educational institution, its efficiency cannot be divorced from how it avoids waste in the utilization, of all its resources, whether material, economic or human and achieves optimum results, a fact which introduced the scientific management movement or Taylorism in the field. This broad understanding of efficiency, applied to Universities, unfortunately masks several details which are necessary in evaluating their standing in certain essential respects.

Rather than viewing efficiency very broadly, it is more profitable to examine its other dimensions that are relevant to Universities. We can thus talk of civic or political efficiency, economic efficiency, occupational efficiency, and social efficiency. While civic or political efficiency relates to “being a more agreeable companion to citizenship...to judge men and measure wisely and to take a determining part in making as well as obeying laws”¹, economic efficiency borders on “being able to earn one's own living and that of the children dependent upon him”². Occupational efficiency has to do with how training perfectly matches available job opportunities and demands in the world of work. Social efficiency is seen as “the socialization of mind which is actively concerned in making experiences more communicable; in breaking down the barriers of social stratification which makes individuals impervious to the interests of others”³.

For Universities, considerations of internal efficiency, that is how they utilize their resources, and comparative efficiency, (how their efficiency compares with non-University training in giving society the ultimate beneficiary and determinant a just return on investment) are equally important. It is from this more detailed view of efficiency that attempts will be made to examine the extent to which Universities approximate either as bastions of efficiency or baskets of waste.

6.1 Universities in the Past as Bastions of Efficiency

At least in the broad sense to which civic and political

efficiency can be understood, as participation in the process of governance, Universities in the past, down to this day, have achieved remarkable success. It is the educated elite, especially those with University education, whom Obafemu Awolowo referred to as being “trained in the art of government so as to enable them to take over complete control of the affairs of the country”⁴ maximum efficiency has been clearly achieved. The wide gap between their educational attainments and the extreme illiteracy that has remained the lot of the population always meant total surrender of political leadership to the educated elite.

Economically, return on investment at both the individual and different corporate levels like family, community and country, was high. It was rare to have University graduates, products of the system, search for jobs which were in relative abundance. This was particularly so because of the high level of occupational efficiency in which an individual trained in a particular area, baring no shift in interest upon graduation, is almost certain to find a job opportunity in an establishment most suitable for the application of his skills. This made transition from school to work almost seamless and enabled University graduates achieve maximum utilization of skills.

With internal and comparative efficiency, it is doubtless if Universities in the past exhibited high levels. From both the management and cost perspectives of internal efficiency, this could be seen to be so, for with relatively few members of staff, both academic and non-teaching, the effective participation of each in performing his assigned functions is itself an indication.

With students eager to learn and teachers competent and willing to teach, occasions for missing lectures were very infrequent and one could predict with a high level of assurance when a school year commences and ends, just as students took for granted the expectation of individual results for written examinations a couple of months after every exercise. When not engaged in classroom activities students found satisfaction in spending quality time in libraries, in intellectual discussions or face assignments. Universities of the past reflected maximum utility of time by all in achieving both individual and corporate goals, the very conditions which make for internal efficiency and evidenced in the limited number of objectively determined failures in the system.

It is however, doubtful if Universities in the past, like their counterparts today, exhibited any level of social and comparative efficiency. Admission to a University and subsequent graduation is always seen as a passport to a 'superior' western culture and departure from the indigenous. In dress and in conduct, the University system has very unfortunately instilled into the consciousness of its students a condescending attitude to the rest of society and rejection of the values which sums up indigenous life. From its very beginning, there has always existed a wall separating town and gown which gets higher and more impenetrable as one gets to the hinterland. It is this attitude which has left governments to sacrifice the interests and welfare of the rural majority for the greater advantage of the urban population which houses products of the Universities. In what has been described as 'psychological deruralization', "The educated African became in a fundamental sense a misfit in his own village"⁵. He can no longer think like one, thus becoming

disconnected and unsympathetic to their social conditions, an alien.

Comparative efficiency presents a very fuzzy situation given the relative absence of comparable opportunities for training in similar skills outside University boundaries. It is therefore difficult to evaluate efficiency of time, cost and effectiveness with similar opportunities that could be said to be available anywhere else. The only way in which comparative efficiency can be made sense of is examining the relative cost of producing a certain number and quality of University products then and now and which as we have already attempted to show weighs in favour of the past.

6.2 Today's Universities as Baskets of Waste

Unlike most other variables examined in this essay, it would have become evident that the sharp contrasts evidenced in others is blurred with that under consideration. Universities seem to exhibit more negative attributes here than positive, they operate more as baskets of waste than bastions of efficiency. The reasons for this unfortunate situation will be highlighted in the concluding part of this section after a discussion of those issues which give them that reputation.

Today's Universities no longer guarantee the level of economic efficiency associated with them in the past. Without the assurance of sustainable employment on graduation, the economic advantage graduates of the system enjoy over non-graduates has become either closed, non-existent or at worst deficit. Four to six years of isolation in Universities schools the attitude of their products from successfully adjusting to the stark economic realities which demand a new response to achieve economic independence. Many prefer to live illusory lives, continue depending on family and the public, a situation made worse by the growing tendency to conglomerate in urban centres hoping for miracles which come to only those who adjust.

The same investment in University education over one's course of study if ploughed judiciously has its advantages,

prominent of which are the low level of expectation and easy adjustment to a life of industry and dependence. If in the past Universities served as good preparatory centres for the good life, today they are serving more like waste centres which take away the young from actively participating in the opportunities which are no longer the exclusive preserves of those with University degrees. Most opportunities today are open only to those who have what to offer, irrespective of academic qualifications.

With occupational efficiency, today's Universities have shown tendencies towards increasing weakness. There is in the first place no guarantee that the time and energy invested in specializing in a particular course of study will be rewarded with an appropriate job to utilize acquired skills. For a good number, their contact with anything related to their chosen disciplines ends on graduation. In today's system, where the chief recruiting agencies of government are the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and the different paramilitary divisions, degrees in engineering, physics and mathematics with all the huge cost in the training turn out to be wastes of extreme proportions. This is especially so because the task requirements of several of these available jobs are such that any average secondary school product, even under today's weak education system, can successfully meet.

It is also realized that considerable differences exist between what Universities teach and demands in the world of work, even for graduates from the highest ranked, necessitating considerable relearning on the job for those fortunate to be engaged where their competences are required. Effectively, these end up utilizing only a tiny component of what is learnt in school, the enormous resources invested in learning what is never made use of effectively becoming a waste. And if we accept that the latest skills and technologies are to be found in industry and other work places because Universities as training institutions always lag behind, simple reasoning should guide us better where state of the art training can best be obtained.

