

**UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

**HERE IS WHAT I HAVE LEARNED  
AS A TEACHER**

**A Valedictory Lecture**

By

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## **PROGRAMME**

- 1. GUESTS ARE SEATED**
- 2. INTRODUCTION**
- 3. THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S OPENING  
REMARKS**
- 4. CITATION**
- 5. THE VALEDICTORY LECTURE**

The lecturer shall remain standing during the citation. He shall step on the rostrum, and deliver his Valedictory Lecture. After the lecture, he shall step towards the Vice-Chancellor, and deliver a copy of the Valedictory Lecture and return to his seat.

- 6. CLOSING REMARKS BY THE VICE-  
CHANCELLOR**
- 7. VOTE OF THANKS**
- 8. DEPARTURE**

## **DEDICATION**

To the memory of my parents, Nwachukwu Ekekwe Ukaegbu  
and Nmecha Nwachukwu Ekekwe Ukaegbu

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## **Protocols**

### **Introduction**

When the Vice Chancellor graciously accepted my request for an opportunity to give this lecture, my initial excitement gradually became clouded over by some anxiety about how I would begin. I thought I knew what I wanted to say, but how was I to even begin? Eventually I found just what I needed in the lyrics from one of my favourite old songs by Frank Sinatra. The song “My Way”, was a valedictory of sorts. As I listened to it and realized it offered some of what I needed, I wished my voice was good enough to sing for you those words written by Paul Anka and others. I will leave the singing to those gifted in that art, but here are a few of the lines that I recall:

And now, the end is near

And so I face the final curtain

I'll state my case, of which I'm certain

I did what I had to do

And saw it through without exemption

Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew

When I bit off more than I could chew

The record shows I took the blows

And did it my way.

That song suggests that the valedictory is about casting a glance back, recalling things that were or could have been – and depending on the mood of the valedictorian - explaining why they were or could not have been and, hopefully, taking responsibility for the part, good and ill, that one played. The valedictory address actually marks the end of a cycle in time.

It should be, *stricto sensu* and in its entirety, an exclamation of joy or the sigh of regret and relief. Or it could be a mixture of all the above because as one looks back he sees an uneven past, a roller-coaster of joy and regret, of things that one could have done but did not. Thus in his address the valedictorian becomes both a historian, a philosopher, and a raconteur. If the valedictorian is a teacher like me he might even, consciously or unconsciously, play Head Master.

I don't know what role I may play here just now: it might be all, or none, of the above. For me personally, the end of this cycle of my employment by the University of Port Harcourt calls for only one thing: joyful gratitude – to my Creator and to His many faithful Servants, gratitude to this university as well as gratitude to my colleagues and students - for the privilege of the opportunity I have had here. It is for this reason that I have departed somewhat from established procedure of providing the usually separate page of “Acknowledgements”. In this instance I consider those acknowledgements the main substance of this lecture. If I say a few words more than the THANK YOU, it is so that this does not become the shortest valedictory lecture you have ever heard or read.

I am sure we all know that well-meant admonition in the song about counting our blessings and naming them one by one. To me, that has always been a rather hopeless idea. My primary and secondary school classmates and teachers will attest to the fact that I was never good at counting anything, especially if it involved going beyond the fingers and toes. But make no mistake, I have always been good at counting money. Just ask my wife!. But it is another matter when it comes to blessings! I have always been surrounded by the rich blessings of the Most High. It does not matter how hard or how many times I try, I just cannot keep track of, or count, them! One of the

things I have learned from this is that you cannot stop a flood with bare hands.

Already before I was born blessings awaited me. My parents more than compensated for their lack of material means with their love, care, guidance and friendship. As if those were not enough, along came siblings, a wife, children and grandchildren who surround me with love and friendship, support and respect. Of course every child will claim its mother is the best cook in the whole wide world. But not all will claim as I do that their parents were the best teachers they ever had. So, it is with a sense of gratitude that I humbly dedicate this day to my memory of Mr. Jeremiah Nwachukwu Ekekwe Ukaegbu and Mrs. Jenny Nmecha Nwachukwu Ekekwe Ukaegbu. Those who knew Dee Jeremiah and Mma Jenny would know they more than deserve this. That lady and gentleman taught me the absolute necessity of having the courage to take responsibility for everything I do in, and with, my life.

A million thanks to my wife, Ifeoma, who over the years has sustained in our home a joyful environment where the laughter can be loud and prolonged; to our children who are also my dearest friends (Nwachukwu Ronald Ekekwe, Mrs. Nnennaya Awoyokun and Mrs. Ngozi Amayo), to my sons from other parents (Engr. Yemi Awoyokun and Mr. Kingsley Amayo); to my darling angels, our grandchildren (Cara, TiOluwani, Clarissa, OlaOluwani and Claribel); as well as to my dear sisters (Ikodiya, Grace, Enyiocha and Erinma) and to my dear brothers (Uwakwe, Ekekwe and Peter), with their respective families.

A million thanks to my uncle and worthy role model, Elder/Barrister E. E. Ukaegbu. “Dee Barrister”, as we fondly call him, excited in me the love of books and learning. Even



though he started on the road of his life barefooted, he pulled himself up by his bootstraps, reading, teaching and struggling against many odds to snatch victory from the jaws of what many would have seen as certain defeat.

A million thanks to two of my former teachers, my benefactors and friends, Mr. and Mrs. Ron and Hazel McGraw, who opened their hearts and their home to me. This couple has always been there when I needed them; they were there even before I knew I needed them. If there were any one man and one woman who put the ladder under my feet so I could climb and stand here, this couple is that man and woman.

To all my friends, a million thanks. You have simply been invaluable. For fear that I would miss out even one person, I had better not start naming you.

To the unique University of Port Harcourt I give yet another million thanks. The Senate and Council of this unique Uniport gave me every latitude to be what I have become as an academic. To my colleagues and students, I say a million thanks. If there was any meaning in the years I spent here, you provided it. Without you I suspect my professional life would resemble the chicken without its feathers. I deeply and sincerely apologise to those in this university community who, consciously or otherwise, I may have given offence. *Mea maxima culpa!*

Above all, and indeed above all, a million joyful, boisterous and effervescent thanks to the One in Whose Will “we live and move and have our being” – to borrow that phrase from the eminent citizen of no mean city, Paul of Tarsus. I have been privileged by the Almighty Father with the great gift of life

and good health, along with the means to sustain them. For these, my Lord and my King, I thank Thee.

Vice Chancellor, Sir, permit me now to put the icing on the cake of this thanksgiving, by sharing some personal experiences and a few thoughts on my appreciation of our collective enterprise. Please understand that I share these clips of personal experiences not because I suddenly discovered megalomania. I do so only to put some perspective on my several forays into the world outside the university. I believe I owe that much to this community that permitted me.

I also hope these recollections will help to put in context some of the thoughts I express below about our collective enterprise as intellectual workers. Throughout, I make no claim to my experiences being in any way the universal account of what others who were here at the same time experienced or witnessed. Because I speak of personal experiences I recognise what Soyinka (2015) has called the “moral burden of verification” in matters like this. I hasten to assure you, therefore, that this paper has been peer-reviewed by three persons who should know – me, me and me.

I need to enter a caveat here on my methodology. I do not believe that much I say here would be new to many of us. I have only clothed what many of us have experienced in my own words. In doing so, especially because I am speaking for myself, I employed the style and skill of the newspaper cartoonist. He exaggerates features of people and things not to distort but to highlight; not to falsify but to emphasise. The sum of those skills and style is that the moment he or she sees the cartoon the reader would readily recognise the character or the situation represented in the work.

**Recollections:**

One feature of my sojourn in this University, one which has occasioned speculations some of which I thought were painful to me was the several opportunities I had to gain experiences in the government, in the media and in the private sector. The record will show that I never applied or lobbied for those other opportunities. If, as speculation had it, my idealism (or radicalism) was faked and I took those opportunities on account of money, then I would have had no need to return from each of my forays. I can only assure colleagues that not even once was money the reason behind anything I did or did not do. If money featured prominently in my hierarchy of values as some of my friends thought I would not have even taken up the job as a lecturer in the first instance.

