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in Africa - Nigerian Academics and Their
Many Struggles

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Introduction

In its rich epistemological foundations, intellectualism presupposes profound knowledge and the capacity to reflect on the problems of society to arrive at a reasonable conclusion. Intellectualism also refers to the quality of being the carrier of certain universal values and morals, including the will and social commitment to ask questions on all matters under the sun without let or hindrance. Indeed, the trademark of the intellectual is the cultivation of pluralism and universalism. An academic is little more than an archetype of this "class" of philosopher-citizen, one who enjoys symbolic power. The intellectual is credited with the mental disposition to put in bold relief "a great variety of schools, ideas, and methods in all sectors of the humanities, epistemology and philosophy, without any notable domination of one thought over the rest".¹ Moreover, the intellectual is expected to lead a life dedicated to the articulation, definition and elaboration of ideas. As a merchant of knowledge and an incubator of ideas the intellectual's sole aim is to investigate, assemble, and disseminate ideas to state and civil society with a view to helping to define and solve material problems of existence and facilitate overall national development.

Yet, the intellectual is more than a theoretical personality. From his or her ivory tower, where, in the romantic tradition, he locks himself or herself up in mental solitude in order to reflect and write,² he also intervenes in the governing of la cite. This linkage is what is referred to in the Nigerian University tradition - developed at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria's first and perhaps the best university - as the gown-town relationship. For Maurice Blanchot, the intellectual operates "between theory and practice. He ...acts... when, in practical cases, justice appears to him... threatened by superior authorities".³

This idea of the intellectual formed the foundation of the university on the eve of independence. There was a university life and intellectual tradition that, mutatis mutandis, conformed with the highest traditions in the world. Relations between the state and the universities were "mervellous and ideal", - to borrow from Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo, the Burkinabé historian, a vivid commentary he made to me in a conversation on the subject at Ibadan in December 1985. With the emergence of one-party states and military regimes, state-university relations took a turn for the worse. The perception of the role of the university and the academic changed in the eyes of the state. In the first decade of independence, this role was seen in essentially developmental terms. By 1970, in some cases much earlier, the university had become a subversive institution. Thenceforth, things were no longer the same. A

long history of difficult and often mutually suspicious relationships, that militarism and authoritarianism would later exacerbate, ensued.

As the last decade of this century draws to a close, there is a growing political determination and will on the part of African Universities and dons to link their struggle for a better University system with the demands for open political space. It appears worthwhile, within this context, to examine the crisis of the University system as an integral part of the crisis of the state. Using Nigeria as an example, I argue that there can be no meaningful discourse about the crisis of the university without a full grasp of the extent of the damage inflicted on the public mind and on civil society in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. I argue that the crisis of the state is mainly a crisis of governance, and for as long as it remains unresolved, no positive changes would take place in the university system. The fact that the activities of the Nigeria's Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) are driven by this linkage between the need to restore democracy in governance and resolve the crisis of the university, coupled with its superb organization and internal cohesion is reason for optimism. Above all, the ASUU has a progressive sense of history, and a positive public image as the only national association that successfully maintained its autonomy against the onslaught of the military autocracy and fought the Babangida regime to a standstill in 1992-1993.

The Crisis of the African State

The crisis of the African State has, since the mid-1980s, been often expressed narrowly as an economic crisis; yet, it is more than that. It is the crisis of a state increasingly unable to perform its functions.⁴ It is the crisis of too much politics, in terms of the use of the state, its agencies and agents for more private, and sectional than public interest. It is a crisis of lack of accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs. It is a crisis of non-democratic governance by which social forces and classes that criticize the ruination of tomorrow by today's practices of *laissez-faire* and *laissez-passer* are declared enemies of the state and of the people, and made the object of harassment and intimidation. The crisis is also, of course, one of economies in dire straits, which the IMF/WB imposed structural adjustment programme (SAP) - its politics and management - has further worsened.

The effects of the economic crisis have become unbearable. The statistics are not cheering; neither is the effect of the crisis on the lives of ordinary Africans salutary. In 1992, GDP grew only at about 2%; the average during the disastrous years of 1981-87 being 1.7%. A quarter of 46 states had a negative growth the same year: about a third experienced declines in agriculture, while 12 recorded losses in industry. The same year, foreign direct investment (FDI) was more in, say, Indonesia than in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵

By 1993, average annual income per head had fallen from \$1,000 (1980) to less than \$250. Similarly, growing foreign debt (\$30,000 million and about \$70,000 million in arrears and lack of investment) have meant higher unemployment, rising

inflation and a further decline in social services such as education, housing and health.⁶ Indeed, by 1994, the continent could only attract a symbolic 1% of total global investments, estimated at a mere \$500 million. S. Akhtar and A. Raffoul are therefore right to observe that "...many developing countries, particularly in Africa, continue to face a daily struggle in dealing with the complexity of managing their domestic and external debt".⁷ In 1988, the external debt of countries of Sub-Sahara Africa was 67.7% of their GNP. By 1996, it had risen to 76.2%. Debt service, as a ratio of export receipts was 12.4% in 1998. (UNCTAD-TDR, 1998). According to forecasts of the prospects for economic growth in the next decade (1995-2005) the situation for these countries is bound to get worse. The region is likely to get poorer in the next century, despite decades of SAP. According to the World Bank and IMF, projected growth will be 3.9% for Africa. Yet the continent requires at least a 5% growth to reverse the general fall in incomes. The corresponding figures for East Asia and rich industrial countries are 7.6% and 2.6%, respectively.⁸ What is more, Africa has only 2.6% of global economic transactions, out of which Mandela's South Africa accounts for 50%.

A major consequence of the economic crisis is the crisis in the educational sector in general and in the University sub-sector in particular. Education, like housing, transport and health, is one of the human resource development sectors often neglected when the state was plunged into a fiscal crisis. Even when the State - as in Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya - does not drastically reduce expenditure in this area, the devaluation of the national currency reduces the relatively huge spending on education to little or nothing. It should also be recalled that what are documented in national budgets or development plans or, even for that matter, in World Bank reports as actual expenditure on education, are often nothing more than mere estimates. What is spent is usually less than what is earmarked. In 1991, only the three aforementioned States spent between 20 and 25 per cent of their national budgets on education. Others, like Mali, Cameroun, Burkina Faso and Tunisia spent less - the latter from 20% in 1975 to 15% in 1988.