Economic and occupational deficiencies of Universities are strongly linked to their internal deficiencies which will become

manifest as we attempt to highlight. Most disturbing is the huge cost required in sustaining them with all its different dimensions. Most discussed and known by all is the total cost of emolument for staff, many of who render services far below their wages. This cost component is one which if not met often triggers considerable outpouring of anger, degenerating in several cases to industrial disputes and unrest and adding a further dimension of waste – the time students take to complete their courses of study. It is obvious, therefore, that when it takes six years to complete a four year course the total cost of University education exceeds projections, the additional years representing wastes the system brings to bear upon itself and students

Students are not spared the burden of waste in several ways. When they have to spend several years to be mobilized for the compulsory national service, recalled after 'graduation' to write examinations in failed courses they were never informed about or have to make repeated visits to Departments and Faculties to ensure proper record of examination scores, they suffer waste of time and resources for no fault of theirs. These wastes only add to the many hours they spend idling about in school which exceed those actively engaged in learning. University years have become more of waste than productivity and there is hardly any difference between those who stay away from class and those who stay in. Almost all 'pass' their examinations without significant differences in levels of performance..

It would seem that while University cost is in most cases viewed from the perspectives of enrolments and actual educational expenditures, the cost of providing municipal services – security, power, water, sanitation, sports and entertainment though significant is hardly given attention. This cost dimension when added to total emolument considerably affects actual expenditure on teaching and learning, the main purpose which Universities are set to achieve. But there is also personal financial costs which students and their parents bear even under conditions of free tuition. This component is so diffused and continuous that

its true value defies precise estimation. It will not be too unreasonable therefore to suggest that personal cost equals the combined value of other cost aspects. Comparatively, the efficiency of Universities is higher than what the world outside their boundaries provide. But this is not the crucial point.

Universities deficiency – the way they teach learners and how much of what they teach is internalized by students provides an added dimension in the efficiency, waste controversy. University students often realize very early that much of what they learn is the outcome of either personal effort or the result of peer teaching. Teachers are good at introducing topics and in some cases defining the limits of expectations, but the actual responsibility to master the content of what students are expected to learn depends on conditions over which they play no part. It is common as a result of this deficiency to find good students standing up to the challenge of more than filling gaps in what teachers do, making one to wonder if such students should not also be placed on some wages.

Universities inefficiency is made clearer from the perspective of time taken to qualify for a degree relative to what is learnt against the duration necessary to acquire the same level of knowledge outside. In University training, to study mathematics or physics one is required to spend time learning history and english language with the result that the amount of the primary course of students exposed to and mastered can effectively be achieved in half the time or less⁶. It is normal to find in this system a very brilliant student in his chosen programme of studies, say computer science, perform excellently in all courses yet be kept back in the University for failing one of the ancillary and often times irrelevant ones. In what has become a classic example the world over, it has been shown how effective native Puerto Rican school dropouts took less than six months to teach four New Yorkers to speak Spanish using U.S. Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Spanish manual, designed for use by linguists with graduate training⁷. This success can be replicated with practically every conceivable university course of study, a pointer to the enormous

waste in engaging services of the number and even high ranks we have in the system.

Growth in efficiency cannot be separated from concentration and commitment which come from interest in an engagement. For both University teachers and their students this condition is in great need. If teachers do not have passion for their jobs, having found themselves within its ranks for lack of alternatives, and if students are forced to offer courses with least interest and aptitude, but are drafted into them in order to meet admission quotas, we cannot expect efficiency in the system. Teaching will lack the energy to communicate and learning the desire to understand. Thus, both remain at levels which cannot foster growth.

6.3 Making Our Universities More Efficient

To free us from the likelihood of boredom and repetition by examining all the variables of efficiency in our attempt to explore ways and means by which this can be restored, it will do to limit ourselves to the core features of the system – the most central of them – which we identified to be internal efficiency⁸. Two dimensions are important in this regard – administrative and operational.

Nigerian Universities must strive to achieve excellence in service by maintaining appropriate staff numbers in their establishment for not only will this reduce overall cost in their operations, it will also lead to maximum output from all. To be effective, a deliberate attempt for an acceptable level of competence is demanded over undue emphasis on irrelevant considerations. Although public Universities cannot be run like banks and industries, they can strive to emulate these with a focus on need than want and the constant concern for some level of balance between productivity and entitlement which at the moment appears totally ignored.

If efficiency is the relationship between process and product, our University teachers must understand that it is not sufficient to focus more on the quantity of content students amass;

they should also focus on means by which this is achieved or its effectiveness. Nigerian Universities encourage over stocking of 'knowledge' to the point in which little is left for the student to think. Such 'knowledge' can only remain 'inert' as Whitehead has consistently shown and so incapable of processing for use or rearranging into different combinations⁹. Just as an efficient alimentary system cannot be judged by its capacity for storage but its ability to process food intake for use by the body, so is an efficient system which our Universities must aspire. To achieve this Universities must strive to reduce the overcrowded curriculum which makes students constantly burdened with memorization and little to derive thereafter.

In place of authoritarian methods in our Universities must be substituted those requiring freedom to exchange and question ideas, to allow learners to differ from the views of their teachers. It is only by learning together in an atmosphere of give and take and the sharing of experiences will the necessary qualities of mind be developed which promote sensitivity to others points of view and background and the guarantee for achieving both civic and social efficiency. This pedagogical approach is one which holds promise in clothing otherwise abstract ideas of instruction with sufficient social relevance made available from the rich cultural diversity of the learners as they freely make their contributions.

The condition of process in efficiency also necessitates as a factor in teaching. To insist on the content of a prescribed syllabus without reference to students ability to absorb is much a waste of time and resources as talking to oneself in a lecture hall and expecting students in their different halls of residence to profit from the act. Efficiency in class has to do with the balance between teachers, learners and the items of instruction; any imbalance resulting to a dislocation which impedes desired outcome.¹⁰

What is even more odious with our University curriculum is the tendency to excessive specialization in the face of still uncertain job opportunities which make products of the system unable to adjust than if they had a less definite training. General education requiring exposure to dominant fields of knowledge can

best guarantee occupational efficiency as well as the ability to adjust to shifting interests to achieve economic efficiency. Too specific training closes a student's capacity to adjust and take advantage of opportunities requiring related competences.¹¹

Just as span of control makes for efficiency so does unity of command. A situation which makes Universities answerable to both the National Universities Commission (NUC) and National or State Assemblies leaves them in the end with no specific controlling authority. On the one hand Universities take orders from NUC on matters of curriculum and quality. On the other hand, they go to the National Assembly to defend budgets or in the case of State Universities to their State Assemblies.

Unfortunately, Assemblies do not have the competence to question certain aspects of the budget like staff emolument and even infrastructure. They only focus on differences in figures between previous and present budgets and pass them in most cases without fully understanding what lies underneath. It is this loophole that Universities explore to recruit beyond their need and maintain the level of inefficiency we have in almost all of them. University budgets are best scrutinized by the NUC or State Ministries of Education. Only these agencies have the competence and time to demand full justification for budget proposals. A reversal of the trend is urgently needed to halt excessive recruitment, especially in areas with less need which has left almost all Universities with over-bloated establishments.