When I arrived at the University of Port Harcourt I was a bright-eyed, idealistic young man (complete with a full head of hair and with more than enough to spare on my chins). I thought I knew what it would take to change the world. With my best friend at the time – Dr. Chijioke Ezekiel Waboso of blessed memory – I had determined that if need be I would personally carry brooms and sweep the streets in whichever Nigerian city I settled. I hasten to add in parenthesis that this was well before any political party in Nigeria knew anything about brooms! This was just our way of saying that we would happily do physical labour and would not be wedded to the relative comfort of the air-conditioned office. My friend and I nursed dreams of being citizens of the true giant of Africa.

For me one of the key elements to waking up the sleeping giant was critical education – education that emphasized learning by reasoning. To put it in the picturesque phraseology of Mao Zedong’s thought, I had dreams of an academic field where a thousand flowers of ideas and concepts bloomed and

contended. It has to be kept in mind that our world then was defined by the anti-apartheid struggle, of the ravages of neo-colonialism and the liberation struggles in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau. Obviously I had not, through literature, kept the company of the likes of Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich and Frantz Fanon; Albert Luthuli and Ngugi wa Thiongo, Karl Marx, Mao Zedong and Vladimir Lenin for nothing.

My leadership of the small but strong and focused African Students' Union at the University of Western Ontario and at Carleton University gave me opportunities to listen to emerging political leaders on the continent. One cannot hear talks by the likes of Sam Nujoma, Thabo Mbeki and Joshua Nkomo – or listen to the blow by blow account, literally, of the 1976 Soweto uprising from an ANC operative - and not be determined to stand among those who would struggle in some way for the restoration of the dignity of the African. How could anyone have sat in classes taught by people like Westmacott at Western, Claude Ake and Leo Pantich at Carleton and not begin to appreciate the power of critical reasoning, of thinking outside the box – especially when that box was filled with the very concepts which were designed to dehumanize and keep down the poor and the oppressed? How could it be otherwise when, as a boy, I had experienced poverty, deprivation and uncertainty; when I had experienced the fragility of life and the sudden collapse of yesterday's certainties in a bloody civil war that took away in its train friends and relations – some of them in air raids on civilian targets that I experienced but the International Observers denied ever happened! And how could it be otherwise when my benefactors were people who would stand up and, if necessary, put their own lives at risk for me and other members of the sick and starving tribe of Biafrans? How, indeed could it be otherwise? In gratitude to my Creator and

for the record, I must state that I was sheltered from the worst of the war experiences. The Grace of those years cannot be lost on me.

A few weeks after obtaining the PhD degree at Carleton University, Ottawa, and uncertain whether or not I could still cash in on a verbal promise by Professor Claude Ake that I would be welcome to join the academic community at the University of Port Harcourt, I took up an appointment as the first Nigerian Director of the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO). I expected that I would serve CUSO, a Canadian liberal-oriented international development agency, for two years and that through it I could contribute to growing the awareness and consciousness of even a few Nigerian youths.

My ideas of how my work with CUSO could lead in that direction obviously made a good copy for a Canadian journalist from the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper who spoke with me in Kano in July 1980. However, it earned me the wrath of my employers who thought I was going beyond my brief. Worse, it also earned me a day-long “chat” – that euphemism for psychological and emotional torture by the state – on September 3, 1980 in the Ibadan offices of the Nigerian state security outfit. Due to a combination of circumstances after that experience, my stint with CUSO was cut considerably shorter than I had planned. I had to resign my appointment. Before then, however, I had negotiated a fresh agreement between CUSO and the Federal Government that renewed CUSO’s licence to operate in the country.

Up to that point I had no direct communication with Professor Ake and so there was no way I could verify that the promise of a place for me in the University of Port Harcourt when I completed my PhD was still live. I had written letters that

seemed to have disappeared into a silent void at the post office or was forgotten in some busy secretary's over-burdened in-tray. So when, at the Staff Club of the University of Ibadan, I had a chance encounter with the Head of Political Science Department of the University of Calabar and he was only too happy to offer me a position there, I grabbed the opportunity with my four limbs.

On arriving in Port Harcourt to request reference letters from Professor Ake and (then) Dr. Kimse Okoko, I received a happy disappointment. With Ake away on the day I visited, Dr. Okoko told me in his characteristic no-two-ways-about-it manner, that neither he nor Ake would help me go anywhere else. I was to come to Port Harcourt where I was awaited. I had to disappoint my new-found friend at the University of Calabar and came to Port Harcourt where I was warmly welcomed by my former supervisor and my senior friend.

The setting at the University of Port Harcourt into which I came seemed to me ideal – the very essence of what, in my opinion, a university ought to be. My senior colleagues were people who easily commanded my respect as scholars and in their individual right – people like Drs. Kimse Okoko, O JB Ojo; and Eboe Hutchful (as they all were then), as well as Professors Claude Ake, Ikenna Nzimiro, Kodjo and Inya Eteng. Across the quadrangle were intellectual giants like Professors J. Alagoa and S. J. S. Cookey. I was particularly privileged to come to the University of Port Harcourt when my Faculty and my Department were at their most effervescent; when it seemed there was room for ideas to take root and blossom; when indeed men could be smaller than their ideas and thoughts, and the possibility of ideation was not a mirage.

I met a crop of students who were just excellent. They were confident and engaged with you as freely as students should with their lecturer. They were inquisitive and they worked hard. Perhaps because there was no Facebook then, it was always a pleasure to go into the library and see a number of them facing the books there. Just how excellent they were was demonstrated in the fact that when a few years later I was Acting Head of Department, I presented to Senate the final year result for Political and Administrative Studies Department in which three (3) students made the First Class Honours category. I believe that remains a record for any Department in this university. An incredulous Senate had to have the results verified and confirmed before it was approved. Two of those students went on to obtain their PhDs from universities in the United Kingdom and Canada. The third, a great loss to academia, became one of the best in his chosen public service career.

Led by Claude Ake, the School of Social Sciences (as the present Faculty of Social Sciences was then called) was the centre of serious debates on academic and national issues. Scholars came here from Nsukka, Lagos, and Calabar, well-armed to join the battles of wits which were regularly staged in the Seminar Room that served both the Humanities and the Social Science. One does not easily forget the camaraderie of the ever-effervescent-duo of Professors Okwudiba Nnoli and Adele Jinadu as they frequently engaged colleagues and students even along the corridors. Out of that intellectual ferment in the School of Social Sciences there developed what came to be known, and respected within the Nigerian Social Science community, as the “Port Harcourt School of Thought”. That School taught the need, and the urgency, for the decolonisation of the mind and of third world history; it taught the critical review of major concepts and theories in the Social

Science disciplines. It stood for the essential methodological and philosophical unity of those disciplines. Its theoretical tap roots were in Marxist thought and Ake's Social Science as Imperialism. It actively engaged in the search for alternative development strategies that put people and not capital first. This search was the context of my two trips to North Korea – on one occasion with Prof. Mark Anikpo and on another with Prof. Ikenna Nzimiro, on the invitation of the North Korean Social Science Council. Looking at Nigeria from the political economy window of that School we watched with growing horror how the dominant faction of the bourgeois class, using the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) as its arrow-head, speedily squandered the hope of democratisation and economic development.