The Nigerian case is perhaps the most alarming and dangerous. According to UNESCO's Rapport Mondial sur l'Education, 1991, while Nigeria's total oil revenue increased by 20,000% between 1970 and 1990, it spent on the average less than 5% of federal budget on education. Illiteracy has therefore increased by 20% in the same period so that today, there are no fewer than 29 million Nigerians who can neither read nor write. Moreover Nigeria spends a mere \$0.22 per head on research. This figure is shamefully low, compared to similar expenditures by countries in Latin America where the average is about \$10 per head. For others, the relevant figures are as follows. The European Community - \$300; Scandinavian Countries - \$400; USA - \$600; and Japan - \$700.⁹

The little attention that is paid to education has produced three main results. The first is mass illiteracy. UNESCO has estimated that by the year 2000, about 74 million Africans would not have access to education. The deepening economic crisis

would lead to a further reduction in average spending per pupil, perhaps making the figures of 1980 and 1990 (from \$133 to \$90) look like a child's play. The second is the acute shortage of books. This is, for all practical purposes, a very serious problem. Whereas Europe published 464 and 584 book titles in 1970 and 1991, respectively, Africa could produce just 23 and 20 during the same period. This is why, according to one observer of the African scene "reading is still the pastime of the rich".¹⁰ The third is that very little research (both basic and applied) takes place in Africa where less than 0.5% of its wealth is spent on scientific research. Indeed, African states, including Nigeria which has developed leadership pretensions, do not recognize that this appalling situation is a major obstacle to the development of skills and acquisition of knowledge.

University Crisis: A Continent-Wide Phenomenon

In Africa, the fortunes and misfortunes of the university system, like virtually all other key institutions of the political economy, is inextricably tied to the neo-patrimonial logic of the post-colonial state. This amounts to the whims of the President and his functionaries. In general terms, after the first decade of independence (a golden era in retrospect), the decay and crisis set in almost everywhere. The university system, as a key component of the social welfare and development regime that came into force following independence, was not spared in the drive towards statist politics. This affected its function: the university as the centre of knowledge and for national manpower development was supplanted by a pernicious perception of the academe as a training ground for subversion of the state and its ideals. This paradigmatic shift was not altogether unexpected: a post colonial militarist or one-party state which, to paraphrase P. P. Ekeh, was weaned in subversion after being wrenched from the womb of its colonial mother, saw subversion everywhere, including what were then centres of intellectual excellence. Within this ideological realm, it was little surprise that the initial rapport between the African post-colonial state and the academe of the 1960s and early 1970s came to quick grief.

Two factors were largely responsible for this development, a phenomenon which has had disastrous consequences on the African University, almost rendering it a caricature of the academe by the 1990s. First, the one-party and militarist states, which littered the continent's political landscape until the second wave of independence following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, were determined to monopolize the public space. The justification for such commandist politics was that it would ensure the total mobilization of resources in all sectors of society for the rapid development of the nation. It was argued that the interest of the state and government in power were coterminous with the national interest. In the course of time, this propaganda became a facade for the pursuit of purely sectional interest at the expense of the interest of the whole nation. Second, the ruling class considered it an article of faith to stamp its authority on the internal affairs of the academe. The appointment of the Vice Chancellor or the President - as the academic heads of the

university are respectively called in Anglophone and Francophone Africa - became the exclusive prerogative of the Head of State. In the circumstances, the Vice Chancellor or President of a university became more Catholic than the Pope - even though the hood does not make a monk. Assured of his or her position, as long as he or she pleased the appointing authority, the Vice Chancellor became an agent of the Head of State. Hence, the Vice Chancellor of Makerere University would argue at the opening session of a conference held in December 1990 on African affairs that Universities are "institutions of loyalty and knowledge" and not "centres of disobedience and violence".

This statement may be interpreted in, at least, two ways. The first is that the academe is, *mutatis mutandis*, an intellectual pillar, if not altogether an extension of the state. Apparently, as the state increasingly became an alien institution suspended above civil society and the academe - alienated from the people and alienating to people-friendly policies, whether economic, social, political or cultural, it became the butt of trenchant criticism from all sectors of society. Though itself a victim, the academe became the accused in the eyes of a public that had become impatient for accelerated, all-round development. Second, whereas national development and social transformation were the goals of the UN-driven first decade of deve

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linked the crisis with the national crisis, calling for a national conference des forces vives de la nation.

were other headaches. As in Cameroun, there is over population of students. By the 1994-95 session, a campus meant for 7,000 had 50,000 students. The Faculty of Law was nicknamed "Popular Republic of China" because it was typical of this student boom. Likewise, bed space meant for 13,000 students was now shared amongst 25,000. On account of poor salaries for academics - between 125,000 and 300,000 FCFA monthly (roughly between \$250 and \$600), many lecturers resorted to additional jobs mostly in the informal sector - what Abdul R. Mustapha calls "multiple modes of social livelihood".¹⁶ A Professor of Medicine summarized the precarious nature of facilities at Abidjan University thus: "I give my lectures surrounded by students seated even on my table. We lack teaching materials; there are not enough books, nor enough money to pass round photocopies".¹⁷

Ruined by rampant authoritarianism of both Idi Amin Dada and Milton Obote, Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda is a script in riches to rags. Up till early 1970s, the intellectual Mecca of a growing number of African scholars, leftists and rightists alike, it was soon superceded by Dar-es-Salaam. The current picture is not very flattering: only half of the lectures hold a doctorate degree; the library is littered with outdated books; there are very few computers; and the halls of residence are over-populated. Academics, whose monthly salary is \$300, on the average, indulge conscientiously in various non-teaching jobs such as consultancy, private businesses such as shop-keeping or taxi-driving just to enable them to survive. Naturally, there is massive brain-drain.¹⁸

