

Our Chance, Our Choice, Our Legacy*

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Everyone present is a witness to an event not merely born out of nostalgic yearnings to rendezvous with colleagues and friends after years of hard work and sojourn in the US, but rather, a gathering of professionals, bonded by a shared national and philosophical identity. It was born out of our resolve to look back and discuss our past, present and the future as it relates to our origin. My address will therefore elaborate on our shared philosophical identity, elucidate on how our training in Ife influenced us, and how this in turn places us in a unique position to assist our alma mater and Nigeria.

How a country is run, in whose interest and for what purpose depends on the nature of the elite who constitute the ruling class. In the case of our homeland, it is a general belief that the elite in the diaspora have a role to play in the development of Nigeria. Desirable elite are those imbued with the attribute of selflessness, who place their society before selves, who shun ostentatious lifestyles and value democratic ideals, including justice and equity. It is my belief that our experience in Ife, fortified by our exposure in the US, affords us a unique platform to imbibe the qualities of desirable elite.¹ How did the Ife philosophical identity, combined with our experience in the US afford us these qualities?

Our outlook on the world is a result of our upbringing and experience. We were formed back in Nigeria as we grew up, went through schools and completed our professional education. Our experiences in the formative years added up and

prepared us for life. Upon emigration, we were free of any college loans and stayed comfortable in the enviable status of the middle class. We may describe life in the US as not easy, but we are better off than most Nigerians and a majority of Americans. Reflecting back, our experience in Ife was hard, challenging, but enriching in many ways than we probably imagined then. How is this so?

The motto of our university is 'For Learning and Culture'.² Not long after I matriculated in 1978, I came to the realization that the intent of the founding fathers (and mothers) was not just to produce professionals, scientists and experts in the humanities who would be versed in the books, but who would acquire the attributes of cultured men. Our university was conceived and established under a founding father who sought to bring about an egalitarian society.³ In the past, this visionary leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, was asked whether a burden of free education would not be too much to bear for a nation. In response, he cynically advised his critics to try illiteracy.

An ideal environment for training health professionals is one that fosters intellectual challenge, curiosity, the spirit of inquiry and excellence in practice.⁴ We received our professional education where students were made to become aware and appreciative of multiple ways of thinking, diverse social concepts, values and ethical behaviour. It is my belief that our education prepared us for identifying, redefining and fulfilling our responsibility to the

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society. Gathering here today therefore affirms our upbringing in the school of social responsibility.

Ife is one institution where contending ideas are allowed to develop and where a left of center ideological bent predominates. It is an environment where the class nature of society and the need for government control of a national economy is firmly rooted. We trained where many were conscious of the danger posed by an unrestrained capitalism. Based on the studied periodicity of global economic recessions and depression, Ife has always been in the forefront on issues about Africa and a new world economic order.

Our university is one in which the death of Walter Rodney would be marked with befitting fanfare. It is an environment where Patrick Wilmot would find genial hosts and for which the likes of Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Chinua Achebe of Africa would be proud. We trained in a community where a Students' Union Government would preempt any punitive action against their compatriots elsewhere in Nigeria or the world. Such were the nationalist and internationalist perspectives to which we were bred in our times.

A common practice among Nigerians and other immigrants in the US is to assist friends and relations in need in their homelands. Most likely, all of us are highly involved in giving back to our communities in one way or another. Therefore, just as many other compatriots, we may have contributed to the Nigerian economy through money remittances,⁵ and perhaps building projects, businesses and other activities. As people of faith, many of us, I believe, continue to make charitable donations to worthy causes through our churches and mosques.

If it is the case that we have given individually to our relatives, alma mater, and perhaps our home country, why is it still necessary to gather here to do what we have always done? What more can we add to our good deeds by being here today? I found a plausible answer to these questions in my musings on the experience of man in society as validated by Darwin's theory. For now, in no other species than man is the capacity to leverage individual and collective disposition to gain control over nature best

realizable. Given that organisms that cooperate with each other can achieve a differential reproductive success than those that act individually,⁶ perhaps as a collective body, we are better suited to help our profession and homeland and leave a lasting legacy.

The office of alumni relations is an important one in any university, as the alumni can contribute immensely to the growth of a university or even transform it. Today, as we deliberate and reflect on our accomplishments and challenges in the US, we shall compare notes and share our experiences to further assist our alma mater. Alumni with global world outlook would not only seek to improve their home programme, they would also seek to contribute to the larger society. By convening here today, we have created a chance to collectively give back to our birthplace, we have chosen this time, and perhaps we have set the pace for others to follow.

Today is a continuation of our giving and sacrifice. Sacrifice is a selfless service for which no reward is expected. As elites, our giving is in fulfillment of some vicarious liability we share with many other Nigerian compatriots, following many years of neglect of our educational institutions. Our buildings have fallen apart, and our programmes are not equipped with state-of-the-art instrumentation. To many, the sordid state of our universities could be blamed mainly on those who have been managing affairs in Nigeria.

Time and again, when I thought about the fate of Nigeria, I kept wondering why our country remained underdeveloped in spite of the resources at its disposal? In all the countries of the world, there are peoples of faith, but not a handful of these peoples are as prayerful as Nigerians. Nigeria has exported pentecostalism to other parts of Africa and the world.⁷ Among our people, scientific outlook remains a tall order, faith remains their opium, and a great mass remain in poverty. Yet we must not give up on Nigeria.

A lot of the progress that man has made in the course of time has been attributed to the discoveries of the origin and dynamics of the universe. Theories of the big bang, black holes and singularities,⁸ and a continuously expanding universe,⁸⁻⁹ credible as they

are, they do not answer all questions about life on earth and the cosmos. Nevertheless, in the world today there is still constant but needless battle between science and religion. Time and again, the courts have ruled against the dilution of science with creation in the US. As enlightened people, we must not allow our beliefs to cloud how we view science.

Ladies and gentlemen, a scientific outlook on the world is necessary for world peace. In recognition of this fact, the United Nations General Assembly, in 2009, celebrated the quadricentennial anniversary of great accomplishments in planetary science. The year 2009 was declared the International Year of Astronomy in order to promote science,¹⁰ and perhaps temper religious fundamentalism. In 1609, Galileo built his first telescope and made revelations that undermined the Aristotelian model of an unchanging and Earth-centered cosmos, while Kepler espoused the first two laws of planetary motion.

During my last visit to Ife, an alumnus bought a generating set for the department, while a group of alumni here has considered renovating the lecture rooms in the department. We must think of more ways in which we can be of support to OAU and Nigeria. We may consider setting up an endowment fund for specific projects in the department; we may also consider assisting in the regular publication of the *Journal of the Nigeria Society of Physiotherapy*.

Fellow compatriots, I want to remind us about ourselves. Giving the current global economic crisis, it appears that many who want to retire early may have to defer such a dream for at least a few more years. Are we saving enough for our retirements? Are we visiting our doctors regularly? Are we having our annual breast and prostate checkups? Are we exercising regularly? Do we take care of ourselves the way we take care of others?

Finally, I want us to continue to seek self improvement and live a balanced life. Just as by maintaining 60 to 40 quadriceps-hamstrings maximal torque ratio ensures knee kinetic balance and forestalls knee injuries in an athlete, so does a balanced life guarantee good health and happiness.

I thank our hosts in Michigan for their effort in making this gathering possible. I thank all who came from far and near. I thank you all for listening.

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