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A Political Economy of African Universities

Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe

University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom

Abstract

I advance two objectives in this article. One, I draw on my autoethnography as well as the industrial disputes, strikes and other interventions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria to reflect on the experience and role of home-based African academics-intellectuals-scholars and national academic unions in engaging the neo-liberal policies and pro-imperialist transformations imposed on the continent and its public institutions-sectors, especially, higher education and the public universities by the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) and their International Financial Institutions (IFIs)—the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Two, I show that although the 1960s–90s were decades of deep-seated authoritarian rule in Africa, this period also marked the apogee and golden era in the historical articulation of resistance politics by African academics-intellectuals-scholars and university students against neo-imperialism and state repression. I build on my thirty-seven years of active involvement in university life—research and teaching—on Africa, Latin America, Middle East and South Asia (1988–2025) to construct a political economy of Africa's public universities and an ethnography of ASUU's engagements, limitations and resort to complicity, co-optation and despair in its relations to the state.

Introduction

A crisis in education would at any time give rise to serious concern even if it did not reflect a more general crisis and instability in modern society. "*The Crisis in Education*" p. 173—(Hannah Arendt 1968, 173).

Now that Okeke has become a soldier, where are their boots. Chapter Two p. 41—(Achebe 1960, 41).

Problems are like plants. They also have roots (Awolowo 1981a, 91; 1981b, 109).

This article draws on my autoethnography as well as the industrial disputes, strikes and other interventions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria to reflect on the impact of the neo-liberal transformations taking place across Africa's public universities from the 1990s–2020s onwards. The 1960s–1990s were decades of deep-seated authoritarian rule in Africa. This period also marked the golden era in the historical articulation of resistance politics by African academics-intellectuals-scholars and university students against neo-imperialism and state repression. The pro-imperialist transformations from the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) and their International Financial Institutions (IFIs)—the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank of the 1990s—eroded the achievements of the early post-independence universities in Africa. Studies have not connected the resultant crisis with the problems in African universities.

In the 1980s, global economic shifts and political transformations dealt a fatal blow to the foundational pillars of postcolonial and socialist regimes across the world. Unable to respond to the domestic and external challenges to their attempted monopolization of economic and political power, these states succumbed to economic liberalization, macroeconomic stabilization, political pluralism and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Scholars have examined the decline and transformation of communist and socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Few studies have investigated the fate of postcolonial states in the global South and

in Africa in particular. From this perspective, Africa's economic performance has been debilitating. Most devastated have been agriculture, education, healthcare and infrastructure.

From the 1990s-2020s onwards, the state in Africa has defended and enhanced external policy impositions from international institutions as well as neglecting and repressing its public universities. This has been occasioned by the impact of the contradictions in the character and nature of the state; the crisis in its political economy; the failure of its neo-patrimonial elites and their distributive pressures; as well as the role of the IMF and the World Bank—through the SAPs and other macroeconomic stabilization policies (Arowosegbe 2025). The impact of the African crisis and African tragedy on African universities has not been established in the literature on African development and African universities.¹ Beyond the sharply critical highly externalist examinations of the political economy of African development, balanced scholarship on this subject must establish how this crisis continues to undermine the transformative efforts by African academics-intellectuals-scholars and national academic unions to reverse the marginalization of the knowledge produced by African institutions² at global institutional sites and spaces where fundamental decisions on the continent are made.³

I focus on Nigeria to show how the conditioning effects of this crisis—its economic hardship and intrusive state politicization of the universities—inform (i) the abandonment of knowledge production; (ii) the complicity and co-optation of home-based African academics-intellectuals-scholars in institutionally-destructive elite projects with state officials; (iii) the deaths, exit and relocation of Africa's best-trained and highly qualified manpower away from the universities; and (iv) the resort to consultancy among other low and vile coping strategies as well as (v) the politics of despair by appropriating and instrumentalizing public office for bureaucratic aggrandizement, cake-sharing and neo-patrimonial practices that undermine academic integrity and the quality of university education. I explain how these indulgencies inform the abandonment of popular struggles and underline comprises and conversion of office to dark opportunities for hegemonic co-optation with the state for primitive accumulation through appointments and kick-backs by African academics—in and outside the public universities.⁴ ASUU's engagement with international capitalism and the state from the "Global Sixties" to the 1990s highlights my understanding of Hannah Arendt's transformative politics as freedom. The post-1990s compromises by its members and other stakeholders in elite alliances with the state—foreground my claim on its reputational decline from the 1990s. These illustrate my thesis on the lack of change and development in African academies and societies. I underline the impact of this lack of change and transformation in the elite practices in Nigeria's public universities in (i) the brain drain, (ii) collapsed research infrastructures and (iii) desertion of the academies by the most-talented minds.

¹ As reported by Giovanni Arrighi (2002, 5), in 1975, Sub-Saharan Africa's regional GNP per capita stood at 17.6 percent of the world's per capita GNP. By 1999 this dropped to 10.5 percent. Based on comparative global South estimates, records and standards, adult literacy, health and mortality levels in the region deteriorated. With 34% of its population classified as undernourished; life expectancy at birth dropped to 49 years. Infant mortality rates in Africa were 107 per 1,000 live births in 1999—compared to 32 per 1,000 live births for Latin America and 69 for South Asia. Roughly 9 percent of its 15 to 49-year-olds lived with HIV/AIDS—the highest throughout the global South. Its statistics on tuberculosis was 121 per 100,000 people compared with 45 in Latin America and 98 in South Asia. On the conceptual origin and discursive shift from "African crisis" to "African tragedy", see Colin Leys (1994).

² These include the colleges of education, polytechnics, technical and vocational institutions, research centres and institutes and the universities linked with the continent's intellectual, scientific and technological development. Thandika Mkandawire's (2015, 52-75) illustrations on these are apt and instructive for this work.

³ I have examined the impact of the involvement and policies from the BWIs – the IMF and the World Bank – in Africa's higher education sector, together with the failure of the state in Africa to harness and productively transform the continent's demographic boom – youth population – from the 1990s onward among other external factors (Arowosegbe 2024). Here, I concentrate on how the resultant crisis undermines the transformative efforts and other interventions by home-based African scholars and national academic unions to redeem the situation.

⁴ My usage of primitive accumulation in this article is best understood as greed.

I lean on Hannah Arendt's political thought on freedom and revolution (1958; 1963); non-violence (1970) and totalitarianism (1951) to interrogate the contribution and dividends of ASUU's politics to decolonize academic freedom and university autonomy in African universities; and the impact of such efforts.⁵ To substantiate my point on the anti-developmental character and role of the state in Africa in undermining the transformative efforts by African academics-intellectuals-scholars and national academic unions, I showcase ASUU's industrial strikes and other struggles—spanning several decades and regimes—against economic repression by international capitalism and state dictation and neglect.