6.4 Perspectives on Development

Development cannot be meaningfully thought about without the means by which it is achieved as well as how much is achieved. This is what brings efficiency and waste into focus in any consideration of development, for to develop it is important that the most efficient or cost effective means are adopted which minimise waste. And just like development is not about a particular end-state so is it not always the case that we remain only concerned with how much of what we expect is realized. It is always important to relate what is achieved to what is invested to

achieve it. This makes the cost of development, sometimes, a more important factor than development itself, for if the cost exceeds what is actualized we may not reasonably talk of development. Development is the surplus realised after investment, of both material and non-material items.

Universities can become more effective partners of development when they reduce waste in all its forms, when they focus on performing those functions which they are most suited for and when they align their goals and objectives with those of the wider society. They cannot reasonably achieve these except they relate their activities, both teaching and research, to the myriad challenges which characterize their immediate societies.

While some welfarism is good for every society, when this affects what benefits Universities can offer, it becomes counterproductive to development, a waste of resources, both in material and non-material terms. But efficiency has to be viewed from both individual and holistic levels. Our Universities must reduce waste by giving students opportunities to develop their capacities where maximum return is most likely to occur. They must also be bold to engage and hire competent staff, assign them to positions commensurate with their competencies and in numbers necessary and sufficient for the kind of services in need.

- 7 -

7.0 Instruments of Liberation or Implements of Dependency

The concept of liberation has both negative and positive sides. Negatively, it is conceived as freedom from external constraints and positively as freedom to act according to ones volition or will¹. From the perspective of a developing country like Nigeria, application of these interpretations of liberation to its Universities will take the following meanings: either as instruments for freeing the country from external constrains or controls, or as instruments for making the country capable of acting on its own terms. Both of these interpretations focus on liberation at the institutional level, that is the particular roles

Universities perform to liberate the country from external control or dependency on them. But Universities as instruments of liberation can also be interpreted from the expectation that they develop those who pass through them to free themselves from previously controlling conditions.

At the institutional level, liberation can be associated with freedom from cultural factors like norms, values, ideas and technology (cultural liberation), or from economic circumstances (economic liberation) or from political control (political liberation). In all of these, there is progress from a discomfoting condition to a favourable one; a breaking down of chains which hitherto held life back from attaining its more desirable state. Liberation is the means by which the good life is achieved through the actions of a free agent. Individual liberation in contrast suggests a freeing of capacities to direct one's life without control by another; the ability to resist the controlling influence of another individual or group. It is from this interpretation that we talk of education for liberation or the system of education which enhances the development of such capacities.

Dependency, on the other hand, is both a concrete and mental situation in which a system, organization or an individual due to inherent inadequacies, real or imagined, relies on another for the fulfilment of some purpose. The University as an implement of dependency, therefore, draws from a conception of it as either strengthening its level of reliance on foreign institutions, reinforces the continuous dependence of its owning society to the same external conditions or produces graduates incapable of independence of mind and existence. These interpretations are sufficient to place Nigeria's early and present Universities on a comparative scale.

7.1 Universities in the Past as Instruments of Liberation

This description is more a matter of intention than outcome of what their purposes were, rather than what they demonstrated. Nowhere is that intention more vividly expressed than in the ideas of Nnamdi Azikiwe upon which the University

of Nigeria, he founded, was based.

Anchored on his philosophy of Renascent Africa which had the objectives of spiritual balance, social regeneration, economic determinism, mental emancipation and political resurgence, he placed the burden of achieving them on no other level of education than the University. Only this level of education, Zik reasoned, can provide the required level of sophistication necessary to understand the tasks that lie ahead and how to work towards their resolution. Through this level of education, mental emancipation will be achieved and the individual will rid himself of all complexes which could retard his capacity to fully realize a large amount of literature which he can utilize to evaluate European conduct in Africa. Through it also beneficiaries will become sufficiently equipped with the vital weapons to clearly and powerfully articulate their views. University education provides also that singular opportunity, which others cannot, for individuals to have a deeper appreciation of their cultural past. Over and above all these, however, University education being the highest level of education, can be seen as an achievement which, when acquired by Africans, will go to prove that Africans too, like their European counterparts, are intellectually endowed. This will destroy the myth that Africans are mentally inferior. He argues that "the African is human, and is intellectually alert just as the average European, Asianic or American. What he needs is an opportunity to demonstrate his capabilities," concluding that "African backwardness is judged as his failure to measure up to the standards of western education, which has been purposely denied him."²

In the New Africa of Zik's dream, the Universities will help the individual to shape the course of events. "Universities," he says, "have been responsible for shaping the destinies of races, nations and individuals. They are centres where things material are made to be subservient to things intellectual in all shapes and forms."³

Attributing the great movements that have occurred in Europe to Universities, Zik believes the fact that an African

University will provide the necessary ferment for revolutionary changes to take place in the continent and, in so doing will transform it to the realm of light. In his view, Africa's dependence on Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, the Sorbonne, Berlin and Heidelberg for intellectual growth which will bring about desired changes is erroneous, since these Universities are off-shoots of different conditions and so will ever remain inadequate in meeting local needs. Only an African University can adequately do this. As long as Africans acquire their education from these Western Universities, they are better prepared for such countries rather than native Africa. "An African graduate, of these Universities, unless he has developed his individuality, is nothing short of a megaphone. Yea a carbon copy of those societies,"⁴ he submits. It is from this background that the inspiring motto of the University of Nigeria, To Restore the Dignity of Man, can be understood. The University was an instrument intended for this purpose. It is only left to be seen how successfully or not today's universities are achieving them.

More than any other level of education, Universities in their early days of establishment served a liberating political role by their supply of articulate and competent Nigerians who speeded up the nigerianization process in both the administrative and commercial life of the people. Standing up to all vestiges of colonial dominance in every aspect of national life, they became the mouthpiece of the people and demonstrated capacity for leadership. Culturally, Universities demonstrated a liberating capacity as well, at least with regard to those limiting aspects which in one way or the other held the people down. The coming together of different cultures and critical evaluation of these provided opportunity to challenge and discard obnoxious aspects while accepting at the same time acceptable ingredients from others, both local and foreign. The liberation from a narrow world view dictated by narrow cultural bonds is a role early Universities surely served. Intellectually, they liberated individuals from the limited knowledge frames of their indigenous cultures by exposing them to the wide pool of others. This does not suggest in any way the superior intellectual content of other cultures relative to ours.

It only implies that the pooling of diverse cultural ingredients enriches content and that process was effectively served by Universities at the beginning.

