

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CJP - 14  
The Weaning of an African University

December 12, 1963  
University of Ibadan  
Ibadan, Nigeria

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, 1963

Dear Mr. Nolte:

On November 18, 1963 in the presence of an audience composed of dons and scholars of international repute, leading Nigerian political figures, foreign diplomats and the itinerant Mayor of West Berlin, Willy Brandt, Alhaji the Right Honorable Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, K.B.E., MP, LL.D, and Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was installed as the first Chancellor of the University of Ibadan. His public installation, a skilled and stirring exercise in high academic ritual, marked the formal end of the University College of Ibadan, with its "Special Relationship" of academic tutelage from the University of London, and the ceremonial beginning of the autonomous University of Ibadan, which by Nigerian law is ordered "to encourage the advancement of learning throughout Nigeria and to hold out to all persons, without distinction of race, creed, or sex the opportunity of acquiring a liberal education...." The period of gestation, from University College to University, was fifteen years.

During this time the system of "Special Relationship" had been applied as an insurance that high academic standards would be maintained. This was important because the social situation in which the University College was created contained the basic ingredients of



SIR ABUBAKAR TAFAWA BALEWA

suspicion: Africans dominated and ruled by Europeans. The first principal of the University College of Ibadan, Dr. Kenneth Mellanby\*, noted that at the very beginning "there was considerable suspicion lest we might be fobbing off Nigeria with a second rate university..... Any criticism of the Western character of the University was slight in comparison with the outcry when Nigerians suspected that Ibadan would not give its students all the advantages they would receive in England".

In an article which preceded the installation of Sir Abubakar by a few days, Peter Enahoro, editor of the Lagos Daily Times recalled the suspicious and negative feelings of Nigerians during those early days in the life of the University:

"A University in Nigeria? It looked like the wildest dreams. And it is true that its first session was ushered into an accompaniment of derisive guffaws.

"Studying in England "in a civilized atmosphere" was both fashionable and recognised by the snobbish academic world of Nigeria at the time.

"To have gone to an American University labelled the unfortunate graduate with an inferiority complex and inferior opportunity.

"So what hope was there for a graduate produced by a university whose campus was temporarily sited at a disused second world war military hospital "partly reclaimed by the jungle"?

"The Ibadan University College quickly developed a sorry image that it was a place for hard-pressed students or near-elderly schoolmasters striving, not so much for education, as to have the necessary letters after their name to enable them to enter that elite group known as the senior service.

"The average age of the first students was above the 30-year mark. They were, not surprisingly, serious-minded people some of whom had children at school.

"Because of this, and because of the very high standard set for them, they were most often to be seen slogging away at text books, swotting Plato and translations from ancient Latin.

"An atmosphere of harsh, ruthless, rugged sweating away at books prevailed over the campus, and the visitor was gripped by a creepy feeling of walking through a tormenting institution that left little room for relaxation but hammered its students into memorizing knowledge."

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\* Kenneth Mellanby, "Establishing a New University in Africa" Minerva Vol. I (Winter, 1963) pp 149-158.



DR. KENNETH DIKE, SIR ABUBAKAR, DR. O. IKEJIANE, PRO-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY, AND DR. C. W. L. BEVAN, PRO-VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY

There is no doubt that the prevailing "atmosphere of harsh, ruthless, rugged, sweating away at books" was the direct result of a tight coalition between the inadequacies of pre-university education in traditional and colonial Nigeria, and the stringent demands of the "Special Relationship".

This system meant that entry into the University College of Ibadan was determined by the requirements of London University; that syllabi and the arrangement of courses were developed by joint consultation between the old and the new institutions; that examinations were arranged and graded via the same process; and that the graduate of the Nigerian college received a London degree.

Dr. Mellanby argues convincingly that the "Special Relationship" has some very solid advantages. First, it is an old system that in the past has been an assurance that overseas colleges like Ibadan would have high standards of attainment that could be publicly demonstrated. Second, it was flexible enough so that courses could be arranged that were "particularly suitable for African students". Third, it provided the staff of the young colleges with the valuable experience of planning and examining courses in collaboration with more experienced colleagues in London.