As the crisis of Africa's public universities continues to worsen, and as the state continues to constrain, neglect and stifle the development and expansion of scientific knowledge and thought, attention has focused on the impact of infractions and policies imposed on these institutions by the IFIs and the operations of the state in Africa. Far fewer efforts have been invested in examining the interventions by African scholars and national academic unions in addressing and mitigating this situation. Their constraints and limitations have hardly been brought to the fore. Given their role in producing the normative knowledge that is central for defining societal paradigms and universes of cognition and perception (Mazrui 1992; 1994), understanding the contributions and limitations of African academics and the universities offers instructive insights into Africa's backwardness, underdevelopment and their possible transformations.

Africa's public education and public universities suffer chronic underfunding, declining quality of faculties, poor remuneration, state repression and violations of academic freedom. The latest illustration of this state-led crisis in Nigeria is telling. This is underlined by the unrepentant resolve by the state to commercialize and privatize public education. In his address at the 2024 Civil Service Week, the Minister for Education Professor Tahir Mamman announced that the Federal Government of Nigeria had concluded that in order for Nigerian youth to access unrestrained quality tertiary education and in view of its limited capacity and resources to meet the heightened demands and needs of its higher education, international and local investors will have the gates of all Nigeria's federal educational institutions open for investment through private-public-private partnership arrangements to be coordinated by the state (The Explainer 2024; News Agency of Nigeria 2024). He described the initiative as aimed at opening up Nigeria's public tertiary education to globally competitive investments for enhanced educational development through the provision of cutting-edge facilities, faculties and funding as well as innovative and transformative infrastructural provision. The nationwide protests and tensions from stakeholders that followed this announcement in June-July 2024 led to the Government's denial of this proposal (Okeke 2024; Tolu-Kolawole 2024). Notwithstanding this denial, the issues generated by the state's intention in this direction raised genuine concerns about the future of public education in Nigeria. They also raise questions about the continued role of popular forces in stemming such tides.

The genealogies of ongoing attempts by the state to commercialize and privatize public university education in Africa are connected to the development of debt and dependency in the global South. To analyze and establish this connection in concrete detail, I draw on existing authoritative interventions in the literature on the political economy of African development and its public universities. I historicize Africa in relation to the dynamics of unequal development and the transformations in world-historical perspectives. I locate sub-Saharan Africa's experience in the broader bifurcation of Third World destinies that has taken place since 1975. My analysis establishes a direct relationship between the development of debt, dependency and economic crisis in Africa on the one hand; and the collapse, decline and withering away of the state together with the crisis and other problems of its public universities on the other. This supports my claim that

⁵ According to Arendt (1958; 1963), freedom is the essence of politics. Modern revolution and its foundations must therefore struggle to establish a new politics and state capable of preserving dignity, human freedom and non-violence.

far from being independent and isolated, the crisis in Africa's public universities is one of the symptoms of a broader crisis. Hence my conclusion that resolving the crisis in African universities must be pursued alongside state reconfiguration, reconstruction and transformation in Africa.

Following this introduction, this article comprises five sections. The first begins with my autoethnography and highlights the "Global Sixties" to the 1990s as the golden era in the historical articulation of resistance politics by African academics and university students against neo-imperialism and state repression in African history. This section offers a political history of the development of university education in Africa. It closes with a note on the role of external actors—chiefly the IMF and the World Bank—and the state in Africa in setting the stage for the continent-wide political economy challenges and crisis in Africa's public universities from the 1990s. In the second section, Nigeria's experience is highlighted to detail out these accounts. Section three offers the first empirical demonstration of my argument. Here, I draw on ASUU to discuss the engagements by national academic unions across the continent, with external forces, international capitalism and the state in Africa. I chronicle and share extensive insights into ASUU's transformative politics—through its industrial strikes and other interventions—as well as the arrests, bans, proscriptions and other repressive responses by the state in Nigeria. The consideration of sub-optimal elite practices and their connections with university decline in Nigeria is underlined in section four. This forms the second empirical treatment of my argument on the conditioning effects of the African crisis and African tragedy on its national education and the public universities. Section five provides an overarching methodological appendix to the work.

Autoethnography and Personal Reflections

My studentship dates to the 1980s. I studied Economics, Government and History as an 'A' Level undergraduate student at the School of Basic Studies (SBS) of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria from 1988–91. My first degree (1992–98) and postgraduate education at the same University (2000–02) together with my doctorate degree at the University of Ibadan (2003–10)⁶ were extended due to local and nationwide strikes—the achievements of which hardly compensated for the lost time and other collateral damages. These were the decades of prolonged military rule (1983–98) in Nigeria. No generation of Nigerian students in the public universities is free from prolonged ASUU strikes. This problem attracted much attention and discussions in the 1990s.

During the 1990s, there was a critical debate on the fate and future of academic freedom in Africa. There were vigorous discussions of the material conditions of higher education and the political economy of Africa's public universities. These extended to an examination of the class-based motives and profit-oriented role of various actors—external and local—in Africa's higher education institutions. The major output of these discussions was the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility of November 1990. This reached back and benefitted from the Dar es Salaam debate of the late 1970s on class, imperialism, the state and underdevelopment in Africa. The resultant reflections among popular forces and the Left led to the published collection edited by Mamadou Diouf and Mahmood Mamdani on *Academic Freedom in Africa* (1994). From the 1990s to 2020s, progressive forces and the literature on the political economy of African development have focused on the economic and social failings of the state in Africa in relation to how to reconstruct and redeem the fast-collapsing social order. Studies have however, not connected this crisis with the problems in African universities. Against the backdrop of the constrained career possibilities for home-based African academics-scholars-intellectuals; continued assaults on higher education by neo-liberal marketization and state repression; poverty and underfunding among other limitations, I discuss my lived-experience on the political economy

⁶ These were in History, Philosophy and Political Science—with specialization in Intellectual History, Political Theory and Global African Studies.

of higher education and the public universities in Nigeria to reflect on what one might conjecture about the future of the public universities in Africa.

Intellectuals and university teachers in Africa were a solid anti-colonial, nationalist force from the early post-independence period to the 1990s. However, owing to the gruesome impact of national economic crisis and repressive state control and neglect, their reputational weight declined sharply from the 1990s–2020s onwards. Their contribution towards building democratic, developmental and socially-inclusive states capable of catching up⁷ (Mkandawire 2015; Arowosegbe 2016) in critical areas of backwardness and lag—also continues to be undermined by the African crisis.

From the Global Sixties to the 1990s (Slobodian 2012; Monaville 2019), African academics-intellectuals-scholars—and students' unions—contributed transformative postcolonial revolutionary struggles towards building new forms of politics and states capable of securing African freedom—with possibilities for a new beginning—a *la* Congo, Dar es Salaam, Dakar, Ibadan, Makerere and Zaria. As a unique moment, decolonization ushered in expectations for innovation in African higher education. The early post-independence African universities exemplified the meaning of academic freedom for the rest of the world (Ivaska 2024, 681). Their efforts at challenging the international order and their own states were among the most prominent beacons for the global democratic movements of that era. The loud and radical support by Congolese academics and students for Patrice Lumumba's denouncement of violence under Belgian colonial rule; his nationalist orientation and overt socialist-Soviet appeal that clashed against Belgian and United States' neo-colonial projects together with their protests after his assassination—announced and give birth to a new context for Africa's decolonization struggles.