Alas, the Port Harcourt School did not survive. Today, tellingly, scholars in the Faculty have retreated to the comfort zone of received Western concepts in which many were trained. There is no way of telling if some of us simply succumbed to the subtle but strong environmental pressure to conform. But, for sure, the dragon lost the fire in its belly and the smoke stopped coming out from its nostrils. “Isms” no longer reverberate along our halls; we don't discuss Marx and class but markets and profits. The once intellectually-vibrant, outstanding and exciting Faculty has assumed an unexciting new normal and is just another Faculty. I recall that our 7<sup>th</sup> Vice Chancellor, Professor Joseph Ajienska, tried to gently nudge my Faculty out of the intellectual doldrums that had enveloped it. But we had developed certain qualities which only the rock of Gibraltar should be proud of: we would not be moved! It would make an interesting history to investigate how we became so very ordinary after teasing the University with the possibility of our contribution to its uniqueness.



Some of us back then took seriously the concept of praxis which was popularised by the Italian Marxist activist, Antonio Gramsci (1971). We tried to abandon the role of the armchair critic. For, the concept of praxis dovetailed into the Marxist precept that what mattered more than merely understanding the world, important as that is, was to go ahead and change it for the better. This was the philosophical background against which a few of us would meet on campus, sometimes late into the night, to discuss Nigeria and its future.

Our small group was concerned with what we should be doing to further the development of Nigeria along lines we considered desirable; lines that at least would help to blunt the sharp edge of capital that was wrecking the country's economy. The test for this group came with the abrogation of Nigeria's Second Republic led by Shehu Shagari and the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). We debated what should be our attitude to the military government that emerged from the 1983 coup, which thrust the stern-looking Muhammadu Buhari to the centre stage, with the taciturn Tunde Idiagbon by his side.

In my view the coup was welcome. Much as I had no love for military rule, I believed that the then ruling NPN had proved Frantz Fanon right. In Fanon's analysis the comprador bourgeoisie in the post-colonial state was not nationalist; it would sell the family treasure in order to import and export anything to make profit. He had described that class as the "transition line" through which the national economy was placed at the disposal of foreign capital (1963, pp. 152 - 153). Shagari's NPN was the party largely of the comprador bourgeoisie. By its policies and style, the NPN had ensured that the most important and popular concept in discussing the national economy was the "import license". The fact was that

everyone on the import-license-as-a-commodity value chain was ripping off the economy which was already in crisis. From those who issued the license and those to whom it was issued, to those who bought and resold it to those who eventually imported, the name of the game was profit.

Unfortunately, it soon became clear that even if the Buhari-Idiagbon administration were determined to stop the rot and transform Nigeria – and there was really no doubting their nationalism at the time - it had no idea how to manage an otherwise dynamic and boisterous population; they would rather turn the country into military barracks. Less than two years later Ibrahim Babangida saw an opportunity in the heavy cloud of criticism that Buhari and Idiagbon had raised, and struck. And so the country exchanged one General with a gap in his teeth who hardly smiled, with another General with a gap in his teeth who often smiled. Initially the country loved the smiling General. But that is another story.

That change in the administration brought our small campus circle a serious challenge. General Babangida had invited quite a number of outstanding academics across the country to serve in his administration. One of those academics was in fact, a leading member of our group, Professor Ikenna Nzimiro of blessed memory. He was invited to into the Presidential Advisory Committee. At the time of our discussion he had not yet accepted the appointment. But what was he to do? And suppose other such appointments came to any of us, what was that person to do?

The discussion around this issue caused a division in the group. One half felt strongly that it would be a betrayal of Nigeria for any of us to accept such an appointment, given the great harm that the military had done to the country and was

still capable doing. The other half (to which position I subscribed) felt that since our opposition was largely academic, given that there was no real prospect that whatever we could legitimately do would send the military packing, the more advisable course of action was to be pragmatic. Accepting the appointment, the latter half felt, would at least help in limiting the damage that the military could do. Eventually, and sadly, there was no reconciling the two halves.

Professor Nzimiro went ahead and accepted the appointment. Many activists and progressive scholars were very disappointed that an intellectual giant who was a revolutionary even before he became a scholar would accept to work with the military. While am in no position to evaluate his eventual performance in the Presidential Advisory Council (PAC), I am sure that many a criticism made of his acceptance to serve in that capacity was unfair and unkind. Before he fully resumed the appointment, Nzimiro tabled for discussion among a few of us the main policy idea he intended to push for adoption by the Babangida regime.

That policy idea was the result of his appreciation of the Nigerian situation at the time. He felt very strongly that the greatest damage to Nigeria and its economy was being done in the rural areas. Local economies were collapsing, leading to increase in rural poverty and in the numbers of the lumpenproletariat. This collapse meant food insecurity and weakened the nation's ability to produce much agricultural input into what industries still survived. To rescue the nation involved focusing on the rural areas where the majority of the people lived. Nzimiro's policy idea was not only accepted by the Babagida administration. It became one of the administration's major policies. That idea was what became the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure

(DFRRI). Until evidence to the contrary appears, if any will appear, I dare say that the DFFRI policy was the Babangida administration's most successful. If so, the University of Port Harcourt would be justified to claim to have been the maternity ward in which one of the major policies of the Babangida administration was born.

Later in 1986 I too was invited, and I very hesitantly accepted, to serve in the Government of old Imo State, in the administration of (then Lt. Commander) Amadi Ikwechegh. Against the background of the discussion in our small group and the strain it caused among hitherto good friends, accepting the invitation was not one of the easiest of decisions I have ever made. Many colleagues and students familiar with some of my views (expressed sometimes in the Guardian newspaper) and activities wondered what someone like me was doing in a military government. The military governor had been my boyhood friend. More importantly, in certain political and economic principles we had a meeting of minds. He felt very strongly that I could be a useful support in his assignment, especially in Imo state where the political old guard felt that this youngest and most junior in rank of the military governors in Nigeria at the time was certain to fail.

How well or poorly one served is not a matter for discussion here. Suffice it only to say that my principal gave me the widest latitude and the greatest confidence to carry out the assignments he gave me. Interestingly, the very first major task I faced in Imo State Government was to develop the template for the State's rural development programme, based on that very idea that our Uniport campus discussions had chewed over. The Imo State template was eventually adopted and adapted by many other States. It is noteworthy that until Ikwechegh left office as the Military Governor, Imo State was

adjudged each year the best performing State in the rural development programme of the Babagida administration. It was also the best in implementing programmes targeted at protecting widows in rural communities – thanks to the indefatigable (then) First Lady of the State, Her Excellency, Barr/Mrs. Frances Nwamaka Ikwechegh. In each of these areas there were concrete and verifiable projects and activities that justified the outcome of the assessments.

A few years after my stint in the old Imo State Government another ideal with which roots I was connected here on campus had matured and it came calling. In 1992 I was invited – that word again! - to join the foundation editorial team setting up Nigeria's first full-process colour chain of newspapers and magazines, the Sunray newspapers. Not a few colleagues believed, very unfairly and without any evidence whatsoever, that Sunray and my position there as Chairman of the Editorial Board were vehicles for hiding the wealth I was supposed to have accumulated while serving in old Imo State Government. I guess one way of looking at those allegations and insinuations was that my own well-received explanations about Nigerian politics had come back to haunt me: had I not written a book (Ekekwe, 1986) arguing that access to, and/or control of, state apparatuses had become veritable means of production - one of the sure means for wealth and capital accumulation in Nigeria?

Sunray was in fact an important political idea that found expression as a newspaper. I was there because that political idea was consistent with my personal ideals and hopes for my country. It was the eventual outcome of an appreciation of the Nigerian condition shared by a few of us on campus and others outside, notably Amaopusenibo Bobo Brown who was then Editor of the Tide newspaper. Our analysis of the political

situation in Nigeria suggested that until and unless States created out of the old Eastern Region make common cause in critical areas such as the economy (especially resource ownership) and infrastructure, this part of the country would continue to be treated as political minority in national affairs; that the inability or unwillingness of these States to cooperate was an impediment on the development of the region. A number of us believed it was being consciously fed by interests outside the area that benefitted from exploiting their resources.