While the "Special Relationship" was a source of academic legitimacy for Nigeria's "premier university", some of its rigidities stimulated chagrin and irritation among Nigeria's nationalistic elites. Enahoro pinpoints the major source of gall:

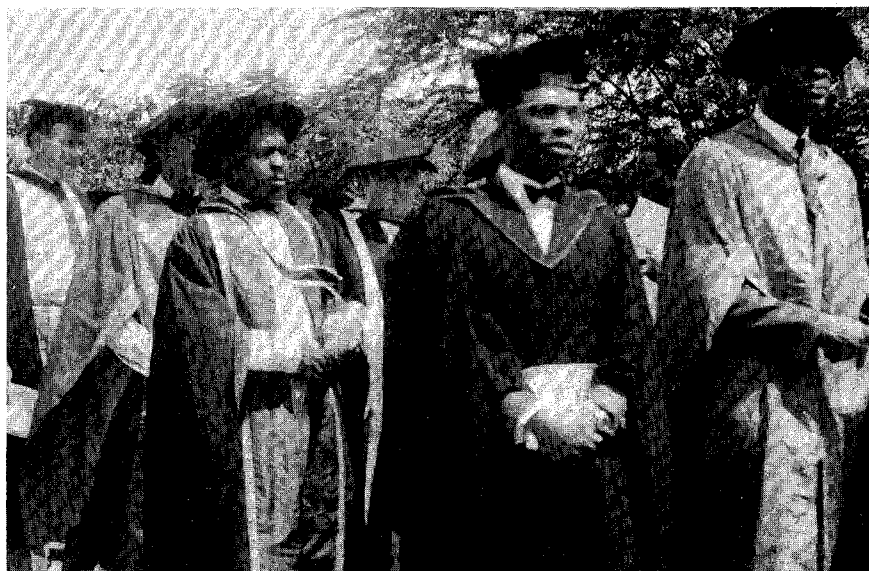
"The early graduates gave the impression that they could talk ancient history, recite passages from Homer and the Iliad, but could not talk about their own environment, their own people.

"A syllabus compiled after the pattern of the "mother" university, compelled the disastrous influence of an academic curriculum that bore no relation to the background and needs of the people.

"The student knew all about the War of the Roses, but hardly a word about King Jaja of Opobo or King Overhamen of Benin".

Dr. Mellanby was aware that the University College had a "colonialist" image and that "some people were disappointed because we were not more revolutionary". The "simple" reasons for this, he argues, were that existing textbooks had to be used; many courses, (e.g. mathematics, chemistry) were of universal

application with no uniquely African character; most of the staff, both European and African, had such inadequate experience of Africa that they were in no position to modify their courses; and finally the faculty was so fully occupied with existing students and studies that there was little time to plan for long range change and development.



THE ACADEMIC PROCESSION COMING

The Nigerian editor and the British ex-Principal agree that whether planned or not changes for the better have taken place. Enahoro sees a "breathless revolution" at the University. Mellanby sees a "viable organism, not tied down in any direction... a truly Nigerian university, retaining the academic standards we tried to install but adapting its curriculum fully to the needs of West Africa".

Successful adaptation and the tutelage of the "mother" university were also the dominant topics in Sir Abubakar's installation address. "Could Ibadan", he asked, "catch and foster the spirit of freedom and the fearless pursuit of knowledge which had characterized the universities of older

THE ACADEMIC PROCESSION GOING

countries? Could so delicate a thing as a university spirit grow on an "alien soil?"

Looking back the Chancellor saw many reasons to be proud of the answer Ibadan had given to these questions. Further, he declared, "We have reason to be thankful to those "men of courage and imagination, both Nigerian and non-Nigerian, without whom this University would not have begun to take shape fifteen years ago. We have ample reasons to be grateful for the stout support and tender ministrations which have led to today's weaning ceremony".

A few facts demonstrate that the "weaning" is timely and appropriate. Three years ago Dr. Kenneth Dike, the present Vice-Chancellor, became the first Nigerian to take over the direction of the University College. At that time only 28.9 percent of the academic and administrative staff was Nigerian. Today the percentage is 35.9, one-hundred and forty-six out of a total faculty of four-hundred and seven. One-hundred and eight of these Nigerians are in academic posts, the rest are in administration. Forty-six of the Nigerian academics are former students of the University and two of the nine holding professorial rank are graduates of Ibadan in history and physics.

In the 1959/60 session of the University approximately one-hundred students were enrolled. Today there are over two-thousand, of these one-hundred and sixteen are engaged in post-graduate work and fifty-five are foreign students from such diverse countries as India, the United States, Kenya, Germany, Japan, Great Britain, Ethiopia and Ghana.

In the three years of Dr. Dike's administration great intellectual strength has been added to the University by the creation of new departments. In the Faculty of Arts there have been established the Departments of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, and the School of Drama. The Science Faculty has added a Department of Geology, with a Chair of Petroleum Geology endowed by the international oil companies operating in Nigeria. Organized under the Faculty of Medicine are Departments of Biochemistry, Pharmacology, Paediatrics, Psychiatry, Neurology and Neuro-Surgery, Radiology and Ophthalmology. In the Faculty of Agriculture new Departments of Agricultural Biology, Agricultural Organization, Agricultural Chemistry and Soils, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine are now operating. Departments of Sociology and Government have rounded out the Faculty of Economics and Social Studies. Finally, an interdisciplinary Institute of African Studies has been founded to coordinate and stimulate the study of African history, culture and language.