7.2 Today's Universities as Implements of Dependency

Much sense cannot be made about this conception without appreciating a theory of economic, political and cultural dependency which have locked Universities in a vicious cycle. Ali Mazrui, the prolific Kenyan political scientist, put forward this position which is necessary to state. According to him (a) the rise of monopoly capitalism following Europe's industrial growth resulted to her need for raw materials and markets for finished goods, (b) Industrial and commercial motives created a compelling expansionist drive through economic penetration, (c) Local personnel in Africa needed to be partially de-Africanized in advance before they can become culturally relevant for the consumption of western goods and life style (d) the church and school were the greatest instruments for this de-Africanization, (e) University graduates and by extension the Universities, in Africa, by being the most deeply westernized, became the most culturally dependent⁵. In other words, inspite of Zik's idealism, African Universities were conceived in the womb of dependency on the West and that says something of their character right down to this day.

If Nigerian Universities started as instruments for liberating those who go through them from the chains of obnoxious indigenous cultural practices and beliefs, they progressed to become too dependent on Western culture. They failed to maintain that delicate balance between the indigenous and alien and surrendered too readily to the demands of Western culture.

Nowhere is this dependency more visible than in the content of University curricula which, except for very minor adaptations, reflect conditions and problems of advanced countries of the West than those of Nigeria. There is more similarity between the content of Nigeria's University curriculum with those of the most advanced countries than should ordinarily

be expected given the differences in levels of development and unique cultural and other variables that separate them. While this universalization has a positive side because it facilitates free movement of scholars and learners, it denies Nigerians from having a deeper appreciation of what they are taught to the concrete realities of the environment they are expected to function. But universitization is not in itself bad. It is condemned because the content of what is transmitted is almost entirely the effort of others and so keeping our Universities in perpetual dependence on them for even what they teach.

A University curriculum is both the accumulated knowledge of a people to meet their problems as well as possible ideas being tried for the same purpose. It must therefore significantly derive its strength and relevance from the environment. When we teach the same engineering content with Universities in countries whose technology has taken people to the moon, we unreasonably imitate others and at the same time abandon a genuine concern for solving the very problems which are faced at the moment. In the confusion our Universities find themselves, by remaining poor imitators and neglecting concern for our problems they place themselves in a worst kind of dependency where they must also rely on foreign Universities for answers to problems peculiar to their environment.

Several decades after their establishment Nigerian Universities are yet to find local substitutes or related models of what we slavishly adopt to suit our unique circumstances. We are yet to develop the ideas of our indigenous philosophers to the point at which the Nigerian undergraduate can have adequate exposure to them. In his foreword to *Main Currents in Nigerian Educational Thought*, a former Education Minister decried our attraction to “the sophistication and soundness of foreign ideas” and the reckless abandon of our own “system of ideas, that are the direct outcome of our peculiar circumstances.”⁶

Dependence on a still substantially imported curriculum introduces further dependence on the technology to make teaching and research effective. It is the norm to find in our

Universities a deliberate attempt to adorn laboratories with state of the art equipments as it is possible in some of the best in the world. By so doing the Universities find themselves in a kind of dual dependency in which on the one hand, they must perpetually depend on external supplies for such sophisticated equipment, which change ever so often and on the other hand, the men and technology to maintain them. It is for instance normal for a University to have in its laboratory a spectrometer, even if it is never used. All what is important is having it and its possession marks the difference between a poor and good laboratory.

Having failed to respond to challenges of their immediate environments, a situation which together with a constellation of other factors made them rank poorly relative to Western Universities, a new form of dependency has become popular. Nigerian Universities are no longer capable of passing judgment on the quality of their research works. They now have to depend on international publication platforms to certify acceptability of standards to get published and be judged scholarly. Our acceptance of the West as the fountain and custodian of all knowledge has made it easier for the latest additions in a Western University curriculum to find its way into what is taught to students in Nigerian Universities than it is for a local problem in Nigeria dangerously affecting human lives to be examined and taught to students. Even our problems have become inferior to those of the advanced West.

It is at the micro level of individual students that we find today's Universities serving most conspicuously as implements of dependency. The University teacher, forced less by an imposed curriculum than by his own interpretation of his role, begins by uncritically accepting the content of every published textbook, especially from the West, as a collection of infallible truths, for those who take the time to read. To others, it is their own notes, written several decades earlier, which serves throughout as that priceless collection. Both hand these obsolete and half digested content to students unfortunate to be under their tutelage in a manner that gives no room for questioning or interpretation, and it

is those who can reproduce such materials on demand during examinations who are rewarded with the highest grades.

This situation, so common in our Universities today, only sustains the chain of dependence from teacher to student, and from generation to generation. A University student who does not see knowledge as instruments to interpret and solve the problems of his life and environment must remain dependent on the few answers he receives from his teacher, but these can never suffice for the demands of all life's problems. University education must instil confidence in an individual's ability to face every situation with the stock of knowledge which his schooling provided. But that can only be achieved not through the authoritarian banking mode of knowledge transmission that is prevalent today but through a problem-posing one⁷.

7.3 Making Nigerian Universities True Instruments of Liberation

To make our Universities true instruments of liberation we must take seriously the statement credited to C. W. Eliot that University, in any worthy sense of the term, must grow from seed as it cannot be transplanted from another country in full leaf and bearing⁷. The tragedy with our Universities is that they have remained transplants from England and America and they have remained so because we only took from these foreign Universities the sweet fruits of their experiences which are packaged as knowledge. We have consistently failed to realise that most theory is the product of practical experience. By ignoring our problems and attempting to quickly master the processed knowledge of the West we remain perpetually behind because we can never achieve the kind of understanding necessary for advancement independent of them.

In place of rigidly structured curriculum must be found a problem centred one requiring deliberate attention to issues which affect our existence. By not beginning from such problems, presenting traditional interpretation and their answers before searching for new alternatives, packaged as knowledge, we will always remain unable to liberate ourselves from both our

challenging circumstances or dependence on others to overcome them. Of even greater significance is the advantage this approach to the curriculum is likely to have on the liberation of the individual. By the very fact that every individual has a background of experiences to share, a problem – centered curriculum more than the rigidly structured one which favours imposition grants every learner the opportunity to share his experiences and even challenge those of others, including his teacher.

Our Universities can begin to depend less on the West for state of the art equipment for their laboratories. They can only achieve this if they focus more on their level of technology to provide what they need do and which can be sustained by their own effort than if they take the easy route of purchasing every new invention from advanced industrial countries to develop ours.

Our current dependency on foreign technology in Universities prepares students for those foreign countries than Nigeria. On graduation, products of our Universities find out that there is almost nothing outside the kind of equipment they were exposed to in school to support or reinforce what they are to be engaged in. Many take the easier option of locating abroad, leaving the rural areas so needy of development in their poor states of underdevelopment. For Universities not to close the gap between what is done inside and what is obtained outside is to maintain an isolation which benefits neither the institutions nor the outer society so much in need of development. Development is only possible when activities and materials of instruction in Universities reinforce those outside and vice versa. It can never be achieved when extreme gaps exist, both in content and equipment.