That beautiful dream about Sunray newspapers turned out to be a nightmare. The idea of such a newspaper did not align with the crass objective of the investors. It appeared that they had severely limited agenda – merely to acquire property, make money and make more money. Indeed, investors have the right to make profit otherwise there would be no point in investing. In this particular case, however, the investors' appreciation of business ethics, and media economics were highly suspect. They provided some of the highest quality printing equipment their money could buy and 'Senibo Bobo Brown assembled evidently a very professional editorial team poached from other media houses and educational institutions. Everything was in place. Or, so it seemed.

The newspaper chain's excellent printing capability was to serve as its cash cow, but the Board of Directors had managed to undercut itself here by sacking competent American professionals who they had invited to install the machines. As we understood it at the time, the Americans were sacked because they apparently asked pertinent but inconvenient questions. In their place another set of Americans came in. This set stood out not just by the colour of their skin but also by their incompetence. These otherwise nice people asked no questions but dutifully took instructions. This was no formula

to satisfy fastidious customers like the oil companies and banks who could get high quality jobs printed in Lagos.

As if that was not bad enough, the Chairman of the Board of Directors hoped that we could sell our professional soul to the Abacha regime when the company faced serious financial crunch: he arranged for the Editorial Board to interview Abacha's Minister for Information. As one who was to chair the proceedings, I was given clear instructions to ensure no inconvenient questions were asked of the Minister. This was an instruction I personally could not obey. In any case, our Editorial Board comprised professionals who would not listen to such nonsense even from their Chairman. The good news is that after the awkward pleasantries and three or so questions into the interview, the room apparently got very hot and the Minister did not waste words telling us he had had more than enough: he gathered his papers and walked out. The bad news is that no money came to Sunray from the Abacha regime's deep pockets and our salaries which had not been paid for months were still not paid. We feared a raid of our offices and arrests of our staff. Happily none of that happened. Before the collapse of the company I had already resigned my appointment. I had also taken the company to court to claim several years' unpaid salaries.

A similar experience as in Sunray awaited 'Senibo Bobo Brown and I in the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited (SPDC), Eastern Division. We had proposed to SPDC what we believed would bring a positive change in the narrative of its ineffective corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme in the Niger Delta. Our concept of what had to be done so impressed some managers in the organization that they thought we should be on the inside, not outside SPDC, to further refine, and eventually oversee the

implementation of the concept. Indeed, a team comprising consultants and scholars from both Rivers State University of Science and Technology (now Rivers State University) and the University of Port Harcourt did further refine the concept and came up with a novel approach to what SPDC and other oil companies were doing. It received very warm reviews from the Nigerian managers in SPDC East, until it ran aground somewhere between the offices of the Nigerian Director responsible for CSR (who had been one of its most enthusiastic cheer leaders) and the expatriate interest bloc. When this Director who had publicly undertaken to secure the funding for it would neither privately nor publicly pronounce on the fate of all that work, we counted our teeth with our tongues.

These experiences outside the university were to prove invaluable to my further growth as an academic. I wish other colleagues would have similar experiences because the chemistry between theory and practice, idealism and realism challenges some of our deeply held equations about the processes of life and living. I recall that when my dear friend, Professor Julius Ihonvbere made a remark to the effect that he learned more about Nigeria serving in the Obasanjo administration than he learned from text books some of which he wrote, a number of our colleagues castigated him for apparently de-marketing the Political Science discipline. But those negative reactions to Ihonvbere were totally unnecessary and ill-informed. The real world of politics and bureaucracy is the real place to test our theories and ideas. Unfortunately that real world is not as disciplined and ordered as our theorists would have us view them. In these parts, on account of the social formation being suspended between two opposing modes of production, informal modes of behaviour from the pre-capitalist era often collide with, and overwhelm, the



formal rules of engagement embedded in the bureaucracy, producing clouds of chaos and confusion in the economy, politics and society generally. I am persuaded by my own experiences that if some of those thinkers whose ideas form the foundation of our Social Science disciplines - Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Locke, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and August Comte - came visiting in Nigeria they would be thoroughly dazed by the chaos and confusion.

I have made the point elsewhere (Ekekwe, 2008; Ekekwe 2015) that our analytical paradigms have not taken into account man's free will the usage of which is what actually drives and directs each individual in all he or she does. In Nigeria, that free will has been in a state of free fall! So long as the Social Science disciplines insist on regarding the human building blocks of society as mere matter, so long will the lacuna between reality and what we theorise keep widening. One of the abiding lessons I learned outside the walls of the university is that the social scientist lives in Plato's cave of shadows who denies the spiritual essence of man. Some colleagues have wondered why I would be associating anything spiritual with our disciplines which are supposed to be pursuing science. My answer has been simple and unequivocal: our disciplines have been mistaken. We must find the courage to seek to correct it. In my understanding, science is man's attempt to understand, mimic and work with the Laws of Nature which apply as much in Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Geography as they do to man who is the building bloc in Political Science, Economics, Sociology, History, Psychology and others. Our social science disciplines have been dealing with half species and mistaking them for the full species. If this is so, I begin to understand why we have so mindlessly been adding to, instead of clarifying, the confusion and chaos.

Recognising man as essentially a spiritual being and therefore much more than matter is not about reciting passages from the Bible or the Koran. It is not about invoking the name of the Almighty Father at every drop of a hat. Nor is it about encouraging students to stand under trees or occupy classrooms to sing and pray when they should be in the library, in flagrant disregard of the teaching in the Book of the Christian Bible, Ecclesiastes, chapter 3. What is involved is a total paradigm shift, a drastic reordering to the finest details of our appreciation of the nature of man, the building bloc of society. By way of an illustration, what we have been doing in our social science disciplines has been less about science and more about technology which is itself a product of science. We must recognise that no matter how good he becomes, the technician cannot become the scientist unless he retools. That retooling means using philosophy (as opposed to quantification) to inform the foundation of our efforts, as was the case before Science became conceited and misunderstood itself.

None of this is to say, therefore, that what we teach and have learned has been of no use whatsoever. I am aware that my former teacher and the founding Dean of my Faculty, Claude Ake (1979: p. xvi; pp. xvii – xviii), already described some of the major concepts in the Social Sciences as “utterly useless as a scientific tool” and as “worse than useless”. Precisely because they are “useless as a scientific tool” we know what we don’t need. The challenge is to find what we need. We must continue testing what we teach and learn against the lived experience of the people, subjecting them to critical analysis and confidently discarding what is useless. We in the Social Sciences in Nigeria need to strive and remain relevant especially because contemporary developmental pressures are

tending toward barbarism. Our universities is where that effort should take root, but not if we continue the way we have been.

**Goats eating the palm fronds on our heads:**

For centuries Africa has been the worst victim of capitalism. Through the loss of its human capital in the slave trade and the continuing loss of its resources, the continent has contributed the most to the global wealth that capitalism has created. Yet it has realised the least of the human potential and possibilities unleashed by this mode of production. Capitalism has dehumanized, pauperized, exploited and disinherited Africa and Africans. These are well enough known facts. What is disturbing is that as academics in Nigeria generally and certainly in the University of Port Harcourt we have not been sufficiently (if at all) alert to the implications of this for what we teach, how we teach as well as what we learn. We have not subjected the values of this mode of production to our real world experience i.e. to the life and living of a vast majority of the African peoples. We have been too busy trying to develop and be modern and so we fail to see how this desire drives us more and more into national disaster and continental hopelessness. We forget that what is modern and developed is by definition not African: it is European and American. And so we criticise Walt Rostow (1961) in one breath and commend Claude Ake (1979) in another; but when it comes to policy prescriptions we hug the former and ignore the latter.