This rapid academic growth confirms Sir Abubakar's optimistic assertion that the "university spirit" has grown on the "alien soil" of Nigeria; but it is doubtful if the "breathless revolution" of Africanization seen by Enahoro is anywhere near completion, or, that Ibadan is the "truly Nigerian university" foreseen by Mellanby.

Sir Eric Ashby\*, Master of Clare College, Cambridge, and Chairman of the Commission on Post-School Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria, has set forth a point of view that encompasses both the current success and the challenge that still faces Nigeria's "premier university". Sir Eric's thesis is simply that:

".... the West African university, when it appears, will be a "slow and natural outgrowth" too; with its roots in the universities of Europe, acknowledged everywhere in the world as part of the international family of universities, but having its own West African identity. In brief, West African universities, like British or French or American or Russian universities, serve their purpose only if they fulfil a dual loyalty: a loyalty to their own society and a loyalty to world standards of higher education. If the first loyalty fails, the university is cut off from the people and serves only an esoteric elite. If the second loyalty fails, the consequences are even worse: the people - including the educated elite - are condemned to limp behind the rest of the civilised world. At present the second loyalty is secure. The first has still to grow."

The pomp and ceremony of the Chancellor's installation was an effective ritual declaration of the "second loyalty". There is no suitable or traditional ritual to proclaim the establishment of the "first loyalty". There is only "slow and natural growth", and hopefully, a continuing awareness of an ideal enunciated over a century ago by Edward Blyden in his presidential address at the founding of Liberian University:

"The African must advance by methods of his own. He must possess a power distinct from that of the European. It has been proved that he knows how to take advantage of European culture and that he can be benefited by it. Their proof was perhaps necessary, but is not sufficient. We must show that we are able to go

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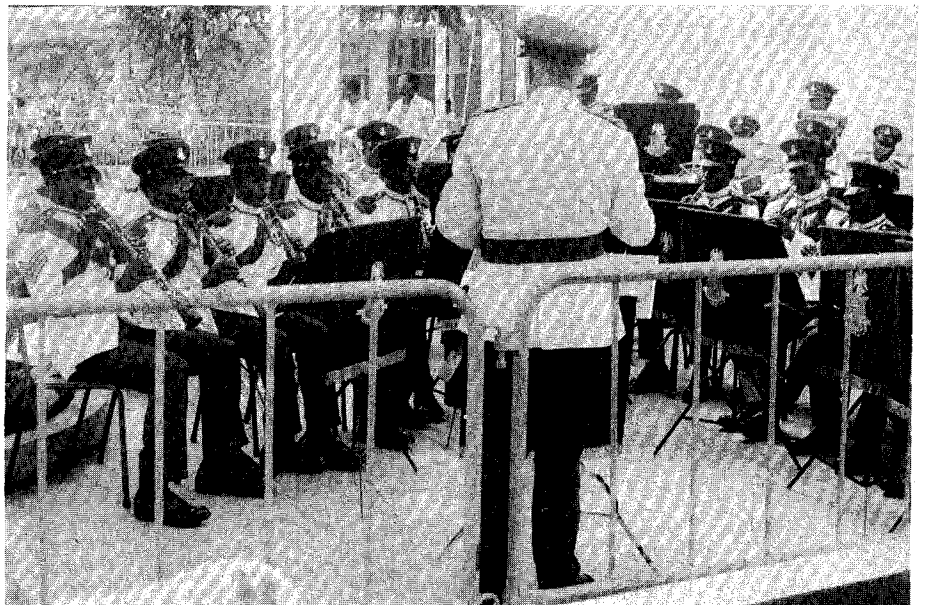
\* Sir Eric Ashby, "The Functions of West African Universities," The West African Intellectual Community, ed. Modjaben Dowuona and J.T. Saunders (Ibadan, Nigeria Ibadan University Press, 1962.

TALKING DRUMS OF THE  
YORUBA TRIBE  
ANNOUNCE  
THE INSTALLATION



HAUSA TRUMPETERS  
SOUND THE FANFARE FOR  
THEIR FELLOW MUSLIM  
SIR ABUBAKAR

A WESTERN OVERTURE  
FOR THE INSTALLATION  
IS PLAYED BY THE  
NIGERIAN ARMY BAND





alone, to carve out our own way. We must not be satisfied that, in our nation, European influence shapes our polity, makes our laws, rules our tribunals and impregnates our social atmosphere. We must not suppose that the Anglo-Saxon methods are final, that there is nothing for us to find out for our own guidance, and that we have nothing to teach the world."

The newly "weaned" University of Ibadan may yet teach the world.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles J. Patterson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name below it.

Charles J. Patterson

Received in New York December 24, 1963.

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