7.4 Perspectives on Development

If development is about change from a present state to another, it must of necessity require a transition from actuality (that present state) to a potential one or what it becomes. Unless the energy for this change comes from outside, the unit of development must have within itself the capacity for achieving it.

When such energy comes almost entirely from outside, the unit may in fact move from point A to B, but we will not call that development. Non-material objectives like stones can move from point to point entirely from external energy. A building can be erected using available materials, yet we do not say that a house has developed. We restrict the term development to situations which the unit in question has within itself the momentum for such movement. It may depend to some extent on external support but unless it has within itself the ingredients for such progress and actually utilizes it we may not associate it with development.

Liberation is the freeing of latent capacities to bring about desired change. For the individual, it presupposes developing his innate abilities of mind and body to the point at which he can sustain himself. Everyone is endowed with a certain range of abilities, development is achieved when these are identified and trained for maximum use. To make individuals think for themselves and to provide sufficient opportunities for its exercise is a requirement for such liberation of capacity. These are the tasks which Universities should promote if latent abilities are to be liberated. At the institutional level, a focus on what is indigenous to us, whether as problems or solutions, is the only appropriate starting point for development. It is only when external problems are identical to ours can we profit from external answers. When they differ, as they often do, their answers can only be relevant as guides, to take from them those relevant for our purpose, after careful study rather than uncritically accepting them as pre-ordained truths.

Our Universities are the greatest repository of talent and knowledge. If they do not rise to the level of focusing on means and methods peculiar to our circumstances and depend on what has been achieved elsewhere we will always perpetuate the cycle of dependence with so much cost in material and psychic terms.

8.0 Hosts of Order or Houses of Commotion

By their very nature Universities have never been good examples of ordered organizations as they have consistently in struggled to free themselves from external control, the world over. But they have not also been perfect illustrations of houses of commotion, perpetually in conflict. In their effort to function as expected they have found themselves oscillating between these extremes at one time or the other. It is then necessary to show how in broad terms Nigerian Universities in the past approximated a sense of order, more than the present which will also be shown as exhibiting more tendencies towards houses of commotion than previously. But first, we must be clear over what constitutes order or the conditions which guarantee it.

The concept of order presupposes stability, harmony and the absence of conflict. Its basic principles are derived from structural functionalism and systems theory, both of which conceive organizations like Universities as structures or complex systems comprising of a number of interdependent parts serving as subsystems, performing their distinctive functions and maintaining a good relationship with larger systems to which they remain a part as well.

Order therefore presupposes both internal and external harmony, the tendency to carry out expected activities under conditions which impose no constraints or barriers. To be orderly also is to be peaceful, to conduct oneself in a manner that is guided by sufficient knowledge of one's limits and responsibilities to others, so that every unit, small and large, knows its place within the wider scheme. Order is the absence of friction and an expression of balance.

On the opposite end, commotion signifies discordance, the disruption of procedures and the prevalence of conflict among component parts. With commotion unity of purpose is undermined as interruption in the pursuit of self-interests take precedence over common interests, while more energy is dissipated to achieve much less.¹

8.1 Universities in the Past as Hosts of Order

For Universities, the greatest single indicator of order is its level of predictability. The fact that members of a University are guaranteed the sequential and timely execution of laid down plans is an indication of order. Students, the most important group in every University, were in the past guaranteed completion of their programmes in stipulated time, achievement of which was the outcome of an environment where there are no disruptions. From the date of resumption to the time for writing examinations, laid down plans enjoyed uninterrupted execution and both staff and students could talk of holidays coming up at set periods in a year. Every examination was followed with concrete assurances of when to expect results, oftentimes at the comfort of students mail boxes. These were possible when communication was still at its infancy and the postmaster was its symbol. Order, which approximated perfection also ensured that no student, either by omission or commission, missed his result or needed to meet the lecturer for correction.

Order in the Universities was achieved because everyone knew his place and role and delivered services as required of his position. The messenger and typist, the administrative staff and lecturer all knew their places and took pride in functioning in their positions. More than just knowing their positions, almost everyone exhibited competence which yielded quick and desirable results and which in turn facilitated the work of others to achieve the level of efficiency evident at the time.

Availability of clearly laid down policies and rules of conduct were supported with respect for justice, sense of belonging and protection in the system. With their manageable sizes and a span of control within the system which made all heads effective in managing both human and material resources and the pyramidal structure which placed functional authority on leaders within the system, Nigerian Universities in the past were able to maintain adequate control of its members. Wide

application of justice and equity was particularly beneficial in dowsing tension within the rank and file as well as placed individuals to positions based on strict satisfaction of laid down criteria, a situation which further added to the authority those in positions commanded.

While these factors were contributory to the level of order Nigeria's Universities in the past enjoyed, the single greatest factor seemed to lie in the relationship which existed between them and larger systems, economic, social and political. Economically, Universities enjoyed tremendous support in more than one way. Apart from considerable funding support enjoyed which minimized tension between University administrations and staff, students too under different forms of scholarships, had little to agitate about meeting their obligations. Adequate living conditions, equipped laboratories and satisfactory feeding, provided at very minimal cost to students satisfied their basic needs, leaving them with the only option to focus on personal academic goals which can only be pursued under conditions of tranquillity and peace. And with staff, both academic and non-teaching, whose monthly enrolments were never under threat of failure or denial, the same focus on achieving personal goals needing peace and order naturally became paramount. Satisfied staff and students can only produce congenial relationships and systemic order.

Between Universities and their immediate environments, Universities stood as models and major determinants of taste and modernity. This in itself placed a responsibility on its members to constantly exhibit acceptable conduct of the highest degree, both within and outside the institutions. These feelings of social superiority by students and staff of Universities in their early days prevented external social interference, especially those of a disruptive nature. Their social isolation also had implications politically as staff and students had minimal interest and contact with external political currents. Social and political insulation meant that Universities conducted their affairs with little

consideration of factors outside the frame of their objectively laid down principles and procedures, a situation which left every member sufficiently satisfied with decisions arrived at in most cases. Equality of consideration guaranteed the emergence of leadership at all levels that commanded collective acceptability and respect and with it the occurrence of order in the conduct of affairs.

A major point of order in Universities at the very beginning was in the appointment of Vice Chancellors, the chief administrative head. In nearly every case, these emerged from among the best that every University could boast of with little or no influence from social and political interests outside. The fairness inherent in the process apart from attracting little condemnation generated cooperation of members of the University community. A Vice Chancellor of such acceptability and personality can only in turn make appointments of individuals with similar credentials. Order was achieved because it was easy to predict with a reasonable level of assurance the line of ascendancy into positions of leadership at different levels in the University. Such Vice Chancellors too, were more likely to be disinterested in students who emerge as leaders, allowed popular choice to assume leadership and students were left with very little to complain about.