This capitalism that we loath and embrace in turns has been for decades destroying democracy which most of us would argue was the best platform for governance. All over the world, the interests of corporate finance have been thrust to the fore and everything must be done to balance the books and promote growth and profit. But the blind pursuit has led to great inequalities and inexcusable inequities across and within

regions as well as between and within nations. The demagoguery that is so evident in most parts of the world; the intolerance of debate, and the aversion to critical analysis or new social and political ideas can only create or reproduce a populace that is docile or can easily be aligned in the one direction that has been shaped by finance capital (Nichols, 2017; Brown, 2013). This demagoguery is either in defence of wealth and privilege or in demand for equity and justice but the protagonists are talking past each other. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms may appear to have given voice to many who were hitherto voiceless – and we know that voice is one of the most important elements in a liberal democracy. But if we look again we see that the apparent voice has only a little more value than socialized noise. That noise creates the impression that people are participating in serious debates when in fact all that is happening is no more than collective navel-gazing. It is the projection of what looks like debate the better to subdue the genuine thing; it is specifically engineered to advance already defined social and political causes, not for discussion or disciplined debate. They serve one obvious goal: the furthering of contradictory and conflicting social causes and the deepening of social divide and acrimony. They do not promote harmony. This is the confusion (with its accompanying fear and insecurity) that capital and the ruling class in Nigeria, the United States and elsewhere ultimately and massively benefit from. In the meantime, capital marches on and it becomes difficult to organise any countervailing force against it.

Ironically, the individuals and large corporations raking in more profits pay comparatively low rates of taxes. This means less money to finance education, health care, poverty alleviation and other welfare programmes even in the

technologically advanced countries. It is observed in various countries of the European Union that: “government expenditure on 'education' as a ratio to GDP decreased over the 2003-2017 period, ... from 5.1 % of GDP in 2003 to 4.6 % of GDP in 2017... the share of expenditure on education in total expenditure decreased from 11.0 % in 2003 to 10.2 % in 2017.” (Eurostat, 2019). A similar effect here is produced by monetarist economics that is hardly interested in funding social and political changes. In South Africa, UNICEF (2019: p. 2) observed that “there are concerns about the lack of growth in education expenditures over the medium term”. On the average, African countries spend about 5% of the GDP on education. As far as numbers go that figure looks impressive seeing that it comes second on a global basis to North America. But match it against the fact that Africa has the youngest population and that this population is growing rapidly then it becomes obvious that 5% of GDP for the continent is not at all impressive. This is a continent that as of 2015 had only 6% of its youth in higher education as opposed to 26% on the global level (Africa-America Institute, 2015, p. 10). And whether it is the advanced countries or in Africa, low funding for education or declining investment in social services is tantamount to denying political voice to the majority of the peoples. Since the Ibrahim Babangida era when we allowed the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to impose the structural adjustment programmes (SAP) on Nigeria, the country’s leadership has accentuated its anti-intellectual disposition through consistently low funding for education.

The military in Nigeria set the pace for anti-intellectualism in the country. Their civilian counterparts in government faithfully followed. Recall that Nigerian universities were easily among the best in the world before the series of coups

sought to replace the pen with the barrel of the gun as the symbol of progress. It is not necessary here to reproduce the mind-numbing figures of persistent underfunding of education in Nigeria. If evidence is needed then one only has to look at the number of times the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has gone on strike over this issue; one only has to wonder why any state worth its salt would reach agreements on funding education in the country and for close to ten (10) years fails to honour what it agreed to. In 1986 when the Social Science Council of Nigeria was planning its annual conference here at the University of Port Harcourt we were advised one fine morning to be mindful of what ideology we propagated. Not long thereafter lecturers were warned against teaching what they were not paid to teach, and to avoid some ill-defined disease called “undue radicalism” - which was equated with ideological and religious fanaticism (Babangida, nd., pp. 203 -204). This was essentially anti-intellectualism dressed in seemingly harmless language. The threat against offenders was camouflaged in a de-contextualised reference to Martin Luther King Jnr about the necessity to use the law “to restrain the heartless” (Babangida, nd, p. 204).

It seems that somewhere between the onslaught of underfunding education and the ever-present threats to discipline them, broad sections of the academia assumed their places as members of the ruling class. This facilitated the growth on campus of a specie of anti-intellectualism with a life of its own. One wonders if that had anything to do with the fast demise of the Port Harcourt School of Thought earlier referred to.

I have learned over the years that in principle, perhaps no vocation is more critical to society than that of the teacher/lecturer. He or she plays a huge role in helping

individuals acquire the tools and values to navigate life and living, and the society to shape its future. But when the teacher assumes the toga of the anti-intellectual, then the situation becomes dire for society. The lecturer/teacher is an expert in his or her field of study and as Nichols (2017, p.11) put it, he or she has “a *responsibility to educate*” [my emphasis]; to help the non-expert improve his understanding of the material world and improve his living condition. In its simplest general meaning, to educate means to help someone to develop his or her mind and intellect to appreciate life and the environment that supports it.

There have been times when I asked myself whether I, with my colleagues, have been educating our students or we have simply been going through the motions of what Illich (1970) described as schooling – certifying young women and men to be issued with diplomas and degrees. I have worried that with my colleagues I have been producing “the mass man” already so painfully described long ago by Ortega Y Gasset (1935). Our mass man has a university’s first or other degrees but he appears to understand very little about himself and his environment. The mass man is also the university lecturer who publishes not so much the result of research aimed at solving or explaining some contemporary problem but just about anything that will facilitate promotion; he has neither the desire nor the skill to mentor students or junior colleagues. Some think that being nice to students means tolerating their worst excesses while to others students are just so many “annoyances” (Nichols (2017)). Such a lecturer thus wittingly or otherwise makes common cause with the politician who underfunds education. He certifies as educated persons who, without critical thinking skills, go on to swell the ranks of an unenlightened, docile and pliant electorate so necessary for the

politician to cling to power (Ake, 2008; Ake, 1996). I will return to this point in a moment.

The university has both a moral and legal responsibility to offer only the best in instruction and guidance to the students. This in fact is its *raison d'être*. How far many of these institutions have departed from their mission was a major theme in the maiden lecture of the Claude Ake School of Government Visiting Scholars' Lecture Series No. 1 by Godwins (2018). There is something highly suggestive in the concept of the university: the "universe" in the "city"; the academy immersed in the universe of ideas. By its nature, the university properly understood, already heralded the idea of universalism or globalization. Everything about it is antithetical to localism, and narrow-mindedness. Universalism or globalization as used here does not exclude what is local but it insists that each locality contributes its best.

To borrow again from the language of Plato's allegory of the cave, the university should be a collection of men who seek to overcome the physical and intellectual limitations imposed on them by the cave; people seeking to go beyond appearances and to apprehend essences; men and women who gather to seek answers to questions about the nature of man and his environment, of life and living, of the material and the spiritual. These were the fundamental questions that constituted the core of philosophy until about the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And so in the academy anyone or idea that was committed to the search for lasting values, or anyone with perspectives the community could learn from, was welcome. It is not a historical accident that the highest degree any university in the world offers for learning and research in our social science disciplines and the Humanities is the "Doctor of Philosophy" degree. Each discipline has its philosophy and the recipient of



the PhD degree has presumably mastered it and is capable of its practical application. But unfortunately when we get these highly-prized degrees we do not philosophise; most of us limit ourselves to the formulae of so-called theories learned in the course of getting the degree.

We have thus abandoned philosophy to the connoisseurs. So, it is little wonder that few of our thoughts are profound and most are simply sterile. They do not enrich or awaken anything in the student's mind. They are simply reflections of the anti-intellectualism deep-seated in the larger society. Notice how in politics there is always some not-loudly-professed preference, especially in times of crises, for the intellectual muscleman euphemistically called the technocrat who doesn't want to bother with the debate but just wants to get things done. Worse, there is the invasion of the political space by "the mass man" who, unable to debate his opponents just does what the man does who has run out of ideas – resort to demagoguery, issue threats and bully your way through. The difference is clear when philosophers are in politics. Consider that men like Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and Woodrow Wilson gave America and the world the first modern federalism and such heady political phrases as "All men are born equal" and "We the people". It also gave the world the idea of the United Nations. But when the American mass men took power they gave the world the first atomic weapons as well as Hiroshima.