Nigeria's early post-independence profile as part of an emerging global South—alongside China, India and Japan—in a new south-driven agency in the context of reorganized global economic equations and political power structure aided the global competitiveness her national universities. This offered them a strong foundation. Her definition of Africa as the centrepiece of her foreign policy; her deployment of economic strength for fighting against União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA)/National Union for the Total Independence of Angola and against apartheid in South Africa; together with her role in ending the civil wars and conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia are noteworthy in her regional power projection (Herskovits 1977-78; Arowosegbe 2017). In Zaire, the early postcolonial attempt by Lubumbashi academics-scholars to radically transform the operations, research and teaching at *Université Nationale du Zaïre*, which clashed-overlapped with the official Zairean policy of *Authenticité* in the context of national cosmopolitanism and decolonization highlighted the intellectual and socio-political dynamism of the Lubumbashi intelligentsia (Henriet 2022). This underlined Lubumbashi and Zaire as important nodes in the continent-wide post-independence intellectual networks. To these were added the early transformative initiatives from the universities in Cairo, Gold Coast, Harare and Nairobi.

These efforts signalled a new era of global prominence for Third World politics. They inspired, reawakened and transformed several anti-colonial movements in Algeria, Angola and Egypt as well as black intellectuals in the Caribbeans, civil rights activists in North America, non-aligned luminaries in Asia, rulers of the new states in East and West Africa together with students' and youths' movements worldwide (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 2014; Gerald and Kuklick 2015; Monaville 2019, 2024). The development of African socialism—Arusha Declaration—and the neo-Marxist debate by the Left and other radical scholars at the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1970s are other heated illustrations of such transformative politics.⁸ The "Fees Must Fall" and "Rhodes Must

⁷ "Catching up" here is not meant in reference to meeting up with Europe and North America or the East Asian Tigers. But as noted above, Africa needs to do this in its critical areas of lag and need.

⁸ On the transformative impact of the Dar es Salaam debate of the 1970s, see Arowosegbe (2012; 2018, 29-78; 50-67).

Fall" protests begun by a level three political science student at the University of Cape Town in 2015 are the latest additions to these anti-colonial struggles by African academics and students.

In the early post-independence period, decolonizing African universities was framed in terms of counter-penetration, diversification and domestication (Mazrui 1992). Africanization called for a change in the conception and purpose of the transplanted universities. From this period—the Global Sixties to the 1990s—African universities demonstrated strong initiatives in this direction and project. From the 1990s-2020s, these initiatives were supported by the need to localize and transform the inherited neo-colonial universities from their cultural and structural dependency as overseas extensions and representatives of the universities in post-Enlightenment Europe. Localization demands a transformation of their culturally alienating character and an emphasis on their problem-solving capacity. Put together, Africanization and decolonization require an appreciation of context together with the protection of African culture—complemented with the appropriation and domestication of Western and other productive technologies undergirded by a critical containment of foreign life-styles and verbal cultures in considerable selectivity. After many post-independence decades, the failure to attain these goals and objectives has been disappointing. From the 1990s-2020s, the achievements of Africa's golden era have been undermined by the harsh realities of its all-pervading continent-wide crisis. The most visible limitation of African scholars is the failure to decolonize the neo-colonial character of the post-colonial universities.⁹

The epic illustration of the cultural-intellectual dependence by African academics, African governments and African universities is the absence of carefully-thought-out national development plans—economic and educational—to critique and productively internalize external initiatives across the states. From the early post-independence period, several efforts have been sunk into attempts at building and unifying African institutions as a way out of the legacy of conflict and underdevelopment. The Lagos Plan of Action for Economic Development for Africa (1980-2000) and the Final Act of Lagos (1980); Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) (1986-1990) later converted to the United Nations Programme of Action for Africa's Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD) (1986); the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP) (1989); the African Charter for Popular Participation for Development (1990); and the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UNN-NADAF) (1991) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) 2001 are major examples. Politically, the Casablanca and Monrovia Groups and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) of 1963 aimed at continent-wide unification. Most of these frameworks stemmed from the failed attempts at addressing the continent's leading problems of the post-independence period. However, notwithstanding their African inputs and the emphasis on integration, popular participation in national development and self-reliance, these initiatives have been overwhelmed by SAPs and other externally-imposed neo-liberal packages.

The role of African universities in engaging and productively transforming these efforts for sustainable development has been marginal. The role of the state in Africa in minimizing the contradictions, inequalities and inequities in the global market systems and thereby spearheading African alternatives to market-led growth has been unsuccessful. As Africa remains conflict-ridden and saddled with dependent capitalist economies in permanent crises, the optimism about the developing states—talked about and theorized from the 1980s-1990s—together with the transformative universities—(*a la* Mazrui 1992)—has not materialized.¹⁰ These limitations pose

⁹ Beyond their own demands and the survival interests of their members, African scholars are no longer able to lead and project any clearly defined national agenda and nationwide reform.

¹⁰ For a theoretically strong critique and statement on the developmental states in Africa, see Mkandawire (2001).

many threats to the future of the universities in Africa and the health and quality of its societies and states *vis-à-vis* promoting and securing human flourishing—beyond mere survival.

The IMF and the World Bank are directly implicated and instrumental to the economic misfortunes and educational outcomes of all the states in Africa in which they intervened. In Nigeria, the interventions by the IMF and the World Bank have reduced state autonomy as the state remains tied to deals with these institutions which require the imposition of reforms designed with Western ambitions and ideals in mind. These interventions have failed to address the root causes of administrative failures together with economic and educational crises—offering short term solutions to much deeper problems. Thus, SAPs and other similar economic and educational reforms have continued to undermine educational development and state autonomy in Nigeria.

Following the announcement at a meeting with the vice chancellors of Africa's public universities in Harare in 1986 by the World Bank that higher education in Africa amounted to a misallocation of funds that could be used more productively in other sections of the education sectors (Mkandawire 2015, 65), African elites surrendered decision making and state sovereignty to free market capitalism. Across the global South, the economic crisis of the 1980s recreated the background to the precarious governmental hostilities against the civil society, the media, the population and universities.¹¹ This led to the imposition of austere and repressive cuts in agriculture, education, health care and other already hard-pressed and impoverished social services.