8.2 Today's Universities as Houses of Commotion

If commotion connotes a situation of noisy confusion, today's Universities are good examples of houses of commotion, characterized more by continuous loud agitations than by peace and tranquillity. To outsiders, these agitations are made more confusing by the numerous Unions which serially make demands with threats and execution of industrial unrest upon failure to satisfy. To make thin the line of demarcation between demand, agitation and unrest, strikes are never permanently called-off but always suspended, with the implication that they can very easily be re-instituted within the shortest possible time or slightest excuse.

Almost all Universities in Nigeria no longer enjoy smooth and predictable academic calendars as solidarity songs and renditions of 'Aluta' have become more common than ever. If it is not a staff union that is calling on members to review observed shortcomings of a University administration, or government's failure to meet commitment, it is students whose demands for better living and learning conditions that easily galvanizes them into action. Our Universities have become unpredictable journeys where one knows when to begin but is never certain when he will graduate, and where challenges of resolving differences have become priority over concentration of effort to bring about accelerated achievement of set goals and objectives.

It is not just in the course of industrial unrests, however that the character of commotion is displayed in the Universities. After every period of unrest, any attempt to exhaust the content of course outlines introduces chaos in the scheduling of lectures with several overlaps which result in some students missing out in many. This atmosphere of commotion often spills-over into the conduct of examinations as everything is done in a hurry to meet revised time-tables. Peaceful and orderly conduct of examinations is substituted with chaos which leads to loss of students scripts and other acts not proper for proper organization of examinations.

Nowhere is the commotion in Universities more obvious than in the wide division among the Unions which pitches each against the other. Every Union projects the argument of indispensability which entitles it to its claims while undermining all others. Each makes its separate demands, enters into negotiations and settlement through signed agreements independent of others. With innumerable signed agreements by different Unions, there is even confusion in interpretation, implementation and recall. It is doubtful how many members of the different Unions remember how many of such agreements exist and their level of implementation, except for their leadership. Even University Managements are often confused over the level and mode of implementation of all signed agreements, a situation which

perpetually keeps the institutions on the brink of the next crises.

Parents, students and indeed the general public are not spared the burden of rising commotion in today's Universities. No one, even the University authority themselves, can confidently state the precise financial cost students have to bear in a given semester or school year. As students return home every semester and inform parents of what they know from past experience being what they are expected to pay and receive this from their parents, they return to school to be confronted with charges at different levels of the system which distort their plans. Parents doubt the truth of their children for further requests for funds which the Universities may not even be aware of how and why the charges are placed on students in some cases.

A frightening spectre hangs over most Nigerian Universities today in which groups with opposing interests among staff and students threaten peace and concord, which are necessary for productive academic work or smooth management of the institutions. By opposing each other they undermine their capacity for collective action on issues bothering on achieving the common good. From the perspective of students, opposition to each other sometimes leads to confrontation and violence over matters which have remained difficult to explain. They have remained active and clandestine with aggressive methods of recruitment to swell their numbers and achieve greater prominence in the negative. When these divisions take root among staff, as is the case in some Universities, belonging to one or the other may be a reason for favouritism, persecution or just neglect. The result is absence of a true sense of community spirit which a University should demonstrate.

Commotion is always the outcome when lines of authority are breached to favour those deserving placement into positions of authority. Resentment often leads to anger and frustration, both of which turn every opportunity into open disagreement and confrontation rather than cooperation. More volatile is the appointment of Vice Chancellors which has turned many

Universities today into grave turmoil with ripple effects on the entire system. The appointment of an individual without necessary authority bases is the best recipe for anarchy within an enlightened community such as a University.

It is evident that much of the turmoil in Nigerian Universities today is traceable to the twin factors of increasing demands for better conditions by staff and students and the conduct of University Vice Chancellors in exercising their functions. While such demands will remain on the increase due to continuous increases in number in the face of limited funds, the potential to mitigate the rise in disenchantment and threat to disorder is only possible through adequate information. The high level of enlightenment found in Universities provokes questioning and doubts from all, which if not adequately attended to heightens an atmosphere of commotion. Availability of adequate information often times provides answers and appreciation of issues which distortion and rumour only inflames. Sufficient information is the best guarantee for accountability and quiet.

Outside Universities democratic institutions operate under conditions of checks and balances to minimize abuses with grave consequences. Both executives and legislatures perform their different roles to achieve reasonable balance for the public interest. University Senates, given their quality and qualification for membership, are even better placed to effectively check executive abuses which so often lead to turmoil. It is left to them to demand strict adherence to laid down policies and commitment to accepted values for the health of their institutions. They must fight against the appointment of lackeys into positions beyond their capacities and who on becoming members of Senate will do nothing other than offer blind support to Vice Chancellors on every step taken or utterance made.

8.4 Perspectives on Development

Order does not only presuppose the absence of conflict. It also entails absence of obstacles which lead to situations that

cause hindrance in operations within a system. Development is best achieved under conditions of peace and order, where everyone performs his functions without hindrance and where conflicts are reduced to the barest minimum. With order every individual knows where his activities complement another and is conscious of his limitations. He is guided by commonly agreed rules of conduct and procedure which serve as frames of reference when conflicts arise, as they must always do.

Planning is both a precondition for order and its effect, for when we plan we are aiming at achieving order just as when we have order it is possible to plan. The advantage of planning is that it enables the proper setting of priorities and the intelligent following of procedures to achieve both immediate and long term goals. It minimizes dissipation of energy both in resolving conflicts or in eliminating obstacles which lie along the way.

No meaningful development is possible under conditions of disorder, conflict or insecurity and when we allow these obstacles to exist before we resolve them, they can never amount to indications of positive effort, which must remain the ultimate objectives set to achieve. Development is achievement of set goals, not elimination of obstacles leading to their achievement. To achieve meaningful development therefore resolution of conflicts though necessary to pave the way for development should never be counted as an aspect of it. Universities cannot become effective factors in development when they remain perpetually engaged in crises. To allow this to become a part of their character is to sacrifice time, energy and resources in tackling circumstances which lead to a dislocation of order and which would have been better channelled to more productive ends. Achievement of this feat is a responsibility for University Managements, Unions, Students and the owning authorities.

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9.0 Seeds of Unity or Fruits of Disunity

It is of interest for us to explore what role Universities are playing in our very diversified country, where ethnic loyalties are stronger than national sentiments to achieve a more united country. For no matter what interpretations we give to the now famous “mere geographical expression” statement by Obafemi Awolowo¹ threats to national unity remain. Recognition of this fact is what drives us to explore the specific roles Universities have been seen to play in addressing the problem from inception. This is because just as it was with the Americans when they created their new nation and “looked to the schools to perform a political function, to ensure the success of republican government”² so must our schools and in particular the Universities be saddled with addressing our unique problem of forging and preserving national unity. Little wonder that one of the country's national educational aims is “inculcation of national consciousness and national unity”³.