In Benin, a major demand of the Cooperative Universitaire des Etudiants du Benin. (CUEB), which broke away in early 1989, from the official student body affiliated to the Parti de la Revolution Populaire du Benin (PRPB) was increased scholarship and improvements in University infrastructure. Here, as in much of Francophone Africa, the university and even secondary students always seek, inter-alia, to protect their scholarships and state subsidies (for food, transportation, housing, etc.) to complement the former. Between 1960 and 1985, the Benin state awarded scholarships to majority of secondary school and University students. By the turn of this decade, there was a net reduction in the level of scholarships and subsidies as elsewhere in Francophone Africa. Protests followed. In August 1989, a broad coalition of academics and students demanded Kerekou's resignation on grounds of widespread corruption. This group, in conjunction with workers, also spearheaded strikes that preceded Benin's National Conference in February 1990.¹⁹ In Mali, various student's demonstrations against inadequate facilities, unpaid scholarships, etc. often supported by their lecture

all research activity needs presidential approval. Inevitably, research themes, which were alleged to be subversive, were denied state permission. As in Nigeria, the academic staff and student associations have been banned several times over since the 1970s. Furthermore, to hold even peaceful demonstrations, students needed police licence. And whenever any of the four Universities (Nairobi, Kenyatta, Moi (Eldoret) and Egerton) was closed, students needed clearance from the local District Commissioner to get out of Nairobi. Between 1968 and 1990, the Universities were closed, partly or wholly, over twenty times.²²

In their study of the latter, D.C. Savage and C. Taylor (1991: 308-321) remark

to do with their Universities in a period of economic crisis, global and national. The dilemma stems from the fact that after the initial

external and internal pressures ... (to resist) SAP. The crisis in their domains of operation, for instance, the disintegration of hospitals and schools, combine with the impoverishment and declassing of their members ... in precipitating confrontation with the State". This phenomenon, for him, has made the African academic a "lumpen-academic".³⁰ In the same vein, Samir Amin (1994) argues that steps should be taken to separate the radical "wheat" from the conservative "chaff" if we are to save the struggle for development, democracy and governance from undue contamination or possible derailment from the onset. He refers to the "chaff" as consisting of those satisfied with the status quo of capitalist-induced misery. This group wants a set of managers, within and outside the State, who would not allow radicals to challenge the system. Amin calls such group "operatives serving the established ideological apparatus". spp

Pressure from the state for political conformity, which is often exercised through direct coercion, or through various mechanisms of co-optation and patronage are well-known to the rank and file of the academic union; and most of its members are vigilant. The few who allow themselves to be ensnared have to contend with existing rapports de force and isolation by their peers. The objective situation is that the social, economic, political hardships, and other factors that undermine his or her professional career have, in recent years, radicalized the majority of academics. Some of them may not always find the time to attend union meetings because of the dire economic and social circumstances; but they are no longer indifferent, or against union struggles for a new political economy in which the university will find its fullest expression. Most academics have come to realize that there is strength in numbers, at least; and so they give the radicals their support either directly or indirectly.

Who then are the radical scholars? What is the nature of their relations with the state? What kinds of struggle have they been waging to extend the political space for academic and democratic freedom? In the rest of this essay, I draw largely from the experiences of Nigerian academics and their union.

Nigeria's University System and the Academic Union

Before the 1960s, there was a Nigerian University system, with Ibadan and later Nsukka, Zaria, Ife and Lagos leading the pack. There was also an intellectual environment, a commitment to truth and "an openness to diverse values, interpretations and frames of reference".³³ Though Nigeria's universities were modeled after some of the best European and American Universities, where the dominant ideology is conservative, radical political thought, mainly Marxist, started to gain roots in most of the universities. Ibadan's Faculty of the Social Sciences and Zaria's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, were among the campuses where Marxist thought gained adherents quite early. This radical movement flowered alongside largely conservative - some will say liberal - Faculty of Arts and its famous Ibadan School of History, to give the university a truly universal and intellectual culture. Students benefited from this culture through a series of lively symposia, public lectures, faculty lectures, etc. until the late 1980's. To be sure, this intellectual tradition still continues even though it has lost much of its vigour as a result of drastic changes in the socioeconomic and political environment of the universities.

Could we then say that there was academic freedom in Nigeria's universities in the early years of independence? Were the universities autonomous of the state - colonial and later neo-colonial? There is no unanimity in the answers to this question. While some are sceptical, others are positive. Archie Mafeje, for example, wonders "how African intellectuals could have expected the realization of intellectual or academic freedom in a society which had no democratic foundations of any kind".³⁴ In contrast, U. Nwala argues, with reference to the specific case of Nigeria, that academic freedom has a long history, dating back to 1919, when the idea of a

University as a free and autonomous centre of thought and learning was articulated in a leading national daily. It was felt that such centres of learning would introduce cohesion into the body politic, whilst their strong opinion would help the "native society" regain its lost balance.³⁵ Nwala further argues that, on account of their relative freedom, the independence universities did not betray "the hopes which inspired the vision of the early nationalists and their founders". He adds that it was in fact "in the process of being truly themselves that conflict has arisen with the powers that be".³⁶ He traces the woes of Nigeria's academic community to militarism and military rule, claiming that about 15 years after independence, the universities had been hijacked by "military, political and bureaucratic cliques". One of the consequences has been to subject the university to civil service rules. This attempt to subdue the university is one of the many battles ASUU has been waging with some success, particularly since 1980-81.

Like Nwala, Adekanye argues that military autocracy has led to the loss of esteem, prestige, and to the rather poor pay and conditions of service generally for university lecturers. A succession of military regimes has elevated the military above not just their peers, e.g. the police, but also above such prestigious professional and occupational groups as civil servants, doctors, judges and lecturers. *Pari passu* there has occurred, a dramatic decline in the value of education and the elevation of material wealth as the main criterion of social distinction.³⁷ But Nwala also admits that the loss of academic freedom and internal autonomy of the university system resulting in undue politicization and control by the state, imposition of policies by the state, and loss of internal democracy date back to the government of Tafawa Balewa (1960-1966). It was the beginning, for example, of the practice of imposing Vice Chancellors, as was the appointment of Professor S.O. Biobaku as Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos in 1965 over Professor Eni Njoku, who was the first choice of the University community. The point is that military rule has merely exacerbated a trend that was already visible under democratically elected governments.