I have learned that Plato's philosopher-king is less about the king being a philosopher and more about the enthronement of philosophy as a means to ascertain the public good. It is also about the individual who must lead himself beyond the limitation of the intellect, striving on a daily basis to rise above the mundane and seek those eternal verities that constitute the

good. The expert in any endeavor who must educate and guide others himself needs the education and guidance that philosophy offers. Otherwise he settles for the mundane; for the easiest solutions which may not be the best. Such an expert becomes an impostor: an occupant of space otherwise meant for those searching for the truth. The university loses its essence and becomes just another factory producing recipients of its diplomas and degrees.

If I make a song and dance about the critical importance of philosophy it is because I became convinced that the Social Science disciplines are sterile without it. Capital would want us to focus on understanding and predicting human behavior the better to position man as the quintessential consumer, so that it can manipulate that consumption addiction to make profit. This is already happening with all the weird and wonderful things being programmed in Silicon Valley to predict and exploit our consumption patterns. It seems nothing would please capital more than our taking leave of the larger philosophical questions of the nature of man, the meaning of life and living, and focus on just being practical and getting the job the done. And so the “doctor of philosophy” literally ignores philosophy! He thus operates mechanically, becoming only a little different, if at all, from the new kid in town - artificial intelligence (AI).

Some objection may be raised and I may be reminded that even those working with AI still concern themselves with ethics, which is a branch of philosophy. And so indeed they (as well as other researchers) do. But this is more or less being done in the same manner as the quintessential capitalist would start off with “Honesty is the best policy” but soon finds out that indeed it is the best policy for the soul but not for the profit-making which is what focuses his mind. He would not

tell you that honesty is no longer the best policy; he simply doubles down on the strategy of the eleventh commandment of “Thou shall not be caught” so that it appears honesty is still the best policy. Being focused and getting things done is great but only if it is being done within a clearly defined philosophical and not some narrowly defined ethical context.

The foregoing may seem abstract until we bring it home. I wonder, for instance, if we have not largely abandoned the philosophy behind the University of Port Harcourt and its role in society and settled down to producing graduates. What does it matter when we produce or teach our bouquet of courses that the motto of this university is about “enlightenment and self-reliance”? I doubt that many of us, as lecturers and administrators spare any time to consider what these two concepts mean for what we do and how we do it. We have not helped our students to know or care about being enlightened or acquiring self-reliance. It will be wrong to counter this claim by pointing me to the attempt this university is making to domesticate entrepreneurship. I would argue that in fact entrepreneurship, in itself a great idea, presupposes self-reliance! Perhaps these otherwise great ideas now mean no more to us than the words inscribed on the Nigerian coat of arms mean to the political leadership. We have ignored philosophy and, like capital, settled for mission and vision statements that are there to fulfil all righteousness. I fear that this brought harm on our vocation.

The student who is an important part of the system is the biggest loser in such a situation. Without the student the university loses much of its essence and becomes a research centre. Were it so, many lecturers would have to look for alternative employment. Through the university every nation produces the major part of its future and thus reproduces itself

- assuming of course that the students knew why they were here in the first place. Where we teach and guide these young minds well the benefits are enormous; where we fail the harm is grievous. The Vice Chancellor, Professor N. E. S. Lale, recently pointed out (Samuel, 2018, p.2) “that the Management of the University would be doing great disservice to the nation if it failed to teach the students and guide them to refrain from actions that may derail their career.” Are we even teaching them to have a career or to just get a degree? If we are teaching them to have a career, are we doing so against the background of the philosophy of enlightenment and self-reliance?

I have learned that learning takes place only in an atmosphere of relative silence, peace, and freedom for the teacher and the student. Notice how lecturers insist on their academic freedom and the poet on his licence. What is not so obvious is that the student needs this freedom too. The atmosphere of our universities is not as free as they could be. If we listen to the footsteps of the ants we will discover, perhaps to our surprise, that interaction between students and lecturers and between senior academic staff and their junior colleagues is governed by the force of necessity, through a well-oiled hierarchy of oppressions. For many a student it takes some courage to do such simple things as meet with their lecturers or process their documents. Some are scared in the classrooms where sometimes the lecturer operates from behind a carefully crafted wall of intimidation which is mistaken for the authority he must exercise. Students are afraid to challenge wrong-doing by teaching staff because they believe – rightly or wrongly – that the lecturers often close ranks to protect each other. The lot of the junior academic staff is only a little better; the professor is his boss or lord when he should be a mentor. It seems that as some become professors they grow above

teaching when that is really the time to teach even more passionately presumably because as the local lingo has it “you now know something”. But instead some of us would hand over courses assigned to them to junior colleagues. If the Professor helped or supervised any junior colleague this gives the Professor the right to often refer to him fondly as “my boy”, like a colonial district officer referring to the colonized man. I was taught in school that when the Professor is assigned to teach a course with a junior colleague it is an opportunity for that professor to mentor, and not just to abandon the course for, that junior colleague.

### **The guardian in need of a guardian:**

The foregoing scenarios appear to be only some aspects of the anti-intellectualism prevalent in our institutions and in the ranks of the ruling class. A deeper look suggests that because most of us have abandoned philosophy we have perhaps very unwittingly, even taken to intellectualizing this prevalent anti-intellectualism. This appears innocent and even invisible because it crept in on us and it has happened partly in response to practical and pressing existential problems that have to do with funding and staffing of our institutions.

Take, for instance, the challenge posed by the inadequate funding of the universities. As a result of the situation universities have had to take desperate measures as they rely increasingly on internally generated revenue. Partly in response to this pressure some universities look out for money bags and not always people of achievement when considering who gets honorary doctorate degrees. On the back of this trend fake local and foreign universities (apologies to Donald Trump) have, in imitation of genuine ones in this regard, flooded the country with all kinds of “Doctors”. It might be very difficult to find other countries where that title which

should distinguish the academic, is more abused than in Nigeria. The academic community raises only the weakest voice against that practice because it created room for the monster.

As students who wear tattered trousers into lecture halls make it difficult to distinguish mad men from those in search of knowledge, so has it become increasingly difficult to tell genuine doctorate degree holders from the honorary variety especially when the latter wear the title on their sleeves. The awardees have what the genuine academic has – the ‘doctorate’ degree. But that academic does not have what the honorees have – wealth and influence. In a society that places higher value on wealth than on learning, the rich honorees dwarf the genuine men of letters and present the wrong role model to the youths who by implication come to believe that it is better to acquire wealth than to get educated because once you are rich and influential, the highest honour the universities can offer is yours – and you don’t even have to ask. Thus is reinforced the anti-intellectualism already prevalent in the society. Once upon a time the professor used to be the preferred role model in the society, but not anymore. That position has been taken by the politician.

One powerful factor feeding on, and in turn feeding anti-intellectualism is the *fils de famille*/son-of-the-soil syndrome. An obvious feature of Nigerian universities is how very local all of them seem to have become (Efemini, 2011) and this tendency is being propelled by the son-of-the-soil syndrome. What started as a negative development and blossomed into a crisis in the University of Lagos in 1965 has become the norm across the country. Now, one can hardly find a Nigerian public university, federal or State-owned, that has defied this trend. And because this is the case, it begins to appear right and

justifies itself because, well, everybody is doing it. One wonders what could be more anti-intellectual than that the most critical qualifications for leading the university in Nigeria are state of origin and political connections. Following the same logic academics from the local communities hosting these institutions insist on being given special recognition and preferences. Thus the son-of-the-soil idea carries with it a certain sense of entitlement. He is to be treated with unusual sensitivity.