The Universities in Nigeria

The early post-independence period (1960s-1970s) marked the politicization and state control of African universities. This phase witnessed the oil boom in Nigeria. It began as a trickle among the 1960 exports. Oil earnings expanded into a national bonanza and provided the regular capital flow for financing physical and social infrastructures.¹² The "Oil Revolution of October 1973" transformed Nigeria's steady annual income into a mega fortune (Joseph 1978, 222). It underwrote the expansion of existing educational institutions. This was accompanied by massive activism among the students.¹³ In Europe and North America, this period witnessed the recession and stagnation of the 1970s—1973–75. However, as the developed economies struggled to mitigate the sudden increased cost of imports and tighten their belts and nooses, policy makers and state officials in Nigeria devised ways of siphoning off and spending the oil proceeds-petro-Naira. About three years later, the realities changed. The total annual expenditure caught up with the increased income from oil export. The ever-increasing bank accounts fizzled out-shrank like an aborted dream. Nigeria began to draw on her reserves to meet new commitments. The challenges

¹¹ For an analysis of this crisis across the Third World; its connections to the broader political economy of global turbulence together with Third World regional dimensions and statistics, see Giovanni Arrighi (2002; 2003). On the funding denials, discriminations and state-led assaults against higher education, public universities and the humanities in Brazil and Latin America from this period, see Sidney Chalhoub et al. (2020).

¹² At this period, Nigeria's economic importance was acknowledged worldwide. It was the second-largest supplier of crude oil to the United States of America. Following its election to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), it played a major role in the liberation struggles across Southern Africa. It drew on its oil-based economic strength and single-handedly imposed a hitherto unimaginably stark choice on Western economic interests. In August 1977, Lieutenant-General M. A. Olusegun Obasanjo, as Head of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria declared to Nigeria's foreign business partners in Lagos: "invest in black Africa or South Africa, but not both" (Herskovitz 1977-78; 2007; Arowosegbe 2017). This was one of the most important events in that decade for Africa. The policy of using economic strength for advancing decolonization and fighting apartheid received widespread backing in Nigeria then.

¹³ The foremost was the "Ali Must Go" nationwide protest or student crisis of 1978, in response to Government's hike in student fees by General Obasanjo-led military administration, with multiple incidents and police brutally killed 10 students nationwide—at ABU Zaria, the University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos (UNILAG)—among other tertiary institutions. Others were the June 12 uprising in 1993; and the End SARS protest of 2020.

and other vicissitudes that resulted from her loss of control and unpreparedness ushered in the national economic crisis.

The 1980s saw the onset of a nationwide economic crisis; entrenched military rule; and the implementation of SAPs. Unlike the 1960s–70s in which arbitrary control of the universities by the state were Nigeria's defining problems of higher education; economic crisis and repressive state control were the problems of the 1980s. From the 1980s–90s, this crisis and the implementation of macroeconomic stabilization policies impelled an over-reliance on the IFIs. The promise of reviving development in Nigeria was undermined by the unsustainability of the gap between aggregate national demand and aggregate supply highlighted by the steady accumulation of foreign debt. Its net effect was the pressure for adjustment. This led to massive cuts in public education funding and especially, the universities. The heightened dependence on the IMF and the World Bank for funding justified the imposition of terms on Nigeria by these international institutions.

From this period—the 1980s, Nigeria's educational system became challenged and crisis-ridden. This context is exacerbated by collapsed infrastructures, expansion in the number of student enrolments and universities without accurate biometrics and commensurate funding. The absence of reliable demographics constrains national development planning. Lack of requisite statistics inhibits investment planning and projections for the public universities. In 1975–80, for example, the percentage increase in Government's recurrent grant to all Nigerian universities was 13%. In the same period, students' enrolment in all Nigerian universities rose by 98% (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1981). These contradictory trends compromised—pressurized limited state resources. They informed the calls for commercialization and privatization of higher education in Nigeria.

A Political History of ASUU's Struggles

The second postcolonial phase in the struggle for university autonomy by ASUU was from 1980–83 under the presidency of Alhaji Aliyu Shehu Shagari.¹⁴ ASUU's demands for academic freedom, enhanced remuneration and improved working conditions in Nigeria's public universities were not delivered. The Federal Government usurped the disciplinary powers of the Governing Councils of all the federal universities. In December 1980, following the report of the Justice Belonwus Visitation Panel, President Shagari directed the Governing Council of the University of Lagos to dismiss six senior academics without the right of hearing. This led to heated protests and strikes by the Union between 1980–83. It was not until 1986 that the Supreme Court ruled in favour of their reinstatement. This arbitrariness marked the fifteen (15) years of military interregnum (1983–98). During this period, ASUU's struggles focused on the survival of the university system. This was conceived in terms of the (i) conditions of service, that is, salaries and non-salary-related issues; (ii) defence of the right to education; as well as (iii) funding and university autonomy. These and other national issues were framed around anti-military rule demands for democratization.¹⁵

From the third phase, mid-1980s–90s, ASUU's hard stance against the government's harsh policies, especially military rule and SAP made it a target of state extermination. In 1985, the Buhari-Idiagbon regime retrenched several workers. It clamped down on ASUU as well as the

¹⁴ The research for this section is based on my fieldwork, at different periods from 2020–2025, at the secretariats of Nigeria's premier institution, the University of Ibadan and the other four, first-generation universities – Ahmadu Bello University Zaria; Obafemi Awolowo University Ile Ife; University of Lagos and University of Nigeria Nsukka.

¹⁵ During the military administration of Generals Murtala Muhammed/Olusegun Obasanjo (1975–1979), ASUU fought against the debt peonage and Nigeria's re-colonization by western capitalism. Under the Generals Muhammadu Buhari-Tunde Idiagbon military administration of (1983–85), the Union pushed for a principled opposition to military dictatorship. Under General Ibrahim B. Babangida's administration (1985–1993), it struggled against the implementation of the Nigerian Universities Innovation Project (NUIP), SAP; the privatization of university education; and the World Bank's US\$120 million loan.

National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) and the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA). It arrested, detained and sacked the leadership and members of these associations. ASUU resisted Buhari-Idiagbon's undemocratic termination of the cafeteria system and withdrawal of subsidies on accommodation. It struggled against the imposition of Decree Number 16 of 1984, which transferred the powers of the senates of all federal universities to determine, monitor and regulate academic programmes to the National Universities Commission (NUC).¹⁶ In response to the Union's opposition of SAP, General Babangida accused ASUU, National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) of planning to topple his regime.

Following the gruesome killing of some students at ABU Zaria by *kill-and-go* anti-riot mobile police during the anti-SAP protests of 1986 (Mohammed 1986; Arowosegbe 2025, 68), a panel of enquiry chaired by retired Major General Emmanuel Abidoye was put in place by General Babangida. This recommended the dismissal of many radical lecturers at ABU Zaria "*for teaching what they were not paid to teach*" (Mustapha and Othman 1986). In 1987, the Minister of Education, Professor Jibril Aminu dismissed ASUU's national President Dr. Festus Iyayi and another branch Executive member of the Union, Dr. B. Agbonfoh on a charge from which they had been previously absolved. This dismissal resulted from the opposition by the local branch of ASUU at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) against the FGN's imposition of Professor Grace A. Williams as Vice Chancellor. To this opposition was added heated resistance by UNIBEN's ASUU to the Babangida administration and its policies.