The issue of autonomy has been a contentious one between the state and the university. It has poisoned the relations between the state and the university on the one hand, and between ASUU and the university administration on the other. Over the years, the Nigerian Head of State, who is the Visitor for all Federal Universities, has almost always stripped the University Governing Council and Senate of the power to appoint the Vice Chancellor and to exercise overall management responsibility for the academe. The Ministry of Education has routinely issued circulars and orders that are habitually obeyed by Vice Chancellors, who feel more accountable to the ultimate appointing authority than to members of the academic community over whom s/he presides, and without whose support and cooperation s/he would fail.

Since the establishment of the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1974 and the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1977, a centralized, federal military system has ensured a tighter control of the University system.

Undoubtedly, these two bodies were established to perform important functions. But in the hands of military autocrats and undemocratic university administrations, they have facilitated the subversion of the university as an autonomous institution. This is an issue that ASUU has been addressing consistently since 1977-78, when the Obasanjo regime dismissed radical lecturers from the Universities of Ibadan and Calabar, and the Ibadan Polytechnic, following the nation-wide student riots of 1978. This is why there is the general feeling that "it is not possible to talk about partnership with government until the issue of autonomy is resolved".³⁸

University autonomy has been further undermined through inadequate funding and poor remuneration for academics. Since 1975 when, driven by huge oil revenue, the federal government took over existing universities and created seven new ones, funding has been used in a stick and carrot diplomacy to regulate the affairs of the university. If there is one thing that gives external forces undue ability to determine how a university system should use its autonomy, George P. Hagan says, it is "the threat of withdrawal of essential support-money, equipment, privileges, and social benefits".³⁹ General Babangida cut subventions to the university system; there was also a reduction, both at federal and state levels, in the number of scholarships and bursaries awarded to students. Yet, Babangida often promised not to starve the universities of money. His advisers also usually claimed that his government did more for university education than all its predecessors put together. But the value of the national currency had fallen so much in the latter years of his regime that the huge budgetary allocations for universities did not amount to much in real terms. In addition, given rampant corruption in that government, there was always a gap between what is budgeted and what is eventually disbursed. At the 13th Annual Seminar of the Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities held at the University of Ilorin in March 1990, Babangida raised the problematic of revitalising the vanguardist role of the Universities for national development in the 1990s. He, however, cautioned the academic community against excessive optimism. He urged the academe to "always bear in mind"; that "(it) constitutes only a part of the national education system; (it) should also know that university education is one of the many responsibilities the Federal Government must continue to shoulder under situations of limited funds...". Yet, in his characteristic double-talk, the General assured his audience that "in spite of the competing demands from other sectors of our public life, the Federal Government remains resolutely committed to ensure that the universities survive".

It is not only the state and its agents that undermine university autonomy; university administrators also do. For instance, an alibi for government's insistence on retaining the ultimate power to approve the nominee for Vice Chancellor instead of the University Council is that the University cannot do so without acrimony. Evidence from the period 1979-84 contradicts this claim. But as K. Adetugbo and D. Fashina have observed, whenever due process is abused, there are always professors ready to encourage government to indulge in such illegalities.⁴⁰ A

contemporary manifestation of this phenomenon is that not only Generals, but also Professors have accepted appointment as `sole administrator' in some Nigerian Universities. There is also the difficulty experienced by university authorities to resist pressure from an odiously materialistic society governed by corrupt military

Ph.D holder, who is employed as Lecturer Grade II was no more entitled to a car loan. This facility had dried up due to poor state financing and internal mal-administration. Nor could the academic obtain a housing loan. This loan too had ceased to exist a decade earlier. The newly appointed lecturer was not sure of getting accommodation on the campus either. While up till the beginning of the 1980s, university accommodation was available for almost all who wanted it, by 1984-1985, the stakes had become high, and the prize smaller. As senior faculty left the country or the service of the university for better paying local employment, a few housing units became vacant. By then, the damage had already been done.

Meanwhile, the criteria for promotion have become stricter and more rigorous. Besides teaching and community service, the two other elements in the overall designation of the academic's work profile in Nigeria, research and publication had gained far greater weight than before. There are no fixed rules, about the number of publications required for promotion. What is interesting, however, is that given the prolific intellectual output of the third generation of academics, standards were raised in several universities. The number of publications that yesterday made a professor is what the present generation of academics requires to become a Senior Lecturer. Above all, it would seem that the more versatility this generation shows, the greater the tendency for various appointments and promotions committees to set higher and higher standards. Thus, at Ibadan and a few other federal universities, it takes between eleven to fourteen unbroken years of teaching and research for an academic with a doctorate degree to be promoted to full professor. And, as the gate-keepers have decreed, promotion is not automatic even when these stringent conditions have been met.

In 1996, the salary of the Nigerian academic was little more than yesterday's pocket money for a high school boy. A senior faculty's total monthly take home pay varies from \$100 to \$120, depending on whether or not s/he lives in university accommodation. Because of the steep depreciation of the naira one's salary is inadequate for one's daily need. How then do Nigeria academics survive on their meagre pay? They have resorted to multiple strategies of survival. These range from small businesses such as shop-keeping, consultancy, income from foreign travel, and operating a taxi service. In this regard, I should distinguish between two groups of academics. The first endeavours to combine business with university teaching. The second considers university work as secondary. Members of the latter group teach; but have little time for scientific research. I call them academic jobbers. They resemble their Senegalese counterparts who, according to *Sub-Hebdo*-a Senegalese politico-cultural weekly, are "soaked with worries about material survival". They tend to engage in work that has nothing to do with research and teaching. Some of them work for government in various capacities and, consequently, enjoy some amount of affluence. The drawback, however, is that in universities where promotion is still a very serious business, such academics hardly get promoted. There are extreme cases of academics with fifteen or twenty years' experience as teachers,

sometimes with a Ph.D, who have not managed to move beyond the grade of Senior Lecturer.

funded and where the faculty enjoy good conditions of service, including a good salary have been several, long and tortuous. In particular, ASUU's struggles have always been linked to the wider struggles for a just, egalitarian and democratic polity.