Obviously informed by the 1965 crisis in the University of Lagos, a seasoned university administrator, Chukwuemeka Ike, published a novel in 1970 titled *The Naked Gods*. In it he portrayed the pathological struggle powered by the personal ambition of the sons-of-the-soil. Those local champions were scheming over who occupies the seat of the Vice Chancellor. Now even questions about filling regular academic staff positions and such humble offices as Heads of Department attract ethnic gladiators. Chukwuemeka Ike's naked gods may have confined their nakedness to Council meetings and the Senate chamber; the contemporary naked gods do not squirm at inviting local community women to demonstrate in support of their quest for elevation.

It is interesting to observe how the *filis de famille* phenomenon in academia and in politics now run parallel to each other and then, depending on the circumstances, meet at some point and become mutually reinforcing. In my view, the phenomenon makes much sense in politics because here many issues are local. In academia, however, it makes very little sense because it strikes against the real essence of what the university should be. In politics it makes everybody a winner because if local issues are solved objectively then the non-native, the "isoma" does not lose. In academics it makes everybody a loser if the

phenomenon throws up mediocrity at any level, as is sometimes the case.

One other tendency towards localisation has to do with the trend which sees our students earning all their post-graduate degrees from the same institution they undertook their undergraduate studies. One recognises that often material circumstances oblige students to do this. But its impact cannot be ignored. The outcome is that the students' perspective is that much narrowed. He or she spends active learning years interacting with more or less the same set of lecturers in the same academic environment. This notwithstanding some of us turn what is essentially a weakness under whatever circumstance, into a negative force for progress in our university profession – a clear incidence of the subjective swamping the essentially objective.

To be quite clear here, I am not in the least suggesting that no excellent Vice Chancellors and PhD students have emerged from these scenarios. To be sure, some of our Vice Chancellors here at the University of Port Harcourt would stand out anywhere in the world. As for very good PhD students, I have been privileged to supervise some of them in my Department and I have seen others in my Faculty and in the Graduate School seminars. So that cannot be my argument.

However, I do think we would be making a mistake to believe that there is no problem in the process. The prevailing situation begs some tantalizing questions: Is it possible that we could have done a whole lot better, to the benefit of the greatest number, if our processes were more or less open than now that they are more or less closed? In a country that is in dire need of national unity and cohesion especially within the



ranks of the ruling class, was this the best the dwellers in the ivory tower could contribute? My fear is that the current system and the process we run make potentially losers of us all; that it might be contributing to the apparent deterioration in the quality of our collective outcomes. Until there is data-based conclusion to the contrary, we should just not rest satisfied that the extant situation is the best we can do.

Institutions which were probably meant to help in checking against this deterioration in quality of university education appear to have become just another layer of bureaucracy. It will be necessary to start some serious, data-driven conversation about the value that institutions like the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) bring to the equation. At this point one can do no more than raise a few very broad questions that might be useful in the conversations I think are necessary. First, why does it appear that JAMB has made no obvious impact on the quality of students admitted into Nigerian universities? After all the stress and pain prospective students go through just to write the JAMB, the agency appears to be little more than the broad road for poor quality students gaining admission. One finds students who presumably passed with credit in English language but can hardly express themselves coherently. Second, if we gave JAMB the benefit of having made a positive difference in selecting suitable candidates, can we tell how much better off the system has been as a result of its role? True, it has of late begun to clamp down on cheats in the examinations. But can it be convincingly argued that the poor quality of students admitted into the universities is the result mainly of cheating? If this is traced to cheating, does it not mean that the body has been a failure – even if for no other reason than its inability to reduce cheating in the process to the barest minimum? Seen from the

point of view of many a parent or student, JAMB is most successful in creating and sustaining frustration. Perhaps it is time to allow the federal principle apply in the admission of students into universities. Each university should admit its students.

Similar questions need to be asked about the NUC. Strictly speaking its role in many respects clashes with the statutory role of the University Senate. Why does it appear that the body is increasingly less about standards and more about uniformity? With all the effort the NUC puts into the accreditation of programmes process and the relatively large expenditure the targeted institutions must make – some of which cannot bear scrutiny – is programme accreditation being done the best way possible?

The desirability of a body like the NUC is obvious simply because it is there; for that reason it seems unnecessary to question its value. If so, the position is as anti-intellectual and unscientific as any. There is little doubt that quality control in the universities should be given top priority. This makes urgent the question as to whether the NUC and every other body involved are the best placed to play that role and, if so, how well they have they been playing it? The NUC has since set some very impressive minimum standards for the universities (NUC, 2007). But that is as far as it seems to have gone. Were it, in my opinion, determined to see universities achieve those standards, especially with respect to infrastructure and quality of graduates, either of two things would happen. Utterly embarrassed by the gap between its recommended minimum (not optimum or maximum) standards and the reality on the ground, it would admit that it has an impossible task and quit the business. In the alternative it would troop out with the Academic Staff of Union of

Universities (ASUU) each time the union goes on strike to draw attention to the havoc underfunding is wrecking on university education.

Bureaucracies like JAMB and the NUC easily perpetuate themselves because those over whom they superintend spend too much time trying to conform to the prescriptions of such bodies and hardly have the time to ask difficult questions of them. Worse, if the manner of operation and the output of the various institutions superintended necessitated setting up the supposed guardian, these institutions lose the legal and moral authority to critically evaluate their supervisors. The poorly performing bodies already over-exposed themselves to the possibility of surrendering completely to the controlling agency. And so in yet another sense they become victims of their inefficiency as well as accomplices in their subordination. In any education system where ineffectiveness superintends over inefficiency the mindless production of the mass man is assured.

It may well be said in defence of these institutions charged with generally with quality control that very many Nigerian students who have gone on to foreign universities have usually distinguished themselves. Indeed, I even referred to some of such high performing students earlier. But that would be a very poor defence. The point is not that Nigeria has poor students. It is that our educational institutions and some of us intellectual workers have been serving those students poorly. Some of the explanations this is happening trace back to the pervasive anti-intellectualism in the country which yields consistently inadequate funding of education. And here, too, it may be said in defence of our governments that inadequate funding of education has been, as I pointed out, a global phenomenon. This is another poor defence. In my hometown,

Igbere, we would ask the man who wants the same hair style as Nwankwo whether his own head and Nwankwo's have exactly the same size and shape. Except in children, blind imitation is a sure sign of weakness and indolence. The country cannot achieve greatness by copying negative trends from Europe or North America. We have an obligation to ourselves to set the pace and not copy the same system that has for centuries exploited and dehumanized our people. Unfortunately, our political leaders have little or no sense of history and of shame.

Fortunately, there have always been flickers of light in the otherwise dismal horizon. In the last decade at least, the University of Port Harcourt has taken some bold steps to improve quality control. This has ranged from creating special office for the purpose, with senior and serious-minded academics in charge. It has also reviewed and tightened up the assessment and evaluation processes that precede promotions to senior academic levels. Good as these processes are there is still room for improvement. For example, our universities appear to more interested in recognising quantity than quality in the matter of publications. This might be because it is very difficult to evaluate quality proposals and publications (Lamont, 2009) and easy to count quantities. Obviously this is an objective problem but it should not mean that the camel can literally pass through the eye of the needle. Besides presuming that every lecturer cares enough about personal integrity to do otherwise, there is nothing stopping him or her from signing on to co-published articles when he or she made no meaningful input into researching and writing the article. Some of the journals we publish in care very little, if at all, about the quality of articles and the peer-review process.

Presumably it was in search for quality that the distinction is made between international and national publications. Often

‘international’ refers more to the place of the journals’ or books’ publication and not necessarily their quality. On closer examination, however, this distinction makes little sense. Worse, it indicts all of us. Assume we assign higher values to so-called international publications in a context where university education is already international in character and quality, and we would have thereby automatically declared our less-than-acceptable effort. I am sure many of us have seen some supposedly international journals whose pages would better serve to wrap akara than as the medium for communicating research results.