Governmental hostility and ASUU's resistance came to a head during the 1988 strike. This strike protested the non-implementation of the Elongated University Salary Scale (EUSS) promised by General Babangida and the unabated impoverishment of university teachers nationwide by the state. In addition to academic freedom and university autonomy; ASUU demanded the implementation of the Elongated University Salary Scale (EUSS) and the setting up of a Joint Negotiation Committee between the Federal Military Government and the Union. On 07 August 1988, ASUU was banned and proscribed.¹⁷ The Minister for Education, Professor Jibril Aminu announced the official seizure of all ASUU's assets and properties. He directed all lecturers to immediately return to class and threatened to sack any university staff and union members that failed to return to work by Monday 11 August 1988. ASUU President Dr. Attahiru M. Jega and his predecessor Dr. Festus Iyayi were detained and tortured. Their passports together with those of other officials were seized. Later, members of the proscribed ASUU formed the University Lecturers Association (ULA). Earlier in March 1990, the Babangida administration had announced its intention to draw a \$120million US World Bank loan for Nigerian universities. The harsh conditions attached to this foreign loan informed its opposition by lecturers and students and their Unions. In pursuance of its resistance against this foreign loan, in April 1990, the ULA organized an anti-World Bank Conference at Obafemi Awolowo University Ile Ife.¹⁸

Upon the completion of this Conference, the Gideon Orka coup was announced. This took place on Sunday 22 April 1990. Senior role players within the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) connected the ULA Conference with the coup. On 02 May 1990, Dr. Idowu Awopetu, Professor Omotoye Olorode and some other local branch leaders of the ULA were arrested across Nigeria—Benin, Ibadan, Lagos, Port Harcourt and Zaria. The other academics were released after many

¹⁶ This Decree appropriated and hijacked the accreditation of all academic programmes from their professional bodies and transferred that power to the NUC. It imposed what it called minimum standards on all academic programmes.

¹⁷ Upon this proscription, the Non-Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (NASU) and the other unions in Nigerian universities dissociated themselves from ASUU.

¹⁸ This was welcomed by popular forces as an opportunity to lead Nigeria out of the dead-end, doldrum and hopelessness of military rule. Its active participants came from the Campaign for Democracy (CD); the Civil Liberty Organization (CLO); the Campaign for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR); the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) among other Nigeria-based pro-democracy organizations.

days of military interrogation. Idowu Awopetu and Omotoye Olorode were however detained for three (3) months. It was not until 01 August 1990 that they were released. Agents of the State Security Service (SSS) premised these arrests and detention on the provisions of Decree Number 2 of 1984. Upon their release, on 31 August 1990, the Minister for Education, Professor Jibril Aminu in a letter he signed, "ordered" them to resign voluntarily in public interest. In response to their reluctance, they were compulsory retired. They were also evicted from their university accommodation. However, in response to pressure from students; the human rights community and the ULA, Justice Monilola A. Fafade of Port Harcourt High Court declared the letter "requiring" their compulsory retirement as *prima facie* illegal; and ordered their immediate reinstatement. Towards the end of 1990, ASUU was de-proscribed. This de-proscription neither improved matters nor resolved outstanding contradictions and tensions. Thus continued the plight of the Union.

After its Delegates Conference of 1991 in Badagry, ASUU approached the Babangida administration for discussion on how to improve the material and working conditions of the teachers in Nigerian universities. This effort led to two rounds of negotiation. Chaired by Mr. Senas Ukanah,¹⁹ the first broke down after it was mired by a disagreement on Government's offer on salary. This negotiation was suspended by its Chair on 30 May 1991. Its inconclusiveness was seized upon by the Government for imposing a unilateral salary package. Further efforts at securing Government attention were carefully frustrated by state officials. Accordingly, on 14 May 1992, ASUU declared another strike. However, based on the intervention of an Industrial Action Process (IAP), this strike was suspended after one week. The IAP ordered both sides to resume negotiation. The Government did not comply with this order. This informed ASUU's resumption of its strike on 20 July 1993. In a diachronic display of force, for the second time, ASUU was banned on 23 August 1993. This time, the Union ignored its ban and intensified its struggle. The failure by the Government in its efforts at breaking this strike compelled its eventual negotiation with the banned Union. This second negotiation was chaired by the Minister of Establishment and Management Services Mr. Gilbert Owelle Chikelu. He also led the Federal Government's team. ASUU was represented by its national President, Dr. Attahiru M. Jega and other members of its NEC. The deliberations and meetings of this negotiation led to the 1992 FGN-ASUU Agreement.

Signed on 03 September 1992, the resultant Agreement represented a rare milestone in ASUU's history and in the trajectory of labour-state relations in Nigeria. One, for the first time in Nigeria's post-independence history, the Union successfully pinned the Government on a rational and workable understanding between labour and the state, in this case, ASUU and the FGN on the development and management of the universities. Two, beyond affirming the Union's right to collective bargaining with the state, this agreement provided for a periodic review of the funding needs of Nigerian universities according to the changing budgets, costs and requirements of the respective courses offered by the universities *vis-à-vis* the changing dynamics and realities of the global and local educational markets. Three, it formed the basis for future negotiations with the state and struggles by the Union. Given ASUU's central role in anti-military rule movements and pro-democratic resistance, the 1992 agreement strengthened the commitment by popular forces to Nigeria's transition to democratic governance. The Agreement also led to the establishment of the Education Trust Fund (ETF). This development provided the platform for the Education Tax Act of 1993 as well as the Education Tax Act Number 17 of 2003 that led to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) in 2011. Its promises were, however, short-lived as the next governments reneged on its implementation.

¹⁹ A former university lecturer, after transferring his services to the Federal Civil Service, Senas Ukanah later became a Permanent Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Education.

General Sani Abacha's administration (17 November 1993–8 June 1998) made friendly overtures to ASUU. It sought to subtly mobilize the Union to support its sit-tight agenda. Following the practices of his predecessor—General Ibrahim B. Babangida's Government—General Abacha tried to deradicalize and politicize the Union through the allocation of federal contracts and political appointments to opinion leaders as well as prominent senior university academics nationwide. This was central to Abacha's politics of hegemonic co-optation. It was the legitimization veneer for his self-succession transition to civilian presidency. He sought to co-opt ASUU and other anti-military rule popular radical unions. This was to silence pro-democracy resistance. However, contrary to the Government's expectations, ASUU refused to work with it. In response to ASUU's refusal to work with the regime on its own terms, the Government also reneged in implementing the 1992 FGN-ASUU Agreement. On its part, ASUU pursued the implementation of the 1992 Agreement as its strongest defence of industrial democracy and national development.

In November 1995, ASUU condemned the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Ogoni.²⁰ This condemnation attracted a harshly written warning from the Minister for Education Dr. M. T. Liman. This was addressed to ASUU's national President, Dr. Humphrey Assisi Asobie. The Minister warned the Union against undermining the efforts of the Government in nation building.