The social and political imperative for making such linkage has been underscored by a number of scholars. For example, Mamdani argues that academics cannot carve out for themselves "an autonomous space except as part of a larger endeavour to define their relations with society on a democratic basis".⁴⁴ On the same score, Ali A. Mazrui argues that "the open society is the oxygen for a genuinely free university, and there can be no free society when there are closed academic minds".⁴⁵ According to Yusuf Bangura, this linkage is both a moral and political imperative. He argues that disadvantaged groups can, and do, contest attempts to foist class hegemony on the rest of society. Their capacity to press for democratization does not lie at the productive base, but in the wider civil arena where national strategies can be formulated and broad coalitions built. Workers' agitations for industrial democracy become effective only when they are linked to broader concerns for national democracy.⁴⁶

Perhaps because of the relative comfort enjoyed by its members in the 1970s, ASUU was not so active. The major confrontation with government was in 1973-74 when the Gowon regime unified university service with the civil service, following the recommendations of the Udoji Public Service Reforms Commission. Academics protested, including the use of the strike weapon. Only the threat to eject them from their official accommodation broke their ranks. But that incident had two effects. It persuaded academics that a military regime could, in one swoop, damage university autonomy; more especially, it radicalized the ASUU.

In 1981, the academic union wrote to the Shagari government expressing its concern over the now famous tripartite demands: (i) gradual erosion of university autonomy, (ii) poor salaries and working conditions for lecturers, and (iii) inadequate funding of universities. There was no reply. A 75-day strike brought no relief. By 1983, the situation had started to get worse, but ASUU was resolved to talk to government. It was convinced that only emergency and extraordinary measures would save the university system from total collapse. Accordingly, ASUU became even more trenchant in its criticism of the Babangida government's policy towards universities following the Harare Conference of African Vice Chancellors in 1986. At that meeting the World Bank and IMF had canvassed the view that African governments should de-emphasize university education in preference for basic and technical education. In compliance with this WB/IMF prescription, the Babangida regime had started negotiating a loan with the World Bank to restructure and reorganise the university system. One of the major plans was the abolition of no fewer than a third of academic posts. ASUU responded to this new threat to the academe with nation-wide protests that led to its proscription by the Babangida government in July 1988. In August 1990 it was recognized again. But in

1992, ASUU was again proscribed in the course of negotiations on the three issues mentioned above.

After a great deal of vacillation on the part of the government, negotiations were resumed in March 1992, and unilaterally suspended in May of the same year by the government team. By then, only salaries and working conditions had been discussed. This was not accidental: government propaganda was that ASUU's concern was essentially a bread-and-butter affair and that narrow corporatist interests had been allowed to supercede broader national interests.

Between the suspension of negotiations in May 1992 and resumption in August, leading to the first major agreement on how to govern and finance Nigerian Universities, the government used every means to frustrate and divide the ranks of ASUU. This included a combination of moral persuasion, material incentives, blackmail and intimidation of the ASUU leadership to back down. Its President, Muhammadu Jega, a Political Science lecturer at Bayero University in Kano, then on sabbatical leave at the Nigerian Institute for International Affairs (NIIA), Lagos was the prime target. When the military government failed in this effort to undermine the ASUU action, it appealed to the Nigerian public to put pressure on ASUU to rescind its decision. In the end, it was forced by public pressure to return to the negotiating table.

The 1992 ASUU-Federal Government Agreement

The relations between ASUU and the federal government have always been very tense. While ASUU tried to expose government to the magnitude of the crisis of the universities, and get it to prevent its total collapse, the federal government could hardly come to grips with it. Instead, it was preoccupied with ways and means to destroy the ASUU and undermine its struggle.

After about nine years of quiet and patient struggle (1983-1992), the ASUU National Executive addressed a long memorandum to the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP) with two main objectives in mind. (i) It declared a trade dispute with the federal government. (ii) It provided an incisive response to the deepening crisis of Nigeria's universities. Entitled *How Nigerian Universities can Survive: ASUU's Log of Demands*, the 60-page document is a tale of the severe damage that government indifference had inflicted on the university system. The document also offered concrete recommendations on how to save the university system from utter ruin. As already mentioned, three issues dominated this document: adequate funding; university autonomy, as well as salary and non-salary conditions of service.

On funding, The Cooley Commission had lamented that "the criteria used in determining the size of resources to be allocated to the university by the government is usually unclear and varies from year to year. The ultimate figure is always arbitrary and unrelated either to the immediate assessed needs of the universities or the recommendations of the NUC".⁴⁷ On its part, ASUU had, in the 1980s, persistently complained to presidential commissions and visitation panels to

universities about chronic under-funding of the system. In 1982 and 1983, ASUU described funding for the universities as inadequate. From 1987 it would describe the same situation as extremely precarious. It had also pointed out the consequences of chronic under-funding, which included both congested physical facilities and brain drain. The latter was singled out for further elaboration. The argument was that even if the finest structures were in place - as in the case of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ahmadu Bello University and ex-Imo State University Okigwe, for example, it would still be impossible for them to function effectively, if they did not have enough lecturers. According to ASUU, academics were leaving the service of the universities in droves because they "have been devalued to such a state of weightlessness that they cannot but float about to the whims of `market forces'". At the same time, ASUU did not subscribe to the notion (being canvassed by government on the advice of the WB) of reintroducing school fees as a remedy for the funding issue. It had

Research Fund" through a levy of 5% charged on the pre-tax profits of certain categories of business enterprises.⁵¹ The Fund was to be administered by the NUC. (v) Transfer of Federal Government's landed and other properties in Lagos and elsewhere to the Universities. This recommendation was merely a rehash of an agreement between government and ASUU in 1982.

Intense pressure from civil society between May 25, 1992 and September 3, 1992 compelled the military government to accept the ASUU proposals and sign an agreement to that effect. But it was quite clear that the Babangida government was not committed to either the spirit or letter of the agreement. In fact, that regime had learned nothing from William Saint's report on African Universities, which was published that year. Saint had called for commitment to a guaranteed minimum level of contribution over a multi-year period by African governments. He had also suggested that governments should be able to anticipate "university-based emergencies" (e.g. threat of strike occasioned by under-funding; poor governance, lack of internal autonomy, etc.) and set up "special communication channels... to deal with such situations before they occur".⁵² None of Saint's recommendations appeared to have made an impression on the military government.

