

A Quick Return to Unilag for the 52nd Convocation Ceremony

By

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For two reasons, I returned to the University of Lagos (Unilag), on January 20, 2022, in an official capacity after almost 29 years, to participate in the 52nd Convocation of the great University, that is, according to President Muhammadu Buhari and many of us, the University of First Choice and the Nation's Pride. I left Unilag as a Senior lecturer in the tumultuous year of 1993 on leave of absence to work at the United Nations as part of the peace support operation in Somalia. I had thought I would be away for only 6 months but it turned out that I was away for 23 years and 10 months.

Of course, I am a proud *Akokite* having obtained a Bachelor degree in Political Science (1976) and another Bachelor in Law (1990). More importantly, however, Unilag paid for my training for a Ph.D. at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in the United States, thanks to the visionary leadership of Prof. Jacob Festus Ade Ajayi of blessed memory. I returned within four years and served for over a decade more than the four years expected of me under the training agreement I signed.

The convocation ceremony was held at the popular J.F. Ade Ajayi Auditorium. When the Auditorium was being built, General Yakubu Gowon, as the Head of State of Nigeria and Visitor to Unilag, had arranged for Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia to be conferred with an honorary Doctorate degree during his 1972 State Visit to Nigeria. The Auditorium was named after the Emperor and the Library of the University of Lagos was named after his host as Yakubu Gowon Library. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia a.k.a Ras Tafari and The Lion of Judah, had led Ethiopian resistance to the brief Italian colonization from 1935-1941, from his exile in England during the Second World War. His resistance only received British support after Italy joined the war on the side of the Axis Powers, in the spirit of the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Haile Selassie mediated without success during the Nigerian Civil War. He had played a pivotal role in realizing the May 25, 1963 creation of the Organization of African Unity, the precursor of the African Union. In addition, a Jamaican religious and political movement had seen the coronation of Emperor Selassie in 1930 as the prophesized arrival of the Holy Messiah who would redeem the black people from slavery and return them to Zion where there would be utmost freedom in a Paradise on Earth. They called themselves Rastafarians from the Emperor's coronation name. Bob Marley and others popularized the Rastafarians using reggae music calling for black people to redeem themselves from 'mental slavery'.

But in his country, the Emperor's rule was under a feudal system that impoverished his people. Starvation was rife. So, little wonder that the Ethiopian military overthrew the Emperor in

September 1974. Murdered or dead from neglect on August 27, 1975, he was buried under a toilet to avoid continued veneration by his supporters until his body was found in 1992 and properly reburied. The initially much loved Yakubu Gowon reneged on his deadline of 1976 to relinquish power in Nigeria and thereby reinstate the civilian rule. This led to the enigmatic Tai Solarin's treatise that was titled: "The Beginning of an End". Of course, like Wole Soyinka, he was incarcerated. But alas, power is transient. Yakubu Gowon was overthrown on July 29, 1975, while attending an OAU Summit in Kampala. He was overthrown by the head of his trusted Brigade of Guards, Col. Joe N. Garba, as he then was. The management of the University of Lagos repossessed the names of the Library and the Main Auditorium and subsequently and rightly granted J.F. Ade Ajayi, an *Omoluabi*, the honour of living on in recognition of all he did to transform Unilag beyond 'Eko for Show' as it was once derisively referred to.

My official return to Unilag on January 20, 2022, was to represent Prof. Chinedum Peace Babalola, the Vice-Chancellor of Chrisland University, who was unavoidably absent. She had to receive a National Universities Commission (NUC) Verification Panel on the College of Law, signifying a major legacy in the growth of Chrisland University. My task, like that of 15 other visiting Vice-Chancellors, was to deliver a congratulatory message encapsulated in a scroll to Prof. Oluwatoyin T. Ogundipe, the Unilag Vice-Chancellor. It was also an opportunity to reconnect with some of my friends, the principal one being Prof. Duro Oni, whose office I used to don the Chrisland academic gown, in beautiful purple colour as a variety to the many red and maroon colours of Unilag.

The Auditorium was full, the ceremony was presided over by Alhaji (Dr.) Abubakar Umar Garbai El-Kanemi, the Shehu of Bornu, in his capacity as the Chancellor of Unilag. The Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Council of Unilag, Prince Dr. Olanrewaju Adeyemi Tejuoso, (a Great *Akokite*), was there with the Registrar of Unilag, Oladejo Azeez, Esq., who also as a Great *Akokite* constantly reminded us of our being at the best University in the Universe.

Present was Oba Lamidi Adeyemi, *Ikubabayeye*, the Alaafin of Oyo. His ancestors ruled over a vast Oyo Empire and decided the life and death of many Yoruba, with the exception of the Ijebu who were never defeated in any war until the British Maxim guns subjugated them in 1892 at Magbon. The Alaafin, in spite of his enormous powers, was under Yoruba democracy, put in check by the Oyo Mesi Council, the King-Makers, who were also the King-Unmakers for tyrants, as they had the power to instruct a tyrannical Alaafin to commit suicide (by drinking from the poisoned calabash) and he had no choice but to comply. This time, he was accompanied by only three of his many beautiful wives. I do not know the exact number of his wives, but he is no match for his father who reputedly had 200 wives. He was at the ceremony in a dual capacity: as the Chancellor, University of Maiduguri, and as a proud father who came to witness the conferment of a Master's degree on Ms. Adedoja Adeyemi, one of his children.