The tense relations between ASUU and the Federal Government remained unabated. It rather escalated and extended existing strike cycles. For example, under General Abacha, ASUU strikes occurred in 1994 and 1996.²¹ Among others, these strikes demanded (i) the announcement of the election victory of the 12 June 1993 presidential election said to have been won by Chief Moshood K. O. Abiola. Other demands included (ii) the re-instatement of the more than eighty lecturers sacked at the University of Abuja by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Isa Mohammed as well as (iii) the renegotiation with Government of the 1992 Agreement. These struggles were unsuccessful. Their demand for the restoration of the election victory of M. K. O. Abiola in the 12 June 1993 presidential election was interpreted in Government circles as political partisanship by ASUU.²² This worsened the Union's relationship with General Abacha, the Minister for Education and other senior state officials. In the long run, rather than meeting ASUU's demands, the Government resorted to political subterfuge and repression. Efforts were made to ethnically and regionally divide members of the Union. Salaries were stopped. University administrations were directed to announce fake resumption of academic activities and university calendars nationwide.²³ The usual appeal from the public and students informed the suspension of the strike by the Union.

In 1996, the Federal Government constituted a negotiation team headed by Professor Umaru Shehu. Its composition complied with the stipulations in the Report of the Cookey Commission.²⁴ Its membership comprised the pro-chancellors of the federal and state universities. However, following ASUU's disapproval of the Government's intention to introduce tuition fees into Nigerian universities as well as the Union's refusal to call off its lingering strike, the Government proceeded on its intention. The outcome of this negotiation was unilaterally announced by the Federal Ministry of Education. The Minister of Education announced the dissolution of ASUU's NEC. The Government also instructed the Governing Councils of all the federal and state universities to negotiate with the branches of ASUU in their universities on behalf of their

²⁰ These were executed by the Nigerian state under General Sani Abacha on 10 November 1995.

²¹ The 1994 ASUU strike lasted for four and half (4½) months. The 1996 ASUU strike lasted for six (6) months.

²² For the first time in its history, ASUU's internal cohesion was affected by this demand. Almost like a blowback, the Union was partially divided across ethno-linguistic and ethno-regional lines nationwide. The resultant polarization was unprecedented. Some colleagues interpreted this demand as democratic and legitimate. Others saw it as over-reaching.

²³ The FGN *reportedly* paid about N8million to some Vice Chancellors to announce and arrange fake reopening of the universities as well as false resumptions of teaching. The resultant confusion weakened ASUU's resolve in the strikes.

²⁴ Federal Republic of Nigeria. *Report of the Presidential Commission on Salary and Conditions of Service of University Staff*. Lagos: National Assembly Press. 319 pp.

members. The aim was to keep ASUU permanently decentralized. ASUU however discountenanced the ban. This was reminiscent of its disregard of General Babangida's ban. Upon the invitation from their Governing Councils, all the local branches presented the same negotiating document that the NEC had submitted to the FGn. The Government's divisive intention thus failed. As a fall-back vendetta, the Federal Government instructed the NUC to request the Vice Chancellors of all public universities to dismiss all the Union's leaders. ASUU's national President Dr. H. Assisi Asobie was sacked at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Other universities also terminated the appointments of the branch leaders of the Union in their universities without trial. These humiliations continued nationwide. Not much was achieved in terms of resolving the disputes. General Abacha's sudden death on 08 June 1998 put an end to the span of his regime.

The new Government between 08 June 1998–29 May 1999 led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar accommodated ASUU's demands and extended some palliatives to the Union. It re-instated all the university lecturers sacked by the Abacha regime over their involvement in the 1996 strike. All the university teachers whose appointments had been terminated based on the provisions of Decree 17 of 1984 were re-instated. Just before it handed over power, on 25 May 1999, this regime signed an evasive and inconclusive agreement with ASUU. This agreement was inconclusive because it did not address academic freedom, basic salaries of lecturers and questions of funding. It merely adjusted academic allowances and recommended that the untouched issues be taken up by a substantive democratic government in the future. Much was thus not achieved under this regime.

Notwithstanding the transition that occurred in May 1999 from military rule to civil democratic politics—after fifteen years of prolonged military rule—Government's responses to ASUU strikes from 1999–2025 have followed the same patterns described above. The working days lost to these nationwide struggles in the Fourth Republic (May 1999–May 2023) have exceeded four and a half calendar years (Arowosegbe 2023, 607; 2024a, 626; 2025). Its last long-drawn strike began on Monday 14 February 2022, ended on Friday 14 October 2022 and lasted for eight months. Its background was the 2020 nationwide strike that began on Monday 23 March 2020—ended on Wednesday 23 December 2020—and spanned 274 working days. The Government responded to this eight-month dispute with deliberate impoverishment, neglect, repression and salary cuts as strategies for co-opting or silencing the striking lecturers.²⁵ Another round of two-week warning strike occurred on Monday 13 October 2025. It was declared on Sunday 12 October 2025 after unsuccessful consultations and negotiations with officials of president Ahmed Bola Tinubu administration. In declaring this strike, ASUU demanded the implementation of FGn-ASUU agreements on the (i) improvement of welfare conditions for lecturers; (ii) increment in salaries; (iii) payment of earned academic allowances; and (iv) university revitalization. In response to (i) interventions by the Senate Committee on Education; (ii) negotiations with the Government's team led by the Minister of Education Dr. Morufu Olatunji Alausa and (ii) pressures from other stakeholders, on Wednesday 22 October 2025, ASUU called off its two-week warning strike. In an address-announcement-statement delivered by its national president, Professor Dr. Christopher Goson Piwuna, on Wednesday 22 October 2025, the Union cited "useful engagements" with the Government and "a return to the negotiation table" as explanations for calling off its two-week warning strike. The disputes and issues that informed these past strikes from ASUU's early post-independence history to date have been recounted by scholars in other works (Jega 1995, 1996). Overall, Government's responses to these struggles reflect a harsh combination of approaches reminiscent of the state's anachronistic-authoritarian, quasi-democratic and repressive character.

²⁵ In Government quarters, these strategies were deliberately deployed to frustrate ASUU members nationwide and thereby crush their capacity, disposition to, and interest in future anti-establishment resistance and strikes generally.

Elite Practices and University Decline in Nigeria

Here, I highlight ongoing challenges and problems at Nigeria's premier and other first-generation universities to underline the impact of the African crisis and African tragedy as well as state decline, state neglect and repression of the academies on academic freedom; knowledge production and university governance in Africa. Owing to the overwhelming impact of external forces, governmental neglect and state repression, internal practices and responses by Nigeria's home-based academics-intellectuals-scholars and university administrators to emergent economic challenges from the 1990s have been debilitating and problematic for university education—undermining the productive transformation of the academies. As Nigerian politics continues to fall into the hands of conservative, counter-productive postcolonial elites, university administrations in Nigeria are also highjacked by corrupt and over-bureaucratized academics whose interests and understanding of the system conflict fundamentally with the essence of a world-class university. Such actors find acceptance from their collaborators in government quarters. In the emergent circumstances, university administrations across the states are marred by a high degree of bureaucratic aggrandizement; low level of public accountability and ruthless pursuits and struggles for private accumulation through looting and the instrumentalization of office. With different dimensions and dynamics across the states, constrained career possibilities; excruciating material conditions occasioned by governmental neglect; and adverse political control have continued to define hostile working conditions for the universities in Nigeria. As a response, Nigeria's home-based academics and administrators have resorted to sub-optimal coping mechanisms. The predisposing conditions appear understandable. The resultant indulgencies are however, compromising and devastating for the integrity and quality of university education. Cake-sharing psychosis, extractive behaviour, fake and sub-standard publishing together with neo-patrimonialism and patron-client relations are the major illustrations of these ruinous practices.