On the second issue - academic freedom and autonomy - ASUU sought to debunk the government argument that ownership confers total right of intervention, or interference. The issue had been made even more controversial by the Secretary (Minister) of Education and Youth Development, Professor Ben Nwabueze. On the basis of a so-called theory of 'imperfect obligation' the eminent jurist tried to distinguish between necessary and unnecessary intervention by government in the internal affairs of universities. He endorsed university autonomy. But he asked rhetorically: "3lly:yp2F'3 hqTMM"jYM3bhqT"BB3phTT"xY'x3 3thq"2F" B'xR33ah2"j2Fj'3nhTT"B'xF3hB"jFjR

The controversy over university autonomy is not a recent one. It dates back to the 1970s when the federal government took over universities formerly owned by regional and state governments. In the 1980s the situation got much worse when, through the use of draconian laws and actions, successive military juntas tried to conquer the university as the citadel of independent thought. For example, Decree 16 of 1985 (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) transferred to NUC nearly all the powers statutorily vested in the university senate to

character and peculiar nature of the academic and his job profile. The union contended that "university academic work is highly specialised", that lecturers are not only "among the most hard-working beings", but also "among the most innovative and creative beings in the country". Also they are internationally competitive. To that extent, academics share a major responsibility for the development of their country. In recognition of their unique qualification and attributes, they "should not be treated as public servants."⁵⁸ ASUU lamented that the Nigerian state had not come to grips with this reality. Hence the tendency throughout the past decades to pursue policies that would reduce the academic to penury. For instance, by 1992, Nigerian university lecturers were the least paid compared with their counterparts overseas. By 1996 they had become much worse off despite some improvements in salary and non-salary entitlements, which were the result of the 1992 agreement. The following comparative salaries for professors from various countries underscore the plight of Nigeria's academics.

Professors' Basic Salaries For Selected Countries

Countries	Amount in US \$ (p/a)	Amount in naira (p/a)
USA		
UK		
Singapore		
Jamaica		
Zimbabwe		
Kenya		
Cameroon		

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The government conceded ASUU's demands, but not without a fight. Hence, the 1992 agreement included virtually all of the union's recommendations on funding. On autonomy (or the governance question), the major agreement was that the academic community would have a greater say in the choice of the Vice Chancellor. Rather than send three names to the Head of State, from which he would choose his favourite, the University Council would henceforth send only one name at a time until a candidate was endorsed for appointment. The procedure for the appointment and re-appointment of Vice Chancellors was set out in Decree II of 1993.

With the conclusion of the 1992 agreement, ASUU naively expected the government to refrain from further interference in the affairs of the university. On the contrary, besides increases in salaries and allowances, other terms of the agreement were honoured more in their breach than in their observance.

The Aftermath

It was not long after the 1992 agreement was signed when ASUU realized that it would take eternal vigilance on its part to ensure the implementation of the various provisions of the agreement. Normally, this should involve nothing more than lobbying the government. But relations between the state and universities in Nigeria are not so simple. An essentially militarist state perceived the university as no more than a military garrison or cantonment, and university academics as a mere detachment of the latter. This perception underpinned the university's crisis generally.⁶⁰

In the context of this relationship, it would seem that the only language the military rulers understood was the strike action. Accordingly, they would not act until academics laid down their tools. Nor would they move swiftly to address the issues which might have prompted a strike in the first instance. Their standard response was to seek to break the strike through a motley of instruments, including propaganda and blackmail; coercion through stoppage of salaries; infiltration of the academic union, and bribery; as well as the use of some Vice Chancellors. It is only when all such tactics fail, and they come under intense pressure from civil society that they agree to negotiate. Thus, ASUU was forced to resort to a strike each time there was a dispute with the government. As the union's national president argued shortly after the last strike (April 1996 to October 1996) called to compel the government to review the 1992 agreement began, "it is only through strikes that ASUU has managed to get anything out of the system".

What the Nigerian State has clearly demonstrated since 1993 is that it does not value the 1992 agreement with ASUU. It does not consider university education a national priority, due perhaps to the fact that leading members of the military regime did not have much education, and yet they enjoyed a high social status by virtue of the political power they exercised. It would seem therefore that for Nigeria's military rulers, there is hardly any visible linkage between sound and qualitative education, and social mobility. For them there is a short route to progress, which is political

needs of the society". But on other issues Nwabueze would not apply a similar logic. For example, regarding salary and non-salary conditions of service, he argued that the government would have honoured the agreement but for the opposition by lecturers. More especially, he claimed that low salaries and poor conditions of service were not responsible for the brain-drain. For him, the brain-drain was due rather to the corruption of the values of Nigerian society, which valued the acquisition of material wealth more than academic qualification and intellectual prowess. Therefore the solution did not lie in improving the pay and conditions of service of university lecturers; it lay rather in the "ethical transformation of the value system" of Nigerian society.⁶¹ So, ASUU should postpone its militancy to that millennium.

Because of attitudes such as this, both budgetary and non-budgetary sources of funds for the universities were no longer generous. For instance, less than 50% of the capital grant provided for in the agreement was disbursed to universities. Consequently, ASUU lamented in its Proposals for Review ... (1996) that several provisions of the agreement remained a dead letter. In other words, "many of the non-budgetary sources of funds... were not activated and tapped e.g., The Stabilization Fund; Higher Education Tax, the landed property for universities and the universities property company, and making consultancies available to universities through the consultancy units". In particular, by 1994, government owed ASUU 1.5 billion naira in stabilization funds. The agreement had provided for a stabilization fund of 1.5 billion naira to be augmented annually with 0.5 billion naira. Apart from some paltry payments made to a few universities, when institutional patience had been overstretched, very little else was done. Government disbursed just 0.1 billion naira in 1993. But as claimed by ASUU, the government "did not invest it, nor did it set up a board of trustees to manage the stabilization fund". Similarly, the capital vote fell short by 1.62 billion naira. What is owed on these two accounts is, according to ASUU's calculation, just over US\$136 million. The union argued that, "with a daily oil receipt of US\$ 32.3 million, it requires just a little over 101 hours of oil export receipts to honour that aspect of our agreement".⁶² Furthermore, while the decree on higher education tax was promulgated in 1993, the huge amount of money expected to have accrued from it in three years (3.20 billion Naira) was not collected, let alone disbursed. Yet, several corporate groups had deducted the pre-tax levy from their annual accounts. The government's explanation for its inaction is that it has not yet inaugurated a board of trustees to manage the fund, as required by the agreement.