Interestingly, national unity is distinguished from “mass allegiance” or the coercion of people to act in certain specific ways. It is more appropriately a matter of integrating the people into “smaller and more concrete units” and building on a “network of interlocking relationships at the grassroots, beginning with the family, stretching outwards through local associations to the larger community”⁴. And since under-developed countries are poorly integrated vertically between elites and the rest as well as horizontally between groups defined in ethnic, social, religious and linguistic terms⁵ the educational system's role in achieving unity can only be effective if it facilitates these aspects of integration.

9.1 Universities in the Past as Seeds of Unity

In the formative years of University education in Nigeria, recruitment of staff of all shades had representations from every section of the country, with Ahmadu Bello University and University of Ibadan standing out as shining examples. It was common to find in these Universities names on office doors

reflecting the heterogeneous character of the country, although this could not have been evenly distributed given the educational history of the country in which some sections enjoyed initial advantages over others. Although many of these Universities were the products of Regional efforts, their taking over by the Federal Government opened them up to national representation, especially at higher levels of recruitment.

To establish true federal presence, appointments of Vice Chancellors did not also follow strict regional or ethnic lines. Here, again, one must observe that the Federal Government found it easier to entrench this liberal policy with Universities in so-called minority States than those in dominant ethnic locations. Any limitations even at this did not significantly affect the federal character of the country as University Senates remained truly national in composition.

To address the obvious imbalance which characterized the distribution of Ashby Universities in Nsukka, Zaria, Lagos, Ife and Ibadan, the seven Jibril Aminu Universities were located in Jos, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Ilorin, Kano, Maiduguri and Sokoto. This fairer distribution was intended to address the imbalance in the supply of educated manpower in the country which was aggravating suspicion and undermining national cohesion. To the extent that this act widened access to University education to all sections of the country, feelings of exclusion were being addressed and with it the strengthening of national understanding and oneness.

Despite these attempts, Universities were exacerbating disunity rather than fostering unity in the country, when it was discovered that admissions were still skewed in favour of some sections against others. Again, Universities were required to address this with the introduction of a quota system of selection of candidates aimed at giving more opportunities to candidates from deprived areas⁶. Although the controversy which followed this policy in some way divided the country between those favoured and disfavoured, Universities played the role expected of them at

the time.

No matter what may be said about the quota system of selection the fact that it brought together students from diverse backgrounds to live and share experiences in the complete residential nature of Universities prevalent at the time had salutary effects. Within them “personal attitudes and habits which favour cohesion and solidarity in the national community are cultivated...(where) repellent images of other ethnic types inherited...from the septic prejudice of their elders dissolve and vanish”⁷. With every opportunity to interact with others, sentiments give way to concrete personal assessment of one another and with that the creation of new bonds of friendship which cut across ethnic and religious lines.

With the different levels of government at the time providing all forms of sponsorships to University students and the care and comfort available to them in the course of their studies, a feeling of attachment to the country was easy to cultivate. Universities provided the kind of living condition which was not different from those earning paid income from government employment. They naturally became the crucible in which students were being moulded to assume leadership as Nigerians and not as individuals being denied these means for the fulfilment of their aspirations.

9.2 Today's Universities as Fruits and Seeds of Disunity

It is difficult to admit if today's Universities by their practices and modes of operation are merely fruits of disunity. For the idea of fruits of unity places the burden of their present state as being exclusively derived from the increasing disunity being experienced within the larger society. While we cannot entirely dissociate happenings in Universities from external influences, to see what obtains within the system as entirely the fruits of such happenings is to think too little of them. We may then better view them as both fruits and seeds of disunity. They are fruits of

disunity because of the impact of wider currents of disunity on their conduct and are also seeds of the same occurrence because the fruits within them have matured and produced seeds which in turn feed the larger society.

In today's Universities, staff recruitment has assumed extreme ethnic bias at two levels. In the first, all Federal Universities have increasingly discarded federal representation and are being populated by staff from the dominant ethnic groups of their location. At the second level, almost every Vice Chancellor in some form of competition concentrates on recruiting staff from his particular section of the ethnic group. An unwritten statement is somehow made that others should wait for their turn to achieve the same. Increasingly, individuals from other ethnic groups are becoming a dying species. Our Federal Universities have become State institutions in staff composition. But the complete story need be told if we are to find adequate response to the trend.

On the eve of independence when the Ashby Commission submitted its report to establish Nigeria's first Universities, only two major ethnic groups, Igbo and Yoruba, produced over ninety percent of the indigenous academic staff in all the Universities. When the second generation Universities were established a decade and half later the same ethnic groups took their initial advantages to populate these as well. The same advantages were bound to be maintained unless something extraordinary was done to reverse the situation which was beginning to cause unease in Universities outside the geographical locations of the two dominant ethnic groups whose indigenous peoples were being made to believe they were incapable of high quality or just could not have the manpower to recruit. A wave of superiority and inferiority was unconsciously being cultivated, the seeds of disharmony were being sown and supplied with nutrients to sprout into unhealthy fruits. With sufficient support from outside the Universities, almost all first crop of indigenous Vice Chancellors in Universities located outside the two dominant ethnic groups

embarked on aggressive measures to reverse the situation by employing more of their indigenes into teaching positions. They were forced to adhere to the practice of reverse discrimination.

In taking this course of action these Vice Chancellors satisfied all the logical and necessary conditions for this mode of distribution of opportunities. These include (a) existence of an initial act of discrimination that the discrimination is aimed at rectifying (b) beneficiaries of the acts of reverse discrimination have been handicapped by the initial act either directly or indirectly as offspring who inherited the handicap (c) victims of the acts of reverse discrimination must have benefited from past discriminations, either directly or indirectly (d) even if all discrimination was stopped immediately, its negative consequences will be passed on to successive generations⁸.

Indigenes of Universities outside the two dominant groups for a long time monopolized teaching positions even when and where indigenes were available. Secondly, the indigenes suffered both direct and indirect handicaps. Directly, those qualified at a given time were prevented from securing employment. Indirectly, their offsprings also suffered because they found themselves unable to compete for the same jobs with those of the initially advantaged. Thirdly, members of the dominant groups who started complaining of discrimination under the new policy, the new victims, have benefited both directly and indirectly from earlier discrimination. Lastly, Vice Chancellors in these Universities reasoned that conditions of advantages and disadvantages will be perpetuated almost indefinitely along initial lines unless they apply the policy of reverse discrimination in recruitment.

Agitations have continued right to this moment by members of initial disadvantaged States who are being discriminated against. They complain that they have converted Federal Universities into State institutions, yet see nothing wrong in the same Federal Universities in their States of origin being more entrenched in the same condition. In whichever way the

issue is taken, all Federal Universities fan the ambers of ethnicity and they have become the least federal in composition among all federal parasatals in the country.