The first conditioning crisis of Nigeria's public universities is the politicization of the academies by university academics, administrators and the state. This politicization creates the environment congenial for bureaucratic aggrandizement; clientele-patronage manipulations; and normless struggles for appointments, kickbacks, promotions, recruitments as well as resource acquisition and allocation by all the groups within the universities. Given their untransformed nature and the expanding governance crisis nationwide, politics actually underdevelops the universities in Nigeria. The resultant political conditions undermine academic freedom and institutional autonomy in ways that are recounted below. The underdevelopment of Nigerian universities by politics results from the politics of independence and the untransformed character of the postcolonial state. In Nigeria, the politics of independence was limited to the acquisition of state power and replacement of colonial manpower by local officials. Nigerian elites develop and dispose of no other wealth than the monopoly of state positions and the support of the pygmals from the global North. No thought is invested in state reconstruction nor the transformation of the inherited structures of the colonial economy and society—by state officials. All the defining attributes and routine practices of the colonial state crept intact into the fabric of the postcolonial state—and continue to determine its operations. There has been no full erasure of the colonial conditions and postcolonial experience. The resultant politics of the academies and the state continues to block the emergence of national universities and a postcolonial state that would have been the objective reflection of the interests of a decolonized society. The underlining dynamics continue to determine the logic of the postcolonial state and its universities. These attributes constitute the political legacy of colonialism. Not surprisingly, in the face of its humanitarian emergencies and multi-dimensional poverty, Nigerian economy remains disarticulated, extractive, non-developmental, outward-looking and uncomplimentary. This legacy derives from the imperial framework of the colonial universities. Given the lack of change and transformation, this model has remained the core impediment undermining the development of the postcolonial universities.

The mode of hiring public officials is important for understanding their capacity and commitment to discipline, ethics and professionalism. This sheds light on their disposition to service delivery and the location of their loyalty. Whether public servants are hired based on merit or political and other criteria has implications for institutional survival (Brierley 2021). Patronage recruits are usually less competent and hardly essential to the continued running of their institutions. Such system of hiring can place undue strain on the public treasury; and undermine investment in capital infrastructure and other critical areas. Partisan appointees intensify corruption and undermine the provision of public services—creating an expansive, institutionally-subversive system of clientelist political economy.

The benefits of patronage appointments include the possibility of extracting campaign work and loyalty from public servants. Two costs are associated with this practice. One, it can lead to inefficient functioning of institutions and the state. Two, with the continued expansion of the public sector, interfering in hiring processes takes a toll *vis-a-vis* time considerations for patrons and politicians. These become heavier for high-skilled appointments than for low-skilled positions. As Sarah Brierley (2021, 185) shows in the case of Ghana, patrons and politicians often retain discretionary control over bureaucrats' careers. As they leverage on these to influence their work, such discretion allows patrons and politicians get both high levels of competence and loyalty.²⁶

Nigeria's experience reveals that when perpetuated in the universities, these practices engender corruption, in-breeding and localization as well as nepotism and the sub-optimal utilization of manpower and public funds through their diversion into non-essential components of the institutions. They undermine academic integrity and merit as well as the quality of university education.²⁷ Nigeria's first-generation public universities are examined to substantiate this claim.

In Nigeria's public universities, academics-intellectuals-scholars and administrators demonstrate a cake-sharing rather than a cake-baking pressure and distributive rather than a productive psychosis. For the most parts, Nigerian universities exist and operate in isolation from the rest of society. Their internal struggles are narrowly defined, focused and limited to the allocation of admissions; appointments; contracts; promotions and recruitments. The backward-forward, integral-organic connection-linkage between the ivory towers and other sectors and units of society—gown and town relationship—written about by Claude Ake (1981) is absent in Nigerian economy and society. In the emergent contexts of constrained career possibilities and shrinking national revenues, these attributes underline the animosity, bureaucratic aggrandizement as well as ruthless competition and toxic collegiality for scarce resources undermining the academics. These considerations underline my thesis about the reputational decline of home-based African academics-intellectuals-scholars *vis-à-vis* their relevance for productive and transformative change in African societies.²⁸

The post-Enlightenment universities in the West are designed to develop and productively transform Western societies. Their colonial-neo-colonial variants are meant to institutionalize

²⁶ For a detailed treatment of merit and patronage in modern bureaucracies in relation to many variations across other postcolonial states, see all the chapters in Joseph LaPalombara (1963/1967).

²⁷ In Nigeria, the purchase of official vehicles for university administrators together with many poorly implemented contracts—often awarded to families, friends and loved ones by public universities' officials among other profligate and riotous spending of national funds—are examples of the sub-optimal and wasteful utilization of taxpayers' money. Far from being exemplary in disciplined and prudent utilization of public funds; by indulging in these acts, the public universities are not morally superior to the national politicians they are wont to critique. These practices nurture the lucrative idleness of public servants in Nigerian universities. They are linked to the broader spectrum of institutional corruption that have dissipated the achievements and reputations of the early post-independence universities.

²⁸ For a strong critique-statement on the reputational decline by African academics-intellectuals-scholars and in particular, ASUU in election administration as well as political and socio-economic engineering, more broadly, see Arowosegbe (2020, 1012-1020; 1023-1028). See also Arowosegbe (2016).

permanent, systematic dependence on the West. Rather than transforming this arrangement for the purpose of domesticating and localizing their beneficial constituents, Nigeria's home-based academics continue to grope as dependent gladiators—with neither market-applicable nor socially-relevant transformative knowledge. Under the tutelage of the IMF, World Bank and other IFIs, no visible efforts are made to retrieve major heritages and knowledges of the society's illustrious pasts. Not surprisingly, Ifa²⁹ and other autochthonous knowledge systems have remained unexplored. As African universities continue to produce unemployable graduates without problem-solving capacity nor socially-applicable skills—wordsmiths instead of worksmiths—these universities have become experimental laboratories for helpless neo-liberal policies.

Conclusion: Methodology and Findings

In order to ensure reliability and representation, the fieldwork for this research was expansive in content, context and coverage. It was longitudinal in duration. I began this between January 2018–August 2019. I wrote the initial draft between 2019–20 as a Senior Researcher at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. I have continued to rework and rewrite the manuscript since then.

In my critique of home-based African academics, I focused on Nigeria's five, first generation universities. These were the earliest recipients of academic practices and intellectual traditions in Nigeria. I zeroed-in on the University of Ibadan—the foremost among these institutions. It was first established as University College Ibadan in 1948 as a College of the University of London.³⁰ I showed how the implanted academic cultures and inherited world-class traditions of university life introduced therein—have been comprised and lost—through the indulgent resort to consultancy; lucrative idleness; patron-clientele relations; and other sub-standard practices by post-1990s generations of in-bred officials working as university administrators and teachers in these academies.³¹ I explain how the spread of these dark-sub-optimal practices to other generations of national, private and state-owned universities, continues to erode institutional capacity, integrity and quality of university education.