Review of the 1992 Agreement in 1996

the union wrote to the NUC Executive Secretary in July 1995. Even though the latter had verbally expressed solidarity with ASUU's cause in August 1994 (when he said the agreement was due for review because of inflation) his response to ASUU was to request it to direct its letter to the appropriate authorities. Clearly, this was strange and anomalous. The NUC is the body that is statutorily vested with direct responsibility for university education rather than the Education Ministry. In view of such negative responses, ASUU decided to go public by August 1995. At a press conference in Ibadan, where ASUU has its headquarters, its national chairman, Assisi Asobie, appealed to government to enter into dialogue with the union.

The first signal that government was unwilling to review the agreement came during an ASUU meeting with the Minister of Education in September 1995, when he claimed that there were varying and contradictory views on the agreement in government. In the same month, ASUU wrote a series of letters to prominent individuals; traditional rulers; and the Ministers of Education as well as Labour and Productivity. A reply from the Minister of Education in November 1995 merely hinted at the government's willingness to review the agreement, and nothing more. There was no positive development after this. An industrial dispute was thereafter declared on January 10, 1996.

After that declaration, the Minister scheduled a meeting with the ASUU for January 30, 1996; but not for negotiations. At the meeting, the Minister only asked ASUU to wait for the 1996 budget. When the budget was read in mid-February 1996 it became evident that the government was no longer interested in the 1992 agreement. Despite this disappointing development, ASUU's strategy throughout the period was to avoid a strike action as much as possible, and rather persuade government to review the 1992 agreement. Because of this commitment the union did not embark on a strike until April 9, 1996, and only after it had given the government more than one ultimatum. According to ASUU, no fewer than 22 letters were written to the Minister of Education; several phone calls were made to him and meetings held with him and other government officials between 25 May 1995 and 9 April 1996. But all these came to naught.

Public indignation finally forced the government to decide to negotiate with the striking lecturers in early May 1996. But once again, the military government showed bad faith. It imposed a partial ban on ASUU on May 15 1996 without even the courtesy of informing its own negotiating team led by Shehu Umaru, a senior professor of medicine. Thenceforth, all ASUU activities were restricted to its local chapters. Following this partial ban, the government unleashed a barrage of threatening actions. Payment of salaries and allowances to lecturers was suspended in April; threats of mass dismissal and ejection from university accommodation were issued; and the Minister threatened to recover research grants from those who would refuse to resume lectures by June 19, 1996. Clearly, these measures were designed to intimidate the striking lecturers and weaken their resolve to find a lasting solution to the crisis of the university. When those threats failed, the government

announced in late August a total ban of ASCU as a national organization, and the forfeiture of its assets to the state. Concurrently, the government unilaterally amended the tenure of Vice Chancellors from two terms of four and three years, respectively, to a single five-year term. Thereafter, more threats were issued, all to no avail.

and seeking to use some of these characteristics to stimulate innovation within the system". Saint explains: "... [By] judiciously managing relations of autonomy and accountability between universities and the state, ... (one) creates incentives for internal and external efficiency as well as quality performance".⁶⁶

In both developed and developing nations, the role of the state in the development process cannot be over-emphasized. While structural adjustment policies have stressed the need to harness the resources of non-governmental and extra-state actors and agencies for the pursuit of economic growth, this anti-state policy has not weakened the state as the ultimate catalyst to, as well as the greatest obstacle to national development. However, the need to strengthen the state to enable it to perform a positive role in the developmental process must be emphasized. According to Yahaya,⁶⁷ the African state should be armed with appropriate moral, philosophical and policy instruments to enable it to fulfill its social purpose.

How could this be done? In the case of Nigeria, we should revisit the ASUU Proposal for Review of the 1992 agreement which was submitted to government before the 1996 strike. Surely, a comprehensive ref

5. Cf. Lewis, Peter. "The Politics of Economics" Africa Report May-June 1994 p. 47-49.
6. Africa Confidential, 9 September 1994. p. 2.
7. A. Akhtar and A. Raffoul "Third World Debt and its Management" Canadian Journal of Development Studies, XV, 2, 1994. p. 274.
8. "IMF/World Bank: A Challenge from the South" Africa Confidential 21 October 1994. p. 1.
9. UNESCO, Rapport Mondial Sur la Science, 1994. Cited in Jean Poussin "Les Défis de la planète science" Jeune Afrique 1759, 22-28 Septembre 1994. p. 48-53.
10. English rendition of the title of essay by Yves Aoulou Jeune Afrique 9-15 Septembre 1993. Pp. 66-68.
11. Cf. 'Kunle Amuwo "Is there really an African University System?" West Africa 6-12 October, 1997. Pp. 1592-1594.
12. The Nigerian experience has been excellently documented in Yann Lebeau "Dans des Campus Nigeriens: Etude des Transformations de l'identité sociale et du statut de la population étudiante au Nigéria", Ph.D thesis. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, Fevrier 1995 t1 and 2. See also his "Etudiants et Campus du Nigéria Recomposition du champ Universitaire et Sociabilités étudiantes." (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1997).
13. See " Etudiants de Yaounde: Grève à l'Université. Voici Pourquoi les étudiants(es) de l' Université de Yaoundé ont fait la grève ou l'Incontournable Conférence Nationale" in Peuples Noirs, Peuples Africains, 14,80, Mars-Avril 1991. Pp. 23-53.
14. Jean Barthaburu "Urgence: Sauver l'Université Camerounaise" Africa International (Paris), Mars 1993. Pp. 16-17 and Thierry Vincent "Cameroun" L' Université en chantier" Jeune Afrique 1720-1721, 23 Décembre - 5 Janvier 1994. Pp. 42-43.
15. See Rémi Godeau "Université cherche raison d'être" Jeune Afrique, 1693, 17-23 Juin 1993. Pp. 38-40.
16. A.R. Mustapha "Structural Adjustment and multiple Modes of Social Livelihood in Nigeria" in P. Gibbon et al., (eds.) Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment: The Politics of Reform in Africa (UPPSALA: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies (1992).
17. Géraldine Faes "Côte d'Ivoire: Pour 33 milliards t'as plus rien ..." Jeune Afrique 1785, 23-29 mars 1995. Pp. 26-29 and Augustin Thiam "Abidjan a chaud à son campus" Jeune Afrique, 169, 4-10 Juin 1992. p. 8.
18. Keith B. Richburg "Ouganda: Makerere en ruine" Jeune Afrique, 1756, 1-7 Septembre 1994. p. 18.
19. See John R. Heilbrunn "Authority, Property and Politics in Benin and Togo" Phd. thesis, University of California, L.A. 1994. Pp. 533-539; and Chris Allen