Giving support to this localization of recruitment is the unwritten law of appointing Vice Chancellors and principal officers from within the same geographical location of Federal Universities. When this trend is reinforced with the loose requirement of spread of student population in admission, which made Universities in the past good grounds for the mingling of cultures, today's Universities are fast becoming breeding grounds of the worst forms of ethnic consciousness and aversion for others. In all Federal Universities today issues have left the lofty heights of national consideration to the low levels of Senatorial Districts and Local Government Areas. Today's Universities are providing increasingly less opportunities for the mingling of minds to appreciate one another and to forge a national spirit. Through them, men and women graduate who think less about Nigeria and without the slightest modicum of knowledge about others. They have become seeds of disunity.

9.3 Returning Today's Universities to Seeds of Unity

It is evident that the quick transition of Universities from seeds of unity to fruits or seeds of unity is traceable to the over-representation of some sections in managing them, the tendency towards maintaining the imbalance and the determined efforts of deprived groups attempting to halt the trend. In the end, all have become engrossed with excluding others from being represented at almost every facet of University life. If we are to halt the trend and return to some level of fair representation by all sections so that every University assumes a true meeting point of Nigerians from all backgrounds, certain deliberate policies must be put in place.

The National Universities Commission was once described as “Traffic Warden in Ribadu Road”⁹. This was when it was situated on that Lagos street. Today it should be made to serve the true function of a traffic warden, now at Agui Ironsi street.

This function cannot be far from directing, like all traffic wardens do, movement to most desired routes and locations. The Commission should cease to be merely concerned with matters of quality and curriculum to include foundational issues of unity which are capable of undermining the nation's fast vanishing cohesion from what is going on in Universities.

Beginning with the Appointment of Vice Chancellors, necessary measures should be put in place to prevent their appointments from States where each is located, with the added condition that no State should as well at any given time produce more than one. Once this is achieved, a deliberate policy of redistributing academic staff to Universities away from their States of origin should be given some consideration as well. If these measures are supported with similar responsibilities on the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) to insist on compulsory distribution of qualified candidates to States other than theirs, much will be achieved.

9.4 Perspectives on Development

It is easy to conceive of development as though it is a unitary piece of item which can be picked or purchased from a supermarket. If this were so it would have been possible to surrender its realization to the effort of a single individual or few. This is not however the case. Development is on the contrary a complex process involving a multitude of tasks and goals, requiring the contribution of everyone to play a part towards its realization. Such contributions may not often be directly aimed at achieving common goals as it is in advancing personal ones. In the resulting circumstance clash of interests are bound to arise.

At another dimension, the people making their contribution as far as they come in close contact with others and pursue their individual interests will often come into conflict. Unity is not the absence of such conflicts: it is the awareness of their inevitability and the willingness to tolerate one another in the course of their being condemned to live and work with each other.

Again, unity is not the absence of differences. It is from understanding such differences that genuine unity can be built upon¹⁰.

The heterogeneous nature of our country cannot be wished away, a fact which makes the need for common understanding an ever pressing one. Disunity only increases the obstacles which lie along the way as we strive for development. Doing away with it or considerably eliminating policies and actions which lead to it is an important factor in development. Disunity only divides us and dissipates our energy and resources, instead of converting these into ingredients of development.

In all these, Universities must consciously be made to serve as the great meeting points where individuals from all backgrounds come together and emerge at the end with an increased sensitivity to our differences and appreciation of each other. If they fail to achieve this, all their other developmental achievements can in a single moment be undermined by forces of disunity which pitch each and everyone against the other, thereby undermining collective effort so necessary for development.

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10.0 Universities and Development: A Positive Account

Throughout this essay there has been no attempt to examine the concept of development, perhaps as a basis to appreciate what and how Universities can do to achieve it. I have not discussed development because it cannot be conceived in terms of a particular standard of attainment which marks out a less developed or even an over developed one from it.

More importantly, the concept of development must be distinguished from developed. Developed implies complete actualization of potential, an end which cannot admit of further achievement or progress. It can be likened to the concept picked, "he picked the ball" carrying the meaning that the exercise has been carried out to completion. Development on the other hand

suggests an ongoing activity; a process which is open to many possibilities. Picking, then and not picked conveys the meaning of development as an ongoing, continuous process. To talk, therefore, of development is to focus on those conditions which make the processes ongoing. This being the case, we agree with Adam Curle, that “development is the way of achieving a society having certain qualities, rather than merely offering a degree of affluence expected to produce such qualities”. It is a dynamic process involving the interaction of internal and external factors in shaping material and immaterial conditions within a system for the improvement of human life.

Qualities which enhance the process of development include excellence, efficiency, learning, liberation, democracy and order. I have been consistent in presenting our Universities past as possessing more of those qualities than the present which exhibit more of the negative qualities of mediocrity, ritualization, waste, dependency, despotism and commotion. By reason of the fact that Nigeria's first generation Universities compared to what obtains today approximate centres of excellence, citadels of learning, bastions of efficiency, instruments of liberation, embodiments of democracy and hosts of order, they were also theatres of dreams and seeds of unity. Similarly, today's Universities can be more likened to cocoons of mediocrity, temples of rites and rituals, baskets of waste, implements of dependency and houses of commotion. They have also become thrones of frustration as well as fruits and seeds of disunity.

Among the several factors bedevilling today's University education in Nigeria are overzealous universalization of its curriculum which ignores the particular problems the country faces, methods of recruitment and promotion which de-emphasize objective criteria, pervasive use of authoritarian methods of administration and instruction, overcrowded curricula which leaves learners with little room for thinking, a method off assessment more favourable to recall of information than critical thinking, as well as elevation of process over substance. Others are gross abuses within the system, over-bloated

establishments caused by unchecked recruitment, the increasing wave of demands in the face of dwindling resources and the confusion over their proper functions. While acknowledging these internal factors, the essay also identifies external circumstance which bother on dwindling support by owning bodies and continuous lack of patronage of the pool of ideas located in them.

Under every subtitle the essay attempts a reconciliation of present observed weaknesses in the University system by drawing from points of strengths from larger systems. In other words, the essay projects optimism over the possibility of today's Universities becoming more development partners if certain steps are taken.

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Tribute

Professor Kevin Ogon Etta, lion of the jungle, administrator par excellence, scientist of distinction and master of the English Language; pathfinder of generations yet unborn; leading light in a sea of darkness and reject by the very people he was destined to liberate. We salute you today as always.

From your courage and stout determination, we now have a generation of professors who know no other name than yours.

May we always remember those moments preceding your ascendancy when those you liberated were frightened heirs condemned to a life of servitude. This essay is dedicated to you in appreciation for what you represent.