My fieldwork enquiries revealed three pathologies. One, many public universities across Africa have neither the capacity nor infrastructure to support their home-based academics to sustainably embark on cutting-edge research. Beyond their weakened physical infrastructure, their finance offices, laboratories, libraries and research support are comparatively inadequate. From the 1990s to the 2020s, these institutions have become ill-equipped and sub-standard. These situations are worsening given the brain drain and the emigration of Africa's best, highly-skilled manpower. The quality of facilities, faculties and funding at universities in the global North is utterly lacking in

²⁹ Ifa is the oracle of divination in Yoruba cosmology. It is an abstract system of mathematical modelling, based on indigenous systems of initiation. It dates back to the existence of the Yoruba race beginning with Oduduwa.

³⁰ I also researched for my Doctorate (PhD) Degree in Intellectual History, Political Theory and Global African Studies as well as taught Political Science at this University from April 2003–October 2023.

³¹ ABU is the only first-generation university located in Northern Nigeria. The other four are located in Southern Nigeria and have played a major role not only in the establishment of private universities as well as the second, third and other subsequent generations of public universities in Southern Nigeria; but also, in transmitting Western-styled academic traditions into those established universities. These four universities have contributed much of the academic and intellectual manpower exported outside Nigeria to distant overseas academies, especially Europe, North America and Southern Africa. ABU is the hub of Left radical scholarship in Nigeria. Its niche areas include research and teaching on Africa and the Middle East; Arabo-Islamic civilization; Islamic intellectual history of Muslim West Africa; the Islamic Library of West Africa among other noted sources of Arabic Literature. Unlike the other four first-generation universities, given its connections with the Caliphate, ABU has strong historical links with the academic world in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Most of the academic staff in the public universities in Northern Nigeria—Bayero University Kano (BUK); University of Jos (UNIJOS); University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID) and Usman Dan Fodio University Sokoto (UDU)—undertake their postgraduate education, Masters and Doctorate Degrees at ABU. Those universities also began largely as satellite campuses of ABU.

many of the public universities in Africa. The mechanisms that support home-based African researchers for applying for funding or joining funding bids are either non-existent or weak. In rare situations where these academics are able to attract funding, the institutional arrangements within the local university structures constrain research funds from reaching the academic departments, individual researchers and research units for whom these grants are meant.

Two, in these universities, there are hardly in existence, institutional mechanisms that balance, recognize and regulate workload for academics engaged in research. To illustrate, in Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, academics are allocated a % of their workload depending on their funded research projects. Their time is also costed into the resultant proposals and research. This system does not exist in most African universities. The universities in Africa hardly reward or support their academics for research-intensive activities. It therefore becomes impossible for many of those academics with incredibly high administrative and teaching workloads to meaningfully engage in research. This leads to a perverse incentive structure in many of these universities. Rather than investing their active early career periods in scholarship, in many of these universities, early and mid-career academics end up in senior administrative roles—thereby trading off their commitment to research obligations.³² This is because there are hardly any institutionally-based research-led career paths available for exploration.

Three, as an impact, the reputational decline of African academics-intellectuals-scholars continues to undermine the relevance of African institutions of indigenous knowledge valorization. This feeds into the decline in the overall quality of African intellectual manpower. Unlike the 1960s–90s in which Adebayo Adedeji, Claude Ake, Samir Amin, Mahmood Mamdani, Mamadou Diouf, Thandika Mkandawire and other well-groomed world-class scholars headed African institutions; African Association of Political Science (AAPS), African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) are examples of Africa's apex institutions now led, from the post-1990s, by inexperienced and low-rated career opportunists whose curriculum vitae, experiences and profiles are only sinking and stagnating African institutions—rather than building and globalizing them.

Post-independence African academics in the Global Sixties invoked Fanon, *Marxism-Leninism* and other liberatory doctrines to underline the transformative impact of knowledge. From the 1990s, corruptive variants of these doctrines now dominate Africa. These are tagged, "If you cannot beat them, you better join them." Senior academics working with corrupt politicians who refuse to build hospitals, roads and schools but give appointments and money to deradicalize and hegemonically co-opt popular forces—illustrate the lack of change and transformation in Africa. Notwithstanding the industrial strikes, African universities are filled with academics who are less interested in being moral checks on Government than in benefitting from its booties. Radical scholarship has thus not had much transformative impact in African societies as it did in the post-Enlightenment universities in Western civilization and all the societies in Asia that carefully followed its principles.

As many home-based African academics-intellectual-scholars are left out of research, African researchers are consistently under-represented in research publications on Africa. For example, in climate change research, [58% of papers on African climate had no African authors \(North et al. 2022\)](#); in health research, only [52.9% of first authors were from the African states of focus \(Hedt-Gauthier et al. 2019\)](#); and [one in five papers published on Covid-19 in Africa included no Africa-based authors \(Naidoo et al 2021; Tonen-Wolyec et al 2022\)](#). Rather than fund and support knowledge production and research, the state in Africa continues to constrain and stifles them.

³² Most of those academics trading off their early and mid-career energies for opportunistic and premature resort to administration, have neither academic nor administrative experience(s) with which to build any world-class academy.

Intensified marketization continues to assert ever-burdensome and excruciating competitive and financial pressures on African academics, African publishers, African universities and other knowledge-sector institutions that are critical to the functioning of democratic society. As neo-liberal and state-driven changes to the funding models, incentive structures and performance benchmarks of African universities continue to erode and threaten their autonomy and resistance against intrusive influence, the realities of tighter budgetary constraints and growing intra-sectoral inequalities are making these institutions intolerant to controversy and critique.³³ With the rise of Artificial Intelligence and other powerful online platforms, the African crisis and African tragedy—illustrated in unassuaged economic pressures and state repression—are rapidly undermining the continued relevance of home-based African scholars and African universities.

The resultant underrepresentation of indigenous African knowledge and African scholars matters greatly for Africa. One, it implies the absence and marginalization of local contents, contexts and priorities in the research that informs investments and policies on the continent. Two, it affirms and perpetuates the myth on the lack of home-based African expertise in these critical areas. From the late 1980s, the alternative for African academics for pursuing serious and sustainable research careers on an active, permanent basis has been to take up full-time positions at universities in the global North. This leads to a perennial loss of academic manpower for the continent. The other option has been to work outside the university structures in consultancy. This puts huge pressure on those academics who are effectively straddling two callings or jobs in order to continue as researchers. Such academics end up as data collectors and processors rather than active or committed research collaborators. The declining involvement by home-based African academics in cutting-edge research undermines academic integrity and the quality of university education for future and present generations of African academics and students.

³³ For an elaboration of this point beyond Africa, see Glenn Tiffert (2020).

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