- "Restructuring an Authoritarian State: Democratic Renewal in Benin" *Review of African Political Economy* 54, 1992. Pp. 42-58.
20. Davies, George Ola. "An Unhappy Anniversary" *West Africa* 17-23 October 1994. p.1783.
 21. Morna, Colleen L. "The Plight of the Universities" *Africa Report*, March/April 1995. p. 33.
 22. See Savage, Donald C. and C. Taylor "Academic Freedom in Kenya" *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 25, 1, 1991. Pp. 308-321.
 23. Lobkowiz, N. cited in D. S. Sanders "The Role of Universities in Peace and Social Development" *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 9,1, 1994. p. 54.
 24. Savage and Taylor "Academic Freedom ..." p. 311.
 25. Goulbourne, H. "Conclusion: The Future of Democracy in Africa" in *Democracy and Socialism in Africa* (ed.) R. Cohen and H. Goulbourne (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991). p. 234.
 26. A major role assigned, for instance, to the University of Ife (since 1987, Obafemi Awolowo University) in Nigeria

40. Adetugbo, K. and D. Fashina "Abdulkadir's Nigerian Universities Crises" *The Guardian* (Lagos) October 8, 1987. p. 9.
41. This and similar issues received the attention of Margaret Peil in her essay "Leadership of Anglophone Universities, 1960-1985" in Abiola Irele (ed.) *African Education and Identity*, London and Ibadan: Hans Zell Publishers and Spectrum Books, 1992). Pp. 79-87.
42. I am not unaware of Jean Copans' interrogation on the use of 'intellectual' for African academics when he poses the question "Can one say he is an academic when writing materials like paper and biro are lacking?" But then there are many African academics who work very hard as "men of knowledge" or "professionals of transmission and creation of knowledge" - which are qualifying criteria of intellectualism according to Copans himself. See his *La Longue Marche de la Modernité Africaine* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1990) p. 350. Note 65 and p. 349-50. In any event, individual academics can afford these tools only the university administration complains ceaselessly!
43. In his address (as Visitor) to the 4th Convocation Ceremony of the Federal University of Akure (FUTA) on November 3, 1990, General Babangida raised, inter alia, this issue, which he described as disturbing extra-academic activities. He was more concerned about their consequences. He said: "lecturers must appreciate the incessant cancellation or rescheduling of lectures, teaching in a few days a corpus of knowledge that should have taken a whole semester to impart; moving to the next semester without marking the scripts or releasing the results of the last examinations ..."
44. Mamdani, M. "Introduction: The Quest for Academic Freedom" in Diouf and Mamdani op. cit. p. 10. Cf. Hagan's contention that "... freedom cannot be made exclusive to universities" in *ibid.* Pp. 56, 40, 42.
45. Mazrui, Ali A. "The Impact of Global Changes on Academic Freedom in Africa: A preliminary Assessment" in Diouf and Mamdani. p.123.
46. Bangura, Y. "Authoritarian Rule and Democracy in Africa: A Theoretical Discourse" in P. Gibbon et al., (eds.) op. cit. p. 47.
47. Cited in "ASUU:... Log of Demands" 1992. p. 19.

- equally demanded sponsorship for at least one local conference every year and one international conference every three years. By 1996, in light of further damage to the system, ASUU tightened the noose asking that "each university shall fully fund at least two local conferences per year and one foreign conference every two years for each academic staff". See ASUU Proposals for Review of Federal Government of Nigeria - ASUU agreement of September 3, 1992. (1996).
52. Saint, W.S. "Universities in Africa: Strategies for Stabilization and Revitalization" (Washington: World Bank Africa Technical department Series, 194, 1992). p. 37.
 53. See Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development. "The September 1992 agreement between The Federal Government and ASUU" Address to representatives of ASUU, 30 March 1993 by Prof. Ben Nwabueze in *The Guardian* April 6, 1993. p. 10.
 54. Press Release of December 3, 1985 in "ASUU ... Log of Demands". p. 37.
 55. See *Weekend Third Eye* (Ibadan) 24 August 1996. p. 12; emphasis mine.
 56. As in 54 supra.
 57. Op cit.
 58. Op cit.
 59. Sanda, A. O. *Managing Nigerian Universities* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1992). p. 11, 17.
 60. See Note 55 supra,
 61. ASUU, University of Ibadan Branch: *Staff Bulletin*, 10, 21 November 1994 p. 1.
 62. See "Paranoia and Blatant Lies as State Policies" in *The Academic*, (Newsletter of Academic Staff of University of Ibadan), Vol. 1, Issue 2,2 September 1996. p. 2.
 63. Gana, A.T. "The Nigerian University at the Cross Road" *Annals of the Social Science Council of Nigeria*, 5, January-December 1993. p. 1. 64. Gana, *ibid.* p. 7.
 65. Saint, "Universities in Africa..." p. 126.
 66. *Ibid.* p. 127.
 67. See Yahaya, A.D. "Management of Nigerian Universities in the 1990s" *ASCON Occasional Papers*. Badagry, 1991. Pp. 2-11.
 68. See Robert Blair and Josephine Jordan "Staff Loss and Retention at Selected African Universities: A Synthesis Report", *AFTHR Technical Note No. 18*, World Bank, Washington, 1994.

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4. Amin S. (1994) "Ideology and Social thought: The Intelligentsia and the Development Crisis" CODESRIA Bulletin, 3.
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14. Irele, A. (ed.) (1992) African Education and Identity (London and Ibadan: Hans Zell Publishers and Spectrum Books).
15. Jega A. and Beckman, B. (1995) "Scholars and Democratic Politics in Nigeria" Review of African Political Economy, 64; 167-181.
16. Jega A. (1995) "Nigerian Universities and Academic Staff under Military Rule" Review of African Political Economy, 64, 251-256.
17. Megil I K. A. (1970) The New Democratic Theory (N. York: The Free Press).
18. Morin E. (1986) "La Vie Intellectuelle Francaise" Le Débat, Mai-Septembre.
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