One has seen supposedly peer-reviewed publications and wondered if the author – assuming he or she submitted a decent paper - should not demand apologies from the editors and reviewers. There have been instances of external assessors evaluating publications and wondering how internal assessors could have seen the quality of publications submitted and still recommended the authors for promotion. It would appear that many of us have lost the courage of our conviction and can no longer call a spade by its name. To be sure, not everybody in my discipline, for instance can be Claude Ake. That is not the point. However, none of us should be what Ortega Y Gasset (1935, p. 70; p. 112) has called the “intellectually vulgar” and the “learned ignoramus”. That is really the point.

## **Conclusion:**

I should not be surprised at all if anyone is wondering what on earth a political scientist is doing discussing education, when his own discipline seems to be at its wits end concerning the political problems of the country. I wondered about that myself. My justification is the duty all of us have to continually assess our environment and what we are doing in it, with it and to it. In thinking through some of the issues I raised here, I learned that perhaps the greatest challenge facing mankind is not just climate change after all, and I do not mean to even faintly suggest that climate change is not an existential problem. I think that the crisis created world-wide by the underfunding of education is virtually on a par with the climate change challenge. If we got our education right we can solve the climate crisis faster – provided, of course that the Donald Trumps of this world will return to school. For me, so grave is the crisis in education that it is too important to be left to education experts alone. I have only tried to reflect on questions that have bothered me for almost as long as I have been privileged to be here.

Each time I reflected on it, that phrase spoken when we graduate students, claiming that they had been found “worthy in character and learning” always made me uneasy. I have often asked myself how and when we assessed character, whether I was part of that assessment or where I was when it was being done. I often wondered what I would do or say in the hypothetical situation where, at a convocation ceremony, the Vice Chancellor were to ask Ekekwe to stand up and confirm to the public that I found all my students being graduated worthy in character and learning! Was grading examination and essay papers appropriate assessment of training, enough for me to stand and proclaim that society and employers could bank on it? I suspect that we merely repeat

that phrase because it sounds nice, even profound, and because it was hand down to us as. In any case, over the years I have come to accommodate it in the same corner of my mind where I accommodate the claim in the Nigerian Constitution that the people made and gave it to themselves. Indeed the tsetse fly has settled on a delicate spot!

Drawing attention to these “open secrets” may seem unkind. But the fact is that our collective future and professional integrity are under threat from how we are conducting ourselves. We live in denial and to the peril of our collective enterprise unless we work long and hard at restoring quality and discipline. For as long as we allow sentiments to push us in the direction we now seem to be going, we risk the danger of the profession we love coming under increasing public ridicule. Some of us may have heard knowledgeable members of the public as well as colleagues wonder aloud why or how certain persons were pronounced “doctors” and “professors” by some universities. These and similar observations cast an unwarranted shadow on otherwise very good and hardworking persons in the system. These are the people we need to protect, and in doing so protect our collective enterprise, by warding off the “intellectually vulgar” and re-designing the mass man.

It is encouraging to note that in some universities, including the University of Port Harcourt, serious steps are being taken to address the situation. But those efforts have a long way to go yet. There is in my view no better way to handle the situation than for each institution to satisfy itself that the right steps are being taken, and to also set up structures to ensure continuous compliance. In this regard the work of ensuring quality control ought to be sustained and deepened. What may be more difficult is to tame the ethnic champion that feeds on,

and is fed, by self-interest and narrow-mindedness. For the avoidance of doubt, I believe that everyone has a right to her or his identity. If Nature, in its wisdom has let evolve in these parts the variety of ethnicities we experience, then each individual has the right and a duty to express that uniqueness because it can only bring some advantage that might not be readily obvious. This right, however, comes with the responsibility to ensure that it does not become weaponised against others, as happens all too often. Otherwise, like everything Nature has divined and put in place, it returns to give us a taste of what we sowed.

At the end of the day it comes down to personal responsibility and personal integrity. While I fully accept my share of the responsibility for whatever I may have contributed to the issues to which I draw attention, it is my prayer that others avoid the mistakes I have made. What seems clear to me is that the present course only leads to the blind alley.

I wish to end more or less the same way I started, by recalling a few other lyrics of Sinatra's "My Way":

I've loved, I've laughed and cried  
I've had my fill my share of losing  
And now, as tears subside  
I find it all so amusing  
To think I did all that  
And may I say - not in a shy way  
Oh no, oh no, not me  
I did it my way  
For what is a man, what has he got  
If not himself, then he has naught  
To say the things he truly feels



And not the words of one who kneels  
The record shows I took the blows  
And did it my way

I once more thank the University of Port Harcourt; my family,  
my colleagues and students for supporting me. I thank all of  
you here for honouring me.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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### **PROFESSOR EME NWACHUKWU EKEKWE**

Eme Nwachukwu Ekekwe was born in Igbere Clan, Bende Local Government Area of Abia State, to the family of Nmecha Jenny and Nwachukwu Ekekwe Ukaegbu on 03 September 1949. He attended Igbere Central School (1955 – 1962) as well the famous Hope Waddell Training Institution, Calabar (1963 – 1966). As a result of the Nigeria-Biafra war he could not complete his secondary education in Hope Waddell but did so in 1971, at the Oakridge secondary School in London Ontario, Canada.

Ekekwe earned the BA (Hons) degree from the University of Western Ontario, London, Canada and the MA and PhD degrees from Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada in 1975, 1976 and 1980, respectively, all in Political Science.

Ekekwe completed his secondary education on the scholarship of the London Ontario Board of Education. In the third year of his undergraduate studies, he was awarded the Andrew Grant Scholarship for Excellence in Political Science and throughout his years at Carleton University he benefitted from the University's Teaching Assistantship and was awarded the Ontario Graduate Scholarship in 1978.

In both universities that he attended, Professor Ekekwe was very active in student politics and the anti-apartheid movement. As a third year undergraduate student he caused a stir on campus when, in the campus newspaper, the *Gazette*, Ekekwe made a full-page rebuttal of the writing of an unapologetic pro-apartheid History Professor, challenging him to a public debate "anywhere and anytime on campus". At Carleton University he led the African Students Association to successfully campaign for the resignation of a pro-apartheid professor.

Ekekwe returned to Nigeria in 1980, having been employed by the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) as its first Nigerian Director. It was from there he resigned and took up appointment as Lecturer at the University of Port Harcourt in 1981. At various times in-between, Ekekwe served as Personal Assistant to the Military Governor of old Imo State (1986 – 1990), Chairman Editorial Board of Sunray Publications as well as Head of several units in the Public Affairs and Sustainable Development sections of the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited (SPDC).

Professor Eme Ekekwe has twice been Head of Department (1984 -1985; 2012 - 2014), Director of General Studies (1985 – 1986), Assistant Director, Emerald Energy Institute (2011 - 2014). He has also served as Chairman and member of several

Departmental, Faculty and special committees. Between 2014 and (June) 2019 he was Chairman, Editorial Board of *Uniport News*. A former student of, and much influenced by, the late Professor Claude Ake, Ekekwe was appointed the pioneer Director of the Claude Ake School of Government (2014 – 2018) and Occupant of the Claude Ake Professorial Chair of Political Economy (2014 – 2019). Professor Ekekwe has been External Examiner to University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Uyo, Rhema University, Aba as well as Federal University, Otuoke. He is the author of several books, monographs and articles published in international and local journals.

Outside the University system, Professor Ekekwe served as Deputy Chairman of the Federal Government's Bitumen Project Implementation Committee and a member of the Abia State University Governing Council. He has been very active in community service and has received several honours from his Igbere Clan where he was active in community development which culminated in the *Igboto Mma* ceremony he performed in 2014.

Professor Eme Ekekwe is married to Elder/Mrs. Ifeoma Ekekwe. They are parents to three young adults and grandparents to five beautiful and simply glorious girls – Cara, Ti Oluwani, Clarissa, Ola Oluwani and Claribel.

**Professor Ndowa S. E. Lale**

Vice Chancellors