Without the official task, I would, like *Ikubabayeye*, have been at Unilag to witness the admission of my resilient cousin, Dr. Titilope Olorunyomi, nee Koya, to a Ph.D. in Guidance and Counseling at age 51. Titilope, like her father, Otunba C.O. Koya, the Patriarch of my maternal family, had obtained Bachelors and Masters from the University of First Choice. I am very proud of Titi as we fondly call her. I know that it has not been easy to combine the general hardships of Nigeria, demanding responsibilities from work with the Ministry of Education where she is an Assistant Director, teaching Biology at King's College, Lagos, as well as jointly with Segun Olorunyomi, bring up children, including Ms. Funmilayo Olorunyomi who bagged a Bachelors in Economics two days before Titilope was conferred with a Ph.D. A firm but approachable teacher, Titi enjoys working with teens and sees her work not just as a career but a calling.

The title of her dissertation corroborates her passion: "Effects of Activity Schedule and Anticipation Training Therapies in Alleviating Psychosocial Premenstrual Syndrome among Female Secondary School Adolescents in Lagos State". The study was based on the survey of a sample of 105 female adolescents.

There were many other side shows with one being the conferment of a Ph.D., in Engineering on 70-year-old George Asuelinmen, a retiree. There was a lot of excitement about this stellar achievement which goes to show that it's better late than never. Almost all on the Chancellor's first row, stood up in recognition of Dr. George Asuelinmen and had photographs with a role model that would, in saner climes, have been conferred a national honour. Alas, in Nigeria the national honour is largely reserved for politicians, thieves of national patrimony as well as friends of the President and Governors of states. D. Joy Chinyere Umudu, Ph.D., in Pure Mathematics, obtained the Overall Best Ph.D. Thesis and many prizes, as a result.

I thought there were too many speeches than really necessary. I paid particular attention to two: those of the Vice-Chancellor and that of the Visitor. Prof. Ogundipe, in what he described as his last Convocation address, detailed the achievements of Unilag under his leadership. In a laconic manner, he acknowledged his victory, nay victory for the rule of law over his purported removal from office by the immediate past Pro-Chancellor and subsequent reinstatement. He asserted the fairness of President Muhammadu Buhari as the Visitor when he noted that PMB, "ensured that the University of Lagos navigated a turbulent period untainted".

The Visitor, President Muhammadu Buhari, who was represented by Dr. Chris Maiyaki, Deputy Executive Secretary of the NUC, equally noted the unnecessary challenge to the claim of Unilag being the University of First Choice and the Nation's Pride, as a result of the turbulence of 2020 that unnecessarily delayed the conferment of degrees and subjected the University to ridicule.

However, I am disappointed that PMB said nothing on the White Paper Committees to address all findings from Panels set up to look into what happened or is happening at many Federal

Universities, including Unilag with a view to apportioning blames as necessary. The tardiness over the release of the outcome of the entire inquiry into Unilag resulted in the claim by *THISDAY* Newspaper on September 13, 2021, that the former Pro-Chancellor had been vindicated and the Vice-Chancellor indicted. This claim was immediately and unequivocally denied by Mr. Ben Bem Goong, Director, Press and Public Relations of the Federal Ministry of Education, in a Press Statement issued on September 17, 2021. I am on the side of due process and appreciate the Federal Government's intervention that confirmed the violation of due process and rightly restored Prof. Toyin Ogundipe as Vice-Chancellor. The Visitor needs to urgently release the findings of the Panel of inquiry and vindicate Prof. Ogundipe or confirm the several allegations on his management of the University of Lagos.

Returning to the speech of the Visitor, PMB lost me and many other listeners when he made Dr. Maiyaki boldly tell us that his administration has done well in the fight against corruption, improved security, and stimulation of the economy. He should have told that to the Marines. I am Yoruba to the core. Yoruba culture does not allow me to write that a man old enough to almost be in a position to give birth to me is telling lies. Maybe I can try to be smart like respected Civil Rights leader in America, Andrew Young who told the world he never met the late Yasser Arafat. As the Permanent Representative of the US to the UN, with the policy guidance of the Carter Administration, he knew he was not to meet the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Those days, American Administrations regarded the PLO as a terrorist organization. When shown the proof of his meeting, he was asked why he told a white lie. He responded that he did not tell a White lie but merely shaded the truth grey. PMB had shaded the truth grey on his achievements at the helm of affairs in my country.

We all know that Nigeria is worse off than when President Buhari came to power in 2015. There is general apathy in PMB's fight against corruption. Compliance with the UN's Convention Against Corruption that we signed on to has been thrown overboard by his Attorney-General who has done like his predecessor on that issue. Of course, I know he would tell me he set up a Committee on implementing UNCAC in 2017. What has happened four years later on that Committee? Corruption at all levels has graduated from being endemic to being a pandemic – sharing the status of coronavirus in the continued decimation of our lives. Impunity continues to reign supreme in our lives. Of course, small kids not politically relevant get punished for corruption. How many high-level corruption issues have been swept under the carpet by the PMB Administration? A visitation on Panama, Paradise, and Pandora papers would be very instructive.

Insecurity has spread beyond the Northeast even if Boko Haram's physical control of territories has been reduced in that part of our country as they switched to setting up fiefdoms in Northcentral. On peace and security, Nigeria is worse than PMB found it. The vociferous

separatist cries, herders/farmers clashes, the spate of kidnappings for ransoms, etc., all support my claim.

I am not saying that Nigeria would have been better off if President Goodluck Jonathan had won the 2015 election. His trajectory with the rapacious stealing under him was not salutary. But PMB, in my assessment, has not performed any better when one considers many indices, including the unbridled rapacious stealing of national patrimony as if there is no tomorrow as well as the reduced levels of human security. On the economy, Nigerians are unable to feel the impact of the “success” of Sai Baba at the marketplace in spite of the fake rice pyramids we are being shown.

I will pause in order to live to talk about the Buhari Administration another time when I can better absorb the emotional stress involved in discussing the pathetic situation of Nigeria. For now, my purpose is to congratulate the University of Lagos and the newly released academic giants.